

An Established Priority

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 January 1994

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 0 0] All right, now that's to give you a visual focus so that you can hear what I have to say. And then you've heard the passage read, and I was talking to Kathy Murphy yesterday about talking about this today.

And in my imagination, I told her that I felt talking about this means that in a kind of metaphorical way, when you leave here after looking at what Paul says, and if you hear what Paul says, you will be leaving as though you had on a short leash walking along behind you an elephant, something huge.

And if you in fact take it back to your place of work, you will find that a quite spontaneous reaction is, get that damn thing out of here, because it interferes.

So you can think about that too. I won't explain that illustration anymore, but you can think about it. I got, I mean, it was lovely to have Lisa and Philip here today after so many months.

And Lisa has emceed this for longer than anybody else, I'm sure. And it was nice to have her back and to meet her son.

[1 : 5 0] My, you know, one of the sort of, I sat in the study this morning and looked out the window, see, and there I was laboring away at this thing.

And, I mean, and across the road was a guy with blue jeans and a rugby shirt and rubber boots and a wheelbarrow and a long-handed shovel and a pile of gravel.

And he was moving it, you know. And that's about the level at which I really enjoy living life. Having to work in the realm of thinking about things is, somehow, it's not as rewarding.

So I was envious of him, but I kept at it anyway. The thing that I wanted, the illustration from True Life, which I wanted to pass on to you as a kind of introduction today, was that I was listening to part of the CBC program the other night when between 9 and 10 and there was books being reviewed and a lady author was asked to review a book by another lady author.

And she said, as she introduced the book, I think the book is called Ordinary Times, and it's an autobiographical book about dealing with marriage and marriage problems and illness and all the sort of basic issues of life from, I gather, a highly personal and autobiographical point of view.

[3 : 2 7] But anyway, the lady that was reviewing this book for the CBC said, I am surprised that I enjoyed that book so much because the author is married, a mother, and a Catholic.

And I am single, lesbian, and agnostic. I thought that was really quite wonderful that that could happen.

There's a tremendous amount of freedom when you can say in public broadcasting, when you can make a statement like that. She also said, which I would like to think about, and you can think about it too, the lady who was the single lesbian agnostic said that she really appreciated, she really found a meeting of minds with this person, which is fascinating to me that she did.

She also said, my medium is fiction. Hers is autobiography. I prefer fiction. I don't know if there's any connection between that or not, but it was interesting.

But the thing that I saw there, you see, is the thing that really impressed me was between these people who outwardly are as opposite as can be, that there seems to be somewhere a point of convergence.

[5 : 10] And that point of convergence, where a single lesbian agnostic finds something in common with a married mother Catholic, is very intriguing to me.

Because the whole problem of our humanity is that there must be for us a point of convergence, something where it all comes together.

And I would like to contend that if we are really honest in a scriptural way about, a scriptural and perhaps even autobiographical way, about our faith, that we would find a deep point of convergence with almost everybody.

But of course, that doesn't happen. The point of convergence, where the ultimate human longing, the deepest kind of human probing, comes together with truth, is something that escapes us.

We live in a world where science is looking for an answer that science cannot find. And that's not a condemnation of science, but science is so structured that it can't find.

[6 : 57] It's got to go on looking and looking and looking. And the nature of science is that it can never do more than look. If it ever finds, it becomes something less than science.

The Jews are looking for a Messiah, but they will never find him. I think it's a wonderfully positive motivation.

And it's characteristic of human life that most of us spend the whole of our life and most of our energy looking for that, which deep down, at heart, we suspect we will never find.

But we keep looking at, probing, seeking that point of convergence where it will all come together and it will all make sense, but we never seem to come to that place.

The intellectuals want to discover God without God ever discovering them. And they know they can't do it because when they get close, they have to back away.

[8 : 19] When you look at Christian, the way we've structured our Christian faith in the various churches, what seems to have happened is that the Roman Catholics say, we are the church, that is, the community, the continuing historical community outside of which there is no salvation.

Now, these are caricatures because, you know, I wouldn't argue that with a Catholic, but traditionally that's been the kind of perspective they have, that we are the community and within the community is salvation and outside of it there isn't salvation.

Or then you come to the Pentecostals and they say, we are the people who can provide you with an experience of God that will change your life.

They will provide you on a regular basis. I remember going through Napanee, Ontario, and there was a little sign up that said, revival Friday night at 7 o'clock.

