

The big push

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[0 : 00] Now, topic. I have put up that quote there, one of Winston Churchill's famous sayings, and it refers to the Allied victory at El Anamain when Rommel and his Africa Corps were eventually turned back.

! Up to them, the fascist forces had seemed practically unstoppable, but Monty and the desert rats turned them back at El Anamain.

And that wasn't the end of the war, and Churchill put it this way, this is not the end. It's not even the beginning of the end, but it is perhaps the end of the beginning.

And what we're looking at here is the end of the beginning. There's, on that slide, this program that Luke sets out, or rather Jesus sets out.

Luke just recorded it. That it's, that we will, the people will be his witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

[1 : 20] Now, this is, of course, a version of the Great Commission. And I thought, just before we dive in, as it were, it is just worth looking at Matthew's version of the Great Commission also.

It's interesting, maybe just to compare them. Sorry, I've actually got my iPad turned on for my notes here. I don't think we need to worry that the words are somewhat different.

I'm sure that Jesus said quite a lot, and Matthew and Luke just, you know, chose to pick out different phrases just to summarise the whole, as it were. But this is what Matthew writes.

If we look at this, as I say, we can compare them a bit.

Luke talks about power, dunamis. But Matthew here talks about authority, exousia. And Luke just talks about being his witnesses, Jesus' witnesses.

[2 : 47] But Matthew rather expands that into this business of making disciples and baptising them and teaching them everything that Jesus had commanded.

But the particular point I'd like you to note here is that, except for the, in that Trinitarian Baptist, baptism statement, there is no mention of the Holy Spirit here.

He has to be baptised in the Holy Spirit, but he doesn't say anything about the power of the Holy Spirit or the presence of the Holy Spirit here. Instead, what we get is that last sentence.

Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Well, of course, he's not, is he? He's up in heaven. He ascended. The apostles saw him go.

But he is. He is with us. And how is he with us? Well, of course, he's really saying the same thing as Luke here. He's with us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and in the church.

[3 : 53] And so that's what I want to explore a bit tonight. Not so much expound the passage in detail, but to look at it as being kind of the start, the beginning of the end, the big push, when we start to fulfil that command of Jesus.

And I'd like to present it to you. This isn't too much of a gimmick. It was in the form of two interviews. Interviews with the Apostle Paul.

Now, pretty I didn't have a bit more time, or I might have got Mark or Ben to play the part of the Apostle Paul. If you haven't seen Ben's How to Get a Russian Wife, or if you haven't seen Mark's impersonation of Elvis Presley, then you've missed a treat.

You're just getting to do a rerun at some point, I think. But unfortunately, I just didn't have time to organise that, so I'm afraid I'm going to have to play both parts of the interview. I hope that won't be too confusing.

I'm going to have to be the interviewer, and I'm going to have to be the Apostle Paul. So I want you to meet our reporter. Let's call him Steve, because that's my name.

[5 : 06] And Steve works for a Christian news magazine. And he's a very junior reporter. He's on the trail of a scoop. He's found out that Paul is in Pisidian Antioch.

And he's going to catch him just as he leaves the city. And get an interview with him, see what he's got to say. And, well, here he comes now.

Paul, Paul, could you stop a minute? Could you just tell me about your trip? We want to hear all the details. We want to hear everything.

Tell us it all right from the beginning. Paul, well, I'm in a hurry right now. Oh, please, Paul, just stop for half an hour and tell us the story.

Well, I suppose I can spare ten minutes, I guess. Okay, what is it you want to know? Well, just tell us the story. Tell us what's happened.

[6 : 08] Tell us what you're doing here. What's going on? Start from the beginning. Tell us what's happening. Well, okay.

Paul, this is how it goes then. It kind of starts in Jerusalem, but at the moment things are getting a bit grim in Jerusalem. You may have heard that James, the brother of John, has been killed.

And Peter was arrested. He did manage to escape, but he and the other apostles have gone into hiding. So our story, the beginning really, actually, it really started in Antioch.

Because in Antioch, there was a bit of a breathing space. And the church leaders were gathered for a retreat. There was Paul and, there was Barnabas and me, of course.

And there's this posh guy called Mannion, who was actually a friend of Philip the Tetrarch. And a couple of other guys, and we were the leaders of the church in Antioch. And we'd gather together for a time of prayer and fasting to see what the Lord had to say to us.

