

Whom The Extraordinary Is Ordinary

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[0 : 00] Well, last Thursday I went to Newfoundland and PST is 12% on top of GST.

Gas is 59.9. You can't catch a fish off any dock in Newfoundland at the present.

The Russian, Portuguese, Japanese trawlers are working hard at what they call the heel and the toe. I don't know if you've heard those terms, but that's the part of the Grand Banks that still isn't quite within the 200-mile limit.

And they're being worked to death by other trawlers. All the teachers in Newfoundland are on strike. All the kids are out of school.

In Cornerbrook, where I went, the day I got there, they just announced 500 were going to be laid off. They provide paper for one of the big papers.

[1 : 13] You know, they do pulp. It's a paper mill. But they were the happiest, most enjoyable people you could ever meet. It was, they were just, they were wonderful.

And I went out and visited Rocky Harbor, which is about 50 or 100 miles further up the coast from Cornerbrook.

And it's one of the outports. And I suddenly realized that what I hadn't realized before was that the outports of Newfoundland are just little toeholds on the shore that were totally independent little units that you could only connect by water.

You couldn't, I mean, there was no inland roads to cross between one and another. So that they are, they've been there for, they've been sort of holding on by their fingernails to that province for centuries now.

You see a nice little house which would perhaps have two or three bedrooms in it. With a wood pile that would stretch from here to Howe Street outside it to keep it warm in the winter.

[2 : 29] You know, all cordwood cut up and drying for the summertime. They, they hate the government because the government hasn't done anything but take money away from them.

And they were getting along well before the government started doing that. And now the government's taking it all away from them. And so they're angry at the government because they are so cussedly independent and what you might call self-reliant.

You know, as long as you can grow a potato and catch a cod, life will go on. And, and cut a cord of wood. You know, that's a, that's their life.

And why the government should interfere with them when they're doing that, they can hardly imagine. I, I hope I won't be offensively political by telling you that it seemed different from British Columbia.

Where everybody thinks the government's there to support us. We're not here to support them. They're there to support us. I don't know which political theory you subscribe to, but it certainly, there, we had a group called the, or the Genesis, the Bluegrass Gospel on Saturday night.

[3 : 52] And did they ever say, My brother who was there with me at the conference I was at, was addressed by a young lady who had been to one of these concerts, you see.

And they were all, the, the, the band was playing and they were all dancing, you see. And the band ran out of tune, so it started playing hymns. And she said, I didn't know whether I should dance or not when they were playing hymns.

But when they got to the old rugged cross, I said, no way. Like that. They were, they were really, uh, wonderful people.

And, uh, and I, uh, I felt really good about being a Canadian with them Canadians and us Canadians. It seemed a good thing. So I hope some messy politicians don't go and bugger it all up. As they, uh, seem want to do. However, I just wanted to tell you that, uh, and I'm going, and I'm going to New Brunswick this weekend.

[5 : 07] Uh, but I'm not coming back. So that, uh, not till July. So I am, I have the responsibility of commending to you one Richard James, whom I think you will really enjoy.

He's a, he's a very, uh, bright, diligent, uh, humorous, young Australian who's been in Canada for less than a year still.

But he's, he's, uh, he really is. You'll really like him, I know. So I hope that you will give him your support and encouragement. He's, uh, I just learned today, I was reading about it.

One of the things that the, uh, the church in Australia did, uh, during the thirties and forties and fifties is that they sent a lot of missionaries to East Africa.

And, uh, about that time in East Africa, there broke out a, what they call the East African revival.

[6 : 17] So a lot of the Australians who went there were infected by the East African revival and, uh, brought it back to Australia with them.

It's a sort of missionary activity in reverse. Interesting, eh? And that, uh, that's, uh, and I suppose you could say in some ways, uh, Richard James is one of the inheritors of that spiritual heritage.

You have in front of you, uh, Acts 19. Uh, and, uh, you know, it's, uh, it's, the thing I want to tell you about is this.

