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## DOING THE CANNONBALL Colossians 3:23-24

I find as I have gotten older I have become less fond than ever of cold water. When Laurie and I were first married we used to go body boarding a lot in the summer. I don't remember the last time I did that. A big reason is that even when the water here warms up in the summer, to me it still feels too cold to enjoy. I wish that weren't so, because I love playing in the ocean. I wish the ocean water temperature here was like it is in Florida or in the tropics.

I've always been kind of a wimp when it comes to water temperature. I was, and still am, the guy who, when getting into the pool, or the ocean, strings it out, going in gradually. Get used to it up to my knees before being so bold as to get in up to my waist. Delay forever the ultimate shock of dipping all the way in. However, I have always admired those bold souls who approach the swimming pool by just yelling "banzai" and doing a cannonball to get in. It seems unwise to me. Surely the shock of the cold water might stop your heart, or at the very least be terribly unpleasant. But I am impressed by those who throw caution to the wind and just plunge in.

I also find myself admiring people who take that approach to life. I want to be more like those who don't just stick their toes in, and carefully slowly, wade in, trying to avoid any unpleasantness, but instead who just go full speed ahead. Not only do I admire them, I find that God wants me to be more like them. One of the most often iterated commands in the Bible is "do not be afraid." God calls us to be fearless. That fearlessness and confidence is grounded in a rock solid trust that my life is in the hands of a Heavenly Father who loves me, who is powerful and good and working to bring about good for me at every moment of my existence. Let's think about that as we look again at Colossians 3:23-24.

### GOD WANTS US TO BE ENTHUSIASTIC

In verse 23 Paul said, "whatever you do, work at it with all your heart." We saw last week that this was in the context of how slaves did their work. But the expression "whatever you do" is expanded elsewhere in the Bible to include more than our work. Ecclesiastes 9:10 says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might." There is "whatever" again. That says that no matter what we do, we are to do it with all our might, in other words, with enthusiasm. So when my hands find some dishes to wash, I should do them with all my might. When my

hands find a bed that needs to be made, I should do it with enthusiasm. When my hands find an annoying task at work I should do it with all my might. When I get up to go to face another day of uninspiring work at my job, do it with all my might. Romans 12:11 commands us “never be lacking in zeal.” Never. At every moment of life be full of zeal no matter what you are doing. I love Psalm 126:3. “The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.” No matter what I may be doing, this is the underlying reality of life. The Lord has done great things for us and we are filled with joy. That means not just have a bit of joy in all the gloom, but to actually be filled with joy.

In his book, *Of God and Men*, A. W. Tozer wrote, “God dwells in a state of perpetual enthusiasm.” We don’t often think of that, but it makes sense. God is the source of all good, all life, all joy. He is a continuing fountain of life and joy, thus, he is always alive, joyful, hopeful, because he knows his purposes will be fulfilled. He is enthusiastic about all he does because he knows it has a beautiful and good point and it will be successful. Thus he is perpetually enthusiastic. Since we are being transformed into his likeness, what does that mean for us? Surely it means that we also will more and more live in a state of perpetual enthusiasm. The great preacher Dwight Moody said, “I believe the religion of Christ saves the whole man. Why shouldn’t a man play baseball or lawn tennis? Don’t imagine that you have got to go into a cave to be consecrated and stay there your whole life. Whatever you take up, take it up with all your heart.”

The Bible tells us that we should be fully present wherever we are, totally engaged, full of enthusiasm, brimming with life because rivers of living water are flowing through us, and that whatever we do, we should be doing it with everything we have within us. God doesn’t want us to go through life being unconscious or at best semi-conscious. He doesn’t want us bored, unemotional, just going through the motions. Neither does he want us to be negative, seeing only what is wrong or disappointing in everything and everyone. He wants us to be alive. And whatever we do, he wants us to do it with eagerness, to the best of our ability. We have reason to be at peace. We have reason to be joyful. We have reason to be confident and optimistic about life because God always leads us in his triumph. Enthusiasm won’t look the same in all of us. It doesn’t mean we will be giddy or loud, but it does mean we will be positive about life, will not be driven by fear, and will give our all in whatever we do.

