

The Wimp Who Conquered Continents

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 5th of September 2004. The preacher is Paul Dudley. His sermon is entitled, The Wimp Who Conquered Continents, and is based on 2 Corinthians, chapter 10, verses 1 to 18.

Before I begin this morning, I have a very serious matter to address with you. The church has received an open letter from Paul from overseas, and he makes it very clear that he knows that there is a minority amongst us that no longer supports his ministry.

That he knows that there are people out there who have allegations and innuendos and are trying to actually produce a smear campaign against him.

He knows what the minority is saying. That you think that he's an old windbag, that he's full of words, that he's a craven dog who barks loudly, but that he has no teeth.

That when he comes to face us, face to face, there'll be nothing but hot air. He's written to say that he knows about this, and he promises that when he comes back, he will not act lightly.

[1 : 27] That although he may be weak in body, he will not be weak when he returns. That he will show that he does have teeth, and that he will settle this issue once and for all.

That when he comes back, he'll be ready to punish as he ought. As I said, this is a very serious issue. Therefore, he asks in this letter, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, to repent, that he will not have to execute his judgment of God when he arrives.

Imagine being at Corinth, getting that. Imagine being there back in Corinth when one of the elders got up and said that. For those who thought I was talking about Paul Barker, I wasn't.

It was actually just, it was just the letter here. I was just trying to put you in the picture what it would have been like back there. But if you did feel guilty, and you thought you were a part of that minority, I think you better come and talk to me after.

Imagine being back there when one of the elders got up and read this section of the letter. But I guess there would have been no doubt as to whether you were a part of that minority or not. For as we've seen through this letter of 2 Corinthians, there are these false teachers that are in the church and they're undermining Paul's authority.

[2 : 42] They're saying that Paul no longer has the right to have authority over the church. Paul the Apostle, that is, not Paul Barker. They say that Paul the Apostle is a worldly person, that he's blown around by the worldly things.

He is not spiritual enough. In our passage, it would be good for you to have open 2 Corinthians chapter 10. In verse 10, that's on page 942, in verse 10, Paul makes it very clear that he understands what the issue is here.

That is, the false teachers are claiming that Paul keeps on vacillating around whether he's bold in one way and weak in another. So we see there in verse 10, His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak and his speech is contemptible.

This is the issue that Paul is dealing with here in chapter 10. One of the issues. The Corinthians, if you recall, has been working through 2 Corinthians. Paul has sent 1 Corinthians, the letter of 1 Corinthians, to the church, as he expected them to change into godly behaviour.

But he's found out that they actually haven't changed. So he goes to confront them face to face about their behaviour. And when he arrives in Corinth, one man there, presumably one of the elders, assaults Paul and tells him to go.

[4 : 05] And Paul, rather than making a fuss there and then, leaves. From his position where he is, not in Corinth, he writes a very severe letter. The letter that's mentioned here in that verse 10, where Paul speaks very severely.

It's a letter that we actually don't have in our Bible. It'd be interesting to see what Paul would have said in that letter. But Paul there obviously speaks very severely against the Corinthians. But the false teachers say, look, look at the way that he speaks in these letters.

He's so harsh and so mean, so full of confidence. But when he is in our midst, look how weak he looks. Look how weak he is. He can't be a true apostle.

If he's that way, one way and another, another way, he's not truly spiritual. You can't follow him. As we've seen through 2 Corinthians, Paul has written this letter to try and encourage the majority. What has happened since the severe letter is, is that the majority of the congregation have realised that they were in error and they have repented. In chapters 1 to 7 of 2 Corinthians, we've seen Paul encouraging these people who have repented.

[5 : 12] The majority at Corinth to continue to trust in his authority, in his apostleship. We've also seen how Paul has encouraged them to complete the collection, to be generous in their giving to the Jerusalem church.

But as we've gone through those nine chapters, we've seen just lurking in the background these false teachers. Well, in chapters 10 through 13, Paul confronts them head on.

Paul confronts the persistent problem of his opponents. In the previous chapters, we've seen that Paul has been an ambassador of reconciliation. But in these last three chapters, we'll see Paul as the warrior against rebellion.

We'll see that what Paul is really fighting for, although he is fighting for his authority in the church, he doesn't do it because he wants all the glory and honour for himself.

He actually wants to deal with a heart issue, the issue of a wrong understanding of the gospel. At the beginning of our chapter today, Paul appeals to them by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.

[6 : 21] He wants them to repent, that when he comes to them, he won't have to act boldly. But he lets them know in verses 1 and 2, when he does come, he will act if he has to.

And he says there that the weapons that he has when he returns aren't weapons of this world. They are divine weapons, weapons that will have effect. Look there in verses 3 through to 6.

Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards. For the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God. We take every thought captive to obey Christ. We are ready to punish every disobedience when your obedience is complete.

