

Our Response

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Date: 08 April 1992

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Let me just pray and then I'll... Father, we're very conscious of being in the midst of a city with people going in all sorts of directions and all sorts of errands and all sorts of missions.

And it's very hard to tell where people are at and what they're doing. And we come together now to sort of sit under your word and your teaching and ask that by your Holy Spirit we may leave here being refreshed and renewed by fellowship in the gospel and aware more of what you are calling us to be as the servants of the gospel.

We ask that you will be with us and give us understanding. We ask this in Jesus Christ's name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. There's an article in the Manchester Guardian this week which tells about a Midwestern town where at 5 o'clock in the afternoon or 5.30, a businessman in his business suit steps out of the store which he runs and takes his key and locks the door and walks over to his Mercedes Benz, climbs in and drives to his suburban home and family which is a picture that you might see repeated a thousand times any day of the week.

The distinguishing thing about this article is that the man who does it is the famous or infamous Lieutenant Calley who led the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam.

[2 : 07] And that he's now in a business suit and driving a Mercedes and doing well in business and enjoying free enterprise society.

And the great mystery of how he came to do what he did and how those with him came to do what they did remains unsolved really.

But here you are in your business clothes and with your cars across in the parking lot and I have no idea who you are.

And I did not I'm not all of you certainly and outside who the you know the question that comes on. You know comes very forcibly to me I think day by day at least week by week is is how how do we encounter God in the midst of this you know.

How how does that how does that happen. And this man who I suppose will never outlive the identification he has with.

[3 : 24] I mean he's probably outlived it were in his hometown. But nobody else knows anything about him or probably ever will know anything about him beyond his involvement in that dreadful event in the Vietnam War.

And I you know I look at the mystery of who people are and the things they may be suffering or the agony they may experience or the frustration they that may that their life represents.

You know that somebody nobody ever expected to suddenly commit suicide or somebody else who is having an ordinary kind of life that's going on in an ordinary kind of way commits adultery.

Or somebody else comes along and finds that they commit themselves to to a lie which they recognize the cost of doing it but recognize that there's no way around it.

And so they make their commitment to it and they have to live the rest of their life with with that commitment. And so that you know these commitments that we make of our lives are are really very important.

[5 : 01] And and how do you how do I mean perhaps life ends up for most of us at the point of commitment that that kind of commitment.

I I am interested in the NHL and in the hockey players. I have any of you ever heard of people like Red Horner and Turk Broda and Buescher Jackson and most of you would never have heard of them but once upon a time they were great names.

They were great names. Now there's a whole set of new names. I was distinctly under the impression that the function of the NHL was to play hockey and that the goal of that was to win the

Stanley Cup.

But you know you know you and I have discovered in the last week that at the bottom line there is an entirely different agenda.

And and and and and that's that's not surprising and I'm not in fact it's fairly human. In fact I would say that in the church you often discover that the the advertised agenda and the real agenda are two quite different things.

[6 : 31] And the church gets wound up in issues that are not primary to its function. You know they back down from the Stanley Cup theories in which the whole thing comes to a glorious climax and you you understand then clearly what it's all about.

I I I don't understand what the strikes about and and and I understand that people have feelings and that it's a business and this kind of thing happens but you know it's it seems to me so wonderful a kind of picture of the fact that that the real goal of our lives we lose sight of in terms of other issues that come along and totally occupy us and to which we give ourselves so that we lose sight of what what it's all about.

And that's why in the passage today that I want you to look at there's a there's a fairly strong statement and it says it it starts off saying provided that you continue in the faith.

That's the thing where you set your goal and you keep going towards it that's always there you continue in that you don't get led astray you don't drift off you don't get caught up in something else you know what that goal is and you continue in that.

Now I I I feel apologetic having said that even because I guess there's lots of people in our city who simply and maybe you're among who don't know what the goal is who've never defined it who've never figured out what that means and that the occurrences and the demands and the involvement of every day occupy you sufficiently that you don't have to take it.

