

“Nothing Higher”
Romans 8:28-30; James 1:2-4

1/24/10

9 & 10:45 am

Series: “*Beyond Compare*”

INTRODUCTION

About 30 years ago I began to see that God’s highest purpose for my life was for me to become more and more like Jesus.

I had been memorizing Romans 8:26-39 and meditating on its meaning.

Shortly thereafter Janelle was born and on day 10 of her life, she contracted spinal meningitis.

When we realized that she could die, and the possible damage to her brain and eyes if she lived, one of the first thoughts that came to my mind was, “*What did I do to bring this on my little girl?*” I was thinking that she or I was being punished for something wrong I had done.

Almost as soon as the thought entered my mind, I knew it wasn’t true because of the truth of God’s Word: He does not punish children for the sins of their parents, and because of what I had been memorizing from God’s Word, I knew the truth: that we live in an imperfect world, sickness and disease happen to all of us, and in spite of it all, God takes whatever comes into our lives and uses it to make us more like Jesus.

I remember thinking, “Janelle’s too young to need to be made more like Jesus, so, the Lord wants to use this in my life.”

As a result of that experience, God inscribed this truth on my mind, and I taught it to others on many different occasions.

After that, there were many times when I talked to different people here, and pastors from other churches about discipleship. I was asked several times, “What is discipleship? What is its purpose?” I would reply, “*Discipleship is helping people to become more like Jesus.*”

But, it wasn’t until late last summer when I was studying for the series of messages on joy, that I discovered I hadn’t seen the breadth or depth of that truth; nor had it permeated my heart, mind, life and ministry the way God intended.

I had other goals; godly goals. I wanted to be a very good husband to Sharon and a great dad to our children, and not allow the ministry to take their place.

I desired to continually grow and mature in my life, stay close to God in His Word in prayer and obedience.

For the church, I desired to see hundreds and even thousands of people come into a relationship with Jesus through this ministry ... through you, through me, through us together.

You might ask, “*So, what’s wrong with that?? Isn’t that biblical? Didn’t Jesus die so that that would happen?*”

Yes, it is quite biblical, and Jesus died so that we would have the opportunity to enter into a personal relationship with God. But He died for more than that – for a higher goal than that – and I hadn’t given that goal its status as “*Beyond Compare.*”

OPEN to Romans 8:28 (**PAGE** 1757)

I. Grasp God’s Highest Purpose for Your Life: *Becoming Like Jesus* (Romans 8:28-30, James 1:2-4)

READ Romans 8:28-29

“And we know that **in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose.**

29 **For those God foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.**”

foreknew: to know before it happens (not *cause*, but *know*)

predestined: pre-determined (based upon foreknowledge)

conformed to the likeness of His Son: God’s highest purpose is clear: He wants us to be like Jesus.

firstborn among many brothers: Jesus is the model for the entire family of faith (“brothers”).

This is the re-creation.

In the *first* creation, God created Adam and Eve **in His image.**

Later, when Adam and Eve sinned, that sin marred the image of God in them, and in all of us who followed.

Sin makes us self-centered instead of God-centered. And the more self-centered we become, the less like God we become, the less we reflect God's image.

But, because God loves us, He didn't write us off. He sent His only Son, Who willingly died for our sins, so that all who admit they have sinned and accept His death as payment for their sins, are reunited in a relationship with God. All through Christ.

When we believe, the Holy Spirit comes and indwells our very bodies and the recreation takes place!

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”**

“new creation:” is *metamorphosis*: the word we use to describe the process of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly.

The active work of God renewing in us (caterpillars) the image of Jesus (butterfly); Who is the image of God, begins.

God's highest goal and desire for us is that we increasingly reflect His image through our thoughts, words, attitudes and actions; that we become more and more like Jesus, **“the firstborn among many brothers.”** This is God's highest purpose for our lives, and everything else He calls us to do flows from this incomparable purpose.

James' version of Romans 8:28:

TURN to James 1:2 (**PAGE** 1880)

James 1:2-4 **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds,**

3 because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance.

4 Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

I believe it is very important here to recognize **“mature and complete not lacking anything”** is describing Jesus.

“Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be LIKE JESUS.”

God wants us to see and grasp that while we are going through trials of all kinds, that He is working to make us more and more like Jesus. If we recognize that and adopt becoming like Jesus as the highest goal in our lives we will be able to have **pure joy** as we go through those trials.

Both passages state the same highest purpose for our lives.

From this truth, we're going to take an application step: This truth should create the framework through which we understand God's purpose for our lives as individuals and also collectively, as the church, the Body of Christ.

II. Embrace the Purpose of Ministry: Helping One Another Become More Like Jesus (Colossians 1:28-29)

TURN to Colossians 1:28-29 (**PAGE** 1833)

“We proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect [mature] in Christ.

29 To this end I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me.”

Discipleship!

Again, Christ-likeness is the goal and this is the goal to which Paul gives his focus, labor, struggle.

This is clear also in Ephesians 4:11-15 (**PAGE** 1821)

“It was He Who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,

12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up

13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.

15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into Him Who is the Head, that is, Christ.”

So, as we think about ministry, as we think about all we do in this church, it is all for this one great purpose. **SO:**

- As we become more like Christ, we will increasingly love God with all our hearts, all our souls, all our minds and all our strength. (The Greatest Commandment)

- *As we become more like Jesus*, we will *increasingly* witness and help people to become fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ. (*The Great Commission*).

- *As we become more like Jesus*, we will *increasingly* love one another the same way Jesus loves us. (*The distinctive mark of discipleship*).

Everything flows from the one purpose we have that is *Beyond Compare!*

And one day, God *will* bring this to completion.

III. Anticipate God's Completed Work in Your Life: Completely like Jesus (1 John 3:2)

READ 1 John 3:2

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made [fully] known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

One day when Jesus comes for us, whether it's in the clouds, or when He comes to meet us when our spirits leave our bodies, we will be like Him. God's highest purpose for our lives will be completed.

IV. Adopt Christlikeness as Your Highest Goal in Life

What is your highest goal? Is there something good, but less than becoming like Christ that is in His place?

It may look or sound like one or more of these:

ultimately, what I want in life is to be liked

ultimately, what I want in life is money

ultimately, I want to be a great husband / wife

ultimately, I want to be a great dad / mom

ultimately, I want to make enough money to retire securely

ultimately, I want comfort, ease, happiness

ultimately, I want to stay out of trouble

ultimately, I want the space do whatever it is I feel
like doing

ultimately, I want other people to see things the way
I do and do what I think they should do

ultimately, I want to be married, and if possible, to
a really awesome person

Since God loves us so much, He will continually show us and allow us to experience the frustration of our ultimate goals that are not His ultimate goal for our lives. In His love, He wants us to see and fully embrace becoming like Jesus, the goal which is *Beyond Compare*.

Because, He wants us to see a truth that, for me, was a very clear and gentle, but forceful realization: Idolatry is pursuing, loving, serving, or being fully devoted to something other than Jesus and becoming like Him.

When He made this clear, I asked for His forgiveness, and His help to turn around and embrace, with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, His supreme goal for my life.

“Lord Jesus, I want to become more and more like You. Please teach me and show me, and where necessary, convince me that becoming like You should be my highest and greatest pursuit. Amen.”