

Making the Commitment

Our Family Values:

Philippians 3:17 – 4:9

September 6, 2009

Wesley J. Gabel

Bethany Church

William Wilberforce was one of the most articulate and gifted men to ever walk this planet. With his amazing gifts, he could have sought privilege, position, power and prosperity. Instead, his heart was captivated by the gospel of Jesus Christ and pricked by the atrocity of the slave trade in the British Empire. As a legislator, Wilberforce had a mission from God that he pursued with every fiber of his being, in illness, pain, exhaustion, and depression. Year after year, he would write, speak, teach, confront, propose and vote for the end of the slave trade. Time after time, he was defeated. His body filled with opiates to combat the pain, he pressed on. He finally won with trickery. The end of the slave trade was advanced by a bill that in appearance seemed irrelevant. Wilberforce deemed the end of the slave trade more important than keeping the trust or confidence of his peers. We are talking about values. We are discussing what this heroic figure valued.

Today, we are embroiled in national debates over healthcare, debt, war, energy and the economy. The fear of many is that our elected leaders will value the passage of their issue more than the trust of their constituents. They fear their leaders will win like Wilberforce with trickery. They fear being duped, misled. This fear is not new, and it certainly is not confined to one administration, congress or party. The prospect of so much change intensifies the fear. What do our leaders value? Do they tell us certain things and not tell us other things because they consider winning a particular legislative battle more important than keeping our trust?

We do what we value most. Whatever we say, we do what we value most. I've preached beginning early May on ten core values of this church. Let's read them:

1. Experiencing salvation
2. Believing the Bible
3. Praying
4. Worshipping God
5. Growing with one another
6. Witnessing to the world
7. Serving compassionately
8. Pursuing unity
9. Loving our neighbor
10. Blessing families

We can say that these things are at the core of who we are, but it can be just talk. We can say that we believe the Bible, we can quote, "**We value the Bible as God's authoritative Word, study it together, and build our lives on its truth,**" and neglect to open it while we fill our minds with words from magazines, newspapers, and romance novels.

Truthfully, there are things we are doing because of what we value. We are putting a mission team together because we value:

Growing with One Another: We value the fellowship and ministry of every believer, and an atmosphere of acceptance and mutual accountability, through which we develop our spiritual gifts, grow in servant leadership and unite in Christ.

We are expending money and effort to go to Jamaica, because we value:

Witnessing to the World: We value our Holy Spirit-empowered identity as Christ's witnesses to all people.

And we value:

Serving Compassionately: We value serving others at their point of need, following the example of our Lord Jesus.

We are dropping the age requirement down to eleven, because we value:

Blessing Families: We value families (or households) as God's primary means of providing for, protecting and developing people.

In making some decisions, we are operating on these values. However, what do we value more? When one thing competes with another, which takes priority?

Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ... I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead. (Philippians 3:7-11, NIV)

There is no doubt what St. Paul valued more than anything else. He wanted to know Christ. He didn't just want to know about Christ. He wasn't focused on intellectual knowledge. He wanted to know and experience Christ relationally. He said, "*I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings.*"

For the Apostle Paul, this was not a wish. It was a commitment. This intimate walk with his savior was the focus of his life. Getting to know Christ shaped all of his activities and decisions. For in Christ is salvation. Salvation isn't just getting to heaven. It is being restored to the original intent of your creator. It unfolds with a personal and corporate relationship with Jesus Christ. Jesus doesn't just come to you alone. He also comes into your midst when by faith you assemble with others in his name. Together you become a temple for God. Together you become a body for Christ.

Have you ever imagined that horrifying scene when beaten, bleeding and groaning in agony Jesus hung on the cross? Do you recall the mockery of the crowd and thieves who hung with him? Do you remember how the one thief asked Jesus to remember him? What did Jesus

know about the thief? Did he know his crimes? Did he know his habits? Did he know his home life? Did Jesus know who he wounded, who he harmed, who he exploited, how much evil he did? Jesus had emptied himself of all the abilities and knowledge he possessed as God and learned the tough work of obedience that requires trust. Jesus knew nothing about this man except that he turned to him in the hour of his death. At that moment the thief received forgiveness from God. His judgment was gone. He was saved from the wrath and judgment for unbelief. He was included in kingdom banquet of Christ. However, the thief never knew the power of salvation that transforms lives on this earth. He never knew the redeeming and restorative work that is unfolding right now. He did not know what it feels like to be purified of sins while you walk this planet. He did not know what it is like to live as you were created to live as you go about your daily life. He never knew the power of God coursing through his life and faith. This is what comes from being built together with the people of God. This is the salvation that unfolds with a corporate relationship with God.

I remember when our youngest was born. Our other children were 16, 14 and nearly 11. They held him constantly. We almost had to take a number to hold the little guy. Moreover, his older siblings almost always gave in to his requests. I must admit. He was a charmer. One look from him and I'd melt. (I'm not alluding to water on the wicked witch of the west.) I remember Diane and I deciding to take him to daycare so that at least someone would wrestle a toy away and he'd learn to problem-solve. We knew that his development required interaction with us, his siblings and peers, including conflict and forgiveness. God wants that for you in a family where he rules and where his values guide all conduct.

The Apostle Paul's life was all about growing in that personal and corporate relationship with Christ. Everything else he regarded as rubbish to be discarded. He wrote:

Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you. (Philippians 3:17, NIV)

He told the believers in Philippi to grow their relationship with Christ pursuing these values. There were resentments, divisions, anxieties, discouragement and bad things in the church of Philippi. However, these were opportunities for believers to know Christ and experience his amazing work. The Apostle wrote:

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. (Philippians 4:9, NIV)

Brothers and sisters, the Apostle Paul could write this way because first and foremost he made a commitment to value knowing Christ and his salvation more than any other thing. What is your highest commitment? What trumps everything else?

I know many think that ending the slave trade was William Wilberforce's highest value. It wasn't. As I read more about him, I learned that the drive of his life was the love of Christ. It trumped everything. He wanted to leave politics, but he stayed and fought for the end of the slave trade, for the love of Christ. He married and raised his children for the love of Christ. What about you?

The Apostle Paul counted everything but knowing Christ as rubbish. What about you? As you call on Christ and embrace what he values for you, you will experience changes that will surprise you. It will require you to dump other things... to count them as rubbish in comparison. It cost Jesus everything to save you. It will cost you everything to walk in that salvation. Do you believe?