

Lost for Words!

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[0 : 00] 2 Corinthians 9, verse 15, where we read, Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift.

If I were to give a title to the sermon, it would simply be Lost for Words. I wonder if you've ever been lost for words.

It seems that the Apostle Paul was at least on one occasion, because here he is in this verse, verse 15 of 2 Corinthians 9, trying to describe something that he just found beyond description.

How do you put a value on something that is beyond price? Or tell about something that there are just not enough words to catch the nature of the thing that you're trying to describe and tell about. You're just lost for words. Well, quite often, we find the writers of the Bible that they would tweak an existing word to give it a specifically biblical nuance or meaning.

[1 : 41] Or as Paul did in the words of our text, he added a little bit to one of the words here that was used to describe something really wonderful.

So as to make us ask, what tongue could tell about that? So Paul is saying that the gift of God is quite simply beyond comparable.

It's inexpressible. Or as one paraphrase puts it, no language can praise it enough.

But what is the gift that Paul is so excited about and thankful for? Actually, our text doesn't tell us. So we have to look around the whole passage to find out. And as we do look around, we find ourselves in a passage about what might seem to us a rather mundane issue.

[3 : 00] It's the taking up of a special collection in church. Now, I'm sure we're all used to special collections in church.

We too had one not so long ago taken up for the poverty-stricken Indian brothers and sisters in the free church area in that vast country.

And there is a similar poverty situation too in the areas in South Africa where we'd been working before and in Peru as well, I believe, as I mentioned in the prayer earlier.

In Paul's case here, the money collected was to go from the church in Corinth, which was in Greece, to the poor Christians in Judea and Jerusalem, who at that time we believe were suffering from a severe famine.

The Corinthian Christians were sending them a gift to alleviate their poverty. It was a gift of money.

[4 : 24] But Paul saw it as something very much more. It was an expression of love, an expression of generosity, and an expression of solidarity on the part of people who, in normal circumstances at that time, would have had no dealings whatsoever with one another.

You see, the Christians in Judea were nearly all Jewish, while the majority of the Christians in Corinth would have been non-Jewish, Gentile Christians.

And normally, Jews had no dealings with Gentiles. But these were all Christians.

And that was what made the great difference. They were brothers and sisters, one family in Christ, just as we are one family with our brothers and sisters in India, South Africa, or wherever believers in Jesus Christ are to be found.

And that gives us the clue about the inexpressible gift that Paul is writing about here. About the Corinthians' gift, Paul says, So two good things will happen.

[6 : 16] The needs of the Christians in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanksgivings to God.

You will be glorifying God through your generous gifts, for your generosity to them will prove that you are obedient to the good news, that is, the gospel of Christ.

That's how verses 12 and 13 in this chapter are translated in the New Living Translation. So these Corinthian Christians were unashamedly showing their faith in the gospel of Christ that had changed their lives.

And what was that gospel? What was the good news that they were following, and which Paul calls the gift of God?

Well, you find one of the clearest and best descriptions of the gospel in words that I'm sure you're all familiar with.

[7 : 42] In John chapter 3 and verses 16 and 17, For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

So here, on the one hand, Paul was emphasizing just what a help the Corinthians gift would be to the poor Judean Christians.

It would show love and concern for them. But on the other hand, God's gift of his Son is in an altogether different league.

Certainly, Jesus did come to help the poor. The Gospels are full of instances of that.

[9 : 00] Jesus fed them, he healed them, he cared deeply for the outcasts and the marginalized.

But the message of the Gospel, the good news from God in giving his Son, tells us much more than that.

You see, Jesus came into the world to people who were not just poor, but who were lost.

Perishing, the Bible tells us. And that's an awful word. It's a frightening word. Telling us of the abandonment of someone.

And the Bible says that people were lost and dead in their sins.

These words used in the Bible to describe people whom Jesus came into the world to benefit from God's gift.

[10 : 17] And money couldn't help people like that. people who were lost and in grave, grave danger. People who were perishing and facing the prospect of being cut off from God forever.

People who were spiritually dead. These people needed not money, but the help of a Savior.

And that is exactly what Jesus, the Son of God, God's gift. Truly is. Now, folks, I've been speaking about people who are lost and perishing and spiritually dead and cut off from God.

And that's, you'll admit, not a flattering picture. but you know, I'm not really speaking about other people.

I'm speaking about you and about me because that's the kind of people we are. Jesus is the Savior we need.

[11 : 40] God's gift. Let's think about that for a little time just now. first then, let me repeat, Jesus Christ is God's gift.

God's gift of a Savior. If I was speaking this morning to a bunch of hardened criminals or openly, brazenly, immoral and blasphemous people, I would have to tell them, you just keep on as you are doing and you will be in great danger of perishing because you're lost and cut off from God and you will be forever, if you go on like that, you will be forever cut off from God.