[8 : 49] Take time to say well this is the ultimate goal and meaning of my life. And you live you know you kind of live life hand to mouth as is not a surprising thing to do.

I have I have I have I have real problems and I tell you this every so often I have real problems with the church.

And it's partly because I had to preach on Jonah last week and that story remember that I told you how the church tends to be off by itself watching the world happen you know.

And that it tends to be a community that's over here and the world is happening over here. And and and in a sense we're shouting to the people who are in the world telling them about the gospel.

And I I suspect that the people in the world understand the gospel better than the church does. And that's because.

[9 : 59] And that's because. I don't know I don't know I don't know I don't know what to do with that statement now I've made it I don't even know how to defend it.

I. I. I. I. I. I. But. what what I'm what I'm what I'm getting at here is. That.

That. That. The implications of the gospel. You seem to have to be able to work out.

In. A setting which is alien to the gospel. And then you understand it I've told you before that. The gospel makes more sense in prison than it does in a parish church.

You know that's because that's the kind of thing that happens. And and. It's it's this business of.

What. What. What it is that we continue in what it is that the gospel means how the gospel takes hold of us how it grabs us what.

[11 : 02] It's because the gospel is very much a church word isn't it. I mean you very rarely use it outside of the church context. You can talk about gospel truth sometime and and you know you can talk about good news as a gospel.

But the gospel is a highly technical term which is right at the heart of what the Christian community is all about. It's it's that gospel that makes the difference between the Christian community and the rest of the world.

And it's the orientation to that gospel. And we go and shout at the world and say you don't believe the gospel. And the world I think tends to say we don't even know what it is.

And nobody is bothered to tell them because it becomes such a kind of in language. One that we use among ourselves and think we understand it.

But the world doesn't doesn't really understand what what the gospel is about. And so when I start today by saying and you continue in the faith in the faith in what the faith in the gospel.

[12 : 12] What is the gospel? And how can that gospel possibly be relevant to the dynamics of my life in the city, my life in my family, my life in my community, my life in relationship to myself?

Which is a deep mystery for most of us. How does it work out? Well Paul goes on in this passage and if you look at the passage just so that you get the picture.

He says provided you continue in the faith stable and steadfast not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard. Well it's like this that you in a sense have a foundation here on which you take your stand.

And that foundation is the gospel. And that's that's it. And he says you continue there. You are steadfast there.

You have a firm footing there. And you don't shift from the hope that is there as that is yours with that foundation. In other words the foundation of your life in this world is the gospel.

[13 : 27] Now you don't know what the gospel is and you don't know what the foundation of your life is. So that that becomes the problem.

So this is the thing on which you and what it says is that you're looking in this direction and you have in view a hope. This is the basis on which you entertain the hope.

And the hope is the fulfillment of God's purpose in the world. And that is the hope that is given to you. Now I want you to understand this and the fact is you probably understand it better than I do. And all I'm doing is trying to sort out my own problems in front of you. But I want to pretend you don't know it so that I can explain it to myself. And so I look at that and I you know and I have a lot of people who come to me.

And you know and what they are is living their life trying to look at the future and me telling trying to tell them the gospel.

[14 : 44] But what I have to do is not deal with the question they have right in front of them because they can't deal with that question until they have a foundation built under them.

From which they can look at that question in the light of the ultimate hope that belongs to them. Do you see what I mean? I came across somebody this week who has the most profound faith in God of anybody I've met for a long time.

It is amazing. He is absolutely and totally biblically illiterate. He has no idea what the Bible is about or what it says.

But he has a very profound faith. And he has got an enormous problem in his life. A king size problem. The first time that he a very successful person has been up against a problem that is a whole lot bigger than he is.

It is the very first time. And he says to me Harry what am I going to do about that problem? And I don't know what to do about it. All I know is that somehow this foundation has to be built under his life.

[15 : 55] So that he can begin to deal with that problem in the light of the hope of the gospel. And that's a big order isn't it?

And it requires a miracle of the grace of God. And I might say that he came to me saying Harry I need a miracle. And he does.

