

Rev. Seth D. Bode † Sermon 310, 03-10-2019 † First Sunday in Lent

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

2 CORINTHIANS 6

¹As fellow workers we also urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain. ²For he says:

At a favorable time I listened to you,
and in the day of salvation I helped you.

Look, now is the favorable time! See, now is the day of salvation!

³We are giving no one a **reason to stumble** in any way, so that our ministry will not be blamed. ⁴Rather, in every way we **show ourselves** to be God’s ministers: in great endurance, in troubles, in hardships, in difficulties, ⁵in beatings, in imprisonments, in riots, in hard work, in sleepless nights, in times of hunger; ⁶in **purity**, in knowledge, in patience, in kindness, in the Holy Spirit, **in sincere love**, ⁷in **the word of truth**, in the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness on the right and on the left; ⁸through glory and dishonor, through bad report and good report; **treated as deceivers yet being honest**, ⁹treated as unknown and yet being well known; as dying, and yet look—we live; as punished yet not put to death; ¹⁰as grieving yet always rejoicing; as poor yet making many rich; as having nothing yet possessing everything.



Dear Christians, You Only Seem To Lose

Sometime since becoming an adult, I have begun to question my relationship with the mail. Mail these days often seems to be things that demand payment. We have utility bills, vehicle bills, and medical bills, more now than ever. We even receive fake bills ... sincere-looking mail that says it’s important or looks like it’s hand-written. They may sincerely want our business. But it’s no sincere friend trying to contact us.

Without a doubt, you face the same insincerity of the world. So it would be nice to know if God were sincere about His Scriptures, His Bible, His letter to humankind.

Jesus went hungry and thirsty for forty days and forty nights in the desert. In our text, St. Paul also talked about having nothing, at least as the world sees it. The mindset of the Christian seems to be chronic suffering and **only losing**.

One example: The Corinthians seemed to lose to the Macedonians. They were unsettled that Paul would go visit Macedonia before returning to them. It was a change in the original travel plans, but it had to be this way. Paul knew that, but it was harder for the Corinthians to trust.

They accused – St. Paul and his associate pastors like Timothy, who was with him in writing this letter – of being insincere, perhaps recommending themselves too much. In order to combat that, Paul wanted to show how he and his fellow missionaries “*in every way*” showed themselves “*to be God’s ministers*.”

Here we see Paul putting value into the pastoral relationship. He wanted the Corinthians to see how sincere he was for the ministry, so that God’s Word might remain true in their minds.

Now, this was not a boast, but it was important to remind these Corinthians Paul wasn't living in luxury by the proceeds of the gospel. He wasn't taking advantage of anyone and Paul was NOT *faking* his faith.

A. What follows is a catalog of concentrated facts, an elaboration of “in every way.”

They had to endure troubles, hardships, distresses, anxieties, imprisonment, poverty, and constant sorrow; teetering on the edge of death the whole time.

I will give you a few examples:

- Beatings – In Acts 16:23, Paul was whipped. Later in this letter, Paul says this happened eight times. It was illegal the whole time, but it's not until the end of the book of Acts that Paul explained he is really a Roman citizen.
- Riots – In Acts 18:12, we have record of the Jewish opposition starting a riot in Corinth. In Acts 14:19, we see them throwing stones at Paul in Lystra and dragging him outside the city, assuming he was dead.
- Sleeplessness – Paul and his fellow workers ministered by day and made tents by night. If they didn't, they went hungry.

Certainly no one could call Paul insincere about working himself to death and then some.

I knew people like this going through our ministerial training system. Some people I know took a pass on making earthly wealth so that they could be a pastor or a Lutheran school teacher. I know a pastor who had a free ride through our community college in math, and probably could have gotten the same deal at a prestigious university, but he became a pastor instead. I knew a guy who was 6'10" and had a chance to play serious basketball who's a pastor instead. The ministry of the Gospel is just too precious and too important and too vital. But it comes with what looks like loss.

