

# Christ's Love Compels Us

## Living Crazy for Jesus

2 Corinthians 5:1-21

Key verses 5:13-14

If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

Through yesterday's message, we learned what following Jesus involves. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it." Based on these words, what kind of life will followers of Christ live? Doesn't it seem too extreme? Wouldn't someone who really lived this way appear to be out of his mind? Based on the examples we looked at during this conference, it seems that the answer is "yes". Think about Abraham. When he was an old man, God told him to leave his country, his people, and his father's household and go to the land God would show him. What did Abraham's neighbors think when they saw him packing up all his stuff? When they asked, "Where are you going?" he answered, "To the place God will show me." They probably thought to themselves, "The old man finally lost his marbles." Levi's example is similar. In a depressed economy with few opportunities for high-paying employment, Levi had a stable, well-paying government job. Some say that there's only two things you can be sure of in this life: death and taxes. So, Levi had a secure job. Yet what did he do? He left his job to follow a man he didn't know who didn't have any money simply because the man said, "Follow me." Levi's old friends surely thought that he was out of his mind.

Yet another example of someone who was crazy for Christ is the Apostle Paul, the author of today's passage. Paul's life of following Jesus was truly extreme. As a missionary, he traveled over 10,000 miles, much of that distance on foot, to bring the gospel to all the major cities of the ancient Roman world. In following Jesus, he endured all kinds of troubles. He describes his way of life in the next chapter: "as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance, in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger; in purity, understanding, patience, and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as impostors; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything." Wow! What a life! How can we describe Paul's life? Surely, he was crazy for Christ.

Why, then, did Paul live such a life? What made him so crazy for Christ? In this passage, Paul explains why he was out of his mind for God. The answer is in the key verse: it was the love of Christ that compelled him to live such a life. What is amazing is that this love that compelled Paul is not just for Paul--but for all of us. Let's take a look at the passage to understand this love better.

### **First, Paul's confidence**

Look at verses 1-10:

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while

we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

These verses show us that Paul was confident that the life he was living was the best way of life.

First, Paul saw that his life here on earth, in this mortal body, was so poor compared to the life he was looking forward to in Christ. How are they different? They are as different as a tent from a building. If you've ever been camping, you know that a tent has tons of limitations. A tent has no plumbing, which means no bathroom or sink; it has no electricity; it is poorly insulated; and bears can easily knock them over looking for food. During this conference, we are staying in very humble dorm rooms--they do not even have air conditioning. Yet, they are far better than a tent. If a humble dorm room is so much better than a tent, how much greater is the building that is built by God? Paul also describes our condition in these mortal bodies as being "naked," which means shame, poverty, and exposure. Paul sometimes groaned and was burdened because of his sinful nature. Sometimes, he did what he didn't want to do and cried out, "What a wretched man I am!" So, he longed to be clothed in his heavenly dwelling. Paul's hope was to be totally changed and to live together with Jesus forever. Then, he would never suffer from doing things he didn't want to do; he would experience true life--a life filled with joy, freedom, and power.

Second, Paul knew that what he did in this body would count toward his life in his heavenly dwelling. Paul says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." One of the big problems among Christians today is that we forget that what we do here on earth counts. It is true that Jesus died for our sins and there's nothing we can do to add to his work of sin-forgiveness; yet, it is also true that God pays attention to what we do, and he will give each person what is due him. When we use our life here on earth to do what pleases God, we can be confident that we will be rewarded accordingly; and when we do things that we know displeases God, we will suffer real loss on the day of judgement. For this reason, Paul made it his goal to please the Father.

These are the things that Paul was confident of, and his confidence was rooted in the work of God in his life so far. After repenting of his sins and confessing his faith in Jesus, Paul received the gift of the Holy Spirit from God. The evidence of this gift was that Paul's life was changed, and this change was clearly the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet, this change was only a small deposit on what was yet to come. Paul was changed from a persecutor of the church into the most zealous missionary for Christ, yet this change would pale in comparison to the glorious change that would take place when he exchanged his earthly tent for his heavenly dwelling. So Paul lived by faith, not by sight.

## **Second, the love of Christ**

Look at verses 11-15:

11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. 12 We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those

who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. 13If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. 14For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

Not everyone understood Paul's way of life. Some people thought that he was out of his mind. Yet, it was actually the love of Christ that compelled Paul to live the life he lived. Jesus revealed his love for us by dying us. If Jesus had not died for Paul, he would not have had the hope of the heavenly dwelling; instead, he would have to fear condemnation and death for his sins. When Paul remembered that Jesus died for him, he was moved by the love of Jesus. He could not take this love for granted; he could not just forget about it. He had to respond to the love of Christ. He understood that Christ's love meant that he should no longer live for himself, but for Jesus--the one who died for him and was raised again.

Look at verses 16-21:

16So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! 18All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: 19that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. 20We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

The love of Christ changes everything. His death is the death of our old lives and the beginning of a totally new life. If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The way of life that Paul lived was the only life that was compatible with his new life in Christ. His old life purpose was to live for his own glory and please himself; his new life purpose was to live for the glory of God and please Jesus. His old mission was to destroy the church; his new mission was an ambassador of Christ, bringing the message of reconciliation to all people. To those who have not been changed, Paul's life looked crazy; but those who are in Christ are new creations; they are able to see and understand that Paul's life was, in fact, the most sensible, logical, and excellent way of life that one could live.

If anyone is in Christ but is less than "crazy" for Jesus, that person is probably not happy. A new creation cannot be happy and satisfied living the old way of life. It is only when we devote our lives fully to Jesus that we are truly happy and confident that we are on the right path. Surely, the most fitting way of life for those who are in Christ is to be out of our minds for God. This is the reality of our new life:

My identity: a new Creation

My hope: Eternal Dwelling

My purpose: to live for Christ

My motivation: Christ's love

My mission: the ministry of reconciliation

My job: ambassador of Christ

Personally, I can testify that living crazy for Jesus is the most excellent way of life. I grew up in a Christian family, and when I was a teenager I met Jesus personally and began to be changed by the Holy Spirit. Yet, I did not devote myself fully to the Lord. Instead, I devoted myself to school and athletics, and for the most part I suffered from a weak spiritual life, with little joy in the Lord. Yet everything changed for me when I went to a summer conference like this one and heard God's call to follow Jesus by living as a Bible teacher for college students. This commitment was hard for me to make at first, but once I made it, I was almost instantly out of

my mind with joy as I devoted myself fully to Jesus. When I went to the campus, I invited everyone to Bible study--even a group of tough-looking gangsters. I taught the Bible to many students even though I was a full time student and worked part time. I'd stay up late teaching the Bible and wake up early for personal devotion--my roommate at college thought I was out of my mind, yet I had never been more alive and filled with joy and confidence that I was living the right life.

These days, however, I have lost my craziness for Christ. I've been too busy with my dissertation and teaching to teach the Bible to more than one student at a time. I've become more "sensible" in the eyes of the world, but in truth I've been missing out on the most excellent way of life. The real problem is that my heart has been closed to the love of Christ. I didn't remember that Jesus died for me to make me into a new creation. I forgot that all of my hope and the purpose of my existence is rooted in the love of Christ. I repent of forgetting the love of Christ. I pray that I may hold to the love of Christ so that I am once again compelled to be out of my mind for God.

May God help all of us to live the only way that is fitting and right for those who are in Christ. May the love of Christ compel us.