But it's that kind of thing that intrigues me about this passage. Because what you see in the passage is something which I think is interesting.

You look at it. What does it say? It says it talks about the gospel. And it talks about it in three ways. It talks about it something.

It's the gospel that you heard. It's the gospel for the whole world. Because it's gone out into all the world. And it's the gospel of which Paul is a servant.

[16 : 56] And that's what this passage is about. If you want to look and study this passage. It seems to me that this verse this is what it's about. It's about this gospel.

And the reason he's writing to the Colossians is because they have heard it and understood it. And it's become the foundation of their life. On which they can see the hope that has been promised to them by God.

And they can live their life with that hope firmly in view. Established. Firm. And with that hope. So that no matter what happens in their life.

They have that foundation with which to deal with whatever comes along. So he says you heard the gospel. The function of the gospel is that the whole world is to hear it. And I think that's an amazing statement.

Because it is for the whole world. And it's not just for you. It's for the whole world. It's not something you've invented or you've created or you've dreamed up.

[17 : 56] It's something which God intends that the whole world should hear that gospel. And we don't often understand that. But that's what we're presented with. Well, so there is the gospel.

Well, let me go back now and tell you that you probably know that that's where it comes from in old Anglo-Saxon.

The God spell. The God story. And you who have believed in the gospel have come under the spell of the God story.

This isn't a witch's spell. This is a spell that you've come under as you have heard this story. And you've been captivated by it. And you've understood that that story makes sense in the way that nothing else does.

You are caught up in the story of the God story. You're caught in it. And that story is the means by which you relate to your world.

[19 : 12] That's the way you understand yourself. Now, you can go on from there and discover certain things about it. Because it's the translation of the Greek word euangelion, which means good news.

And it's always translated in the Old Testament as good tidings. So that it's distinctive in the New Testament. Because it only really became a word, an important word, in the New Testament.

And it became an important word when Jesus stood up and said, in the synagogue in Nazareth, He said, He has appointed me to preach good tidings to the poor.

And, you know, they tried to do him to death in response to that sermon. People just walk away and ignore me when I'm finished. And I... If someone would just throw something at the end of every sermon, I'd feel so much better.

No, no. I'm just... But... But it was Jesus that started saying that. And when he starts his preaching, he starts by preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

[20 : 37] The good news of the coming kingdom. But you see, when his... After his death and resurrection, the church began to realize that the good news of the kingdom was Jesus himself.

So they preached Jesus as the good news, the gospel. The story of Jesus is the story they told.

And that's the story around which the whole community comes together. Well, people like John the Baptist came along and they had some doubts about Jesus and said, You know, are you he that should come or do we look for another?

And so Jesus sent him word saying, tell John the Baptist this is what's happening. That the dead are being raised, the lepers are being cleansed, the blind are able to see, the deaf are able to hear, and the lame are able to walk.

And the good news is being preached to the poor. And those were the signs of the kingdom.

[21 : 49] That this was happening. And you see, in the same way that the deaf need a miracle, and that's hearing, and the blind need a miracle, that's seeing, and the dead need a miracle, that's raising them again to life, and the lepers need a miracle, and that's cleansing.

So the poor need a miracle of the same order. And what is it? The preaching of the good news.

That's what brings the miracle into their lives. That's what brings the miracle into our lives. It's when we hear and understand and believe the story, which is the gospel.

But when you start to look at the New Testament, you find that it's not like a textbook. It's a kind of kaleidoscopic thing in which the gospel becomes all sorts of things.

It becomes light in darkness. It becomes life over against death. It becomes a kingdom with a king who will rule forever.

[23 : 00] It becomes a judge who will stand in judgment at the last day upon the earth. It becomes a high priest who offers the one perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world.

The perfect king, the perfect judge, the perfect high priest. It becomes a beautiful woman who loves an ugly husband.

A faithful husband who loves an unfaithful wife. It becomes a new birth. A born-again experience.

These are all the signs of the gospel. That's what happens when the gospel comes. But, you see, the difficulty is that what you do is you hear the story of Jesus, of his life, of his death, and of his resurrection.