You need a Savior and that Savior is Jesus Christ. Christ. But if on the other hand, I was speaking to the superest bunch of people you could imagine with none of the obvious failings of the other lot, I would have to say the same thing to them if they were not Christians.

You need a Savior Savior. And we, you and me, we need that Savior too.

We cannot lift ourselves up out of our lostness and spiritual deadness, but God, and when I say these two words, but God, they're such wonderful words.

[13 : 35] you find them here and there in the New Testament at the most critical junctions of our spiritual experience.

But God has given us the Savior we need, and that Savior is Jesus, God's gift.

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift. gift. But we might ask in the second place, what prompted God to give Jesus his son to be our Savior?

And the answer is as surprising as it is gracious. He gave his son because he so loved the world. Isn't that wonderful? Jesus Christ is the gift of God's love to a lost and broken world.

[14 : 52] A world that rose up in rebellion against him and ruined the beautiful creation he had fashioned. God's man.

How the very holy nature of God must have recoiled from the sin that entered the world, the beautiful world that he had made and continues, the sin continues to soil the hearts and the lives of people as well as blighting the natural world around us.

Yet God could not stop loving the world and that's why Jesus came. In Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 4, Paul says, but God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead in our trespasses.

You know, friends, if only we could realize how our sin, yours and mine, must look to the all-seeing, all-pure eyes of God, we might get a glimpse of the grace and of the love which are at the heart of God.

And we would see why Paul says that the gift of God, his son, is beyond words, inexpressible, love.

[16:49] The well-known American theologian of past years, B.B. Warfield, has a great sermon on John 3, 16. And in it he says, he, that is God, loves the world.

The world that is so bad that it takes a great kind of love to love it at all. And much more to love it as God loves it when he gave his son for it.

That is the kind of love God has for you. His gift is the gift of love.

God achieves something wonderful through Jesus Christ.

The text in John 3 and 16 says, whoever believes in Christ should not perish but have eternal life and be saved.

[18:17] Three amazing things. Not perishing. Remember that awful word, perishing, meaning a terrible abandonment.

But those who believe in Jesus should not perish but have eternal life. Those who are dead in sin, dead, having eternal life.

And those who are lost, being saved. Three wonderful contrasts to the kind of people we are in our sin.

And these three great realities, for they are realities, are God's gift to us in Jesus Christ.

And of course, they're life changing. And they are of such a nature that we don't deserve them, of course.

[19:29] And we couldn't work for them. And we cannot find them anywhere else but in Jesus Christ himself.

And they're God's gift to us. This gift of grace and love. And as I say, we only find them by trusting the word of God, God whose aim it is to save the lost, and in trusting his son, Jesus Christ, who came into the world to seek and to save the lost, and to give his life for their salvation.

salvation. So then, where do we go to get this gift of salvation? We go to the cross.

We go to the cross where Jesus died for sinners. And there we confess our sin and repent of it. And there you will be given the hope which is a reality, the hope of eternal life.

[21:03] As Paul himself looked back at the time he came to know Christ, he said, but far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I'm sure some of you know the story by John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress. And in that story there's a dramatic moment when the pilgrim burdened under an intolerable and heavy load on his back.

it's his burden of sin. And he staggers up the hill Calvary to the cross of Jesus Christ.

And as he stood there at the cross, the bands that were holding this burden on him snapped away and the burden fell off and rolled away into the empty tomb, a symbol of the finished work of Jesus for our salvation.

And in sheer relief he started to sing, blessed cross he said, but blessed rather be the man who there was put to death for me.

[22:39] and that is how you too can sing when you come to know Jesus as your saviour, when you come to him as a sinner and confess your sin.

And from there, from the cross, we go forward to a life of loving obedience to the God of this inexpressible gift and Jesus who is the gift.

And what a life it is to be a follower of Jesus. We will be, as Paul said to the Corinthians in the chapter that we've been reading, enriched in every way through all that Jesus has done for us.

So my friends, let me ask you as I close, do you know Jesus as your saviour? If not, think seriously of the consequences of where you are without him.

And remember, God's gift is held out to you in grace and in love.

[24:12] There's a verse of a lovely old hymn which puts it this way, it is a thing most wonderful, almost too wonderful to be as God's own son should come from heaven.

to die and save a child like me. Wonderful, but it's true, and you too will be lost for words as you come and thank God for this inexpressible gift.
amen. Amen. Let's pray together. Dear Lord, we thank you for the gospel and we thank you for Christ who is the gospel, the great good news of a loving God who sent his son to be the saviour, the saviour of all who trust in him.
We pray that you will bring many to put their trust in him this day and know him in their own experience as their saviour and their Lord.
For his name's sake we pray. Amen. And now may the blessing of God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit rest on us and abide with us and with all whom we love this day and forever more.
[26 : 09] Amen.