

### Why Do This?

*“If anyone would be first, he must become last of all and servant of all” Mark 9:35.*

What sorts of things make you ask, why do this? Could it be an athlete who works so hard to come back from a significant injury only to get seriously injured again and yet vows to work even harder to return a second time? How about bungee jumping off a bridge or parachuting from a perfectly good airplane? What about paying thousands of dollars to go into space knowing all the risks involved?

Maybe it doesn't have to be that drastic either! Many of us might ask, why do this, for things like public speaking. Or perhaps we have a list of certain jobs that we personally wouldn't dare consider. For some it's things like food or music that can really provoke this question, why would someone eat this or why would they choose to listen to that? This list just scratches the surface of so many other things that make us ask, why do this? And even if I can't cover all of them now, perhaps you've already helped me out by thinking of things that personally make you wonder, why do this?

To narrow our focus a little bit more, let me ask you this, of all the things that you would consider that make you ask, why do this, do you ever think of religion, of being a believer in Jesus, of being a Christian? Maybe someone has asked you this question before or perhaps, you've found yourself at one time or another in your life asking this question, why do I do this church stuff, this religious routine, this Jesus following, this daily life of faith in the triune God? What doesn't help either is that sometimes the portions of the Bible we have in our service sometimes make us consider this question even more.

Our first two readings from Jeremiah and James seem to do that today, make us ask why do this life of faith in God? The brief passage you heard from Jeremiah highlights some of the cost of following God – of living a life of faith in God. In this reading, Jeremiah learns from the Lord that his life is in danger. The surrounding verses of this text reveal to us that Jeremiah is dealing with people that have rejected God over and over again. Generation after generation has turned to idols and now as the Lord's current messenger to this people, Jeremiah is the man they want removed from their presence. Worse yet, these people plotting against Jeremiah are folks from his own hometown!

Now, Jeremiah didn't have to have his life threatened by his own townsfolk, he could have turned his back on God. He had a connection with these people already. He probably knew what really pleased his fellow citizens' passions and how much easier pleasing them would make his life in that moment. But instead, Jeremiah committed his cause to the Lord, why do this?

Our reading from James also begins to place a Jeremiah-like predicament into our present lives. Like the people from Jeremiah's hometown, our pride leads us to follow the wisdom of the world around us. The pleasures and passions we covet and desire in this temporal life push us to be selfish and hateful to others around us. It often feels like the easier way to live and we're often convinced that looking out for number one, ourselves, is the only way to survive in this world. Why in the world would we then heed James' call for repentance and humility when it's so much easier to go along with the world around us? Yet, that's what the believer is called to do, to crucify pride drawing near to God.

This is the dilemma we find ourselves in regularly as people of faith! Here in church we may want to live out our faith, it might seem important to us in this moment, but once the service is over and life picks up again, this desire for the life of faith goes out the window. Perhaps it's persecution from those close to us that makes us give up on committing our cause to the Lord. Maybe it's our own personal desires for success, comfort, approval, etc. that lead us to choose being a friend of the world even though it means being an enemy of God. It's hard for us to get past sinful logic like, if this world is

already broken and unfair why would I want to cling to a life of faith that only brings more sacrifice in this earthly life? Why do this?

To really answer this question, of why should we cling to faith in the triune God, or why should I be a Christian or follower of Jesus seeking to swallow my pride and choose a life of service over a life of being served, we have to look again at the actions of this God. Jesus came to earth, God in the flesh, knowing full well what He was coming to do. In our reading from Mark, He prophesied what was going to happen to Him. **“The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him. And when he is killed, after three days he will rise”** (Mark 9:31).

After being born in a stable, growing up with poor parents and then finally breaking through to widespread notoriety and fame, this was going to be Jesus’ end. He was to be killed by the very people who knew Him quite well! Victim of the prideful, jealous and selfish passions of a people and their leaders who had turned their back on God. Accompanied by disciples who didn’t get what was going on around them and instead chose to argue about their own greatness moments after He tells them this sobering news. Jesus had to be tempted to ask, why should I even do this? Yet, He did it anyway. He fulfilled His own prophecy of dying and rising for a world that He could have just thrown away in order to start over with a new one.

Why would Jesus do this? Well, you know the Bible’s clearest answer to this already, **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life”** (John 3:16). Jesus did this because He loved you. He wanted you for Himself not simply in this life but for eternal life too. He knew that we needed Him and He also knew that we were too caught up in our own sinful passions to even be able to ask for His help. He came into the midst of our fighting and quarreling to forgive, renew and restore our hearts no matter the cost. He did all of this because He saw you as someone worth keeping and loving for all of eternity.

Jesus’ actions, His fulfillment of His prediction of His own death and resurrection, His love, was the answer for His own disciples as to why they continued to follow Him. These men who argued about their own greatness too afraid to ask Him what His prophecy meant, who would then run in fear at His arrest and fulfillment of this prophecy, could have scattered never to be heard from again. But instead, by God’s grace, these humbled men were brought out of their selfishness and fear and like Jeremiah before them committed their cause to the Lord even in the face of persecution and death.

This same love that changed and sustained Jesus’ disciples’ hearts then, continues to change and sustain His disciples’ hearts, our hearts, here and now. Jesus’ love is why we follow Him. His eternal love makes it worth swallowing our earthly pride and humbly turning away from our worldly passions. For the same grace that forgave and renewed those selfish and fearful disciples back then is the same grace and forgiveness that He extends and delivers to us now.

While we may not always want to hear it, we need to hear and be reminded that Jesus’ humble and sacrificial love is far greater and important than all the pleasures and passions that we are tempted with in this world. His servant love is makes it worth choosing to suffer and sacrifice in a world that is already broken and unfair. His eternal love leads us to pray for and even seek reconciliation and forgiveness in our relationships with our neighbor even when the world around us tells us to write them off and instead get even with them.

We are believers because in love God has drawn near to us. We are Christians because Christ is who we continue to need and who this world continues to need as well. We are disciples of Jesus because His Word and promise lead us to humbly love and serve in His footsteps. We are humbled servants in this world because Jesus first loved and humbly served us. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan