

There is an old, old story about a university professor being ferried across a body of water. The professor chided the ferryman, for his ungrammatical language. When he learned the ferryman never attended school, the professor said: "What? Half of your life has already been wasted!" Shortly afterwards, the ferryman asked, "Professor, did you ever learn to swim?" "No, I did not," replied the professor. "Well," said the ferryman, "in that case it seems **all** your life has been wasted . . . we're sinking."

A life is a terrible thing to waste, isn't it? Here is a question for each of us this day: Could we come to the end of our lives and conclude that we have robbed ourselves of the opportunity to make our lives count? Could we conclude that our lives have been largely wasted, that there was really no point to them at all? Is there a way we can know that our lives really do matter?

I don't believe that anyone would charge the Apostle Paul with wasting his life. He was beaten and thrown into prison because of numerous confrontations with political and religious authorities, but never could he have been charged with wasting his life. Indeed, few people have ever made the contributions to human existence that Paul made. Ironically, he would receive even more credit for his contributions had he not been so effective in convincing us that he was but an instrument of the risen Christ. The secret to his purposeful and powerful life is summed up in these words from I Timothy 2:5-7—

"For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.... For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle... a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth." Let's consider that first clause: *"For there is one God . . ."*

You and I take that great truth for granted. The writers of the Bible could not. They knew what a struggle it had been for their fathers to declare the unity of God. Their neighbors worshiped many gods. It was these stubborn Jews alone who maintained that there was but one God, *Yahweh*, and that there could be no other gods above him, or beside him. They declared the unity of God, and they declared the universality of God. *Yahweh* is the God of all creation. Indeed, he is the creator of *"all that lives and moves and has its being"*(Acts 17:28).

The children of Israel declared God's unity and his universality, but even more importantly, they declared his unique intimacy with the world he created. *Yahweh* was no remote god who created a world and then forgot it; *Yahweh* was involved in the life of his people in a very direct and personal way.

"There is one God," declares Paul. Then he adds, *"And there is but one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself a ransom for all . . ."* We have moved now from the universal to the specific. Again, this was no frivolous claim. Most of the early Christians were Jews. The God they worshiped was a God of power, majesty and strength. To look upon God was to die. Even to touch the things of God with unclean hands was to risk retribution. The Jewish God was no "man upstairs." He was a God whose glory could not even be properly contemplated by mere mortals. And yet, John writes in the prologue to his *Gospel*—*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with*

God, and the Word was God . . . and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son of the Father . . .”

John’s hands must have trembled as he wrote those words: “*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us . . .*” The early disciples believed with all their hearts that there was but one mediator between God and humanity. There was one way, one truth, one life, one shepherd, one door— and that was Jesus. They heard him teach, they saw him heal people’s hurts, they witnessed his death and they encountered him in his glory on the road to Emmaus, in the Upper Room, and on the mountain, where he ascended to God the Father. And throughout the New Testament they tried to sum up the impact of his life on theirs.

They called Jesus Prophet, High Priest, Servant of God, Lamb of God, Son of David, Son of man, Holy One of God, Son of God, Savior, Christ/Messiah, King of Kings and Lord of lords. Only within Christianity does the Word become flesh; and it is that *Word become flesh* that offers human beings access to the Father. “*There is one God . . . there is one mediator . . .*” writes St. Paul, “*For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle . . . a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth . . .*” Paul’s life was grounded in his knowledge of God and his experience of Christ. That knowledge and that experience had two effects on Paul’s life.

Paul’s great cause was to glorify God— whether he was making tents or writing letters to newly founded churches, or preaching on street corners, the object was the same. He did all things for the glory of God. And, my friends, that is your task and mine, too. To do everything we do— whether it be in a business, on a construction site, in a classroom, at home or wherever— to do everything we do to the glory of God.

How do we make a difference in the world? We do it by centering in on everything we do and asking ourselves: Is this something I can do for God’s glory? If it is, we ought to give ourselves to it with total abandon. That is one secret of a super-successful life— to have a focal point for our lives that we can believe in without reservation, and to give all we have to it.

Paul saw himself as a “funnel” through which God’s purpose and power could flow. Someone did a study of the lives of great people, and they discovered that invariably these monumental achievers did not consider the path of greatness as leading **from** them but rather as leading **through** them. The source was somewhere *other than* themselves.

Have you ever completed a task and looked at it and thought to yourself, “Wow, I couldn’t have done that! It’s simply too grand!” It’s a wonderful feeling. Have you felt that behind your work was an unseen hand? Paul believed that about his life. He was but a channel through which God’s power flowed. It was the power of the risen Christ working *through* him that was the source of his great accomplishments. “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live,*” wrote Paul to the Galatians, “*but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*” (Galatians 2:20).

This is to say that if we will but surrender our lives, there is a source of power available to us— that can flow through us— and help us to accomplish

more than we ever dreamed possible. Paul accomplished things very few people ever accomplish; they did not come **from** him so much as it came **through** him from another source. That power was the power of the Holy Spirit— the same God, but manifest differently. Paul was the conduit for that power represented by the Holy Spirit. Paul could never have been accused of wasting his life. He made his life count. How? By surrendering his life to Christ and allowing Christ to live through him.