



“All for Jesus”

Richard Jordan had the American Dream unfolding before him: cars, a nice house, and a fiancée. Then she left him suddenly, and Jordan didn't know what to make of his life. So he used all of his life savings to buy a Lamborghini Gallardo and drive across America in search of himself. It wasn't actually as easy as that. No one wanted to buy his new house so he was stuck with it. It took him months to sell the rest of his possessions. That, combined with the majority of his life savings, he used to afford a \$90,000 down payment on a Lamborghini Gallardo — one of the most expensive vehicles on the market. After locating the right model and arranging the financing he picked up his black Lamborghini Gallardo Coupe from Lamborghini of Ohio. The date? July

4th, 2006. Independence Day was an almost intentionally ironic choice, as he picked that day to separate from everything he'd created but now no longer wanted, including the house. “I'd become a prisoner to my house, to everything, to my fantasy of an American Dream or anything I could remotely call home.”

I used to love watching programmes such as “Antiques Roadshow” - I loved seeing the surprise on people's faces when they were told what their dusty old painting or slightly chipped vase was worth. Sometimes I couldn't help but feel that they were not really interested in hearing all the historical background of their item, where it had come from, who had made it, the number of them in existence etc. but that they were simply nodding their head, trying to seem interested, while all along inside they were quietly saying, come on, just tell me what it's worth! Ok, perhaps I'm a cynic. Perhaps they were more interested in the story behind the item...but I doubt it. For every one surprise item that comes up with great worth I am sure there are dozens of others that went away with their china dogs or brass candlesticks disappointed because they were told that financially they weren't really worth that much.

Paul writes about his lifetime achievements saying:

*If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*

At one point in time in Paul's life, these were the most important things. Paul would have invested time and money and energy into being the ultimate Jew. There would have been a number of Hebrew men that would have seen it as their duty and their right to rise as high as possible within the Rabbinic tradition. There would have been a sense of competition as to who would have been seen as the most righteous and zealous for their faith. It was something to be proud of, something that Paul (or Saul as he was known then), had poured himself into.

One Jewish scholar writes on each of these lists:

“Circumcised the eighth day” (Phil. 3:5). This was done in strict accordance with the Law. Isaac was circumcised when he was eight days old. Ishmaelites were circumcised in their thirteenth year. Gentile proselytes were circumcised as adults. So Paul demonstrated that he was neither a heathen nor an Ishmaelite.

“Of the stock of Israel” (Phil. 3:5; 2 Cor. 11:22). He was specifically a member of the covenant nation; he was not of mixed stock, like many of the Jews who dwelt in Palestine. He was not a proselyte, but of the original “stock.” To be of the seed of Abraham was to have absolute racial purity.

“Of the tribe of Benjamin” (Phil. 3:5; Rom. 11:1). By the first century A.D. many Jews could not trace their genealogy, or were descended from proselytes. Paul was not from one of the “lost tribes” of Israel. The tribe of Benjamin had a unique place in the history of Israel. Benjamin was the son of Jacob's beloved wife, Rachel (Gen. 35:16–18). Benjamin was the only one of the patriarchs who had actually been born in the Promised Land. It was from Benjamin that the first king of Israel had come (1 Sam. 9:1). When the tragic split of the kingdom came, Benjamin and Judah were the only two tribes who had remained faithful. When Israel went into battle, it was the tribe of Benjamin that held the post of honour. During the terrible days of Babylonian captivity, it was Mordecai, “a Benjamite,” who saved the nation.

Hebrew of the Hebrews” (Phil. 3:5; 2 Cor. 11:22). A Hebrew was a Jew who could still speak Hebrew as opposed to the Jews who had been scattered across the known world who had forsaken their native language for the Greek of their adopted countries.