Paul makes it very clear that his weapons aren't weapons of his expertise or his experience or physical strength. They're not weapons of his personality or passion.

[7 : 25] They are divine weapons. They are weapons that will destroy strongholds, destroy arguments, bring down every proud obstacle and capture every thought for Christ.

Well, what is this weapon that Paul speaks about here? What is this divine weapon that Paul has that when he marches into Corinth, he's going to start wielding around? Is it a very large sword? Is it that he's going to start zapping people with bolts of lightning if they dare stand up against him?

As we read through Paul's letters, it is very clear that the power that Paul has is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The proclamation of the truth of the gospel with the power of the Spirit of God. This is Paul's weapon. It is Paul's divine weapon. It is a weapon that will take every captive thought.

It will knock down every proud obstacle, destroy arguments. You see, Paul has been working around through ancient Greece and Turkey and Syria and Palestine. He's been going through all these different places and what is his weapon in all those different areas?

[8 : 29] It's proclaiming the truth of the gospel. But it's proclaiming the truth of the gospel to places of teeming with religious cults and philosophies, of teachings and dark magic, of high-flown wisdom, of arcane rituals and passionate held ideals.

Paul comes to this diverse culture. He comes with the truth of the gospel, the truth of Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, and has had a powerful impact.

He has planted churches. He has done great works through God and the power of his Holy Spirit. It is the power of the truth of the gospel with the Spirit working in people's lives.

This is the weapon that Paul has. And when he comes to Corinthian church, he's going to continue to proclaim the truth of the gospel and the way that it should flow out into actions in their life.

By doing so, he will proclaim judgment upon those who do not submit to that. As we think about our world, we think about even our church. Here we are some 2,000 years later, a handful of men going throughout the churches, setting up churches, so that now even here in Australia, so far away from where Jesus was, so long ago, the power of the gospel is still working.

[9 : 49] Here we are, people who have been affected by God's power. It's great hearing stories of conversions, of people in the midst of Muslim countries, where they recognise the truth of Jesus and the power of his death and resurrection, and that they are prepared to stand up for it, even if it means persecution for themselves.

This is the power of the gospel. This is what Paul wills when he comes to rebuke the Corinthians. Well, in verses 7 through to 11, Paul affirms that he does belong to Christ, that Christ has taken him captive, that he belongs to Christ, and that Christ has given him authority.

And we see there authority to build up and also to tear down. It's not authority that he takes on himself, but authority that has been given for God, for their benefit.

We see there in verses 7 to 11, that when he returns, he will not be timid and weak, as they claim he will be, but he will be bold and strong.

Let such people understand what we say by letter when absent, we will also do when present. Paul wants these Corinthians to be reconciled. Paul wants them to understand that he has authority, that his authority comes from God and that they should follow him and not the false teachers.

[11 : 08] He wants them to be reconciled to him. Well, in verses 12 through to 18, Paul then points out a very obvious chink in these false teachers' armour. He goes on to point out the chink of their boasting.

He attacks them about this error that they have in terms of the way that they boast about themselves. Look there in verse 12 and feel the sarcasm that Paul has as he writes this down. We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. See, these false teachers, they've come into the back door of Corinth and they actually don't have great things to boast about.

Their boasting is there with their glib tongues and fancy letters. We saw that in chapter 3. They've got these letters of recommendation saying how great they were.

But that's just from other people that support them, part of their own little band of followers. That's their recommendation. That's their boast. And so they boast about themselves.

[12 : 11] They're the standard by which everything should be judged. Paul says, Oh, far be it for me to classify myself amongst you. Far be it for me to measure myself against you.

But then he goes on to say, Well, let me show you what the measurement you really should be using. Let me show you the limits by which I will boast about myself, about my ministry.

Let me tell you about these limits. In verse 13. We, however, will not boast beyond limits, but we keep within the field that God has assigned to us to reach out even as far as you.

Paul then goes on to say, Well, if we're going to boast, here are the limits that God has set out for me which I can boast about. Let's just have a look at what I've actually done in this church here.

Let's just have a look at the fact that I'm the one who's planted this church. I'm the one who came to evangelise this church. I'm the one who's not only done that, but also done it throughout all the different churches around the area.

[13 : 09] I'm also hoping that not only that, that in this church at Corinth will actually be a place where we can spread the gospel even further. Let's just have a look at my ministry.

Let's get a tape measure and let's have a look at my ministry and see, let's use that, the test by which we actually do our boasting. So have a good look at it.

Have a look at my ministry. And so Paul says there in verses 14 through to 16, For we are not overstepping our limits when we reached you. We were first to come all the way to you with the good news of Christ.

I was the one who first came to you, he says there. We do not boast beyond limits, that is, in the labours of others, but our hope is that as your faith increases, your sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you without boasting of work already done in someone else's sphere of action.

