Succeeding at the Wrong Pursuit

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Preacher: Dr. Michael Staton

[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. I have a couple of recurring nightmares.

There are about three of them. And they happen just all throughout the year. Generally, at times where life is extremely busy, where the pace is really hectic, or with a lot of deadlines, these recurring nightmares tend to happen.
They're nothing serious, but they are very real, and they're really frustrating. One of those three that I often have, I imagine many of you probably have had as well, it's where I am told at the end of a semester that I have a final exam at high school that I need to go and take.
And it's always the same. I went to Westmore High School, South Oklahoma City, about 110 years ago. And I show up and I tell them, I've already graduated from here.
My picture is on the wall with the graduates, 1991. And they don't care. They tell me that I have to take this final exam and pass it, or I will not have passed high school.
[1:28] And then I tell them, I've already graduated high school. I've already have a college degree. I've got a couple of degrees after college. I've already done this. And they always very politely say, it doesn't matter what you've done.

You will not have graduated high school if you don't pass this test. And I ask them every time, what is the class? And it's always something I've never heard of in my life.
I would have no possible way to pass that final exam. And I just am in panic of how is this happening? And the unique thing, I've been having this dream for about 35 years since I graduated high school.
And in my dream, I'm aware that this dream happens all the time. And I will tell them, this isn't even real. I have this nightmare and that's all this is.
And they say, I'm sorry, this time it's real. And it doesn't matter how much I try to tell them what I've already done or what I've already done outside of high school.
[2:32] Every time it's the same, they tell me, it doesn't matter what you have achieved. You have not succeeded at graduating high school. I wake up and I am relieved that once again, I really did make it through high school.

And the essence of that kind of recurring nightmare that comes around is that they are telling me, it doesn't matter what else you've done in your life or what other degrees you've earned in your life, you haven't succeeded at the right thing.
They're telling me, you didn't really finish high school. It doesn't matter what else you did, you did not succeed at the most important part. Well, thankfully for me, that's just a nightmare I wake up from.
But the truth is, in the spiritual realm, there are all kinds of people wearing themselves out to try to achieve and accomplish different things.
And they just haven't succeeded at the most important. As much as we're thankful for those who serve, as much as we rely on the generosity of our members to worship through giving, as much as we are grateful for all that people do to lead and to minister within our church, none of those things matter at all if you do not know Christ as your personal Savior.
[4:12] There is no achievement, there is no accomplishment you could have that would overcome if you do not have that basic, elementary, ground floor element of what it means to serve the Lord, and that is to, by grace through faith, have a relationship with Him.

I've heard it said that many people spend their life trying to climb to the top of the ladder, and some of them make it to the top of the ladder, only to look down and realize that ladder has been leaning against the wrong building.

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In other words, you really made it to the top, but what you made it to the top of is not the place you wanted to go. We return this morning in our study to Philippians.
We are starting this morning chapter 3, where we're going to see the reality that for some people they are successful, but they are successful at the wrong pursuit.
My hope this morning is to encourage each of us that we would not waste our time pursuing the things of the world or pursuing the things that do not matter, and instead would ensure that the most important thing about us, that we would have a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ by His grace, is true and alive within our hearts.
[5:40] Philippians 3, we're looking this morning in verses 1 to 7. He begins, Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.

To write the same things to you is no trouble to me and is safe for you. Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh.
For we are the circumcision who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.
Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh, also, if anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more. But whatever gain I had, I count it as loss for the sake of Christ.
Make note with me in verses 1 to 2 that there is a war that is raging. There is a war. He begins, Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord.
[7:19] He is about to say some things that are hard. He is about to say some things that are very convicting. But He does this because He loves them.

You see that with the affectionate term here, my brothers. That's important because that reminds us that as we teach the Bible, whether it is a preaching service, or whether it's in a Sunday school classroom, or whether it's parents in a living room instructing their children in the home, that we teach because we love.
We want to say things that are true, but we say things that are true to people that we love. Never forget that. The people you're teaching, the children you're instructing, the people who are a part of the class that you lead, these are people that we are to have affection for, compassion with.
Finally, my brothers, He says, rejoice in the Lord. Now, this is critically important because He's about to describe this war that's raging, and yet notice He begins by saying we are to rejoice in the Lord.
In verse 2, He gives the warning of the war, but that war begins by rejoicing in the Lord. Spiritual battle that we are a part of as brothers and sisters in Christ is not a spiritual battle we wage with hatred and with anger or with malice.
[8:57] We are to be a rejoicing people. We hate sin. We hate the consequence of disobedience.