Just if you look at it, Paul entered, this is, this is Ephesus. This is how it all began in Ephesus. Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months.

This provided, Ephesus provided him, the synagogue in Ephesus provided him with a foothold in the community. Just as, uh, you know, I think all, I mean, this is one of the other things that concerns me.

[7 : 33] I mean, that I feel very strongly about is that all across this country, there are tiny, struggling, dispirited, disheartened, and discouraged little congregations going to little churches and not, you know, sort of feeling that the, the end is almost on them.

And, uh, and I, I just think that, uh, maybe they were like the synagogue in Ephesus, that, uh, when Paul came, the whole thing reversed itself.

And, uh, when the, uh, the good news of the gospel comes to these, these foothold churches that are all over the country, that something could happen.

And what Paul did when he got there was he started to dialogue with them and to persuade them and, uh, to speak boldly.

That is, they, they needed to be stirred up. Uh, you know, the trouble with the Baptists is that once you make the great discovery of the significance of adult baptism, that could represent the grounds for a real spiritual breakthrough.

[8 : 52] Then a generation later, you've traditionalized it and kind of killed it, you know, so that, uh, the sort of new sign of the Holy Spirit in one generation becomes the tomb of the Holy Spirit.

And the next, because you become doctrinaire about it. That's what, that's what most of the denominations have done is they, they've started with a tremendous thrust of inspiration, which God has given them and a new awareness of the gospel.

And then given a generation or so, they have, they've entombed that into some kind of ecclesiastical tradition and have lost the vitality of it.

So, that's what the synagogues were doing. They were preserving something, but they needed to be challenged. And Paul went in there and he argued about the kingdom, argued persuasively about the kingdom.

And what, you know, as I told you, I mean, one of the great contentions of my life is that most of our churches need to be places where you have a lot more argument going on.

[9 : 58] Loving, caring, thoughtful, rational argument, you know. But, but most of our churches are so heavy with tradition and so heavy with the vested interest of those who want to preserve the tradition that nobody's allowed to ask any questions.

We went to a church once to examine how it ran and, and we met with a group from the church after the service and said, how come nobody asks these questions?

They said, because we don't think the minister can answer them. So, yeah, the congregation was a, a simple conspiracy of people who were being loving and charitable because they didn't think their questions could be answered.

So they didn't ask them. And nothing helps a congregation more than somebody who comes in and starts to argue and ask questions. And he, Paul, Paul did this about, about the kingdom of God.

By the end of three months, as you will see, look, I live, you see, what had happened was that by the end of three months, a split had occurred right down the middle of the congregation at that synagogue.

[11:15] Now that, you may not think that's a very good thing, but, uh, Luke doesn't apologize when he tells us about it. The reason it happened, if you look in verse nine, is because some of them became obstinate, refused to believe, and publicly maligned the way.

So what this argument did was to bring out the objection to, uh, what Paul was preaching, the resistance to the gospel, the willfulness of the people who would not submit.

And, uh, you know, it's considered to be the best thing to do in a church is not to create that kind of tension, not to create that kind of split, but you need that kind of split.

Uh, because otherwise, uh, all you're doing is covering up, uh, by some kind of conspiracy, the reality of the decisive nature of the gospel.

The gospel tends to split. And if you look here, Paul gives an example of how it happens. Now, you may think that's a dreadful thing to say, but I hope, I hope you'll think it through anyway.

[12:34] Paul, as a result of that, you see, what was happening on one side were the people who became obstinate, they refused to believe, and so they bad-mouthed the way.

Instead of confessing the way, they bad-mouthed it. On the other hand, there were those who were convinced, persuaded, confessed the faith, were willing and acknowledged themselves to have found freedom in being the disciples of Jesus Christ.

So that's, that's what happened. That was a very important split that needed to take place. The result of it, after three months, you'll see that they went to a new venue, as they say.

