*Sunday, January 1, 2017am – Rose Ave.*

*Friday, January 20, 2017 – Santa Paula, CA*

**WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CHRISTIAN (8)**

**Am I Done Yet? Is it Worth It?**

We have been engaged in a study dealing with what it means to be a Christian. We have talked about what a Christian is, obeying the gospel and growing as a Christian. We have also addressed numerous hindrances both to becoming a Christian and growing as a Christian. As you study the scriptures and determine what is expected of us as Christians it can become overwhelming. The sacrifices we are called upon to make, the trials and struggles we face, and the marathon of a race that is the life of a Christian. This might cause one to ask if it is worth it. That is why, as we conclude this study we want to address two final questions. 1) Am I done yet? 2) Is it worth it? So let’s get started.

1. **Am I done yet?**
	1. ***NO! We have much left to do. We can’t quit until our time here is done. As long as there is breath we must keep on growing.***
	Hebrews 10:38-39 speaks of those who draw back, “My soul has no pleasure in them.”
	1 Corinthians 9:24 – run so that you can receive the crown
	Paul in Acts 20:24 spoke of going on to Jerusalem even in the face of threats, “*so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*”
	Jesus in Luke 9:62 dealing with excuses said, “*No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*”
	2. ***We need to endure*** -
	The Greek word for endurance (ὑπομένω, hypomenō) literally means to bear up under. It implies the idea of remaining or standing, even after trying circumstance.
	In California, we are concerned about earthquakes. As a result, most new structures, including highways are designed to endure even in a powerful earthquake. The structures have been fortified. Older structures are often “retrofitted” so that they too will ENDURE, should the unforeseen occur.
	As Christians, throughout this study we are reminded that being a Christians is NOT without its troubles and trials. We will face obstacles, disappointments, and setbacks, sometimes BECAUSE of our faith. But we can’t quit!
		1. ***Hebrews 10:36-39*** finds the writer reminding them that they need endurance. When we study the examples of Hebrews 11 we think of their faith. But a quality of their faith in every example manifested endurance. Hebrews 12:1-2, again appealing to those examples calls for us to endure.
		2. ***Endurance builds us up*** – James 1:2-4 speaks of how tribulations can make us stronger (also Romans 5:3-5). The patience we addressed this morning in 2 Peter 1:6 is a form of this same word.
		3. ***Matthew 10:22,*** Jesus taught that he who endures the end will be saved.
		4. We cannot control everything in life, but we can still endure it.
	3. ***We need to redeem the time*** (Col. 4:5, Eph. 5:16) – the word “redeeming” is a word that is associated with buying up something – in this case, the time you have been allotted. In our texts, it means to take full advantage of an opportunity and be wise with our time.
	Time is a valuable commodity. In fact, there is a sense in which everything in this life is measured in time. You are paid for your time at work. The more time one spends learning, the more he is able to do. When you suffer injury or illness it affects your time (perhaps the living you are hindered from making by lost time). Conversely, wasted time results in wasted opportunities.

 As with everything else we have been given by God, ***we are stewards of our time as well.***
1 Peter 4:10, *As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.*
Consider the one talent servant – not only did he not utilize the resources he was entrusted with, he was called a wicked and lazy servant. He didn’t even try. He did NOTHING! He wasted his time as well as the resources he had. And for that he was condemned (Matt. 25:18, 26).
Are we wasting our time? Every day, each of us has the same number of minutes - 1440 minutes to be exact. Are we being wise stewards with our minutes?
Here is a scenario (fictitious, and disregard the materialistic aspect of it): Image if those minutes were converted to dollars. Every day when you woke up, you had in your bank account another $1440 dollars to spend. But there is a catch – you have to spend it all that day or you lose it at the end of the day. HOW would you use your time that day? Would you be flippant with it, or would you make sure you used your time wisely spending what you had at your disposal? Would you waste the day watching television, or on the internet, or in some other way? You know you have to sleep, but how much? You have to do your job or chores (so that time is already spent). So how would you use the rest of your time?
NOW, relate that to the real world. We HAVE BEEN given by God those precious minutes. How are we using them? You can do a lot in a minute or two: You can say a kind word to someone or seek an opportunity to study with them. Many little organizational tasks only take seconds to complete.

 *Wasted time cannot be bought back*. While time for relaxation and recuperation are good and have a purpose in refreshing our minds and bodies (and are absolutely needed), we cannot use up all our time pursuing such things. To do so is to squander what time we have been given.
James 4:13-17 teaches us that in making plans, we include God. Think about that as we utilize our time.

 ***Take it a day at a time*** – Matt. 6:34 – don’t worry about tomorrow, but deal with the now!

 *Is God pleased with how you use your time?* We have been emphasizing giving Him our best? Have we been doing that with our time?

 We are still here – so we need to remain faithful (Rev. 14:13). As long as we have breath within us, we still need to keep growing as Christians!