Paul points out here, look, I'm not going into someone else's area that they've set up in terms of churches. I haven't gone and piggybacked on someone else's. I've gone and planted these churches and look at the fruit that's actually come here.

[14:16] The false apostles, they're parasites. They're ones who've come in to poach from Paul's patch. They're seeking to exploit the labours of others. They're seeking to come in and undermine Paul's work that he's done.

Paul says, measure the rule and have a look what I've done. Then he actually turns it a little bit in the last two verses. It makes them realise, look, it's actually not what I've done but what the Lord has done.

The way the Lord has blessed my ministry. Look at the way that God has blessed me and God has commended me. He says, this is the true way of actually working out what you can boast in. Don't boast in yourself. Boast in the fact that God commends you. That God is the one who boasts in you and your ministry. Look there in verse 17. Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord. For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved but those whom the Lord commends. Paul says, look at the way that God has commended my ministry. I will boast in my Lord.

[15:17] I will boast in what he has done. I won't boast in myself like these false teachers are doing. Paul points out this very big chink in their armour. Here they were boasting in themselves but Paul says, no, I will boast in the Lord and what he has done.

Well it seems that the Corinthians were dazzled by the glossy image of these false apostles. They came in waving their letters of elegant speech.

They probably were six foot tall broad shoulders. They were probably all these very impressive people with impressive personalities. Paul, weak, wimp, Paul.

Paul wants them to actually have a look beneath the surface at these false apostles. He wants them to see that they're actually not commended by God at all. Their only commendation of God is themselves.

Paul wants them to have a little look at them, a close look but also to look at Paul. The way that God has used him to conquer continents. It's God's commendation that Paul seeks and that's what counts for Paul.

[16:21] Well at the heart of this issue is actually the gospel. It seems here that the Corinthian church is trying to work out who they admire and who they follow. Do we follow Paul the apostle or do we go for these impressive looking false teachers?

Who do we follow here? But there's actually this following of the false teachers. It's actually a false understanding of the gospel. You see these false teachers they're all about triumphalism, about impressiveness, about how good they look.

They see that from Christ. Christ rose triumphant. Christ is the one that brings a triumphalism. He's this great spiritual battle that will be won and fought and we'll win them and we're so impressive. Look how impressive we are. Paul points out the very beginning. He appeals to them by the meekness and gentleness of Christ as he appeals to the way that Christ suffered, the way that Christ withheld his judgment, the way that he died a weak death because it's in the midst of that weakness that God is strong.

They had a wrong understanding of Christ. Sure they understood who Christ was but the picture was skewed. They changed it just slightly to suit themselves and their own egos and Paul says he wants none of it.

[17:32] But who do we admire? I love the Olympics. The Olympics are great. My biggest disappointment that Paul has been away is that I've been so busy I haven't been able to watch more of the Olympics. It's just, it's a great thing sitting up at night time watching the Olympics and seeing all those great events and the great heroes that we see come out of the Olympics.

Olympics. I love those hero grams. I wonder if you sent a hero gram one night. I didn't but I wonder if you were going to send a hero gram who would you send your hero gram to? Would it be Ian Thorpe in the 400 metres?

What a great race. Fantastic. The hockey. When they scored that goal the men's hockey I had tears in my eyes. What a great victory. Who would you send a hero to?

A hero gram to? Well who would you send a hero gram to in terms of Christian things? Who's your heroes in terms of the people that you follow? Who are the people that you admire?

See Paul's talking to this Corinthian church and he's saying who are you going to follow? Are you going to follow me or the false teachers? Are you going to be looking at personality and passion and looking impressive?

[18 : 38] This dazzling glossy image or are you going to be looking at things that count? People who go into hard places pioneering with evangelism. People who don't rest on their laurels or boast of past events.

People who rely on prayer and holiness. People who preach God's good news the gospel. People who don't rely on their own achievements or gimmicks or showmanship.

Who are the people that you admire? There's a person who I phoned up recently. A Christian man here in Melbourne and he stood up and he proclaimed the truth that filled my heart with joy.

He stood up and rebuked the Archbishop. Not the Archbishop of Melbourne but of Australia. He rebuked people who wanted to falsify the truth in the midst of them.

Such courage. People who are prepared to stand up for the truth and point out the truth of the gospel and its implications. People who are prepared to stand up in synod and declare the truth about Jesus rather than trying to undermine or change this picture of Jesus to suit themselves.

[19 : 45] Are we prepared to stand up for the truth? Are we a church that's prepared to try and encourage each other to continue to look at the truth? Are we a church that keeps on looking at the right picture of Christ and understanding him fully and the impact of him being Lord of our lives?

Are we people seeking to commend ourselves or to be commended by the Lord? Are we people who know the power of the gospel in our own lives but also in other people's lives?

Are we prepared to take this great news as Paul was to continents, to our neighbours, to our friends and family? For Paul, he wanted to be commended by God and not others.

Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.