[7 : 23] And the Lord did give us a word by his spirit. There were no tongues of fire this time, no flame, no wind, just a word.

And what was that word? Well, that word was Paul, Barnabas. Why are you still sitting around here? It's time. It's time to go.

So we packed up and the church sent us off. And we went off down to the coast and we took a boat to Cyprus. We took John Mark along with us as our attendant.

So what happened? Well, it started a bit slowly. We preached in a few synagogues, but we didn't really get that much response. But then the governor of the island invited us to his house.

It's a strange sort of a place and a strange sort of guy we met there called Elymas. About the most misnamed man I've ever heard of because Elymas actually means wise man in Arabic.

[8 : 33] Though there was somebody who was not a wise man, it was this one. I had to be quite straight with him, actually. I had to point out all his trickery.

And the Lord blessed that and because of that, Elymas went blind for a bit. And this did rather impress the governor. Actually, I'll just tell you, that governor had a funny name too.

His name was Sergius Paulus. And that means something like little wonder. I'm not so sure about the wonder, but I quite like the little bit. So actually, I'm going to tell you, don't call me Saul anymore.

Call me Paul. Paul means little. So, yeah, okay. I'm Paul now. Anyway, that's not very important. The important thing is that the governor believed our message and he turned to the Lord.

So the reporter says, that's great news. That's great. What happened then? Well, says Paul, after that, we crossed to the mainland. I'm afraid I have to tell you that Mark got fed up and went home.

[9 : 42] But we carried on up north, went northwards towards Pisidian Antioch. And we went into that city. I should just say, of course, this is not the same Antioch as they started with.

It's a different place, which is why Luke calls it Pisidian Antioch. Yeah, we went to Pisidian Antioch. And actually, that started off quite well. The synagogue elders invited us to speak.

They said, they said, told us that they wanted an encouraging message. So I thought, great, I've got an encouraging message. I'm going to tell them that Jesus is the son of David.

But then I had to tell them that the Jews in Jerusalem had executed him. That didn't go down quite as well. I didn't think that was quite as encouraging. But still, I went on to explain how God had resurrected him and so he had fulfilled that psalm about the Holy One not seeing decay.

And then I went when I told them that it was only through the death of Jesus, not through the law of Moses, that they could really get close to God.

[11 : 00] Steve says, did that go down well? How did it go? How did you do? And I reply, well, sort of. Some of them believed and followed Jesus. And at least the message, the word got around a bit.

In fact, next week, practically the whole city was there. There was a great big crowd. And of course, a lot of them were Gentiles. And so we preached the word to Jews and Gentiles alike.

And the word of God began to spread. But the Jews, having invited us to speak, decided they didn't like what we had to say at all.

And they were getting jealous. And so they formed a lobby and got together with some of the leading women of the city and they had us thrown out.

And that's why you caught me just here. I'm just leaving the city. But hang on, I've just got something more to say to them. I've got to shake the dust off my shoes to show that now I'm really going to the Gentiles.

[12:11] Of course, this is what the Lord has commanded us. I've made you a light for the Gentiles that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth. So, sorry, I've just got to go and deliver that message.

But that's the story. End of the interview. But what did happen? Well, actually, if you look at verse 48, you can see what did happen in Pisidian Antioch.

That those who were appointed for life were glad. And they gathered together and the Holy Spirit said, Joy.

It's begun. So, let's now fast forward 20 years or so.

And we'll interview Paul again. Now, I'm going to get the words of the interview from 2 Corinthians 11 and 12.

[13:12] 12. Now, at this point, alarm bells are ringing in your head, or at least they ought to be, because you ought to think, hang on, you know, he's interviewing a legitimate exposition of the scripture.

But, so what I'm going to do is I'm going to give you the references that will be on the next slide, so that you can check that this really is pretty much what Paul says. I've allowed a bit of an artistic license, but basically what I'm repeating basically is what Paul says.

But, actually, you do need to know the context as well. And this passage in 2 Corinthians is when Paul is writing against these what he calls super apostles.

And these super apostles were people who came along with a new brand of gospel. They weren't quite so keen on the old one. It seemed a bit old hat really. Not quite, you know, you need a new marketing strategy at least.

