

## **Keeping a Heavenly Focus 1 Corinthians 7:29**

*This is what I mean, brothers: the appointed time has grown very short.*

Brothers and sisters in Christ, have you ever found yourself living by the motto, “Why should I do today what I can put off until tomorrow?” Even if you have been described as hard-working and persistent, there are times your work takes a backseat to other preoccupations. I know that my most frequent reason for procrastination has to do with sports. You can probably name two or three of your own rather quickly.

Procrastination is certainly a foe of work, schooling, or household chores. It is even more problematic in regards to your faith. The problem is, we often look for our faith to help us now rather than getting us ready for heaven. That leads far too many to the mindset that only once they’re older or illness sets in will they come back to church. Now you are here because you know you need God, but it doesn’t mean you haven’t been of this mindset before, or now.

What if tomorrow never comes? The dirty room, the unwashed dishes, the not done homework or reports, the un-weeded garden, aren’t going to matter. But your soul matters. What if tomorrow is Judgment Day? What accounting of your life will you be able to give God?

So much of life is living for today, but I never want you to forget that you are heading somewhere. Like Paul, I want you to keep your eyes on heaven, and God. Heaven is the place of perfect, sinless existence, and God is the only One who makes it possible.

How do we live keeping this heavenly focus as often as possible? Though it seems Paul is advocating a pretty boring life of non-attachment to worldly things, he was actually encouraging the Corinthians to not get preoccupied by the world and its values. Scripture tells us that there is a time to mourn and dance, to weep and laugh, to seek and to lose. Don’t leave the people in your life behind, neglect your responsibilities, or reject your feelings.

This holds true for you. You don't need to hole yourself up somewhere where all you do is read the Bible every day, and maybe what others write about the Bible, and then spend a lot of time praying. Actually, you live with a heavenly focus when you live out the life God has prepared for you.

Think about the Gospel reading, where Jesus calls the first of His disciples. Certainly there would be plenty of time to learn God's ways, much more than Scripture shares with us. Yet Jesus says, "Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men." They would have the responsibility to share, not hide, what they had learned.

You also are keeping a heavenly focus when you share the knowledge of your Christian faith. The Church always needs teachers. Yes, I mean for official classes like Sunday School, VBS, or adult classes, but you are also a teacher to your spouse or children or grandchildren. Tell younger ones the accounts from the Bible. If you work with ones who are older, ask questions that get them thinking about how God's Word applies to their lives.

And then live out your faith. Be thankful for the blessings you have been given – and not just shy about it. Don't make a big scene either, but you can confidently let others know that God deserves praise. When you are ailing, be a witness to the hope of Christ that endures within you. God isn't the source of your trouble. He is your strength, your rock, and your fortress. Encourage others; don't be sarcastic. Comfort those who mourn, for they need the peace that the message of God's presence can give. And worship; again, not in a boastful way. Worship so that you can be an example. This is God's presence with you. You don't have to leave feeling that you have changed, just know that the Holy Spirit is continuing His faithful work to help you.

But there is another clue, if I can call it that, also from the Gospel. When Jesus begins His ministry His first words are, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and

believe in the gospel.” Repentance. This is the Christian life. Is it not how Martin Luther began his 95 Theses - “When our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, said ‘Repent’, He called for the entire life of believers to be one of penitence”?

This is your full-time calling: repent of your sinfulness. Recognize that you are no master of your life. Your ways are most often not God’s ways. And don’t just say that of unbelievers; say it of yourself. You have used words to tear others down. You have done actions either to seek pleasure for your own body or to make life more difficult for your neighbor. Your thoughts betray the good you usually try to do. This doesn’t make you an unbeliever, but it shows how easy it is to fall prey to sin, and how damaging that can be, and that you do need to daily repent.

Repentance turns you to the only One who makes living worthwhile: Jesus Christ. In Him you are not just an accident of nature or subject to some invisible karma. You are a valuable creation of your heavenly Father – so valuable that He sent His Son to redeem you and to make His home in you.

Repentance is needed because all that I said about keeping a heavenly focus at all times is impossible to do. It’s good. It’s right. But there’s no way you’ll ever measure up. In repentance you confess that very fact to God.

Because the Spirit moves you to repentance He leads you to Christ, the One who never procrastinated for your sake. In Jesus you don’t just have forgiveness of sins, you have His righteousness that leads you to live in a God-pleasing, helpful manner.

Christ came so that you would be ready for the Last Day. Without Christ you are left only to your own works and ideas. But those will never fly with God. You need more.

Christ gives more. He gives you Himself. He reveals the true, loving nature of God wherever He is, whether in His earthly ministry or in His grace-filled presence now in the Word

and Sacraments. He draws you with Him to the cross, where He laid down His life for all your sins. Jesus didn't live for Himself. He lived so that through His suffering, the shedding of His blood, and His death He could make the payment for your sins. He gifts you with forgiveness so that you are not kept out of God's kingdom.

He even blesses you with the gift of His resurrection as affirmation that death is defeated and that there is eternal life in Him. The new heaven and earth are yours, and one day you will be glorified. From the time of Adam life had been leading up to these moments. Where Jesus' death and resurrection are proclaimed you are being made ready for the completion of all things.

This shows us that God is not someone who is aloof or detached from us. He is a God of action. And He is still working through the Spirit to teach you and to cultivate in you a loving nature and a deeper, profound faith. When your heart starts to linger too long on earthly pleasures like health and wealth, the Spirit draws you back to the cross and empty tomb.

Because of Jesus you are more than just a creature of earth – you are an heir of heaven. Your true citizenship lies there, for you are just a wanderer here. Again, that doesn't make your life here meaningless, for there are so many important relationships that you have. But as time grows short, in Christ you are ready. In Christ, you are focused. Amen.