Phil Edwards was a legendary surfer from Oceanside. He is credited as the first person to surf the Pipeline in Hawaii and one of the first professional surfers. He said, “There are uncounted millions of people right now who are going through life

without any sort of real vibrant kick. I call them the legions of the unjazzed.” We are not to be in the legion of the unjazzed, people who barely have a pulse.

Unfortunately being always jazzed, being perpetually enthusiastic, is easier said than done. There are a number of things that I am not jazzed about doing. Paying bills a couple of times a month is not something I tend to do with gusto. I don’t sit down and say, “Wow, bills! Let me at them!” Filling out tax forms for the IRS is not a task I do with great relish. “Hot dog, a 1040 form! Oh, and look, here is a Schedule A for itemized deductions. I’ve been waiting a year to get to do these.” I don’t know about you, but that’s not how that goes for me. I read recently about a guy who had a job, his worst job ever, of punching holes in belts in a belt factory for 8 hours a day. One is not naturally enthusiastic about such a job.

A few months ago I encountered a couple just before our worship service began that I talked to briefly. They looked familiar and talked like they knew me, but though I wracked my brain I could not place them. It was only after the service that I figured out who they were. They were Pat and Carol Curtis, a couple I had not seen in more than 30 years. Pat and I were good friends in college. The last time I saw the two of them both Pat and I were in seminary. Pat is a guy I sometimes think of when I think of enthusiasm, because he was an “all in” kind of guy. I first met him when I was a sophomore and he was a freshman. We played baseball together. We got to be very good friends. But I was surprised when near the end of that year he told me that when he first got to know me he didn’t like me much. The reason was that early in the season I was torn over whether to keep trying to play baseball or to quit. It was obvious that my playing days were near an end and that at most I could hang on for one more season. I was going back and forth about whether to keep going or to just admit the inevitable and give up. I had a number of conversations with teammates in the locker room over the issue. Pat said he didn’t want to play with a teammate who was not committed and whose whole heart wasn’t in it. He saw me as half in and half out and didn’t want me on his team. He would come to realize the problem wasn’t that I didn’t love playing and didn’t know if I wanted to. My heart was in it, the problem was a lack of ability. As I said, we became good friends. I loved playing ball with Pat. He was always enthusiastic. He was a big guy who could hit the ball hard. One game he crushed the ball a couple of times, but got no hits, though he had a couple of prodigious fly balls that were caught right at the fence. I had three hits that day, though not one of them was hit hard. I tried to encourage him, saying he hit the ball well even though he didn’t get any hits. He said, “It’s okay, Rick, if you put all three of your dinky little hits together they didn’t go as far as one of my fly balls.” Pat made it fun to

play and brought everyone up because of his enthusiasm. That's the kind of "players" God wants us to be in life.

Most of us do not naturally go through all of our days with joy and enthusiasm. Some of us never go through a day that way. All of us struggle with having enthusiasm in the face of the travails of life. So what can we do to experience more of God's enthusiasm?

## HOW CAN WE BE MORE ENTHUSIASTIC?

### ***Do it for the Lord***

We looked at this some last week, but this is really the key element as we can see in Colossians 3:23. Whatever you are doing, whether it be teaching a class, sweeping the floor, filling out tax forms, cleaning a toilet, playing softball, selling widgets, talking to your neighbor, going out on a date with your spouse, whatever it is, do it for the Lord.

