

“More than Just a Good Cause”
By Chris Ulrich
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We had a radio program, years ago, and it was called, “Steps to Reality.” What’s interesting is that, years and years ago, before I became a Christian, I used to think that Christians really didn’t have a grasp of reality. When God started dealing with me, and drawing me into His truth, (I’m not here to be the judge of the world, God is the judge) but, as Christians, we actually have a better grasp of reality, as Christ said to be aware of the signs of the times (Matthew 16:1-3).

Despite the deterioration of morals, ethics, and just general good conduct, there are a lot of good causes out there. I know that sounds like a contradiction but hear me out on this one. Oh, I’m not trying to say that the condition of this world is improving, although I wish I could stand here and tell you that’s the case. There’s times of war, there’s times of peace, there’s times when it seems like there’s improvement in *some* ways, but, overall, you look at the turmoil, not just in the Middle East, but, you look at history, and, as it gradually led up to World War I and World War II... You look at the number of fatalities that happened during those conflicts, and there had never been any world wars, at least, not to that extent, prior to this past century. So, when you think about it, the Bible talks about how in the last days iniquity would abound and the love of many waxing cold (Matthew 24:12). How that perilous times would come in those days, unspeakable crimes, lawlessness, great conflict, and on and on and on. But there are good causes out there. And for a minute I want to highlight some of those good causes to make a point. I’m not talking about just in church—I mean, obviously that’s our focal point, but think about: There are programs to get people to work, programs to help our senior citizens, our children, and our disabled. There are charities that are sincerely looking to help in the aftermath of tragedy and catastrophe. I remember after we had a fire in our house over thirty years ago (and we won’t talk about whose fault that was). It was pretty major. We had a lot of damage. We had to move out of the house for a time. Thank God we had insurance, and there were no fatalities. We received donations from the Red Cross and I have never forgotten that (things like toothbrushes, washcloths, and towels—things that you don’t think you need that much until the time comes when you don’t have them). The stuff in the basement was protected (there was a barrier that led to the downstairs), but, as far as the main part of the house, all that was left was the dishes in the dishwasher. At least we had dishes. We have rehabilitation facilities to help people recover from substance abuse just to name a few. And there’s nothing wrong with any of those things, in fact, that’s part of what’s right. And there’s nothing wrong with our involvement with any of those things, that’s also part of what’s right. But we’re going to look at something today that’s more than just a good cause.

Proverbs 4:10-18 ... as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.

This month’s theme (at Christian Fellowship) has been the path of Christ. There’s a couple of point that I really want to highlight: In verse 11, where it talks about “I have taught thee in the way of wisdom; I have led thee in right paths.” That’s the understanding we can only get from God. In the last verse of that segment, it says that the path of the just is as the shining

light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day. That's what we have to look forward to: We have eternal life, but we also have a hope in God in this life. I was thinking earlier this morning, and, how many here have ever heard of Murphy's Law? "Anything which can go wrong, will go wrong." Here's what I've got to say: What's the opposite of Murphy's law? God's Law: "Anything that could go right, will go right." There are plenty of things that go wrong, don't get me wrong; don't let me paint a picture where everything is going to come up smelling like roses. We're going to fight battles; we're going to have challenges; we're going to face difficulties. We also have something to look forward to: We have a hope in God that's real, that's tangible, that's undeniable, that's permanent.

Parrish and Bob both gave sermons earlier this month about the path Jesus walked. Parrish expounded on the early years of the life of Christ, from the promise of his arrival through the visions of the prophets of the Old Testament, to the miraculous and tumultuous times of the birth of Jesus, to the times of his discussions in the temple with the religious leaders. Bob took us through the baptism of Jesus and its importance, several of the parables, and mentioned that seeking God can't be our last resort—it needs to be our first option.

