

Sermon on 2 Corinthians 12:11-21 prepared by Jonathan Shradar

The One spent for you desires your heart.

John Eldredge, in his short but powerful book “Epic,” describes how every story, every tale we share, every account that captivates us is actually the casted shadows of a more important story. An epic that reveals the plot of humanity, and more so the protagonist God that works rescue and beauty among us. And we yearn, whether we understand it or not, for this story.

It is why we are moved by the heroes that sacrifice for others. The characters that give themselves for the rescue of someone else. Like Bingbong from “Inside Out” who gives himself up to forgotten memories to save Joy. Or Mulan, who takes the place of her father, willing to die for honor and dynasty.

We cheer for them, we shed tears because of them. The mother who rescues children from the fire. The officer that runs back into battle to protect his men. The Advocate that raises their voice for the speechless.

We are drawn to these stories and long for them because it is embedded in our DNA. We can’t always describe it, but the sense of needing rescue, of being valued and won resides in each of us.

And this is what Christianity is all about. The hero has given himself for us - and is shaping us into his likeness as he builds his kingdom. Multiplying this rescue to the ends of the earth.

In the nitty-gritty of church drama we hear the story once again - if we have ears to hear it.

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2 Corinthians 12:11-21

We come now to Paul's concluding warning to the church - calling the remaining opposition to repentance. False apostles have been manipulating the people to give up themselves for the enrichment of the wanna be apostles.

2 Corinthians 11:20 "For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you, or devours you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or strikes you in the face."
(ESV)

And this is the final appeal to rescue them from those that lead them astray.

As we progress today we want to look at Paul and heed his warning, but we also want to keep our eyes just over his shoulder to another hero.

1) Genuine Ministry

Here he stands and he can do no other. Paul has served this church, labored for them, paid his way, and suffered for them.

We read Scripture from our own vantage point or perspective and as a pastor I have taken to heart Paul's description of ministry. Weakness yes, but also the great sacrifice. A willingness to give all of who he is and has to serve them that they would see Jesus.

This is so countercultural, opposite of cancel culture, Paul gives repeated nurturing, correction, and he expresses his desire for these people. Not for his gain but for their good.

Paul is the real deal. He can be trusted and listened to.

He has entered into the foolishness of comparison but he really has the credentials. He has asked for no money for himself from them, placing no burden on them. And the signs of a true apostle were performed among them - signs and wonders, the miraculous! He has been humble, genuine, and caring and the Holy Spirit has confirmed his work.

Some in the church have been deceived away but he still loves them as a parent would.

Those of us that are parents can understand this type of love. Wanting the best for our children so we provide and care for them, but we also correct them and spur them on to good things. Ewen this last week was receiving some correction, and he responded "Can you be less direct?" *Hopefully he realizes my love still!*

This is Paul, not wanting them to serve him but giving of himself to serve them. The false apostles accuse Paul of being a crook and tricking the church... what a joke! He doesn't take advantage but lives out in the open weakness and all for their good.

"Paul actively teaches important elements of Christian thought and behavior by means of his manner of life which he deliberately sets before others." Barnett

In this genuine ministry, Paul's band of pastors has "been speaking in Christ," for the church's upbuilding. Not for numbers, not for their own fame, but to see the church strengthened, and the kingdom expanded among them.

The goal has always been their good - the thing of first importance, the application of the gospel on their lives, that they would not be left the same.

"True ministry selflessly seeks the spiritual welfare of others, gladly spending and being spent. This is true whenever you serve, be it with believers or unbelievers or children or students or the ill or in the pulpit or in world missions. This is what is most needed if authentic ministry is to take place - joyously seeking the best for others and gladly spending self. This is Christlike, apostolic, true ministry."
Hughes

Paul spent everything for the Corinthians. All of his resources and all of his energy. The price was impoverishment, lousy health, premature aging, and a martyr's death. His model has motivated many; his example led the wealthy, *privileged English athlete and scholar CT Studd, upon graduation from Cambridge, to spend his life in the Congo with this motto: "if Jesus Christ be*

God, and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him."

Paul's goal though in Corinth is simply repentance.

2) Hoping for Repentance

The danger in the church is that they would go on indistinguishable from the world around them. That the preaching they find most appealing gives them permission to reject holiness and live for temporary things of pleasure and greed.

The pastor's fear is finding them lost still in sin which the false apostles seem to encourage.