There was a great scene in an old classic Oscar winning movie, *Chariots of Fire*. One of the central characters in the movie was Eric Liddell, who was a devoted Christian. He would go on to serve as a missionary in China and give his life there. Before that he became an Olympic sprinter representing Great Britain. In a scene in the movie Eric's sister is questioned why he kept on competing as a runner. Why divert his attention from his real role in life, serving God and winning people to faith in Jesus? Eric acknowledges that God had given him gifts as an evangelist, then he said, "but he also made me fast. And when I run, I feel his pleasure."

God has given us all gifts and tasks to accomplish. When we do those things cheerfully and to the best of our ability we offer it up to the Lord as a gift to him. That provides us with enthusiasm in two ways. First it means that everything we do has meaning. There is not a single thing you can do in your life that is empty and pointless as long as you do it for the Lord. Recently we were talking with friends from out of town and somehow the topic of books I've written came up. Laurie and I told them about my second book, *One More Tomorrow*, and I explained to them how it came about. I had an idea for a story, and when I described it to Laurie she said she wanted me to write it. I told her it would be a lot of work and it would probably never be published, but she said she really wanted to know how the story would go. So I told her I would write it for her. And I did. When my friends asked if it sold well I told them it had not. They asked if that was frustrating for me I said, "I guess a little. But I wrote the book for Laurie. Whether anyone else bought it or read it wasn't really the point." When we do whatever tasks we have for the Lord even if no one else notices, it means something, because God cares.

Second, as we do whatever we do with joy as a gift to the Lord remember that it will be rewarded, even if no human sees. Verse 24 says, “you will receive an inheritance from the Lord.” Consider what this means. Suppose that what you have to do for the Lord is to endure through some hardship. That could be dealing with some physical or health problem. It could be dealing with a gut-wrenching loss, or facing some trying relationship problem. When we go through it “for the Lord,” we seek to serve him as we endure, we seek to offer him the gift of our faith, our peace in the midst of the turmoil, our confidence that he is with us and will give us the strength to get through it. We give him the gift of rejoicing in his love in the midst of the trial. What will be the result? 2 Corinthians 4:17 says, “This momentary light affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” For your faithfulness there will be a reward that nothing you have ever seen, nothing you can even imagine, could compare with. You can’t conceive of how great it is going to be.

When we do whatever we do for the Lord it doesn’t really matter whether anyone else knows it or values it. The world may never give us credit for the good we do and for the enthusiastic attitude we bring to the task, but that doesn’t matter, for we will be rewarded. God knows, and he says we will be glad we have served him. The reward will be more than we could ever hope for or even imagine.

There was a commercial that ran on television last year that I thought was quite funny. I don’t even remember what it advertised, but it showed a man in a woman’s clothing store. Obviously he is with his wife who is shopping for some clothes. He is sitting down, looking at his smart phone. His wife comes out of the fitting room, trying on a dress she is considering buying. She looks in the mirror to see how it looks and asks her husband, “what do you think of this dress?” Without even glancing at her, in a somewhat monotone voice he says, “It’s very slimming.” The message, of course, was that he was bored to tears and was enduring the shopping, just hoping it will end soon. They made such a commercial because lots of men can identify with that guy. Would you say that guy, and all those guys who can relate to him, are doing that shopping with all their might? Are they fully present and engaged in the event with enthusiasm?

That’s a definite no. I thought about what it would be like if the shoe was on the other foot and the roles were reversed. I imagined what it would be like if I took Laurie to a Padre game, and throughout the game she was sighing, looking at Facebook on her phone, when I asked, “Wow, did you see that play?” she answered in a monotone, “Yes, it was a great catch”? What if she kept asking,

“How much longer is this going to last?” In other words, what if she did what I can tend to do when she’s shopping? Would I appreciate her? Would I feel like she wanted to be there? Obviously no. So it occurred to me that a way I can love my wife is go with her when she’s shopping and instead of viewing it as a trial, as something to be endured and to be ended as quickly as possible, what if I saw it as an opportunity to give a gift to my wife, to express love to her? What if I paid attention, waited patiently, offered an opinion when asked, and tried to let her know that I was thrilled just to be with her, even if the thing we were doing isn’t something I relish. Just thinking of it as an opportunity to express love to my wife does two important things. First, it informs my behavior. It changes how I will act during the shopping trip. And second, it actually provides the power to be able to act as I should. Because it is a gift for her it gives the motivation to do it. That’s what happens when we do whatever we do for the Lord. It shows us how to act, and it provides the motivation to do so. So when we do things for the Lord we will do them with all the strength we have, we will do them as well as we possibly can because they are for the Lord we love.