He was faultless in keeping the law and delighted in persecuting the early church as he saw them as standing against all that he believed. So with all this bubbling around in our minds, as we realise the depth of tradition, emotion and pride there was in the former Pharisee, we are suddenly brought down to earth with a massive bump as we hear him saying, *“What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish...”*

All that I have just listed, that long list of achievements of Paul’s we now read he considers as “rubbish.” Now please don’t be tempted to try and sanitise this word that Paul uses which in the greek is ‘skubala’ - the NIV has translated it as “rubbish” but that is actually a weak translation. In fact, if I was to modernise that word, and use it’s equivalent I would shock most you and it would probably be the only thing you remember me saying this morning! So please understand that what Paul is saying is not only was all that I had in past worthless but it is now also offensive to him. Why? How come? What could have possibly replaced what Paul has in his life of such phenomenal success? Not a thing, but a person...the person of Jesus.

Paul, as you may well know, went on to live the rest of his life defending the gospel, setting up young infantile churches and nurturing them into strong beacons of the faith in a world that would soon be ravished by persecution.

He swapped glory and prestige for a hard life with little or no thanks. In 2 Cor 11 he lists what he has up to that point endured for the gospel:

*“I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have laboured and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches...”*

But for him, it was all worth it, so that as he puts it, “he might gain Christ.”

Next Sunday morning we will come and gather into this sanctuary to worship God through faith in His son Jesus Christ. But just how important is Jesus to us today? If we were to draw up a list of things and people that mean most to us in this life, what would be on that list? I’m guessing, our family, our friends, our home, our job, our “wee luxuries”, our money, our leisure time, our achievements, our awards, our qualifications, our standing in society...Jesus?

Ok, well then let’s assume that these things and perhaps others are on our list, and you were asked to rank them in order of importance from one to ten and so on, what would be top of the list? Where would Jesus be, assuming He is on your list?

I remember about 13 years ago standing in Dungannon Presbyterian church at a commissioning service for a friend who was heading off to Mexico with OM to work and witness for Jesus to the people of Mexico city. As we stood in at the end of that service we sang Robin Mark’s song, All for Jesus. Jesus, all for Jesus, All I am and have and ever hope to be. Jesus, all for Jesus, All I am and have and ever hope to be. All of my ambitions, hopes and plans I surrender these into Your hands. All of my ambitions, hopes and plans I surrender these into Your hands. For it’s only in Your will that I am free, For it’s only in Your will that I am free, Jesus, all for Jesus, All I am and have and ever hope to be. As I stood there singing those words the tears began to flow as I realised that this was the only way I could live at peace with myself and with my God. Not holding onto my plans for life but surrendering them all to the One who deserved my praise and worship, my surrender.

As we come to the Lord’s table next week you have the opportunity to come to it in a way that perhaps you have never had before. We have seven days of grace between now and then to asses our lives and to see where Jesus fits in.

Is He squeezed in somewhere during your busy day?

Is He given time when you go to your small group?

Is He given 75mins on a Sunday morning and beyond that He is largely forgotten or

Is He given the first part of your day and they relied upon and spoken to throughout the day?

Is He consulted during the day about many things?

Is He ever told you love Him for all He has done for you, not least taking your place and dying for you on the cross?

All for Jesus or all for me and Jesus can get the remainder of what is left...

I want to challenge you as I have been challenged myself this week about Jesus's place in my life.

Does Jesus have the place of greatest importance in my life or is it only given to Him at moments of crisis or distress?

We mean the world to Him.

He died because He couldn't live without us.

I know we are not all "Pauls" but nor should we be tempted to say that simply because we are not all like Paul we cannot place Jesus as number one in our life.

(Luke 18:28-30)

"Peter said to him, 'We have left all we had to follow you!'

'I tell you the truth,' Jesus said to them, 'no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.' "

Take time this week in preparation to meditate on these closing thoughts:

The fact that our possessions can make it impossible for us to inherit eternal life.

That we must give up everything we have to follow Jesus.

Following is not just a religious phrase; it will cost us everything we have.

God will reward us in this life for whatever sacrifices we are called on to make. We cannot out-give God.

He will also reward us in the age to come with eternal life.

Sacrifices have both a temporal and eternal reward.

Through Jesus, God too, gives that which is most precious to him.

Jesus was willing to give his all.

That's why he has asked us to commemorate the Lord's Supper in memory of His sacrifice for us, that's why He deserves first place in our lives.

Let's pray together.