And so, these were the super apostles. And, what was it they were trying to sell you? Well, you know, we've got to focus here on these great mystical experiences.

[14:32] We've got to focus on all these signs and wonders. That's what the public wants. And Paul, well, actually, it's pretty much what Francis Schaeffer calls super spirituality.

And there are plenty of these super apostles around nowadays, aren't they? You find them in all sorts of groups, some of these extreme charismatic groups, or these prosperity gospelers.

They're super apostles, aren't they? They've got a whole new brand of spirituality. spirituality. And they don't really like the sort of old hat spirituality that we preach in our reformed churches where we put all this boring emphasis on expounding the word.

And so in this passage, Paul is explaining his brand of spirituality, how he views walking by the spirit and living the Christian life. And actually, to be honest, it's a bit over the top.

Paul is using that Jewish trick of using exaggeration and paradox to make his point.

[15:43] Now, of course, when we, in our culture, we don't use them much that way, we tend to use satire and irony for the same purpose, don't we?

And so that's why I thought it would be good to think of it as an interview again, but you do need to check that I'm really using Paul properly as I go through and so I'll put the references up for you.

Now, I tried to make it a bit, excuse me, just have a glove of water.

I tried to make it a bit humorous but, because I think it is, in a sense, a bit humorous, but it's humorous with a barb, with a purpose.

So, let's see if we can get Paul to tell us again, speak to us again. Now, we're not by the side of the road, I'm not a cub reporter anymore.

We're in a big TV studio, big plush place, you know, and there's TV cameras everywhere, and there's sound engineers, and lots of people rushing around doing all sorts of esoteric things.

[17:01] And now, I'm not in my travel kit anymore, I'm dressed up with a nice suit, and we're sitting on plush chairs, and we're just about to go live, and we've got a special guest tonight.

We've invited the Apostle Paul so that we can interview him, and so everybody can hear what he's got to say. Paul, it's so good to catch up with you again.

Do you remember when we met 20 years ago, such a long time ago? Yeah, yeah, I remember it well. I see you've come up in the world a bit since then. Well, yes, yeah.

Well, last time you came, you'd just started your work, but now we want to know how it's going. You've been all over, haven't you?

You've been all over the place. All sorts of places. I want you to tell us about your life as a missionary. Maybe some of the people here, maybe they would sign up to be missionaries.

[18:09] We can put it on the website how they sign up, if what you say tonight persuades them to be a missionary. And even if our listeners don't really want to be missionaries, they all want to know about how to be a disciple.

They all want to know how the spiritual life works. So why don't you tell us what it is to be a disciple? Why don't you tell us what it is to be a missionary?

Give us some exciting times. Give us some great spiritual experiences. Tell us about all these mighty signs you've been doing, Paul.

Okay, okay, well, ask away then. Well, Paul, yeah, what about spiritual experiences? Spiritual experiences. Yeah, I had one of those once.

Let me put the slides up. It seemed to be like I was taken up into heaven. It was really quite glorious. I have to say though, it was a long time ago, 14 years ago.

[19:17] It doesn't seem so important now. Oh, okay. Well, what about the mighty signs then? These marks of the apostle?

Yeah, marks of the apostle. Yeah, I've done a few of those. Do you remember that source of Elymas I told you about before? Yeah, I suppose that was a mighty sign. But, you know, I don't focus on those so much now.

Now, by this point, I, as an interviewer, getting a bit worried. I know what makes a good story, and this doesn't seem to be quite our message here. Come on, Paul, my readers want excitement.

Excitement, you say? Well, I was shipwrecked, that was exciting. In fact, I've been shipwrecked three times, actually. And one time, I spent a night in an open boat.

That wasn't quite what I had in mind. Well, how about travelling overland? I mean, it must be great travelling overland with your companions, all those long walks, peaceful journeys in the countryside where you can share some fellowship together and you can pray.

[20:39] Paul says, yeah, I did do a few trips. Covered quite a lot of distance, actually. I'll tell you one time, we had some close fellowship, the river flooded and we all had to huddle together on the top of the hill.

That's a real close fellowship then. And I can tell you when we did some praying, that was the time we were attacked by bandits. I can assure you we did a lot of praying then.

