

Almost

INTRODUCTION:

1. *Almost* is a very sad word...*almost* all the time.
 - A. There are occasions when *almost* is much better than all the way, such as in when you almost fell off the cliff, or you almost had a wreck, etc.
 - B. But for most situations, it is a word we would just as soon forget.
 - i. You don't hear people reliving the "almost" days!
 - a. "Let me tell you about the time that I *almost* hit the winning shot."
 - b. "I just want to brag a little about the time I *almost* got an award."
 - ii. You don't find people caring much for *almost* complements!
 - a. "You almost look handsome today!"
 - b. "You almost smell nice!"
 - c. "You are almost a nice person!"
2. We don't care for *almost* because so very often it is synonymous with failure, pain, and regret.
 - A. We don't want that word to be descriptive of our lives, especially in the areas that count!
 - B. That is surely true when it comes to matters of the soul—matters to do with our service to God—matters that relate to our eternal destiny in heaven or hell!
3. So, let's spend a little time this morning talking about *almost*, about what the bible has to say about it and some important things we should gain from it.

BODY:

I. Biblical examples of *almost*:

- A. One of the more well-known incidences of almost concerns Paul preaching to king Agrippa.
 1. Text: Acts 26:24-29 – "Now as he thus made his defense, Festus said with a loud voice, "Paul, you are beside yourself! Much learning is driving you mad!" ²⁵ But he said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak the words of truth and reason. ²⁶ For the king, before whom I also speak freely, knows these things; for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention, since this thing was not done in a corner. ²⁷ King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know that you do believe." ²⁸ Then Agrippa said to Paul, "**You almost persuade me to become a Christian.**" ²⁹ And Paul said, "I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, **might become both almost and altogether** such as I am, except for these chains."
 2. Did you catch that infamous statement (26:28 – "You *almost* persuade me...")?
 - a. Almost being persuaded to obey the gospel meant Agrippa remained *completely* lost.
 - b. Sadly, Agrippa's *almost* is never said to have become *altogether*. He remained lost/hell!
- B. Another is the rich young ruler (Lk. 18:18-25 – "And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother." ²¹ And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." ²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "**One thing you still lack.** Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²³ But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. ²⁴ Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God.").
1. This account like the next doesn't contain the word *almost*, but it abounds with it.
2. Here is a young man who was very faithful to God's commandments, who we may all have felt was a great man, but one Jesus said had *almost* done everything needed to enter life.
 - a. He lacked just one thing—**sell everything** and follow Jesus—total commitment.

- b. He was *almost* there...but he chose death! The sacrifice was too much!
 - c. This should scare every one of us considering our wealth. And, it should cause us to ask how we view our stuff and whether we truly have total commitment!
- C. A third and most infamous example of *almost* is Pilate concerning Jesus (Lk. 23:13-25).
- 1. Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent and *wanted to release Him* despite the Jews' cries against it (23:13-22).
 - a. Pilate knew that justice demanded releasing Jesus, who was an innocent man!
 - b. In fact, Matt. 27:18 says Pilate "knew that they had handed Him over because of envy."
 - c. God provided Pilate with further reason to do the right thing (Matt. 27:19 – "While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent to him, saying, **"Have nothing to do with that just Man,** for I have suffered many things today in a dream because of Him.").
 - d. He had every good reason to perform history's greatest and most demanded act of justice!
 - 2. And He *almost* did. But instead Pilate released Barabbas and sentenced Jesus to be crucified (Lk. 23:23-25 – "But they were insistent, demanding with loud voices that He be crucified. And the voices of these men and of the chief priests **prevailed**.²⁴ So Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they requested.²⁵ And he released to them the one they requested, who for rebellion and murder had been thrown into prison; but he delivered Jesus to their will.")!
 - a. That is what Pilate is known for—being the one who gave the order to crucify Jesus!
 - b. And, that is what Pilate will answer for at the Judgment—for being the one who ordered Jesus to be crucified!
 - 3. Shouldn't Pilate have gained some favor with God for trying to release Jesus?
 - a. Pilate had the power to release Jesus and protect Him from the Jews *if he so desired*!
 - b. He should have listened to his wife, his heart, or even Jesus who explained that His kingdom was not of this world and no threat to Caesar...but, he didn't!
 - c. Why did he give Jesus over to the Jews, because he *wanted to please them and maintain his position* in this world *more than to do what was right*!
 - 4. That was the problem then and that is the problem now! *Worldly desires and motivations* always separate almost doing what is right from actually doing what is right!

