

To Nigeria with Love

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[0 : 00] 2 Corinthians 4 3 Corinthians 5 3 Corinthians 5 4 Corinthians 5 4 Corinthians 5

And I see Don Boyd down there who's sent a number of representatives of his family out to serve Christ cross-culturally in the fellowship of the Church Missionary Society.

The East Timor crisis, I think, revealed some of the differences in the way that Indonesians view reality and the way we view reality.

And therefore, as a spin-off, we have different values.

We have different values that are not self-evident. It just so happens that we have been enculturated in a culture which was formed by our ancestors who were changed by the gospel of Christ 1,500 years ago.

[4 : 01] Well, there isn't Christ sent Paul to preach the gospel to non-Jews. Contrary to his own, every natural inclination of his own, he found himself sent out not to his own kinsmen whom he dearly wanted to see turn to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, but he was sent to the Gentiles.

But nevertheless, he could say in 1 Corinthians 9, 22, I have become all things to all men, that by all means I might win some. And as we look back and read the Acts of the Apostles and read the letters of Paul, we perhaps think what a spiritual giant this man was.

His ministry subverted in the end, the ministry of Paul and Paul's off-siders subverted the whole Greek-Roman culture of the first century.

And began to shape a different kind of culture from which we have personally benefited greatly.

And we see from the Apostles' letters, which were a kind of distance education for young churches, we see a little more, however, of what Paul was really like.

[5 : 35] He reveals himself very honestly, not least in 2 Corinthians, as we read this morning, as a man who's very conscious of his own fragility and weakness.

He speaks of personal weariness, of depression, of poor health, of an overwhelming sense of his own mortality. And he speaks of a recent near-death experience in Asia in chapter 1, verse 2.

So he had a lot of reasons, actually, to be discouraged. But he says, having this ministry, by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

At the very beginning of the letter, Paul wrote, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the church at Corinth. So, being apostle to the Gentiles was not a job that Paul had applied for.

He was chosen and called by God, and this call of God was an act of great mercy, as he says in his first letter. That was the basis of Paul's ministry.

[7 : 17] And I trust that's the basis of your own Christian life. By grace you are saved, through faith, that not of your souls. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.

By the grace of God, I am what I am. Those words point then to the basis of Paul's ministry, and to the reason why he refused to throw in the towel in the face of adversity.

He, of course, could specifically look back to that conversion and God's call to him on the road to Damascus.

And so he says here in this chapter, chapter 4, verse 6, the God who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

wonderful echo of Genesis chapter 1. And, of course, it reflected his own experience, the way in which he came to be confronted with the risen Messiah.

[8 : 42] But in Paul's mind, it was such a miracle that he likens it to God's creative act in the beginning, when the sovereign creator of the galaxies said, let there be light, and that his word, the darkness, was dissipated by a flood of light.

So the basis of Paul's ministry was the merciful call of God, and that's why there could be no turning back.

I'd like you to think a little bit about the method of Paul's ministry, because he touches on that in verses 2 to 4. He says, we have renounced underhand ways.

We refuse to practice cunning, or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth, we commend ourselves. We learn from the letter that Paul is under attack from Jewish opponents, Christians, Christian Jews, who have come to Corinth, and they were denigrating Paul's ministry.

And perhaps they were suggesting that he had diluted Christ's message by leaving out the teaching of the law and circumcision.

[10 : 15] And 20 years previously, of course, Paul would have shared those assumptions. But here, this is a battle for truth, for the truth of the gospel.

It's not a matter of differences over personality or style, as sometimes can cause problems in a Christian congregation. But these new teachers are seeking to establish themselves by, as I said, denigrating the apostle, and particularly his gospel of free grace.

They accused him of being weak and demoralized. They suggested that he refused financial support in order to gain a subtle hold on the Corinthians.

They claimed his gospel was veiled, apparently. Perhaps they couldn't understand his Christ-centered message, which treated the laws of Moses as fulfilled and therefore not operative under the new covenant.

Paul, of course, knew from experience that his gospel was veiled, in the sense that many, both Jews and Greeks, rejected it. But the problem was not in the gospel. The problem was not in its presentation.

[11 : 31] The blindness of men and women, he says, is due to the activity of the God of this world, Satan. Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers.

So he reminds us that we are not neutral in our thinking by nature. We are fallen and blind until the light of the gospel, the gospel bursts in.

And this life-changing gospel doesn't come by gimmicks or clever methods, but by the open statement of the truth. And all of us, if we're honest, I think, are tempted to soft-pedal the gospel, to fudge when we have opportunities to give a reason for the hope that's within us.

I had one just a few days ago. It takes you by surprise, really. The man I was talking to, we'd gone a long way together.

