

ASH WEDNESDAY 2024

John 17:24-26

“It’s ALL worth it!”

Jesus worked harder, fought more valiantly, and sacrificed more than any human being ever has (or is ever capable of). He went, quite literally, through HELL. *Was it all worth it? What was His END goal?* What DROVE Him to fight through everything we see here in the season of Lent? He tells us about the End He had in His mind right here – at the close of this glorious High Priestly prayer, there in the Garden of Gethsemane, as hell was beginning to close in all around Him. It would ALL be worth it, and He knew it.

John 17:24-26 (NIV)

24 “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. 25 Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

That GOAL made everything He did / everything He suffered / everything He endured . . . *worth it*. His entire earthly pilgrimage (His state of humiliation) – from His miraculous conception in the virgin Mary to His last breath . . . had to do with this END GOAL. There was no way to possibly get sinners into heavenly glory without the cross / without facing hell / without the torture / the blood / the pain / the mocking / the conviction / the crucifixion . . . and the empty tomb.

It was **all** to show and share God’s LOVE with fallen humanity; to bring His people back into one family (for us to know God and for God to be in and among us down here), and then ultimately to get His beloved people home to heaven. Once again this year we celebrate how He accomplished this goal. We honor His sacrifice and we stand in awe of the amazing grace and mercy that would motivate Him to suffer through all that *for us*. The word “Gospel” means GOOD NEWS – and news of that victory is the greatest and most powerful news for all mankind.

We see and celebrate how Jesus accomplished the END goal of our salvation by His death and resurrection, and how God is continuing to accomplish His goals of bringing souls to faith, then eventually home to heaven. But, what is YOUR end goal, for YOUR life? Do you have it so clearly defined and pictured in your mind / is it in your prayers with intensity like Jesus had – so that you are laser focused on it every moment of every day? I doubt it. There’s ample **proof** in the lives of each one of us here – that we are so unfocused and driven in so many different directions . . . that we don’t even know what we’re doing or why we’re doing it half the time.

We DO know – *thank God* – that Jesus accomplished our salvation 100% on the cross and in the empty tomb . . . it’s already **done** and heaven has already been won for us . . . but then, sadly, sometimes Christians wonder, *“What is really the point of my short life down here?”* The world around us doesn’t know God, and it is trying to convince us nothing is worth dying for, because nothing happens after death, and therefore the only goal we should have is personal pleasure down here. That message sometimes sinks in. Christians too can so easily fill the void with whatever goals, passions, and priorities all those around us have. Maybe we’ll chase after that career and the honor of some title or accomplishment people respect, maybe it’s just the goal of being able to finally relax, being financially secure, retired from work, and able to do whatever you want (or travel wherever you want to go) on your own terms.

But . . . what about the things GOD our Heavenly Father tells us to pursue and focus our energy on? He wants us to be faithful in worship – seizing every opportunity. He wants us to be in His Word every day and spend hours in prayer. He wants us to give generously off the top – to serve (and be involved in) pure Gospel ministry here and around the world. He wants us to tell as many as possible the Good News of what Jesus has done for us. He wants us to prioritize work and service in His Kingdom. He wants us to fight our sinful passions with repentant hearts and put the needs of others first. He wants us to be disciplined and focused. He wants us to give until it hurts and suffer through whatever pain might ever come – in service to our family, our spiritual family, and anyone in need around us.

And . . . sadly, what’s so often our reaction? *“Nah . . . it’s not worth it. That will interfere with my other goals and priorities. It doesn’t seem to make a difference anyways. If it doesn’t make me*

happy and give me instant gratification – I’m not going to bother with it.” Our sinful, messed up, distracted lives and actions are PROOF that our goals and priorities are all messed up and mixed up. We sometimes forget about the big picture entirely as we become engrossed in things that really don’t matter all that much and don’t serve an eternal purpose.

Thankfully, Jesus meets us right where we ARE. He stoops right down to our level and grabs hold us – because that was His GOAL. **Jesus** is our mentor, our Savior, our Substitute, our Best Friend and our Champion – HE purges all our guilt and gives us that glorious *clean slate of perfection* to start with all over again right here today. Forget about the rest of the world for a moment . . . **let’s listen to Him, and learn from Him.** *Can we learn anything from the beautiful END GOAL He was praying about that night / that End which made His trip through hell worth it?* We can do so much more than learn from it – we can adopt that EXACT SAME END GOAL for our personal lives.

Just consider the crystal clarity, discipline, and focus this brings to every single day of our Christian lives:

- 1) I want to be with Jesus in glory. Does that goal . . . make whatever you might have to go through (or suffer through) in order to get there *worth it?* Of course it does. Having the ultimate goal of Heaven in mind keeps everything else in perspective throughout life.
- 2) I want to know and experience God’s love in Word and Sacrament so that I can survive anything the Enemy throws at me. We can have the noble goal of being prepared, trained, and ready for any attacks on our faith and on our relationship with God. *Is it worth* working hard and suffering a lot to pursue this spiritual discipline that God wants us to have? Of course it is.
- 3) I want to be His instrument to make His love known far and wide – so that other souls wind up in heaven one day too. Jesus used a future tense there in **verse 26** because this part of His Goal is ongoing, down through history, and across the globe. Therefore . . . *is it worth it* to spend hours in prayer, to give generously toward Kingdom work, to serve faithfully even when you can’t see the results, you get no praise, you suffer and sacrifice for the sake of the saving Gospel message of Jesus? Yes – without a doubt!

Jesus’ words right here give us a slice of the **laser focus HE** had! What GOALS in life could possibly compare with being God’s instruments to save souls for an ETERNITY / being prepared to face any and every attack that could ever come up against us / and . . . winding up there in paradise / in glory one day yourself?

We also know that when Jesus returns in glory and this world is burned to a crisp . . . His prayer here will then have reached its ultimate fulfillment. He will gather His children together in glory – what He’s been longing to do since eternity. He will then also **praise** all those sacrifices and struggles His people suffered and endured through life here in order to have and share His love. ALL the human accomplishments that people take so much pride in here and now . . . will be dust and ashes. This GOAL we have (as His children) is indeed powerful, and eternal – and whatever God calls on us to do, to give, or to sacrifice toward it . . . well, my friends, *it’s ALL worth it!*