We hate it when we find ourselves doing the things that we don't want to do and failing to do the good that we long to do. We hate sin and we hate the effects of it.
But we are to love the people that we serve. And we are to engage in spiritual conflict with a heart filled with joy.
Rejoice in the Lord, He says. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me, and it is safe for you.
This reminds us of the importance of teaching and then teaching again. So just a quick word to many in our church who are raising little ones.
[9:58] Teach and teach again. I know sometimes when you're raising children, you feel like we've already dealt with this. We've already covered this. We've already gone over this.

And we've got to teach again. That's how we learn. That's true for children. That's true for us. Paul says to them, I'm saying this to you again, but it's no trouble for me to remind you of these things, and it's a safeguard for your soul to be reminded of the things that we know.
We are to rejoice. We are to love those with whom we serve. Our lives are to be marked by joy. But there is a war that's raging.
Verse 2, Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh.
What are we talking about here? The background of this is dealing with a group known as the Judaizers. It's a group that we're teaching that circumcision and the law of Moses was still required to be acceptable to God.

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[11:16] This is a group who is basically saying that to be a Christ follower, you needed to have Christ plus other things.

Christ plus law keeping. Christ plus obeying their tradition. Christ plus anything, my friends, ceases to be the gospel.
They were going to Gentile churches and trying to pull them away from their belief of Christ alone. To embrace this idea that yes, you need Christ, but it's Christ plus your works.
Friends, beware of that. Let's be clear. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone.
Your salvation is not because God was good and you were good. Your salvation is not because God was good and you were smart.
[12:23] It is all of Him. And so He says, you've got to look out. You've got to be at war. You've got to be ready.

Look out for the dogs. These are evildoers. We look out for them. We're to be aware. In fact, just look at verse 2. Let me reread it and emphasize it on purpose strongly here.
Look out for the dogs. Look out for the evildoers. Look out for those who mutilate the flesh. Three times in rapid succession. Look out. Look out.
Look out. This is an urgent plea. You can feel it as you read and hear the text there. This isn't some small thing. This isn't just saying that you're to go through your Christian life and as long as you do some good and you go to church, you're fine.
No, He is calling those He loves. He's calling His brothers and sisters in Christ to look out. Why do you look out? You look out because there's danger lurking. Look out, He says.
[13:30] There's a war that's raging. Sometimes we forget that. Sometimes we approach life as if this is all just some game.

It's not. We're in a spiritual battle. We've got to look out. Because there are those who are longing to pull you away.
And the reality of it is, while the world, those who hate the things of God, those who deny the things of God, would love to pull you away, that's not the only place the temptation and the battle comes from.
In context, these aren't people who are denying the work of Christ. They're just denying the sufficiency of the work of Christ. You've got to be careful on all sides.
Those who would deny the Bible. Those who would deny the Bible. Those who would mix truth and error with the Bible. Those who would claim to be believers but truly aren't. We've got to look out all the time.
[14:39] He describes them. If you want to see evidence of how serious this is, look at the way that He describes these we are at war with. He describes them as dogs, evildoers, mutilators.

In the original text, in the language this is written, He employs alliteration here. These three things, dogs, evildoers, mutilators, in the original text, all start with the same letter.
It's just this kind of staccato, heavy-hitting, fast litany of things that we are to be aware of. Beware of the dogs, the evildoers, the mutilators.
The word He used for dogs here is not the word you would use for your pet. This isn't saying beware of fluffy, alright? It's not that kind of a pet. It's a different word. It's a scavenger dog.
It's the kind of word referred to a dog who would just go through and devour in the trash that would just eat up other people's belongings. These false teachers were claiming that Christians were unconverted because they did not follow the Mosaic Law.
[15:52] And He says these false teachers are trying to pull you away from your trust in the work of Christ alone.

They're trying to tell you you're spiritually unclean, so to speak. Yet, He says, they are the dogs. They are the unclean ones.
It's the very people that are lofting up these accusations against the church. He says, in reality, they're the ones that are in spiritual trouble.
He says they are evildoers. They are mutilators. It's a reference here to their demand for circumcision.
And what He's teaching here is that circumcision, while a physical act in the Old Testament, even in the Old Testament, it was never just about the physical act. It was about the heart.
[16:54] Deuteronomy 10 mentions that. His point is this. If you're trusting in physical circumcision, because that makes you right with God, He says, if your heart does not believe, all you've done is

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mutilate the flesh.