He was being very responsive. But then he said, but you don't believe in all that business about hell and a God of judgment, do you? Immediately I felt the temptation, the pressure to fudge.

[12 : 52] But I didn't. I said, well, what about Idi Amin?

What about Pol Pot? Idi Amin still living in luxury, in Libya, never been brought to account.

What kind of God would the Creator, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be, if he was not a God of judgment?

And we came in it that way. And there were a couple of other things in the conversation, where again, I felt pressured to fudge, to soft-pedal.

I didn't want to break off. But, as sometimes happens, defences that you think are impregnable crumble.

[13 : 55] Because God is at work. As you faithfully bear witness to his word, God is at work in a person's heart. More than you dare imagine.

The method of Paul's preaching then is the open statement of the truth. And thirdly, the content of that truth is Jesus. We do not preach ourselves, he says in verse 5.

These new teachers who'd come to the church in Corinth were big noting themselves. Paul said their preaching actually enslave the Corinthians.

Paul says we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your slaves, for Jesus' sake.

The God of this world blinds. The gospel brings light.

[15 : 00] Satan is only capable of removing sight. God restores sight. How? Through the gospel of Jesus. The gospel that Jesus is God and Savior.

Melbourne is waiting to hear this open statement of the truth that focuses on Jesus. We had a bit of controversy the last couple of weeks over a bulletin article in which one of our archbishops fudged, from my point of view, fudged the truth.

Gave a very reductionist understanding of the death and resurrection of Christ and the claims of Christ.

If that was all the gospel was about, if you read that article, the Christian movement would not have survived for ten years. Wouldn't have changed any lives. only this gospel that changes people's lives.

And what alternatives do folk have? Marxism is dead. The New Age spiritualities that are around about us have no answer when faced with something like Kosovo or East Timor and the heart cries out for a universal principle of justice and a God of justice.

[16 : 37] those New Age spiritualities with their private ethics and private religiosities have no answer at all.

The content of the gospel and a gospel ministry must be nothing less than the Lord Jesus.

And what is the character of a gospel ministry? Paul says it's entrusted to urban vessels. This here is a paradox. A priceless treasure.

A powerful life-changing message. And God has entrusted it to urban vessels. Clay pots like Paul like you like me.

Urban jars that are vulnerable to injury and decay. Our fragility our weakness is embarrassing but it's no accident.

[17 : 42] It's God's policy. God delights to use the weak and the foolish things of this world to bring glory to his own name.

To show that the extraordinary power belongs to God and not to us. Hence that immense discrepancy between the treasure of the gospel and the vessel serves simply to underline Paul's weakness and yours and underline the fact that that is no barrier to God's plan.

In fact God's power is made perfect in weakness and Paul describes verses 8 to 12 something there of his own weakness.

We're afflicted in every way but not crushed perplexed but not driven to despair persecuted but not forsaken struck down but not destroyed always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies for you.

So that is the character of a gospel ministry that it's exercised in great weakness and inadequacy.

[19:10] Don't be surprised by it. fifthly a gospel ministry entails suffering we learn that's what Paul says he carries around in his body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus might also be revealed in Paul's case it was as we heard beatings and imprisonments dishonour and eventually martyrdom at the Lambeth conference nearly two years ago we were reminded that in many parts of the world particularly where the Anglican Church is growing it is still true for God's servants one of the very vivid memories that Judith and I had apart from personal conversation with bishops from the Sudan and Iran and other places where Christians are actively persecuted was on the final night after a kind of barbecue that we had there was a fireworks display and we were going home early and as we were cutting across the field we saw this

African family fleeing in great terror and I ran ahead and called out in English obviously and I said what is the problem are the children frightened and the husband turned round and he said children not the children we are all frightened I said that's just fireworks and he stopped and said fireworks what is fireworks I said it's a kind of entertainment you call that entertainment in my country bombs and mortars are going off people are being killed all the time and it was embarrassing we should pray for our suffering brothers and sisters in Ambon the Moluccas in the Sudan in Iran in China in India in northern

Nigeria at present as we think particularly of the youngs this morning and there will be a cost in Australia too I can't understand why God has not called us to suffer in Australia in more obvious ways than we do but there will be a cost also for those who confess Jesus as Lord in this society and particularly for those who give themselves to a ministry of the gospel it will be a cost perhaps in security in emotional stress in material things or perhaps it may mean rejection by friends and family but as Jesus is revealed in his servant's weakness others are blessed that's what Paul says here in verse 12 so death is at work in us but life in you remember that fifth point the servant is not greater than his master and a gospel ministry entails suffering but there is a wonderful motivation