And I... I love that sign. I never went to find out if it actually happened, but whoever put the sign up was quite confident about it.

[9 : 41] The Baptists are the church that give to you a life-transforming experience called the new birth, being born again. That's the great emphasis.

That doesn't mean they disagree entirely with the Roman Catholics or with the Pentecostals, but their great emphasis is on the transforming experience and being born again.

The United Church says, we are the church that behaves the way Christians should behave, even if we don't believe the way Christians believe.

I don't think that's... I don't think that's an insight. I mean, I think that you get a lot of people by that without... But... And I think it's...

I mean, it has a lot of sympathy in a lot of other churches, too, that I don't believe what you believe, but I behave. So don't take me off the list. You know? And the Anglicans, finally we arrive at the pinnacle of revicting.

[10 : 54] We are the church of the Bible. It's just that we don't believe it. You know, that... It's... You know, somehow we won't sort of...

We have to have bishops stand up and say, I don't believe in the virgin birth. I don't believe in the resurrection. I don't believe in this. I don't believe in that. So the sort of public image of Anglicanism worldwide is that they are very devout and very traditional, but they, in fact, when it comes down to it, don't believe.

So that... What... This is just, I think, though, kind of symptomatic of the world in which we live. And we are seeing the breakdown of the whole of our society.

And I think it's... You know, I mean, I think that it's... It's because... I think in our pride, we've said, we can handle it.

You know? You give us the problem and we'll give you the solution. And the problems have been compounding and compounding and compounding, and the solutions seem to have soaked away through...

[12 : 13] So that... We say we will find a cure for AIDS without inhibiting anybody's sexuality. We will find a cure for cancer.

We've poured enormous amounts of money in that. But it almost seems like we will find immortality. We will find the freedom to practice indiscriminate sex because that's a right we have as human beings.

We will feed the world. We will take control of the environment. We will replace religion with something which includes everybody.

We will manufacture truth which is congenial to everybody. We will free the whole of humanity to spend their whole life in the relentless pursuit of happiness.

Well, those are the kind of goals that are in our society. They are implicit. You know, that... A talk show yesterday on the radio said...

[13 : 27] You know... What is there? Plus 200 drug deaths in Vancouver? Have you any suggestions? Could you phone us? Boy...

There's a kind of naivety about that. You know, that... That if we have a phone in and get everybody's opinion we'll probably get the answer to this.

But... It's... It works. But it doesn't... It doesn't work well enough. It's not... The answers we get which are...

Some of which are quite amazing aren't nearly as big as the problems we have. And small answers don't...

Don't heal big problems. So that... Though I don't think we sort of sit down and admit it I think there is a reality to the fact that things are not working.

[14 : 34] You know. And there is a kind of fear and apprehensiveness that things are going to come apart. Now, there's lots of things that humanly speaking we can't help but think are working.

I mean, there are enormous advances in medicine. There are enormous accomplishments of technology. And science has... You know, is gone in a relentless pursuit of truth.

In fact, science is the only... In a sense, the only discipline that keeps before us the possibility that there is truth. And that's been...

I mean, that's a fascinating dimension of life that, you know, that science is in search of truth.

One of the... Massey lectures in the CBC was given by a fellow who talked about science's search for truth, you know, and said that one day science will look around the corner and find the truth and the truth will step out and smash him on over the head.

[15 : 47] But, you know, because we're not sure what would be the consequence of our ever finding it. But certainly, we're looking for it. So that despair, depression, loneliness, alienation, disease, drugs, and gross sexuality are, in a sense, the marks of our society.

You know, we can hide from them or... What is it people do with things to get rid of them? You know, all the psychologists talk about it.

Denial! You know, we can be heavily into denial, but the problems are there. Now, what we're doing then when we turn from that kind of world to look at what Paul has written, you encounter in St. Paul somebody whom I would suggest to you is more zealous than Greenpeace has ever thought of being.

He is as ruthless as the IRA. He's as relentless as an extreme feminist. He's more of a visionary than Karl Marx and a man with the courage to stand before kings, to face public flogging and imprisonment, to suffer perplexity and persecution.

Every advantage of birth and citizenship and education and language and history belonged to this unique man, St. Paul.

[17 : 35] and he recognized that the reason he'd been given his life was like, his life for him was like a jar of water and that his business was simply to pour it out.

That's what he was doing with his life. He was pouring it out. And that's how he thought to live his life. He described his life as being, himself as being a clay vessel made of mud so to speak but containing something which had gripped him which he said was infinitely precious.