He employs this accusation purposely. They're mutilators. They're carrying out a physical act without faith, without mercy, without trust in God.
His point is, it doesn't matter how religious you are. It doesn't even matter what you do to your own body. If you don't trust in Christ alone, it's all for nothing.
Same thing's true for us today. There are a lot of things Christians should do. There are a lot of things that should be a part of our lives because we know Christ and love Christ.
But if you do those things apart from loving Christ and trusting in Him, it is for nothing. I don't know who the worst singer in our church is.
[18:09] We've got a few of us that could probably qualify for candidates. But whoever the worst singer in our church is, if you love the Lord and your heart is sincere, when you lift up a song of praise to the Lord, it is pleasing to God.

He loves it. Your spouse may not. God does. Conversely, if you take someone with perfect pitch and the most beautiful voice imaginable, and they don't love Christ, they just show up to church and sing, beautiful though it may be, from an insincere heart, that is offensive to God.
Are we called to sing to the Lord? Absolutely. The Old Testament describes the people of God as a singing people. The New Testament describes that we teach each other and encourage each other in song.
Singing is absolutely to be something we do. But if we are singing with our voices and our lips and our hearts are not sincere, there is no worship there.
And Paul says we are at war with those who would try to lead us to believe that you can overcome a lack of trust in God simply by what you do.
[19:38] Don't fall for it. Don't allow yourself to become a prisoner in this war. It has always been about the heart. It has always been about faith in the promises of God.

Be aware of those who would try to lead you away. Will it make sense we would go from war because of the theme he's talking about here, secondly, to worship.
From the emphasis on a spiritual war, to worship, verse 3, for we are the circumcision. Now this is a purposeful play on words here, back to verse 2, where he calls the other ones, those who mutilate the flesh.
His point is that when he says we are the circumcision, he's not referring to the physical, he's referring here to the spiritual condition of the heart. As Romans 2, 29 says, circumcision is a matter of the heart.
And how is our worship to be? Verse 3, we are the ones who worship by the Spirit of God. We worship according to truth.
[20:53] I suppose there's never been perhaps a time in church history where it's been more true that people need to be reminded of this.

In a time where so many churches view other churches as competition instead of co-laborers, in a time where so many people who are in charge of leading in worship and preaching to the body of Christ are far more concerned with entertainment or being impressive than being faithful, at a time where so many people go to church and they choose the church they'll attend based on feelings or just how worked up their emotions can get, not based on the truth of God's Word.
This is such an important word for us today. We are reminded that while we are in a spiritual war, we fight that war with worship.
And as we worship, we worship by the Spirit of God. We're to worship God the way He longs to be worshipped.
So what would that mean? What is the kind of worship that is led by the Spirit of God? What is the kind of worship that the Bible tells us is pleasing to God and honorable to God?
[22:18] Because here's the reality of it. It is very possible to show up to church, sing, listen, take notes, go home, and God has not been pleased by that, but has been offended by that.

How do we know that? Isaiah 29 verse 13, Jesus quotes this in the New Testament also, because this people draws near with their mouth and honors me with their lips while their hearts are far from me.
The prophet is warning the people, and Jesus repeats in the New Testament the same warning, that it is possible that with your mouth and with your body you're going through certain activities of worship, but if your heart is far from Him, it is not worship.

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Which means it's possible to be in this sanctuary this morning and to have sung songs of praise and hymns of worship. It's possible even this morning to have a Bible open and to be listening and taking notes, and yet, if your heart is far from God, you have not pleased Him.
Because God is not looking for people just to go through activities. He's looking for those who would worship Him, John 4, in spirit and what?
[23:45] In truth. Spirit and truth. Our worship must be done with our hearts according to the Holy Spirit in the truth of His Word, which means our singing, our preaching, our ministry, everything we do must be based on Scripture.