The path of the just is as the shining light, that shines more and more unto the perfect day. There are a lot of good causes out there but there's only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism (Ephesians 4:5). There are a lot of good ways to live, but there's only one good way to die. There are still a lot of good people in this world but strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life and few there be that find it (Matthew 7:13-14). It's not like we're the judges, God's going to be the One that judge us ultimately. Christ talks about judging righteous judgment, but it is a matter of knowing that there are a lot of good causes, charities, American Cancer Society, Mothers Against Drunk Drivers... Whatever it happens to be, I was watching TV a couple of weeks ago, and there was this woman who used to be on TV years ago, and she was talking about this diet plan that she had put her kids on, and it was her passion. I'm not negating that, I'm not taking and trying to criticize that, but, what is our passion? We're going to have hobbies and interests in the lifetime; God didn't give us the world to live in and just go through life like a bunch of robots and not enjoy it, but there is an expectation that God has. There's a lot of good philosophies and belief systems out there, but Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man can come unto the Father but by me (John 14:6).

Jesus' Path and the Path We Take

Mark 1:1-3 ... Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

That was talking about John that preceded Christ. John's whole life was to talk about the coming of the Lord, to talk about this man, Christ, and talking about what you talked about Malcolm, as far as hanging on the cross, taking on the sins of the world—that's a strong thing. I don't know if everybody here has seen the Passion of the Christ. I did, years ago, when it first came out, and I actually bought it recently. To me, that's one of the best representations of the emotion... It didn't really get into doctrine—it didn't have to—it wasn't about that, it really more served to convey the emotion, the power of Him taking on those sins. It broke me down a couple of times, and that's good. That's appropriate.

There are a lot of career choices we can make—that's something that the world really drives: you can be a criminal investigator, or you can be a professional athlete, or whatever, that's fine. We all have a career path to take, but that's not really what this is about. There's a

lot of people we can choose to associate with, a lot of places we can look to live, and a lot of beliefs we can choose to have. Think about how many religions there are just under the umbrella of Christianity. When it says in Ephesians, “One Lord, one faith, one baptism,” there’s going to be different churches around, but we should all be speaking the same thing. It’s not like everybody has to act exactly alike—our characters develop through our relationship with God as we go. With all those doctrines to choose from, it’s no wonder there is so much confusion and misunderstanding and disagreement in this world. Who’s right and who’s wrong? Everybody thinks that they’re right. There’s a verse in Proverbs which says all the ways of a man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth the spirits (Proverbs 16:2). We have to go back and just look at what the Word of God teaches. I wasn’t raised going to church at all, and I didn’t have any knowledge as far as what version of the Bible is right, whether we should get baptized, what song should we sing... When I first heard this message and I knew that it was undeniable, and unforgettable. I’m not going to argue with that. I realized that, for my own soul’s sake, this is a lifetime—I hesitate to say ‘commitment,’ because I know that some people are going to say, “Oh, no, no, no; I don’t want to make a lifetime commitment to God.” I would say, “Yes, you do,” but I would also say that, extending my hand out, that it’s the best thing. Not in a forceful way, like, “You better do it,” you know, what am I going to do, come flying after you?

It would be foolish for me to think I can just stand here and in one instance or in a few short sentences explain everything we need to do to have a walk with God. I’m not trying to make it any harder or easier than it really is, but like Kenneth Ray has said on more than one occasion, we need to be watchful for anyone that tells us, “All we need to do is... and then we’ll be OK.” Just say this great prayer; just read five chapters a day; just make sure you get down on your hands and knees like this... It’s true that the Bible does say that we need to repent of our sins, believe and be baptized in Jesus’ name (that’s a start, that’s the beginning of it, but there’s a during...), and it’s true that we need to live a holy life, and it’s true that we need to endure to the end. We’re not just going to take one aspect and say, “That’s it! All you’ve got to do is just believe, or just say this particular prayer, One thing is for sure, though, and that is we need to follow the path that Jesus took. I’m not talking about we need to go to Israel, become carpenters, and try to redo everything he did. I’m talking about hearing the voice of God now in this present day guide us and direct us in the paths we need to take.