They went to the hall of Tyrannus. The Greek word for it is something like school or school. And that's where, in those days, lectures were given every day, but nobody was there in the afternoon.

And so Paul took over, and for the space of two years, he continued the daily dialogue. He continued the dialogue. Not maintaining a Greek-style argument.

[13:53] What I mean by that is this. If you're here like this, having an argument with this guy who's here like this, and you have this fund of knowledge between you here, and he attacks yours, so you end up with a little area of agreement in here.

And that's what most people think dialoguing is about. He has his opinions over here. You have your opinions over here. You, you shatter the things he believes in and reduce them to rubble.

He shatters the things you believe in and reduces them to rubble. And you end up with this little pile here that you agree on, which is probably too insignificant to be worthwhile anyway.

But that's, that's how it works. And so, you see, that's how philosophical debate goes on and on and on. And after it's gone on for long enough, there's nothing left to be worth significantly taking an interest in anyway.

Now, that's not the kind of arguing that Paul was doing. It wasn't Paul with his philosophy and the Greeks with their philosophy, and they were arguing. And, in fact, what Paul was doing was saying, this is who God has revealed himself to be, and he's revealed himself to be that in, in the scriptures.

[15:15] And I want to tell you about it. So that Paul says, if God is God, and if he has spoken to us through the scriptures, the history of his people, and if that has all come to a focus in the person of Jesus Christ, then you don't say, I agree or I don't agree.

You say, I believe or I don't believe. Because that's what he was arguing about. Paul wasn't arguing to say, Christianity has some good points, and I know you have some good points, and let's see if we can't work out a compromise.

He's saying, God has spoken to us in scripture about the person of Jesus Christ. And if you believe this, then it would be appropriate that you would become a disciple of that one whom God has sent. And that's why, that's why the split came, I suppose, is because some were, spoke maliciously, or were stubborn, willful, rebellious, and rejected what Paul had to say.

And others became disciples. And so you have that, that kind of thing happening. Look in verse 10. This went on for two years. With the result that, what it says is that with the result that, the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia, all of them, heard the word of the Lord.

[16:51] In other words, heard what God had said through the scriptures and in Christ. And it went through the whole country. Now that basically is the function of faith in the marketplace at Wednesday noon at the cathedral.

That you are assigned the responsibility to make sure that the whole of British Columbia hears it. And that we just carry on with maintaining the dialogue, maintaining the argument, keeping the issue clear in front of people with the result that it will go out to all the people so people will begin to understand it.

I don't think that's particularly. I mean, people are anxious that you bring people here to hear the word. But there's another way in which Paul worked.

And that doesn't say that he got huge congregations at the Hall of Tyrannus. But it does say that him speaking to them and arguing with them and teaching them meant that the result was that it went out to the whole of the province of Asia.

But then in verse 11 and 12, you get this statement. God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.

[18:17] That was bad stuff, isn't it? I mean, what do you do with that? You get into trouble, you see, because God chooses to work in the way God chooses to work.

And you can't go around trying to provide some rationale for the way God does things. You know, he chooses to do that. And the only way I would like to argue about it is this, is to say to you that this is what Paul did for two years and then that happened.

As opposed to what so often happens in our society is that if you get a miracle happening over here, then everybody goes over to see the miracle. But the reason and the justification and the rationale and the meaning behind that miracle, nobody bothers about.

And so the miracle is nothing more than, in a sense, a flash and a pan. These were miracles, too. Miracles of healing that were taking place. But they were taking place on the basis of an established understanding of who God was, how he had spoken, and what he had said.

And then the miracles take place and must be understood in terms of that. You see what I mean? That's, that's, uh, I think, I think that's really very important.

[19:41] And I think, humanly speaking, that, uh, that it's important that we remember. You get a, you get a good example of how wrong it can go if you look in the next verses about, uh, about Sceva.