And it's hard to get people to hear that story, I think. It's hard because... How do you do it? What is there in you that makes you able to hear the story?

[24 : 20] You know, it's... You know, I so often feel that the church and the people who are listening to it, the world around us, are on two different computer systems.

And the messages we're sending are not being received. They are incompatible. And so, they don't hear the story. And I confess to you that so much religious broadcasting literally turns my stomach. And I feel guilty about that. Because they're talking about Jesus, and they're talking about Jesus, and they're talking about Jesus all the time. And I say, that's right. That must be right. But somehow I feel it's not communicating to people.

They don't understand what it is you're saying. Or why it is you believe that Jesus is who... He's the one... You know, that...

It's... I wish I knew what the answer to that was. Because you hear so much that's good, but then you cringe in agony because you wonder if anybody can understand it when it's put that way.

[25 : 26] And I think the reason is that what is required is that somehow we be enabled to hear the story and be able and to come to the place of believing in the story.

Now, I think coming to the place of believing in the story is always an act of the grace of God. You know, it's not something... I mean, you can build the most eloquent arguments.

You can be the most articulate speaker. You can have the most powerful backing. You can do it with drums, music, trumpet, and everything else. But somehow for people to hear it seems to be a miracle of grace in the same way that Jesus touched the blind and they could see or the deaf and they could hear.

So Jesus touches us with the gospel so that we suddenly are able to respond to it. And that it becomes the story and we're caught up in the spell of it and believe it.

And in believing it, we find that we have been given something, which is the basis of our whole life.

[26 : 40] But you know what I think it is? It's like being given a brand new 3,000 horsepower locomotive.

And all the tracks in your life are the wrong gauge. You can't use it because your life isn't ready to receive that.

And so you've got to start putting your life together in such a way that that gift can become useful and powerful and effective in your world so that the gospel can begin to move in your life and in your circumstances.

And I think that for a lot of people it's, you know, that we live in a world where, you know, we live in a round world and the gospel is a square peg. And it doesn't fit into our world.

It's like being given a language and that's the language of the gospel. And we can't translate it into our world.

[27 : 55] And I think that may be part of why I have trouble with a lot of broadcast preaching is because I think, and I may need to be forgiven for this, but it almost is in a language which I sense that a lot of people couldn't possibly translate into their world.

And so, though it's the gospel, it can't be translated. And that what the church is about is to create a community, that we as Christians are a community that can hear and respond to the gospel so that we can hear about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And when we hear about it, our lives are changed. And when we go on hearing about it, our lives are constantly renewed. Because the foundation on which our lives are built allows us to see the hope that belongs to us.

And though our life may at the moment be in a mess, and though we may be facing the most horrendous problems, which are common to our human lot, the reality of the hope is established, and we have a foundation by being involved in hearing and believing the story so that we have that hope in place.

And that's my concern. And that's my concern for this group on Wednesdays, is that somehow you may come here from your round world and hear again about the square peg that doesn't fit.

[29 : 43] And you go from here either saying you're going to adapt the gospel to your world, or ultimately you have the faith to believe that your world will be adapted to the gospel, that your world will be able to hear it.

And we try and change the gospel to make it fit into our world, and we can't do that. That doesn't work. So we have the gospel.

It's presented to us. And then we pray that God will give us grace to allow our worlds to change. Let me pray. Our God, we ask that, as all of us have been brought under the God spell, the God story, that you will help us to receive that story, and to believe it, and to find what Paul found, that it was the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes.

And then give us grace and patience to rebuild our lives in conformity to that story, to that good news.

We build our lives around being blind, and suddenly we can see, and our whole life has to change. We build our lives around the despair of death, and suddenly we're alive, and our whole world has to change.

[31 : 21] Grant us grace, as each of us encounters this story, either to come to terms with it for the first time, or to be refreshed and renewed by it, as we seek to live out the life which you've given us.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thanks, sir.

How are you doing? Wow! Thank you.

[33 : 50] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[37 : 50] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.