II. Almost means that Satan wins!

- A. When it comes to spiritual matters *almost* means *coming close to*...
- 1. Doing what you knew to be the good and right thing to do, but you didn't.
 - a. It is like being an *almost* committed Christian, where you choose to stop short of active membership in Christ's local church, short of encouraging your brethren in regular study and worship together, short in putting others above self, short of *being a Christian*!
 - b. The problem with *almost* doing what you know is good and right is *it is sin*! (Jas. 4:17 – "Therefore, to him who knows **to do good** and does not do it, to him it is sin.").
 - 2. Standing and speaking up for Christ and righteousness, but you didn't.
 - a. Instead you allowed fear of the world to cause you to be silent, to do nothing, to keep Christ inside, to not let Christ use you to make a difference in this world.
 - b. Almost means Christ's rejection (Mark 8:38 – "For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.").
 - 3. Doing what is needed to overcome habitual sin but failing to bring it into the light as God demands.
 - a. Hiding our sin is death (John 3:19-21 – "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."²⁰ For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his

- deeds should be exposed. ²¹ But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.”).
- b. Slavery to sin is only defeated when brought into the light by confession of our sins to others that can help, that can encourage us, keep us on a straight path, and pray for us (Jas. 5:16 – “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”)
 - c. There may be all kinds of reasons why one shies away from the light, whether it is embarrassment (sinful pride), or convincing yourself you can overcome alone (a lie), paralyzing fear (sin), or just plain love for the sin (which is true more than not).
 - d. Whatever the reason, *almost* means failure to overcome and that slavery to sin continues!
- B. So, my friends, almost is not how God wants our lives to be lived!
1. God calls for total commitment—a total, living sacrifice of our life/will to Him (Rom. 12:1 – “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice**, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”).
 - a. Full commitment is the only spiritual service that God accepts, that pleases Him!
 - b. The Holy Spirit rightfully calls for this in us based on the **mercies of God**.
 - i. God has mercifully brought salvation to us by choosing to allow *His Son to be crucified!*
 - ii. Consider what that mercy means to us (Tit. 3:3-7 – “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, ⁵ He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”).
 - iii. We were foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved, deserving of death. Yet, God chose to save us through sacrificing Jesus that we might become heirs of eternal life instead!
 - c. If the fact that God would give so much for such a worthless person as myself does not warrant my, and your, full commitment, my and your everything, then what does?
 2. You, like God’s people throughout the ages, have a choice to make.
 - a. God presented this choice to redeemed Israel (Deut. 30:15-16, 19-20 – “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, ¹⁶ in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess... ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; **therefore choose life**, that both you and your descendants may live; ²⁰ that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you **may cling to Him**, for He is your life and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.”).
 - b. From the beginning of the gospel people have been given the choice and have chosen to *surrender* their lives to Jesus in faith and obedience to be saved.
 - i. Pentecost (Acts 2:40-41 – “And with many other words he testified and exhorted them, saying, “Be saved from this perverse generation.” ⁴¹ Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them.”).

- ii. Despite facing great affliction, that pattern of full commitment to salvation continued (1 Thess. 1:6-8 – “And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word **in much affliction**, with joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. ⁸ For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything.”).
- c. **If you so desire**, you can make that commitment, be freed from sin and death, and continue faithfully unto the victory of eternal life **through the work of Jesus** (Heb. 2:14-18 – “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might **destroy him** who had the power of death, that is, **the devil**, ¹⁵ and **release those** who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. ¹⁶ For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, **He is able to aid those who are tempted.**”).
 - i. Jesus has defeated the devil that you might be released from the chains of sin and this world.
 - ii. And, He sits on the throne of God reading and willing to aid all who commit to Him.

CONCLUSION:

1. We are about to sing a song that the last verse goes like this: “Almost persuaded harvest is past! Almost persuaded, doom comes at last! Almost cannot avail; almost is but to fail; sad, sad, that bitter wail—Almost—but lost!
 - A. What a sad ending...especially for one’s life...one that I hope and pray is not the end of any of us here today.
 - B. But, to avoid that verse being the description of our end, we must make that commitment of complete sacrifice to Christ, which means sacrificing...
 - i. Our will and lives to do His will, to do the good we know is good/right, as we should!
 - ii. Our fears and trust in Christ to confidently take Him and His gospel to the world.
 - iii. Our pride and bringing our life, with all its sin and ugliness, into the light to get the help we need to overcome.
2. The Savior is waiting for you to make that commitment, to turn from your selfish and deceived ways, and give yourself to Him and His grace to save and sustain you in salvation for eternal life.
3. What will you do with Jesus?
 - A. If you are a sinner outside of Christ, one who has never come to Him today in F,R,C, and baptism for the forgiveness of your sins, will you be persuaded, or almost persuaded?
 - B. If you are a Christian and haven’t been fully committed, if your life has been a tainted, half-hearted sacrifice at best, will you determine to give yourself fully to Jesus today, repenting of your sins and seeking His forgiveness and grace? Will you be persuaded, or *almost* persuaded?
 - C. The choice is yours!