1. **Is it worth it?**
	1. ***When one becomes a Christian and grows (matures) as he ought to there are many strengths:***
		1. ***With maturity comes greater appreciation of our fellowship with God*** –
		Matthew 5:8 – the pure in heart see God. Ultimate we will see God when on the other side of eternity, but as we live our lives for Him while here, we learn more of Him and see Him.
		1 John 1:3 – John’s desire was that we have fellowship with the Father.
		5-7 speaks of walking in the light (with maturity) and the fellowship we enjoy, with Him and with one another (I believe this includes God).
		2. ***With maturity comes a strengthened faith.*** Faith is not something we get overnight. It grows and matures just like our physical bodies. It is reaching that point where we totally trust Him. Wouldn’t you like to have the faith of Abraham?
		What about the faith of Paul we read of in scripture? 2 Timothy 1:12, he said, “I know whom I have believed…”
		David said, “*I have been young, and now am old; Yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, Nor his descendants begging bread.”* Here is a man of faith, looking back at his life, complete with flaws, yet he know his God. (Psalm 37:25).
		1 John 5:4, faith is our victory that overcomes the world.
		3. ***With maturity comes greater confidence in prayer*** – we KNOW from scripture that God answers our prayers – 1 Peter 3:12 tells us that the eyes of the LORD are one the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers. Be reminded that 1 John 5:14-15 speaks of our CONFIDENCE in our prayers. We know He hears. But what’s the difference between the babe and the mature in prayers?
		1) We KNOW He answers prayers because He has! Not in some miraculous way, but we have seen His care.
		2) We are better prepared to accept His answers, even when He doesn’t say yes! (He might answer no! Wait! Not that way but this way!) But He answers and we accept that answer! 2 Corinthians 12:7-9 where pleaded with the Lord concerning his thorn in the flesh which was not removed. Paul gladly accepted that answer.
		3) With maturity we know that He knows what is best! Therefore, we can boldly say, even as our Lord, “Your will be done!”
		Philippians 4:6-7 calls for to not be anxious, but with prayers we request to God, and we have peace.
	2. ***We have hope of an eternal reward in heaven***!

The Bible is filled with examples of the godly who were ready to stand before God.
Hebrews 11:13-16 describes the faith of the fathers who endured so much and didn’t quit.
Joseph, by faith gives instructions concerning his bones (Heb. 11:22).
Moses, forsook Egypt and endured so much. Why? Because “he looked to the reward.” (Heb. 11:26)

2 Timothy 4:8, Paul spoke of the crown of righteousness he was waiting for.
2 Peter 1:11, the entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior is waiting.
2 Corinthians 5:1-8, Paul speaks of our assurance of the resurrection. Our desire to be further clothed awaiting our house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Friends, IS THIS NOT WHY WE ARE HERE? If you miss heaven, you miss all there is!

* 1. ***We avoid the judgment of the ungodly***
		1. *While not popular today, the Bible speaks of the reality of hell.*  Typical of our society’s refusal to be accountable, far too many, even among brethren are now teaching there is no hell. The tragedy of this is that there is no real incentive to not reject God. You can live as ungodly as you want and in the end there will be no consequences.
		2. *The subject of hell is truly unpleasant, but we cannot ignore it.*
		Matthew 18:8-9, Jesus speaks of plucking out your eye or cutting off your hand or foot if that is what it takes to avoid the everlasting fire of hell.
		2 Peter 2:20-22 makes no sense if there is not a consequence beyond this life. How can the latter end of one who falls away be worse than one who never obeyed the gospel, if there is no consequence?
		3. *Hell is everlasting!* Matthew 25:46, the words “everlasting” (punishment) and “eternal” (life) are the exact same words. As eternal as one is, so is the other.
		Revelation 20:10 speaks of the devil being cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. 20:14-15 speaks of death and hades being cast into the lake of fire along with anyone not found written in the book of life.
		Revelation 21:8 speaks of those who will have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. Add to this, Matthew 25:41 those unprepared are told to depart into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.
		4. *Hell is a place of eternal punishment –* 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 – God will repay them with tribulations,… in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel. They will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.
		Matthew 8:12 and other places describe hell as a place of outer darkness and where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (bitter suffering). (also Matt. 13:42, 50, 24:51, etc.)
		Mark 9:43 speaks of a place where the work (maggot) doesn’t die (eternal decay) and the fire is not quenched.
		Luke 16:23, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the rich man awakes in a place called torments. He cries for even the minutest of relief (a drop of water on his tongue – 16:24), a place so terrible the rich man would do anything so that his loved ones would not come to that place.
		The idea of such descriptions is that hell is a place we should seek to avoid at all cost! When you become a Christian you are delivered from that condemnation and if you grow and remain faithful you will not face the wrath of God.
		Friends, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31). Being a Christian is how you avoid that!

And thus, we conclude our study of what it means to be a Christian. We see many today, who even in their old age, are miserable and hopeless. They reach their final years and as they look back, they see lives that have been wasted and they have nothing but regrets. Perhaps they obeyed the gospel years ago, but they never really saw the need to understand what being a Christian is about. They failed to grow.

 Our goal in this study has been to encourage us to not let that happen. We want to be seasoned in the faith! As we approach the gates of eternity we want to be able to look back at our spiritual journey and see that we have reached the top of the mountain – the finish line! But that will ONLY happen if we are willing to strive for spiritual maturity. The spiritual rewards we just mentioned will only come when our growth is in Him and not from some other source.

So as we asked in the title: “Are we done yet?” The answer is a resounding No! But we’re getting there! So don’t quit. Instead, let’s get to work! Revelation 14:13 tells us, “*Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.*” Think about it! The lesson and this study is yours.