It must mean that we delight in the truth. It is worship that is to impact our whole being, our mind and our heart. And the emphasis must always be on Christ, not us.
The quickest way to discern if you are worshiping by the Spirit of God or by a man-centeredness is who is made much of, Christ or us.
And the Scripture reminds us the worship with which we are to engage in is worship by the Spirit of God. He says this in the very next phrase clearly, We are to glory in Christ Jesus.
And put no confidence in the flesh. We are to glory in Christ Jesus. It means we don't just say things that are true, we delight in that truth.
[25:03] We don't just sing songs that are true, but we delight in that truth. We don't just say things to each other that are true, but our hearts delight in it.

We don't just talk about grace and the cross and salvation and forgiveness. We delight in that, that our greatest desire is that people would just make much of Christ.
Brothers and sisters, let's make sure that's true in us. Make sure that you don't just study to get it right, but that your heart delights in that truth you study.
Make sure as you study the teacher Sunday school class that you don't just simply try to get it right, but you get it right because you love Christ and because you love the people you're teaching.
Make sure that as you stand to sing with us that you're not just saying the words that are the right words, but that your heart is captivated by the truth that we get to proclaim.
[26:10] As our choir sang for us, it is an amazing thing that He loves us. It's an amazing thing that He cares.

I hope you never get past that. I hope you never get over that. The God of the universe sent His only Son who died and suffered in our place that all who would believe in Him would not perish but find everlasting life.
That is amazing. Amazing. It's amazing. We glory in Christ. We put no confidence in the flesh.
There's a war. People trying to lead us astray. We've got to be faithful. We fight that war through worship. And then third, in verses 4-6, He gives us a warning.
It's really important here. Verse 4, Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh. Now, let's understand what Paul's saying here because his logic here, his Holy Spirit-inspired logic is very helpful if we're going to rightly understand what he's saying and make sure we're clear in what he's not saying.
[27:34] He says there are these people who are putting confidence in their flesh, in the works of their hands, in what they do, in what they can achieve. And he says real worship, biblical worship, is done out of a glory of Christ, not done out of a confidence in the flesh.

Now, he anticipates, somebody could say, well, you say that because maybe you yourself are very unimpressive. Maybe you yourself don't have the background that somebody else who's really spiritual has.
And so what Paul says is that true worship is by the Spirit of God, it's to the glory of Christ, it's not about our achievements. And then he says, if this were something that you could earn or achieve because of your resume, so to speak, he says, I've got the resume.
And I want you to notice the things he says that he has. These are things he is saying if right standing with God came because of who you are or what you've done, he said, I would have all the confidence in the world.
But all of those things, none of them are able to actually save us. Look at what he says. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.
[29:04] He says, I was circumcised on the eighth day. This goes back to Genesis 17. In other words, he says, my family was obedient from the beginning.

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I'm of the people of Israel. Israel. His heritage is Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He says, I'm of the tribe of Benjamin. The tribe of Benjamin was fiercely proud.
Israel's first king was of the tribe of Benjamin. Mordecai, who we studied about on Sunday evenings this year in the book of Esther, was of the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin's territory included Jerusalem and the temple.
He says, we followed the law from the very beginning. My heritage, my ancestry, is as good as it can be. I'm of the tribe of Benjamin. He says, I am a Hebrew of Hebrews.
The purest of the pure. This is a reference here to those in his day who did not accommodate social changes, but stayed true to their Jewishness.
[30:18] Here's a good explanation of it that I found. The phrase Hebrew of Hebrews means that both Paul and his parents were steeped in the language and culture of their heritage.

But, those Jews who remained uncompromised by the surrounding Greek culture and who were committed to their own culture are often referred to as Hebrews.
And Paul says, I'm a Hebrew of Hebrews. Hebrews. My family are as committed to the core of our tradition as you can be.
He says, as to the law, the Pharisee, the separated ones. They had a high regard for the Old Testament law.
Listen to Acts 26, verse 5. They have known for a long time if they are willing to testify that according to the strictest party of our religion, I have lived as a Pharisee.
[31:21] Their problem was they trusted in their own works and their own traditions. He says, as to zeal, the persecutor of the church. In other words, he says, I didn't just have beliefs.

I put them into practice. For the people who were saying that Christ was enough, that grace was sufficient, that it wasn't about the law and it wasn't about tradition, I didn't just disagree with them.
I persecuted them. In other words, he says, as much as the law could make me right with God, I was there. I didn't sit on the sidelines.
As to righteousness under the law, blameless. He was as holy as his works could make him.
And his works were nothing more than filthy rags because they were not done in faith. What he says here is he gives a warning if you think that because of your family or your nationality or your heritage or your education or your perfect attendance in Sunday school or anything else you've done, if that's what you're trusting in, you will be as holy as those things can make you and those things can't do anything.
[33:06] It would be as if last night if you had no job, no savings, no investments, no house, no property, but played a game of Monopoly and you won.

