

Great Work!
1 Corinthians 15:58

September 19, 2004

SERMON NOTES

A. Introduction: — “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58)

B. “My Beloved Brethren”

1. the first priority ... that of knowing Jesus Christ as Saviour

a. Romans 3:23 — All have S_____

b. Romans 6:23 — this brings D_____

2. the encouragement in this verse is addressed to C_____

C. “Therefore”

1. 15:1–11 — Christ really A_____ from the dead

2. 15:12–19 — Christ’s resurrection is proof our own R_____ will take place

3. 15:20–35 — Christ’s resurrection is the first fruits, the start

a. of the destruction of the L_____ E_____, D_____

b. and is a call to us to A_____ to R_____

4. 15:35–57 — Christ’s resurrection

a. was in a S_____ body

b. so, there awaits for us a S_____ body

5. so, the gospel of the risen Christ gives E_____ results

D. “Stedfast, unmovable, always abounding”

1. Steadfast–Immovable

a. not mere O_____

b. describes the person who ...

(A) Ephesians 6:10 ... is S_____ in the Lord

(B) 2 Timothy 2:3 ... endures H_____

(C) Hebrews 10:23 ... H_____ F_____ to his confession

2. Always–Abounding

a. abounding means to give that extra E_____

b. not for man’s honour but the P_____ of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:13–14)

E. “Work and Labour In the Lord” — this labour

1. is founded upon A_____ in Christ (John 15:4-5,8)

2. not for our own but for God’s P_____ and P_____

3. not merely for a local C_____ but for the Lord

4. not in our S_____ but in the Lord’s (Philippians 4:13)

5. not performed A_____ but in fellowship with the Triune God

F. “Not in Vain”

1. The Preacher (Solomon)

a. examined every E_____ man can pursue under the sun

b. and found that all was V_____ (Ecclesiastes 12:8) and grasping for the W_____ (Ecclesiastes 2:11)

2. but work for the Lord, though now unseen, lasts for E_____

A. Introduction

1. we are in the midst of resuming our fall programs
2. there is much joy and encouragement, as we
 - a. see new children in AWANA; more than for several years
 - b. or as we get involved in prayer or study of God's word or other preparation for our particular roles of service
3. but there are also a number of natural stresses
 - a. deadlines and getting everything ready
 - b. the control of children's natural enthusiasms
4. but this morning I urge you never to forget in all this, that,
 - a. as our verse today, 1 Corinthians 15:58 (AV) tells us: **Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.**
 - b. we are involved in a "Great Work!" ... let's see why!

B. "My Beloved Brethren"

1. this passage is addressed, not to people in general
 - a. it is addressed to believers, to those who belong to Jesus
 - b. so its encouragement only applies to Christians
2. so before going further
 - a. if you are here this morning is outside of Christ
 - b. your first priority is to recognize; that of most importance
 - (A) your sinful state before God ... Romans 3:23
 - (B) your terrible destiny as a sinner ... Romans 6:23
 - c. then to sorrow for and turn from this situation
 - d. putting your faith in God's promise and in Jesus Christ's taking your place of punishment in dying on the cross
3. but now, let us look at why believers can be encouraged

C. "Therefore"

1. it has often been quoted that when you see "therefore" you should ask yourself "What it's there fore?"
 - a. to understand this verse we have to look at the context
 - b. and, in the case of this verse, that is all of chapter 11

2. This chapter is about Christ's resurrection and its implications
 - a. 1–11, Christ really rose from the dead
 - (A) Paul tells us first that this was all prophesied, that it took place "was according to the Scriptures"
 - (B) Paul also lists the witnesses to the event
 - (1) witnesses then alive (including himself)
 - (2) witnesses who could then be questioned
 - (3) witnesses that confirmed this chapter 11 for if they hadn't then we wouldn't find it here in the Bible
 - b. 12–19, Christ's resurrection is a proof of our resurrection
 - (A) the resurrection is fundamental to the gospel — "if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is in vain"
 - (B) without the resurrection
 - (1) the gospel is defunct
 - (2) instead of good news, it would be miserable news
 - (3) "but," the next section begins, "now is Christ risen from the dead"
 - c. 20–34, Christ's resurrection "has become the first fruits"
 - (A) it is the start of the destruction of the last enemy, death ... "in Christ shall all be made alive"
 - (B) and the call to us to "awake to righteousness"
 - d. 35–57, Christ's resurrection was in a spiritual body
 - (A) that this natural body
 - (1) with its sin, its corruption
 - (2) with its aches and pains
 - (3) with all of its accomplishments
 - (4) will indeed pass away
 - (B) but there is a new spiritual body to take its place
 - (1) which will be incorruptible, will be immortal
 - (2) "we shall all be changed — in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."
 - (3) death and the grave will be forever defeated
 - (4) and eternal victory ours: "thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