### ***Watch out for expectations***

On Laurie’s and my tenth anniversary we were surprised when we were given money to take a trip to celebrate our anniversary. We were given the chance to go back to the place we went on our honeymoon. We had not been to Hawaii since our honeymoon, so we were excited. Where should we stay? Some friends in our church at the time told us with great enthusiasm that we should stay in the condo that they owned on Maui. Honestly, at first I thought they were telling us they were giving us a week there as a gift. Eventually it became clear that was not the case, but they insisted we should stay there because it was a terrific place. They loved it and they would give us a great deal on it. That sounded good, and the price did seem reasonable. Leading up to the trip they kept extolling the virtues of their place there and talking about what a great time we were going to have. Looking back on it I realized we were not too smart. We just took their word for it and didn’t get much in the way of specifics. We envisioned it being a one bedroom condo somewhat like the one we had stayed in on our honeymoon. We arrived in Hawaii on a glorious 80 degree day in February. It was bitterly cold when we left here so we were thrilled. Then we got to the condo. It wasn’t what we expected. It was a fairly long ways from the beach. It was just a studio instead of a one bedroom. And worst of all, there were hardly any windows in the unit, mostly just a sliding glass door that looked directly out to a wall. We could have been in Kansas City for all we could see. We enjoyed our trip, but it was tinged with more than a little disappointment and dissatisfaction with that condo because it wasn’t what we expected and it left a little bit of bad taste.

It is very easy for us to go through life with lots of expectations. I expect God to make life work well for me. I expect people to treat me with respect. I expect those closest to me to love me. We can have lots of expectations, and when they're not met they sour our attitude. So what you're saying is we need to lower our expectations? In a sense, I suppose. Perhaps it might be better to say what we need to do is rethink what we feel we deserve. Go back to the book of Romans and recall what it says about us humans. After Paul demolishes the claims of the Gentile and the Jew alike in the first 2 chapters he sums up in 3:10-12 saying, "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." We don't like to hear that.

We tend to say, "Well, that's referring to all those other people, those bad people." That's not about me. Wrong. Romans 3:9 says, "Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. Who is not included in those groups? No one. All of us are under sin, thus worthless. It doesn't make me happy to hear that I along with the rest of the human race have become worthless. But that is the truth. So here is my question: what does something that is worthless deserve?"

We get those mailers that have coupons for various establishments in the area. Typically they have some restaurant coupons for 20% off your bill or buy one entrée, get a second at half price, and so on. We often pull those out and stick them in a drawer to use when we go to one of those establishments. I recall a few years back when our drawer of coupons was overflowing. We hadn't cleaned it out in some time so we had lots of expired coupons in there. The classic on this occasion was a coupon for a restaurant that had gone out of business. What was that coupon worth? Nothing. So what do you suppose I did with it? I framed it and put it up on a wall in a special place, right? No, of course not. I threw it away. It was worthless, and what it deserved was to be trashed.

According to Paul, that's us. We are worthless. So what do we deserve? We deserve to be thrown on a trash heap. That is what all of us have earned. That's what we are earning today, that's what we are earning right this minute. **That's what we should expect!** The fact that I am not on the trash heap today means it is a good day. I have not gotten what I deserved. I should be rejoicing because a wonderful thing has happened. I have been given something terrific that I absolutely do not deserve.