Now, what, uh, what happened here was that some, uh, uh, I don't know, I don't know what you would, what you'd call them, but they were, I think they were religious opportunists.

They were free enterprisers in the religious world. They saw an opportunity to get a franchise going and get it moving out. You know, it sort of, uh, used to be that Colonel Saunders sold chicken, but, uh, not anymore.

Everybody in North America sold chicken, and Colonel Saunders is dead and buried years ago.

You know, there's no, uh, but they still use the form and the structure.

And what's happening here is that these religious opportunists see this opportunity, and they move out, and they say, we're going to do it. So they go out to perform the healings that they saw happening as a result of Paul's ministry, and they said, in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, be healed.

[21:04] And, uh, they got, things got out of hand for them very shortly, uh, when, uh, they, uh, tried healing a man who was, uh, had an evil spirit who, uh, answered them rather eloquently and said, Paul, I know.

Jesus, I know. Who are you? And, uh, and then he attacked them, and they went out battered and bleeding because, uh, they really didn't understand.

They hadn't, they hadn't come to come to know the God who had revealed himself in Jesus, but they wanted to use the name of Jesus. And I, you know, that's a very dangerous thing to do, and we do it a lot in our society.

A lot of people use the name of Jesus without knowing the person of Jesus. And you put yourself in a very vulnerable and difficult and awkward situation when you do it.

But that's what, that's what they did in this, in this situation, and, uh, they got into trouble for it. So that, what, what you get, you see, as a result of these miracles taking place, uh, what do you get?

[22:19] And, uh, I was, I, you know, I, I, I was really think, I think, given a lot by going to Newfoundland to try and tell them how smart we are in British Congo.

Uh, but, uh, the thing, the thing that really struck me with force when I was talking to them, is that, uh, is there seems to be two sides to this whole question.

The two sides to it are summed up, if you look in the last verse that we quote, that we read today, where it, where it says that, uh, verse 20, in this way the word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power.

So there was, there, there was, as, as, if you want, there was the word spoken to men's understanding.

They were dialogued with, they were argued with, they were persuaded by the word. But, it also says, in this verse, uh, the thing grew in power.

[23 : 33] Now, uh, the thing I was, I really, I mean, this was helpful to me. I don't know, but I, I'm just telling you by way of personal testimony, you know.

It's that I have, I, I, I haven't done that great, but what I've tried to do is to convince people, to persuade people, to argue with people, to show people why there is reason to believe in Jesus Christ.

Why there is reason to believe that God has spoken to us through the Bible. And while, if you, if you see the reason for doing it, then you can see the reason for becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ. You can be, I mean, Paul was obviously doing it. He was persuading people about the kingdom. He was bringing them into the kingdom by persuasion, by argument, by building a rational basis for the understanding of the gospel.

They were thinking about it, and he was forcing them to. But with that, you see, came the demonstration of power. That things were happening.

[24 : 46] And this, to the rational person, is a bit embarrassing. Because, um, I guess I've come, I sort of come to think of myself as being somebody who tries to give people a reason to believe.

But then along comes some simple soul who may not be a highly rational person, but has seen the demonstration of the power of God in their own life.

They've seen it. So the reasoned presentation of who God is, how he has spoken to us, the one through whom he has spoken to us, that provides a foundation.

On that foundation, the power of God can begin to be demonstrated in all sorts of what you might call unorthodox ways.

As unorthodox as taking aprons, which Paul had had on while he made tents. Or handkerchiefs, which he used as sweatbands. And taking them, and the sick were touching them and being healed.

[25 : 58] Now that, you can't rationalize that. It shouldn't happen. You know, and you couldn't get Paul to go into a drugstore and touch all the Kleenex boxes.

And, uh, create the answer to all the wheels of the world. You know, that, that's not, that, that doesn't make any sense. But God, in his own, uh, power and divinity can say, I, I want this, you know, that this can happen.