I’m going to ask Brother Parrish to share something. He and I had talked this past week, but I want to introduce this to really do it justice. It has to do with a dream that he had, maybe twenty-five years ago, and, I would say, well, there’s plenty of dreams that I’ve had that meant nothing at all. Let me just come right out and say that. But there are times when we know good and well that God is speaking to us and dealing with us about a certain matter, and a lot of times those dreams are for us. There are times when it could be for other people, but I would say, that, unless you are high leadership in God, that it is really rare to have a dream that really is for everybody, like the visions that John had in the book of Revelation. I don’t want to beat this too much, but I just want to point out that, when Parrish shared this with me, several years ago, it really stood out. When preparing this sermon, I felt it was very relevant. A lot of times, getting back to the point of having different career paths, and not just different careers, as far as professions, but, “I want to go be a cowboy,” “I want to go live out in the wilderness,” “I want to go join the Merchant Marines,” “I want to be a musician and just strum the guitar at Starbucks,” or whatever... Parrish, I’d just like for you to come share, because I felt that it was something pertinent.

First of all, I would just like to say that I am not an advocate to get up and start talking about a lot of dreams, but Brother Chris saw something that would be beneficial to the congregation, so, therein, I share.

Many years ago, that was before I moved up here, God gave me a dream. In this dream, it started off, that I was at the beginning of a city block. There was nothing but darkness behind me, and it looked like nighttime, but it was a darkness like the darkness of Egypt. Walking along this city block, you could go into these shops, but, instead of going into the shop to buy something, it was like you were waking into somebody's life. The first shop was my ex-fiancée. I went in there and I had my friend with me, and we went in, and there she was. She was wearing a beautiful wedding gown, and she was all happy and laughing. Everybody was rejoicing with her. Her groom was right there beside her, and he had no face.

After seeing that, I walked out, and walked into the next shop, and that shop was a family member. That shop had a bunch of antiques, but it was cold, and quiet, and dusty, and it had cobwebs, and it had absolutely no life in that particular shop.

The next place on the block was like a big movie house; it had a big old awning, but, if you walked in, it was this humongous mall. It went in every direction; there were floors up, and floors down, and I never could see the end of it, but, instead of going in there to buy something, you would go in there and choose a life. If you were excited about sci-fi, you could go in there and choose that. If you were into Country-Western, you could go and choose that. If you wanted rap, or dancing, or sports... anything you wanted to choose, there was a shop that you could choose that. Those were the things that you could give your life to. I turned to talk to my friend who had gone in with me, and they had gone into one of the shops. I walked out of the entrance to the mall the same way I came in. There were all these people that were going into it. As I got to the street, there were no cabs, no buses, no cars, there was no transportation of any type. It was just one city block, and the darkness at either end was complete. I just sat on the curb, and I cried. It bothered me for a long time. I asked the pastor, a bunch of us bros were fellowshiping, and I asked the pastor, I had this dream, and I went on to tell him. He said, "Brother, that's not even hard to figure out. The first shop, your ex-fiancée, she was really wrapped up into being married, it really didn't even so much matter *who*. The next shop, was a life without the Lord; some of your family members don't have the Lord. It's got antiques, but there's no life inside. As far as the street that you saw, you're one of those people that, if you were to choose something outside of God, to leave God; to choose something else, you're not going to find your way back. You're going to be one of those people that's just out there in the darkness.

Thanks, Parrish; I know that's not an easy thing to share. It's terrifying. It's Palm Sunday; the goal is encouragement, because, if we look at what God has for us, again, getting back to God's Law. There is a difference. There is a hope in God.

Dedicating our life to God isn't a matter of thinking we'll never get anything for ourselves and that it's nothing but blood, sweat, toil, and tears. That, by the way, is an excerpt from a famous speech given by Winston Churchill, the leader in England, on the eve of World War II. That was his promise to the British people, about the threat that they faced from Nazi Germany. Look back at the annihilation of that war. Elmira and Aleks, you came here from Russia. Russia lost twenty million people. We're taking about a hope in God, but we're also talking about a reality that we are living in a brutal world. We're living in a world where iniquities shall abound, and, of course, Satan's always there to try to teeter on the one extreme to get us to think everything's great, or just to think that everything's rotten and terrible, and there's no balance in between. God wants us to be aware of what's going on, but He also wants us to look at it like, "Yes, we do have a hope." Your hope in God is permanent.

