

### What Are You Willing To Do?

Let's pretend you are a farmer for a moment. The crops are ready, but you have only a small window to go out and harvest your fields. What do you? Whatever it takes. That's why we see combine headlights late at night. It was good to see the Vikings win in overtime last Sunday. I know Kirk Cousins is criticized a bit, but did you see what he did in that one play Sunday? It was third down. He scrambled to the sidelines and tried to get a first down by jumping over one defender while another was holding him. He fell just short of the first down, but he was doing whatever it takes to win the game.

We have an example of that in our epistle reading for today. You have the Apostle Paul. What was he willing to do to share Christ with strangers in foreign lands? Whatever it takes. Good for Paul. Good for any missionary who is doing the same thing today. But they are not the only ones. The question before us today is this: what are you willing to do? May it be like Paul, whatever it takes.

#### *I. It is all about the gospel.*

What makes you tic? What is it that moves and motivates you? I stand in awe of the Apostle Paul. He endured so much more than me. Would I let myself be whipped for Christ? Stoned and left for dead? I fear I would cower before such things. Paul didn't. Why? Ask Paul. He would say, "The Gospel! The Gospel! The Gospel!" The message of the gospel is the driving force behind all that Paul said and did.

Paul was determined to preach the gospel because it meant so much to him. He remembers the days of being a slave to the false belief that God would save him if he worked hard enough for it. Paul believed in that fanatically.

Then Paul met the gospel on the Road to Damascus. Struck down and blinded by the same Jesus he was persecuting, he asked, "Who are you?" And Jesus responded, "I am Jesus." The man who hated Jesus so much loved him. The man who boasted proudly about his own works now saw how far they fell short of God's glory, but rejoiced that in Jesus he has a righteousness only God can give. He was overawed that the God whom he persecuted forgave even him and promised heaven.

That gospel affected Paul. He admitted in Philippians 3: **"But whatever was to my profit I now considered loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. ... I consider them rubbish."** Imagine a rescue dog in the shelter. He is afraid. He is cowering in the corner of the cage. When that hand reached out to him, he resisted. But after about ten seconds in the loving embrace of his new owner, he is excited and happy and loyal to that new owner. That is what the gospel does to us. A good job, a good life are nice, but they don't compare to knowing Christ and his salvation.

Ironically, Paul did not choose to preach the gospel. It was Jesus who chose him and sent him out to preach. What was he willing to do? Whatever it took.

#### *II. What are you willing to do for the gospel?*

Paul was willing to refuse a salary. <sup>7</sup>**Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat its grapes? Who tends a flock and does not drink the milk?** <sup>8</sup>**Do I say this merely on human authority? Doesn't the Law say the same thing?** <sup>9</sup>**For it is written in the Law of Moses: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain." Is it about oxen that God is concerned?** <sup>10</sup>**Surely he says this for us, doesn't he? Yes, this was written for us, because whoever plows and threshes should be able to do so in the hope of sharing in the harvest.** <sup>11</sup>**If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?** <sup>12</sup>**If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more?"**

The church in those day learned something we understand today. The preaching of the gospel is so important that they wanted their pastors, teachers and missionaries to do it full time. In Acts the Apostles were doing double duty, preaching and feeding the widows in the church. The congregation decided to set up a seven man committee to make sure the widows were fed so the Apostles could preach. The gospel was that important to them. By the time of Paul they were paying them a salary. This way they didn't have to get a job and squeeze in the ministry whenever possible.

Paul needed a salary. They probably offered him one. But he turned it down. Why? **"But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ."** This church in Corinth had its problems. It was divided. It was confused. It had a clique who criticized everything Paul did, accusing him of doing this for the money. What was Paul willing to do? He gave up his salary, took a night time job to support himself, so these people could not criticize him anymore. He did whatever it took.

We don't have that problem here. Our church understands that the gospel is important. So this congregation eagerly pays its Called workers. They are not the richest people in town, but they are not the poorest. What are you willing to do for the sake of the gospel? Salaries are good, but is there more? How about also praying for them? Give them a simple pat on the back and a word of appreciation. And what about the pastors who are not here, in our sister congregations or in other states, or our missionaries? Our

mission society has adopted two missionaries. Use our synod mission offerings to train the pastors and teachers you will have down the road. You heard about the Equipping Christian Witnesses program to improve MLC so we can do better at training them. What are we willing to do? Hopefully whatever it takes.

And Paul was willing to do more. <sup>19</sup> **Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible.** <sup>20</sup> **To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law.** <sup>21</sup> **To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.** <sup>22</sup> **To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some.** <sup>23</sup> **I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."**

Let's say you have a party. There are all sorts of people there with different interests. One person is a real fan of music, but doesn't follow sports at all. What will you say to him? You probably don't bring up the World Series. You ask him about music. You become the music lover to the music lover. That is what Paul was willing to do. If he was in a room with Jews, folks who still lived under the Old Testament laws, he would be a Jew like them. He would not offer them pork chops for dinner. And if the room had Gentiles in it, well he would serve them pork chops.

Paul did whatever it took. He even became weak to the weak. What does that mean? Let's say someone is an alcoholic. This doesn't mean you become an alcoholic like him. But you can still be weak like him. Instead of looking down on him and tell him to be more like you, you can sympathize. His problem is alcoholism. Yours is something else. You both are struggling. You both need Christ. Be weak with children, not their superior. Talk in a kind way to them. Use words they understand. Even kneel down to their level.

Paul was willing to do anything for the gospel. What are you willing to do for yourself? You know how precious the gospel is. It unlocks heaven for you. It forgives your sins. Good. But are you doing all you can with it? I find it interesting that Paul says this right after our text: <sup>24</sup> **Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.** <sup>25</sup> **Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever."** Heaven is already ours, but we work and run as though it isn't yet. And how hard do we run? Don't settle for second or third place, but first place. Do the same with the Bible. Don't settle for the minimum. Make the hearing of the gospel and church the highest priority. You've been meaning to start up Bible reading at home. Do it. Break out your catechism and read a page or two a day. Discuss it with your family.

And what about your kids or grandkids? You want them in heaven with you, don't you? What are you willing to do to make that happen? Whatever it takes. Don't just send them to Sunday School or our day school. Be involved. Ask them what they learned that day. Work with them on the memory work so you learn it together. Let them know that the gospel is the most important thing they will receive here on earth.

What are you willing to do for your neighbor, even the one that annoys you? Whatever it takes. You are not subject to him, but you become his servant. You are weak just like him. You have issues just like him. The gospel however has changed your life. Let him know it can change his. And be patient, very patient.

And what are you willing to do here at church? Whatever it takes. Follow the Council and Voters' agendas and minutes. Pray, support it with offerings. Roll up your sleeves and don't let the other guy do it. **"I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings."** By being involved you are sharing in its blessings.

But did you notice something? We change. We talk music with music people, sports with sports people. We become weak with the weak, a child to children. We adapt, we become all things to all people. But the gospel never changes. It is still the same Christ, the same message of the cross and forgiveness, the same sins that are forgiven and the same sinners who are saved. You know how much the gospel means to you. What are you willing to do? Whatever it takes. Amen.