That you will see the power of God, as well as be convinced of the reason for the gospel. That you'll see both. And you'll see it, uh, in two ways.

You see it both in the healing, and, and in the, uh, the healing and the casting out of demons, because they both come together here. Now, what, you see, what I think has happened for us at the moment is that we've become experts.

I mean, medical, technology, and science is absolutely mind-boggling at the moment. In terms of understanding the physical processes by which we live.

[27 : 10] But the understanding of the spiritual reality within which we live, we know a good deal less about. Uh, here, they didn't know anything about the physical, but they knew the power of the spirit.

We who know everything about the physical tend to know very little about the power of the spirit. And so you see these two things going together in, in the ministry of St. Paul.

Well, it, it ended up, of course time's gone fast today. I, I talk too much, I don't know. Anyway, you have this, this amazing demonstration with which I will conclude as quickly as possible.

Uh, when this became known to the Greeks living in Ephesus, Greeks, remember, they were seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.

Many openly confessed their sins. A number who had practiced sorcery brought their scrolls together and burned them. Publicly, while they calculated the value of the scrolls, the total came to the 50,000.

[28 : 29] So you get, uh, this, what happens, you see, is that with this argument that Paul is giving, and then it's complemented by the demonstration of the power, and what happens to the people is a deep fear comes upon them.

Instead of looking at God from man's point of view, suddenly you're switched around and start looking at man from God's point of view. And with that comes fear.

The kind of fear which is spoken of here, and which you know clearly when you remember the words of Mary when she was told that she was to be the mother of the child, she said, My soul doth magnify the Lord.

You know that suddenly God has become very important to me. You know that when you get, when you get ill, or when you're in trouble or distress of any kind, you, you, you are brought down to size, and suddenly God is magnified.

Well, that's, that's what happened when the fear came to these people. They, uh, they, they saw the work of God from God's point of view, and it gave them a perspective, and in the light of that perspective, they confessed their sins one to another.

[29 : 49] Don't, uh, don't, uh, don't get into confessing your sins to somebody who doesn't confess theirs. You know, because, uh, it's got to be a moving of the spirit of God.

And, uh, only a person who is a sinner can listen to a sinner in the same way that only an alcoholic can understand an alcoholic. I mean, it's, uh, it's that kind of thing. But, you see, that's what, what stirred them up.

And, uh, what, what happened to them then was, uh, their evil deeds became intolerable. The enormous waste of their, uh, of their wizardry and their magic and all those superstitious things that they were committed to, the enormous waste, and the, and the insult it was to God for them to think in that way suddenly convicted them and they had a public bonfire and burning to show that the reality of this, uh, that, of the revelation of God through the scriptures in the person of Christ by the arguments and persuasion of Paul, they suddenly realized that the reality of God in a way that they had never seen it before.

They, they were filled with fear. They publicly confessed their sins. They burned all their, all the garbage that they were, that they were, had themselves involved in.

And, uh, and the name of Christ was lifted up amongst them. Well, that's, that's, that's what needs to happen in our society. That's, you know, and I, I, I, I, I, it looks desperate for Newfoundland that they would ever find any economic answers to their questions.

[31 : 27] But boy, they're in danger of finding some profound spiritual answers which, uh, which might in effect, uh, have a greater influence in the long run than anything else.

Let me say a prayer. God, thank you for this wonderful story. Thank you for Paul's arguing, persuading, dialoguing, convincing.

Thank you for the, uh, and we do thank you for the, totally unexplained unexpected way in which you sometimes demonstrate your power in ways that, uh, boggle our minds and, uh, tend to rather embarrass us because we're such rational creatures.

So our God, continue to have your sovereign way in our lives. Do you buy your Holy Spirit that work in our hearts and lives which we desperately need and give us cause circumstances of our lives, to give to you our whole heart's praise and to share with one another the good news of the gospel.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amer deles in His power and tout His through the heaven of the Sherwood of the James