Yeah, okay, okay. Well, Paul, what about those great cities? What about those great meetings when the crowd hung on every word you say? Well, yeah, there were some times of refreshment like that.

They were great. Sometimes we were able to spend some time teaching and preaching and enjoying fellowship in the Holy Spirit and sometimes the whole city turned up like they did in Pisidian Antioch.

But let me tell you this. The thing I've really learned about crowds is that crowds rapidly turn into mobs and mobs rapidly turn into riots.

[21:45] And let me tell you my experience of cities. Basically, there were two types of cities, two types of town. There were the ones where they throw you out straight away.

And then there were the ones when they arrest you and beat you up and then they throw you out. Oh dear, oh dear. Well, okay, what about the great people you met?

What about those churches you planted? Did you have some great times with them? Oh yeah, indeed, I did. Yes, that's true. You're right, there, I keep in touch with all of them.

I read all their Facebook pages and I follow their tweets. And I send lots of emails myself, but all this news, they face so many challenges.

You know, there's sexual immorality in this church and that church over there. Two elders are falling out and they're shouting at each other. They're false teachers. So much could go wrong.

[22:57] I'm very concerned for them, you know. This time, Steve, our reporter, is getting a bit desperate.

This isn't hitting the right note at all. Oh dear. We're going to lose a lot of ratings over this. He has one last try though.

Okay, Paul. Well, that was very interesting. Let me ask you one last question. If you could sum up life as a missionary in one word, what word would you choose?

Oh, tricky question that. I don't know, I'll have to think about that a bit. Let's think. One word, one word to sum up life as a missionary. I know, I know what it is. I describe it as a delight.

Steve breathes a sigh of relief. Delight. Now we're cooking. Now we're on the right track. Come on then, Paul, tell us more. Tell us why it's a delight.

[24 : 07] Oh, well, that's easy. because for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties.

For when I am weak, then I am strong. Oh, I give up. You delight in hardships. How does that work then? Come on, tell us. Well, it reminds me that I follow in Christ's footsteps.

It reminds me that it's all in and by his power. Yeah, I have been all over the world, but it reminds me that I wouldn't have taken a single step if he hadn't led me and if he hadn't sent his spirit with me.

At that point, they go off air. But the spirit's still watching. And what does the spirit say? He says, well done, Paul, you mighty man, you are strong.

But actually, of course, the work isn't finished yet, is it? Even Paul couldn't go everywhere. Even Paul couldn't make it to the ends of the earth. earth. And so Jesus talks to each one of us, turns to each one of us, and asks each one of us, what about you?

[25 : 43] Paul's done his stuff. Will you follow me? I don't promise you green pastures and still waters. For that matter, I don't even promise you shipwrecks and bandits.

It will be different for each of you. But there's something I can tell you. I can tell you that this road I'm leading you along is tricky and narrow.

It's Matthew 7, 14, if you don't know where that comes from. It's a mountain road, a dangerous road. The rock falls and precipices.

But there are also some glorious views. So, Jesus says to us, are you up for it? Will you follow me? And Jesus says, I can promise you one thing, you will have the Holy Spirit to go with you. He's going to go as your mountain guide. He's your comforter and your advisor.

[26 : 55] And he'll be the one who says, be careful here, watch out for that falling rock. And sometimes he says, why not rest a while and enjoy the view? So, we do walk by the Spirit, not always in green pastures, by any means, there are times of resting and refreshment, but often it is tough going.

Often we do have to look out for the bandits and the rock falls and the floods. walking by the Spirit. He's walking along that path that Jesus has set for us and reminding us that he's already been that way.

He does say, follow me. And his was the way of suffering. So how can our path be any different? Where is this road going? it might not look very promising. It's not the M25, not the broad highway. Where is it going? Well, it might take us to the ends of the earth. Some of us might become missionaries or for some other reason, go to the ends of the earth.

[28 : 21] earth. But actually, that's not really where Jesus is taking us. That's not really where he's gone and where he calls us to go. He calls us to go to the eternal city, the place where he reigns as king.

That's where this path is leading to. That's what Matthew 7, 14 says. the gate is narrow and the path is narrow and it's hard to find.

Where does it go? It leads to life. So again, Jesus asks us, will we follow him now? So let's sing a book.