3. the eternal, everlasting results that come from proclaiming the message of the risen Lord Jesus Christ is what lie behind that therefore;
4. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, because the gospel of the risen Christ gives everlasting results, be ye ..."

D. "Steadfast-Immovable, Always Abounding"

1. here we have two pairs of words
 - a. the first pair has to do with our character
 - b. the second pair has to do with our effort
2. Steadfast-Immovable
 - a. we are not talking about mere obstinacy — no, what we are talking about here is linked closely to the qualities of faithfulness and endurance
 - b. It describes the person who
 - (A) has a strong, enduring conviction about his faith
 - (B) has applied Ephesians 6:10 (AV): "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."
 - (C) has learned what Paul sought to teach in 2 Timothy 2:3 (NIV) "Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus."
 - (D) has followed Hebrews 10:23 (NAS): "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for" ... he knows that ... "He who promised is faithful;"
 - c. in the days of sailing ships, when a storm arose that was too fierce to sail through, they would let out storm anchors — large conical bags with a hole in the end — and head the ship to face the storm; in this way the ship would stay safely in one position; so it is with the believer: clinging to our Anchor, Christ; trustingly facing the storm; the Christian can hold his position, steadfast, immovable, and safe ⁻⁽²⁾.
 - d. so when the stresses, the trials, the problems ... whatever ... come, seek to be steadfast unmoved by the winds that blow, laying hold of the Anchor we have Who has entered into heaven, in order to be ...

3. Always Abounding

- a. a few weeks ago we were watching the Olympic games
 - (A) the middle distance running and the various rowing events are very illustrative of this word, "abounding"
 - (B) in these events, for perhaps more than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the race, the contestants jockey for position among the leaders
 - (C) then in the final few hundred metres
 - (D) one or two individuals, or, in the case of the sculling, teams, seem to be able to put their effort into another gear, to kick it up a notch, and overtake those ahead and to place among the medal

- winners
- (E) and with a final gasp reach toward the finish line
- (F) and that is what Paul exhorts us as believers here to do ... to kick it up a notch, to over-go, to press to the top
- b. but this effort, this Christian effort, this work in the Lord
 - (A) is not an effort to save for every four years
 - (B) is not some mere human entertainment or spectacle
 - (C) is not to be crowned by a wreath that soon fades
 - (D) but is worth the effort, even as we read in Philippians 3:13b–14 (AV): ... [this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.](#)

4. so with these qualities we are encouraged to ...

E. "Work and Labour In the Lord"

1. now, our western, particularly our North American, culture is one that centres itself on activity
 - a. so that when we read these verses our eyes and thoughts leap to those words "work" and "labour"
 - b. and, if we have been challenged, as indeed we ought, with these words, then we ask, "what shall I do"
 - c. and this is good; that is why they were written
2. but in so doing, we often blur over the phrase "in the Lord"
 - a. maybe that's why the Holy Spirit through Paul's words has it repeated here: ["work in the Lord"](#) and ["labour ... in the Lord"](#) because we might otherwise ignore it
 - b. for there is an important, contemplative side to this verse
 - c. Jesus said in John 15
 - (A) verses 4–5 (NAS): ["Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing."](#)
 - (B) and verse 8 (NAS): ["By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."](#)
3. and from these words we learn some very important truth about the work to which we are encouraged
 - a. first, it is service or work which is being carried out
 - (A) not for our own purpose, but rather for God's
 - (B) it seeks not our own praise but God's glory
 - b. second, it is not service for Faith Fellowship Baptist Church but for and in the Lord
 - c. next, it is not service or work which is being carried out in our own strength, but rather in God's

(A) good thing too, for as we sang

Stand in His strength alone;
The arm of flesh will fail you—
Ye dare not trust your own. —^{3}.