That's the man that we're talking about. I've talked about the world we live in, the man we're talking about today in Colossians and this is what he is saying.

Now he is in a sense you know this passage that we've read is one of the sort of pinnacles of the whole of the New Testament.

And when he writes it he is writing to answer questions like do you want to know who God is? Do you want to understand creation?

[18 : 56] Do you want to know how the world was made? Do you want to know about heaven which you can't see? Do you want to know about earth and the world which you can see?

Do you want to know about multinational corporations world economies ideologies monarchies republics democracies and dictatorships?

Do you want to know where it all started? Do you want to know how it all holds together? Do you want to know what the church is?

Pentecostal Methodist Baptist Anglican Presbyterian United the whole lot do you want to know what it is? Do you want to know a power that is greater than death?

Do you want to know the point at which science psychology sociology anthropology and philosophy converge where they all come together?

[20 : 01] Now that's the question when you have all those questions firmly in your mind and the kind of world we live in firmly in your mind and those questions are there screaming for an answer then read Colossians 1 15 to 20 he is the image of the invisible God he is the firstborn of all creation by him all things were created things in heaven and on earth things visible and things invisible thrones powers rulers authorities all things were created by him and for him he is before all things in him all things hold together he is the head of the body which is his body which is the church he is the beginning of everything he is the beginning that is before the beginning he is the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything he might have supremacy well and then it says that God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things whether things on earth or things in heaven by making peace through his blood shed on the cross now the whole of our world like your elephant looks at Paul and what he said here and said get that damn thing out of here because we're not going to give time or attention or thought to that we're not going to look at and the reality of it is that and this is what

Paul is saying here that there is look in verse 20 there is a point of convergence there is a point of reconciliation in a world that is fragmented into a thousand pieces there is a place of reconciliation there is a point of convergence and and God was pleased through Jesus Christ to reconcile to himself that is God reconciling to himself which is the ultimate point of convergence where humanity and God come back together again that they've gone in that direction the point at which they come back together again is in

Jesus Christ he is the one through whom reconciliation happens and you see what what it says about it that it's a reconciliation whether things on earth or things in heaven by making peace through his blood shed on the cross so you see this is the point it's an amazing thing you see this paragraph has taken you through the whole of human history through the whole story of the creation of the world it's taken you through thrones dominions principalities and powers through ages of human history through great civilizations it's taken you all through that this one paragraph has and brought you unerringly to the point where

God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things through the blood of his cross it's it's it's an amazing claim you know what one of the when Leslie Newbigin talks about it he says you know he uses the he uses Descartes you know that Descartes was looking for the point of convergence he was looking for the point where it all comes together he was looking for the point where all philosophy could be reconciled where all man's search for certainty could be resolved he was looking for that and he came to the conclusion believing that there was such a point by reason of his Christian background believing there was such a point he came to it when he said you know the famous statement what is it

I think therefore I am and we have taken that as being the point of convergence for 300 years and it's broken down it's no longer working it produced enormous results but now it's broken down and it doesn't work anymore and we are forced to go back as in history we've had to go back and back again and recognize that the point of convergence is the point of reconciliation is his blood on the cross that's so that the statement is comparable to Descartes he is therefore

[27 : 20] I am and you you can't get around it that's what Paul is saying that's what the Christian message is that's what the New Testament says and you can't sidestep it you may be able to ameliorate it or to blunt it or to accommodate it or something but it still you know it still doesn't fit into our world and yet there it is and Stephen Neal says it is the story of one God through one son making one universe that this is the point of reconciliation where it all comes together and the great reality for us is that

I mean I don't know how to put it into words but you see it's not a philosophical theory there's blood on the ground bearing witness there is humanity in all its human weakness there is that which the whole of humanity understands and that is the God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son as the point of convergence the point of reconciliation the ground of peace for our whole world that's where it is and that's what Paul is saying let me pray father when we think of the staggering claim that

Paul is making here and when we we think how easily we slip away into our private conceits and private imagination and how we try and accommodate this thing down to something that is manageable by us something over which we have control and something which I suppose it is our ultimate blasphemy that we by indifference sometimes deny it our God by your Holy Spirit bring us to the place where we are bold enough to accept what Paul has said and to know that in Jesus Christ on the cross is the point of reconciliation for the whole of mankind our God our little minds aren't nearly big enough to encompass this but at least give us hearts willing to submit to and obey it we ask this in

Jesus name amen how do we we have free all in order to able