I don't deserve to be forgiven by God. I don't deserve to be accepted by God. I don't deserve the privilege of coming and speaking to him as my Heavenly Father. I don't deserve eternal life in his kingdom. I don't deserve to have his Spirit in me. I don't deserve to be given the role of being a pastor in this church. I don't deserve to own a home in Carlsbad and to have an abundance of food. I don't deserve to have a late model car that is very comfortable. I don't deserve to be able to see and to hear. I don't deserve to have a wife that is the best woman in the history of the human race. I don't deserve to have terrific kids who are great people and are now married to great people. I don't deserve to be alive. All of this and more is nothing but God's kindness and grace to me. My expectation should be that I would be judged, rejected by God and thrown away as worthless. Anything other than that I should see as an incredible, undeserved gift.

Well, yes, I suppose that's true, but what about how other people treat me. Don't I deserve to be treated with kindness and respect? Well, not really, since you're worthless. But let me point out something else. You live in a fallen world. You live among fallen people. Every single person you will ever encounter in your life is a fallen person. There is a darkness in all of us, an addiction to self that makes us capable of nearly limitless evil. Given that you interact with fallen people on a continual basis, how would you expect them to treat you? If they treat you in a selfish, fallen way, are you surprised? Would you be surprised if you were walking into the ocean, you stepped on a sting ray and it stung you? You might be surprised in the sense that you weren't expecting to step on a sting ray, but once you step on it you shouldn't be mad that it stung you. That's what they do. And fallen, self-addicted people, treat other people in fallen ways. So when someone treats you in a way you don't like and don't think you deserve, remember, they are fallen. You shouldn't be surprised.

### ***Look for the good***

Laurie loves Philippians 4:8. "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things." That verse *commands* us what to think about. Don't think about what is annoying, what is substandard, what is aggravating, what is not up to your standards. Think about what is good!

Let's review: we live in a fallen world, surrounded by fallen people. Do you think there will be any unpleasant or disappointing aspects to the world and people around us? Obviously yes, disappointing and frustrating aspects will be common. So if we decide to take the approach of noting and cataloging everything we don't like do you think we will have any difficulty constructing our list? The answer is



absolutely not. So the question is, does that help you be more joyful, does it help you give thanks to God? If you answered yes, I hate to tell you this but you just failed this pop quiz.

Look for the good in people and life. Focus on those things. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18 Paul said, “give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” Did you hear that. **This is God's will for you.** Giving thanks always is God's will for you. Rather than complaining about how bad things are, rather than grouching about what you wanted and don’t have or whining about how disappointed you are, rather than criticizing everything and everyone because they don’t meet your expectations, give thanks.

Ecclesiastes 9:7-8 says, “Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil.” Eat your food with gladness. But what if it’s the tuna noodle casserole that our children so despised and complained about? Notice that the verse doesn’t say “eat your good food with gladness” or eat the food you like with gladness. Whatever your food is, be glad for it. Give thanks for it and rejoice that you have food to eat. But what if it’s a quinoa and cilantro salad? In that case run away screaming in the night. Or better, be thankful you don’t have to eat that every day. You get the point, I’m sure. See what is good, focus on that and give thanks for whatever it is.

On our recent visit to Disneyland and the California Adventure park we encountered a Disney employee who stood out. He worked at the entrance gate to one of the parks. His job is not one that any kid dreams that someday they’ll grow up and have. He stands at the gate for long stretches and scans passes and tickets with a scanner as thousands of people come through the turnstiles. This is not a scintillating job. By the time we got to this guy it was the middle of the afternoon, so we weren’t catching him early in the day while he was still fresh. He was an older man, very different from so many of the late teen and early twenties employees you see at Disney. Yet he was smiling, friendly and had some positive and cheerful comment for practically every person that came through his gate. He was lively and laughing. Laurie commented to him that he seemed exceptionally cheerful and up. He said, “Hey, it’s a beautiful day and I work for Mickey Mouse. I’ve got lots to be happy about.”