(B) but rather “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13, NKJV)

d. and, finally, it is not work in which we labour alone

(A) how often we are tempted to think to ourselves such words as, “they’ve left it all to me to do” and “why isn’t someone helping me with this!”

(B) but we are never alone

(1) never one step of service that we take

(2) never one frustration or heartache experienced

(3) but that Jesus has first taken that step

(4) and the Holy Spirit within us in supplication with the Father on our behalf

(C) remember this ... you’ll need it!

F. “Not in Vain”

1. the Preacher who wrote the book of Ecclesiastes was the son of David, king in Jerusalem, with great wisdom and wealth to spend in pursuing every endeavour that a man can pursue

a. he examined the gaining of wisdom and knowledge

b. he sought out mirth, entertainment and pleasure — to hear some of the comments by fans and hosts on the FAN radio station, you would think that the NHL strike was the end of the world ... it’s only entertainment! ... it’s of no real, lasting importance

c. he looked at seeking social justice and good

d. he gave his efforts to labouring on great works

e. he gained great wealth

f. he won for himself honour and renown

g. and his conclusion was???

(A) “Vanity of vanities,” — that’s a Hebraism meaning “it is totally and completely vain” — says the Preacher, “All is vanity.” (Ecclesiastes 12:8, NKJV)

(B) for the “man under the sun” — as Solomon describes the natural man — all of life no matter how great his efforts or accomplishments will be found to be totally empty, “indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind” (Ecclesiastes 2:11)

2. but living and working and growing and striving in the service of the living and eternal God is completely different from this

- a. rather than vanity, than emptiness, than transience
- b. every effort expended has eternal consequence
- c. as you obey His word by testifying — perhaps nervously and perhaps haltingly — to a friend or neighbour, though you may not see any result in the here and now, we can be sure that it is used by the Holy Spirit of God in a fashion that will only be fully evident in eternity

3. A gardener, with tremendous care, planted a rare vine that promised the most magnificent blooms. Carefully she set it in the rich earth at the base of a stone wall where it would get just the right amount of rain, sun, and shade. The vine grew, flourished, spread — but no blooms! Standing there one day, contemplating the vine, disappointed and discouraged she considered cutting it down. At this point that her invalid neighbour, whose back lot adjoined hers, called over to her, “You can’t imagine how much I have been enjoying the blooms of that vine you planted.” Stretching, looing over the wall she saw the most beautiful blooms ever. Creeping through a crevice in the wall, the vine had fulfilled its promise. —^{4}.

- a. the effort you make in preparation and doing
 - (A) in the leading of a Bible study
 - (B) in the conducting of a group in prayer
 - (C) in the playing an instrument in public ministry
 - (D) in the upholding of the ministry in prayer
 - (E) in the teaching of a class
 - (F) in the leading in worship
 - (G) in the sharing of your testimony
 - (H) and in countless other ways
 - (I) if done to and for the Lord
 - (J) though its results may not be seen in the here and now
- b. will reveal its blooms, fulfill its promise, in the annals of eternity when God’s full plan in them is revealed

G. Conclusion: 1 Corinthians 15: 58 (AV): “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

1. As one poet has put it

“Only one life, will soon be past
Only what’s done for Christ will last”

2. let us take heart in the service of our Master as we realize our work is not merely for time but for eternity, as we sing in closing that chorus “With Eternity’s Values in View”

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Various English versions of the Holy Bible are used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in [square brackets]. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
NAS	New American Standard version © 1975 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

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2. Adapted from illustration about Richard Fuller, Fredericksburg Bible Illustrator, Holwick Illustration #13600
3. From "Stand Up for Jesus" by George Duffield, (1818-1888)
4. Adapted from "The Other Side of the Wall!" by Glen Young, Holwick Illustration #7628