2 Corinthians 12:20–21 “For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, slander, gossip, conceit, and disorder. [21] I fear that when I come again my God may humble me before you, and I may have to mourn over many of those who sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and sensuality that they have practiced.” (ESV)

This is the warning. He will encourage them later to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith. He longs for them to own up to their sin and lay it aside, turning again to Jesus and the genuine ministry in front of them. To return the love they have been given.

It is central to the epic that God is writing... “So if you are writing a story where love is the meaning, where love is the highest and best of all, where love is the point, then you have to allow each person a choice. You have to allow freedom. You cannot force love. God gives us the dignity of freedom, to choose for or against him (and friends, to ignore him is to choose against him). This is the reason for what Lewis called the Problem of Pain. Why would a kind and loving God create a world where evil is possible? Doesn't he care about our happiness? Isn't he good? Indeed, he does and he is. He cares so much for our happiness that he endows us with the capacity to love and be loved, which is the greatest happiness of all.” John Eldredge

We can hear this warning for ourselves. Turn from the things we used to be identified by, change your mind and surrender to Christ.

The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the gospel.

“Repentance involves your heart being miraculously renewed so that you now love and value Jesus above everything else and are satisfied in Him. Repentance includes turning from your sins. However, Christianity is not primarily external behavior, but an internal conversion. The outer works flow from the inner work... Repentance means reorienting your life around Jesus, and asking Him to rescue you and to be in charge from now on. It means changing from a life that is all about you, to a life that is all about Jesus.” Adrian Warnock

This is what Paul desires for the church, in the sight of God... and it is what the Spirit desires for us.

Paul’s actions are imitation, revealing the reason for repentance. And we can’t leave 2 Corinthians 12 without seeing Jesus.

3) Seeing Jesus

Paul deliberately lived and modeled his life out of the style of a man in Christ so that others would imitate him. He consciously called his brothers and sisters to live this lifestyle that is imitation of Christ.

1 Corinthians 15:49 “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven.” (ESV)

Everything Paul speaks of, everything he does, shows us Christ. Looking at Paul and seeing Jesus.

God himself, taking on the inconvenient to save his people. He is spent for us, spent for our souls. Not for those with some level of pedigree but that each of us is valued by him. His life lived for us, his active obedience in our place. His body

broken for us, taking on the punishment for sin that we deserve. His blood shed for us, to forge a new covenant of grace, of identity, of eternity with us.

He leaves the 99 to rescue the one. You are that important to him.

Jesus desires you. He seeks not what is yours but you. Your heart, the core of who you are, every dirty secret, every scarred fiber. The truest things about you.

His response isn't to recoil, his heart goes out to you more, so much so He was willing to die for you in your helpless depravity.

From that love, he wants you to see and participate in his kingdom's purpose. The upbuilding of one another, away from sin.

As in his encounter with the Woman caught in adultery, the scribes and religious elite wanted her punished as an example, but Jesus extended mercy by silencing the condemnation, and said to her “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.” (John 8:11)

And his advocacy goes on giving us the freedom to live for him. **1 John 2:1–3**
“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. [2] He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. [3] And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.” (ESV)

We can get back up, repent and walk with him again. It is what the story is about, a people made new, given life, and hope, given eternity with God. This is what Paul has laid before the church in Corinth. This is what the Spirit has laid before us Reservoir Church.

If he loves you more, should he be loved less?

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Give Jesus your heart - Trust him, experience his love, stare at his glory until you see it. This means moving other things out of center (all of life as repentance). For the beginner and the pro alike.

Live - With joy, freedom, and confidence of life with the hero! Like Paul, we all can give ourselves for the upbuilding of one another, to invest in what matters and what lasts. Together for the glory of Christ and our good.

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We rally around this ancient epic... but the story is still being told, it is still unfolding. Through the lives of ordinary believers, surrendered to the purpose of our King, in his love, that others might see.

“It is a world of magic and mystery, of deep darkness and flickering starlight. It is a world where terrible things happen and wonderful things too. It is a world where goodness is pitted against evil, love against hate, order against chaos, in a great struggle where often it is hard to be sure who belongs to which side because appearances are endlessly deceptive. Yet for all its confusion and wildness, it is a world where the battle goes ultimately to the good, who live happily ever after, and where in the long run everybody, good and evil alike, becomes known by his true name . . . That is the fairy tale of the Gospel with, of course, one crucial difference from all other fairy tales, which is that the claim made for it is that it is true, that it not only happened once upon a time but has kept on happening ever since and is happening still.” Frederick Buechner, *Telling the Truth*

Give him your heart. Live from his grace for your good.

1 Thessalonians 5:9–11 “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10] who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. [11] Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” (ESV)