It was a beautiful day and he does work for Disney at the happiest place on earth. But I could find lots of other people there who were doing the same job on the same day and many of them were just doing a job. They weren’t grumpy or dour,

but they were just doing what they had to do. They were different from that guy. The difference was he appreciated what he had and was jovial because of it.

If you start looking for good things in your life you are going to see a lot of them. It hit me while I was working on this sermon that I was writing my notes on a computer. When I first served as a pastor I typed my notes on a typewriter. I should rejoice every time I bang something out on my computer. Things like that are everywhere in our world. When we go through our days noticing the many good things God has given to us, rejoicing in them and giving thanks for them, we're going to find ourselves with a lot more enthusiasm for life.

### ***Live today***

We humans have a strange tendency to become occupied with something other than the day we are in. We can easily get focused on the past, either by longing for something that existed in the past, or by obsessing about some hurt from the past. Either of those things is guaranteed to sap energy and joy from us. In Philippians 3:13-14 Paul wrote, "forgetting what lies behind and straining toward what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus." Let go of the past. Like Paul we need to forget what lies behind. Forget it means don't think about it. Don't dwell on it. Make it like it never happened, and like he did, look forward, for in this life forward is the only direction you can go.

The other problem we have is to so look forward that the future begins to own us. We can easily become fearful about what might happen. Jesus said in Matthew 6:34, "do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough troubles of its own." Don't you have enough to focus on today? Of course you do, so let's concentrate on today and deal with tomorrow when it gets here.

There was something I learned not to do when I was in college. Since I majored in math I had a lot of math classes. Early on when I got my books for the semester I would look through my math books and on a number of occasions I got intimidated. I looked at what we would be doing by the end of the semester and thought, "I'm not going to be able to do that. I don't understand that at all and it looks frightening." My problem was that I failed to remember that I didn't have to do all that stuff at the beginning of the semester. When I didn't look ahead but just focused on doing the work as it came, to my relief, most of the time by the end of the semester all that stuff made sense.

I just needed to focus on what I had to do each day, and as I did that by the time stuff I had not previously learned came along I was able to take it in stride. So it is in life. One of our biggest problems is looking down the road and letting those things way ahead intimidate us or grind us down. I've had conversations with people who have said, "I don't know if I can keep doing this for another 20 years" or something along those lines. My answer is, "You don't have to. All you have to do is do it today. Who knows what will happen in the next 20 years."

This week will mark the anniversary of my official beginning as a pastor. I've been doing this for 36 years. I see a lot of men who serve for a number of years then take positions advising pastors because in some cases the weekly grind holds no attraction for them. I've preached over 1500 sermons. I remember many times in the past when I've said, "Can I keep this up every week for the foreseeable future?" Here's the interesting thing, when I just do what I need to do this week I find that God gives me all the energy, all the ideas, all the enthusiasm that I need.

1 Corinthians 10:13 says, "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." The word "tempt" there could be test. When you are tested, by the daily grind over many years, or by some great trial that you fear, God will give you what you need to endure it. Is he giving you enough to endure and get through today? Yes. Then don't worry about what's going to happen years down the road. You could have a brain aneurysm burst tonight and you won't have to endure this for even one more day. So just focus on being all in today, and let all those tomorrows take care of themselves.

Psalms 118:24 says, "This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it." Not tomorrow, not next year, not 10 years from now. This is the day the Lord has made and given to you. So rejoice in today because it is the only day you really have. James 4:14 says, "Why you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." His point is, your life is in God's hands. Leave it there and focus on being fully alive today.

### ***Focus On Jesus***

Hebrews 12:2 says, "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith." If you want to be enthusiastic keep your eyes on him, the one who loves you and is with you always. No matter what you go through, Jesus has been through worse. He is with you every moment and loves you more than you can imagine. So

keep looking at him and he will give you the strength to live today with enthusiasm, no matter what you may be doing.