And tomorrow morning you went to the bank and said, I'd like to buy a house and I'd like to deposit all this money.
I've got all the money that's possible. And they said, let me see it. And you pulled out those green and pink and yellow dollars from Monopoly.
and they said, what is this? And you said, I'm loaded because Saturday night I beat my family in Monopoly and I owned all the houses and I owned all the hotels and I owned all the railroads and I owned all the electric companies and I have all the cash.
I've got it all. And that bank would look at you and say, you're as rich as you can be in Monopoly money and it's worth nothing.
[34:41] And there are all kinds of people offering up their Monopoly money to God and saying, look how spiritually wealthy I am.

Paul says he had everything you could earn by his background, his education and his law keeping and the sum total of it it's worthless.
His resume was impressive and it was completely worthless. worthless. And he gives the warning to anyone trusting in themselves.
The danger of thinking that your works can save you is not only that it distracts you but it deceives you. It distracts you because you end up spending your time trying to be more and more impressive in your works and it deceives you because you think you're safe when in reality you're lost.
when you follow a gospel that is Christ plus anything you will end up distracted and even worse deceived.
[36:03] There's a war that we're in we fight in worship we should pay attention to the warning and then in verse 7 he gives us a word of wisdom verse 7 but whatever gain I had I counted as loss for

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the sake of Christ.

He uses here the language of the marketplace he's talking about profit and loss whatever I thought was in my profit column I counted as loss whatever I thought I had earned by my family my heritage my background my nationality my education my zeal my sincerity my effort whatever I thought I had accumulated he says it's all loss no value it's monopoly money you won the game but you have nothing of lasting value that's what he says whatever he has earned in his own achievements or in his own strength it is of nothing whatever gain I had I counted as loss for the sake of Christ listen to this to have Christ is to have everything to have everything without Christ is to have nothing that's his point if all you have is Christ you have everything and if you have it all and you don't have Jesus you have nothing there's a few implications I want to bring to your attention as we close this morning one we must hold fast to the biblical gospel and continually delight in it we are to hold fast to the biblical gospel and delight in that truth number two we must fight against any form of self-reliance or self-sufficiency we are to fight against any form of self-reliance or self-sufficiency our best works if not done in faith are as nothing more than filthy rags self-reliance self-sufficiency gets us nowhere and then thirdly we must trust in
Christ and Christ alone we trust in Christ and Christ alone this is to be our preaching this is the gospel we share in evangelism this is what is to strengthen us every single day when you feel fearful when you feel overwhelmed when you feel forgotten when you feel desperate remind yourself that in Christ in Christ alone you have everything you need but here's the challenge the world is dark and that darkness wants to creep in all around you and the darkness of this world and the emptiness of this world would like for nothing more than for you to be fearful and they're going to offer you a way out they're going to offer you light but the light that they offer you doesn't work they're going to tell you to be stronger be smarter be healthier be more attractive have more money have a bigger reputation they're going to offer you all kinds of things and all this work and all this effort you put into those things will leave you even more empty than where you started excited because now not only are you desperate but you're desperate exhausted and without anything left to try but the good news of the gospel is that
Jesus has done for us what we cannot do ourselves the good news of the gospel is that not only are your works unable to save you they're not needed because of the work of Christ on the cross and rather than being overwhelmed by the world we look at Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith and we find in Jesus the light of all the world some of you have been around churches for a long time like me remember this old hymn oh soul are you weary and troubled no light in the darkness you see there's light for a look at the Savior and life more abundant and free turn your eyes upon
[42:40] Jesus look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace don't get to the top of the ladder only to find it's been leaning against the wrong building don't succeed at the wrong pursuit rest from your works and in faith trust in the finished work of Jesus and the things of earth will go strangely dim in the light of his glory and his grace Lord your word is what our hearts need I pray

Lord that you would help us even this morning to have heard these truths with hearts of faith help us Lord we pray to be obedient not in order to earn salvation but in a response to what you have freely given to us we pray amen then do so do have me have had any let at time can put or get their heart or know can them they know or or not or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or

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