So I'll say it like this. I really don't know what God has in store for you. Christ aid, "I'll never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5) You might face some of the toughest challenges imaginable—I read this first about a month after I got baptized, and I was like, "Oh, no." I'm just being honest. It's in Acts 9:16, God is talking to Apostle Paul, and He said, "For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." I was like, "No, come on!" But, at the same time, I was encouraged by that. I felt, "I've got the strength in God, knowing the truth, being born again, to be able to face whatever adversity comes along." We're going to have challenges, but on the other hand you might have a prosperity that far surpasses your wildest expectations. I will say that, in the years that I've known God, yes, there's been some persecution. I'm not going to make it sound like Murphy's Law. I've faced some persecution; we all do, but there's times when there's no question about it that God got me through that. I believe that I'm talking to a group of people that feel the same way.

GREATER THINGS The Decision

How many remembers a couple of years ago when LeBron James was entering free agency and the media hyped it up so much that they dedicated an entire segment and called it, "The Decision"? And though it may not always seem like it, we all have some decision making ability in this life. And our choices may not always seem to be weighty when it comes to the matters in this world, but what about when it comes to our soul? I think the decisions that we make regarding our soul is a lot more weighty than, "Oh, well, I think I'm going to take my talents to South Beach." Nobody can force us to accept Jesus and nobody can force us to reject him. People can lie and deceive and be manipulative about their methods in teaching the Bible—and there's a lot of false doctrine out there, there's a lot of false teaching—it's not a matter of, "What about them?" "What about that organization?" Jesus himself said that many would come in His name and deceive many (Matthew 24:5)—How is that even possible? Well, they can come in and say, "Well, all you've got to do is this one thing," but they're not teaching the entire Word of God. That's where our relationship with God gets personal and something that nobody can interfere with. If we really want to know what God expects of us, we're going to seek Him with all of our heart.

Jeremiah 29:11-14 ... find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart....

If we seek God with all our heart, we're going to find Him. Whatever background you come from, whether you're from this area, whether you're from another part of the country, whether you're in the military, if you're seeking God, and you really want to know what God's truth is, then you're going to find Him. Be prepared for that, because it's a good thing. It's not like you have all these promises of problems and trouble; that's not the case at all. There's going to be challenges whether we accept God or not; that's one thing that I want to pass along more than anything. The Bible even says that the ways of a transgressor are hard (Proverbs 13:15). Looking at it from that standpoint; Jesus even said, **"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."** (Matthew 11:2-30) Or, we talked about, in First John where it says, "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous." (1 John 5:3) Again,, there's going to be challenges; our goal is not to make it so that God is expecting us to do something—God is expecting us to put legs on our faith. We've heard that expression before.

It's easier to make decisions about what we'll do when we know what will happen next, but how many remembers an event you've experienced, perhaps a book you've read, maybe a trip you've taken, or a movie you saw for the first time and how you reacted when it was over? Surprised, happy, saddened, angry, motivated? People reminisce about where they were when 9/11 happened, or the Kennedy assassination, or when we landed men on the moon. Nobody talks about where they were when Jesus came walking down the streets of Jerusalem because none of us were there. But how many remembers the first time God spoke to you in such a tangible and undeniable and unforgettable way? How many remembers Jesus knocking at your hearts' door and personally taking time for you? How many knows that God is alive in 2013 and that he loves each and every one of us?

Mark 11:1-10 ...spread their garments in the way: and others cut down branches off the trees...

We have a room full of people with different backgrounds, different careers, different aspirations and expectations of things in this world and there's nothing wrong with that. God made us differently for a reason and he made it so that we wouldn't all be a bunch of clones. He made us with a free will to do as we please but he also has an expectation for us that is not unreasonable. God isn't forcing us to follow his path, but he also offers us guidance and direction which is for our benefit and not to our disadvantage, so he does want us to follow his path. Ultimately, we're the ones who decide what way we're going to go. But one thing is for sure and that is that having a personal walk with God is more than just a good cause. It's the decision that lasts a lifetime and beyond. And it's what is going to save our souls.