I've only got seven points this is my sixth there's a wonderful motivation here sacrifice for Christ is not without good reasons Paul is very conscious of his mortality he just had a near death experience in Asia he says we were so utterly unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself and then he goes on to quote the psalmist in psalm 116 where the writer praises God for delivering him from death and this deliverance reminds Paul that his God who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us that's a wonderful motivation this life is transient how foolish then to pin all our hopes on the puny offerings of this world we have nothing less than resurrection and eternal life to look forward to the gospel is not a band-aid provision it's not about healing and signs and wonders though God may grant those but it brings nothing less than resurrection for the believer and that's a great reason to press on but Paul adds a second motive here that is his passion for the glory of

God as grace extends to more and more people it increases thanksgiving to the glory of God and God's grace through the gospel Paul preached would work not only in the Corinthians but it was going to radiate out changing the lives of more and more men and women who in turn would thank God for his grace and forgiveness and so glorify our creator and saviour and that's what happened to our ancestors the ancestors of most of us 1500 years ago they built great cathedrals to celebrate the coming of the gospel of Christ and to worship this great sovereign Lord who had created all things their tall spires reflected their view of the glory of

[25 : 04] God but what was even more telling was the change in their world value and their values and that's something you realize when you move into a culture that has not been influenced by the Bible we take for granted so many things in Australia that are the fruit of the faith of our Christian ancestors back in Europe centuries ago ancestors of most of us here institutions schools hospitals literacy red cross flying doctor here in Australia silver chain bernardo's homes rspca every organization for good that you can think of in our culture research its history you'll find it was commenced by a man or a woman whose life was transformed by the gospel of Christ those values that I alluded to earlier that again we take for granted they're not self-evident values of justice of truth of individual dignity of a basic equality in the sight of God irrespective of education class or wealth those values are products of the impact of the Christian gospel on our ancestors and as the roots wither in our society so we can expect the fruit to disappear

God's glory that was Paul's motive is it ours we think about what consumes our passions our time our energies what we focus on in our thinking nothing is more real than heaven and hell and the judgment of God man cannot live by bread alone Jesus said by material things but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God oh for a thousand tongues to sing my great redeemer's praise the glories of my God and king the triumphs of his grace Wesley's great hymn that's what we were created for it is the ultimate and supreme motive of every Christian the glory of God is it yours is it mine and finally notice our gospel ministry is not without its reward therefore we do not lose heart

Paul repeats again in verse 16 the first time he'd said it it was because he knew what God's grace was doing through him despite all the opposition and despite the discouragement and despite the fact that he was what one of my pupils once called a geriatric crumble now his perseverance flows from his knowledge of what God is doing in him he says therefore we do not lose heart though outwardly we are wasting away yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day and what Paul says of himself is true of every one of you every Christian this is true of from an external point of view of course we are very aware of the signs of decay and I won't embarrass you by enumerating some of the signs of our decay that I don't doubt you could resonate with

I sometimes find I go to a gym occasionally and I find that the blokes one thing they don't mind talking about is their crook back or they're overweight or whatever their problem is and I often say well you know we're in a downhill spiral now and our only hope is the resurrection and that either kills a conversation or it opens up an opportunity it's by faith we know that God is renewing our lives day by day despite all these outward signs of decay we do not necessarily see or feel this renovation but it's going on again a man I talked to the other day felt that was the opposite for him he said before I was converted

I had no conscience I could do anything I liked and it didn't trouble me but since I was born again three years ago I've had nothing but trouble I can't do the things that I used to do and now I've got to do a lot of things that I didn't have to do before life's getting harder was a sure sign I assured him that God's spirit was working in his heart and God's spirit is a guarantee that we belong to God and the pledge of our ultimate redemption and resurrection so the apostle Paul says here furthermore the slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison the process of death is irreversible our bodies belong to a world order that is under judgment and passing away but the suffering that

[31 : 14] Paul experiences in the body only serves to remind him of the reward and he presses on the reward of the resurrection body which the almighty creator is preparing for him and for all who belong to him through faith in his son so brothers and sisters we might take this message for ourselves this morning and and not least our brother and sister and family who are going back to Nigeria do not lose heart therefore having this ministry by the mercy of God Paul says we do not lose heart in fact he regards his afflictions for the sake of the gospel as trivial and momentary he is sustained by that mercy of God which is the origin of his service and by the certain prospect of eternal life resurrection glory that God has promised and which his own vision of the risen Christ on the Damascus road sustained so we pray this morning for those that are going to be commissioned for service in

Nigeria pray also for your own ministry and all whom God has called to a gospel ministry pray especially for Paul and his assistants pray for your new Archbishop Peter Watson and pray for each other that we may be sustained in the way of Christ and not lose heart Amen and not lose over scorpion and provide some to not lose participation can be Wam too and theylon Wash ■■ and ask saliva soak in acidic Schwar mentor avete