B. If you were expecting comfort and luxury, Christianity does not come highly recommended.

You would need to go make gods out of entertainment, alcohol, sports, show business, magic tricks, amusement parks, beaches, or mountains if you want the life of winning.

God is very sincere about this. The fact that Jesus suffered more does not mean that Christians will suffer less. We may only face more difficulty as Christians. Being Christian can disrupt the community or even the family.

The only reason is that ***we are sincere about this message***. We are sincere about this Gospel of God, this good news that saves. We are sincerely struggling and taking great pains to get it out there. And we sincerely want all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

The word for “sincere love” is really “unhypocritical” or “unmasked agape-love.” A “hypocrite was literally a play-actor, someone “under a mask.” So God asserts that His love is not merely a mask. His letter of love is sincere, a love that draws us to be His own. It only makes sense that our loving God would step into time, defeat sin and temptation and the devil, and save sinners. It only makes sense that He would tell us about that salvation, publicize that information, and use that good news to change hearts.

This mail, this letter of love, this Scripture, is very different than what shows up in our mailbox or email.

C. You and I need to know that God is sincere.

The way to prove sincerity was, among many things, going hungry. Paul and his friends like Luke, Barnabas, and Timothy went hungry. In our Gospel, Jesus went hungry. And you know what the commercials say? "You're not yourself when you're hungry." I know how frustrated and hangry I get when I get hungry and have to wait to eat; when I have a low blood sugar; or just feel the impulse to eat.

But there is one person who remains Himself when He is hungry. Everyone has a hunger limit where their mood changes. Except for Jesus. Jesus was Himself when He was hungry. He seemed to be losing on the outside, wasting away in hunger and thirst for 40 days in the desert. But in fact He was winning. He was winning with every Word of God. He was triumphing over temptation and demolishing the work of the devil. It took hard work. It took God reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, now offering a time of grace for us sinners to remember, repent, and return; to believe the truth of His Word. He means this sincerely! You can tell by what He sacrificed.

In the same way, we may seem to be only losing on the outside.

How are you? Are you starving for the Word? Some of you teachers and counselors have a job that drags you through the difficulties of dysfunctional families. You seem to only lose. You medical professionals may have days when people don't get better, and you only seem to see the aging, the illness, and the ailing. You salespeople face deadlines and personalities and stressors that must wear on you, and you lose commission and you lose family time. You wives and husbands who aren't getting selfless love returned in your marriages are just praying for a sincere conversation instead of another sarcastic argument. You know with those everyone only loses. You children are thirsting and hungering for your time instead of following marching orders all the time. You may seem to only lose.

D. Sin does that. It makes us feel like we've lost even when we've won. Evil in the world can seem like Christians only lose. Some days, the devil brings doubt to suggest that you may challenge God's sincerity, that perhaps God wouldn't work all things out for your good.

You are in the right place, because here you have found a God who would do the sincerest things. He would feel hunger instead of heaven. Jesus would rather thirst than self-gratify. He hungered and thirsted and had nothing. Sincerely. His clothes were taken and divvied out. His body was beaten and bruised. He hungered for your human life and he thirsted for your salvation. He posted sincere love in a banner of body and blood on the cross, and today He sincerely offers and seals it for you to taste and see your forgiveness. When you walk in here, you will learn the sincerity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into whose name you were baptized.

- Matthew 5:6 – Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- Luke 6:21 – Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied.
- Romans 5:3-4 – Glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope.
- 1 Tim. 1:5 – The goal is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

He gives you what He gave Paul: **purity**, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, **sincere love**, **the word of truth**, the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness on the right and on the left (5-6).

Dear Christians, You Only SEEM To Lose

You only *seem* to have nothing, but instead you have everything.
(We will see each week how reality, authenticity, and sincerity are found in God.)

In Jesus' name, (sincerely,) Amen.