

It's Not About the Box

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Preacher: Dave Nannery

[0 : 00] Well, have a seat, everyone. I'm glad to have you all here this morning. My name is Dave Nannery. I am one of the pastors here that has that amazing privilege of serving you all through preaching, teaching, counseling, other forms of care that our church supplies.

We're glad to have you here with us this morning, and I'm grateful to be back. A big thank you to David Corrente for preaching last week in my place while I just sat at home enjoying the flu. You know, it was a really great time. Would recommend it to everyone. But I'm glad to be back and in pretty about 95% health now, so it's good to see all your faces this morning. Let's pray. Let me start with a prayer to God for His mercy over this next hour. Father, I thank you that we have this opportunity to gather together in good health to receive the word that you have for us this morning.

I thank you so much that this is not merely a word of human wisdom. If so, Lord God, then I might as well just sit down right now, because what have I to offer beyond what people have already found out for themselves?

[1 : 23] Father, I thank you that instead these are words of wisdom that come through your Son, Jesus Christ, that come through your Holy Spirit whom you have given us. And I thank you that, Lord God, we have this confidence that there is a beauty and a glory to be found in the wisdom of Jesus Christ, in the person of Jesus Christ, in what He has done for us.

And so I ask, Lord God, whatever that I have prepared that falls short of that glory, Lord God, would you supplement it? Would you bring to mind what is needed and necessary? Would you hold back any words of foolishness, anything that is not true?

And Lord God, would you open our eyes, give us eyes to see, ears to hear, hearts that understand all that Jesus Christ is for us.

Amen. While evangelism may be on my mind this week, the keynote speaker at our recent Fellowship National Conference was actually an acquaintance of mine from my days back in Langley.

And he's a very active, very prolific evangelist here in Canada. I've been through more than a few evangelism training seminars, as well as a lot of talks at the conference that took place the prior week.

[2 : 44] And, you know, once you've sat through a number of those, you learn all sorts of methods, philosophies, approaches to telling people the good news of Jesus Christ.

Now, there is an evangelistic philosophy that I never hear taught at these seminars, training sessions, conferences, and so forth.

And yet, it's sort of this philosophy that seems to work its way into churches. Many Christians I know seem to think that this approach to evangelism is one of the best ways to go.

It's one that is quite popular. We might call it billboard evangelism. I'm just making up a name for it, billboard evangelism. It is the idea that the best way to win people over, the best way to advertise the gospel so that they believe it, the best way to draw people to the central good news of the Christian faith, is to make your life a big, shiny, billboard advertisement for all the benefits and perks of the Christian faith.

The best way to evangelize is to live an outwardly happy, healthy, successful life, to do well with money, to raise a really good, put-together family, to be successful in business overall, be that really put-together person, and everybody crowds around you to look up to you, to come to you for help, because you've got it all together.

[4 : 28] There's this idea that people will want to be Christians if they can see a church that is full of shiny, happy people who look good on a billboard.

If you ever go to, you know, let's say big cities in Texas, you'll see that whole, a whole Christian culture centered on billboard evangelism.

Churches stuffed to the brim with shiny, happy people in good houses and good clothes with good-looking families and big, pearly white smiles on their faces.

A big, beautiful billboard for the Christian life. In fact, you don't have to be a Christian to use this method of evangelism. The Mormons use this exact method to win people over to their religion. They've been doing that for a hundred years to great success. The premise behind billboard evangelism is that the power of the gospel shows up in an impressive, successful, put-together life. [5 : 31] We could give this method another name. We could call it Corinthian evangelism. Because this would have made a lot of sense to the church in the first century city of Corinth.

The Corinthians really bought into this sort of mentality. They really loved impressive-looking people. They would have made amazing North Americans, right?

They were fairly disappointed, in fact, in the lousy billboard that was offered to them by the Apostle Paul. The very man who founded the church turned out to be a little bit of an embarrassment to them.

In 2 Corinthians 10, verse 10, Paul even tells them what he's heard that they are saying about him. He writes, For they say, His letters are weighty and strong, but his bodily presence is weak, and a speech of no account.

What they're saying is, Paul can write, you know, he can write some pretty strong letters. If you've read Paul's letters, you know, wow, this guy has a way with words. But you know what? In person, he's not the big, successful, colorful, charismatic, brilliant, charming leader that you want.

[6 : 56] He's just not that impressive. He's not that good-looking. He's not... Paul is just a very bad billboard evangelism.

He is a kind of a disappointment. But what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 5 is this. What we proclaim is not ourselves.

What we proclaim is not ourselves. In other words, Paul is saying his own impressiveness does not belong on any billboard. Let me read the whole quote.

I'll start in chapter 4, verse 5 of 2 Corinthians, and I'm going to read all the way through verse 15. If you're using one of the Bibles, our usher's handout, then you'll find it on page 965.

Page 965, 2 Corinthians 4, verse 5. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

[8 : 10] For 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 Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

We are 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 manifested in our bodies.

For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake. So that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

[9 : 11] So, death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what has been written, I believed, and so I spoke.

We also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God.

This is God's word for us. And Paul begins by saying in verse 5, What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord.

Paul doesn't view his own life as this shiny billboard of glorious success. Paul says that what he has to offer is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God that comes from the face of Jesus Christ.

[10 : 22] And Paul would know he saw the face of Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. And what Paul is saying is that inside of himself, no matter what he looks like on the outside, inside of himself, he is full of light.

He is full of a message of light that sheds light that comes when you know the glory and the beauty of Jesus Christ.

When you know the goodness of Jesus Christ. When you understand the power of his resurrection. Paul's life is a different sort of billboard.

He says in verse 7, We have this treasure in jars of clay. There's a light inside of Paul. But he himself is just a jar of clay.

The surpassing power is God's. Paul is just a clay pot. Now, this would definitely have brought something very vivid to mind for the Corinthians.

[11 : 30] Because these cheap clay pots and jars, they would have been found in every household all around the Mediterranean world. Everybody knew about these. These things are literally as cheap as dirt.

They are no good as home decor, by the way. You would not use these and put them on your mantle. Look at my beautiful clay pot. Isn't it so lovely? They're not expensive fine china.

They were containers for storage. They're useful, but they don't look good. And they're fragile. And when you break them, you know what you do with them?

You just throw them out. Throw them on the trash heap. Be done with them. Get a new clay pot.

These clay pots and jars made of earthenware, they don't matter.

What's inside of them. What you store inside of them. That's what really matters. Let me give a sense of what Paul means.

[12 : 26] Because probably most of you don't have just a bunch of cheap clay Mediterranean pots lying around your house. If you do have earthenware pots, they're probably more of a showpiece.

So let's get a sense of what this might mean for us. Imagine later this week that I've decided to shop for a big, shiny new TV to put on my living room wall.

And I go online and I'm shopping on the London Drugs website and I see photos. And there's this beautiful 65-inch Sony TV. Looks like this. Oh, isn't that lovely?

Look at the colors. Look at the size. And my eyes are just lit up, shining with the glory of this television. And finally, my living room is going to be a hall fit for a king.

And I see there's one in stock here in Squamish at London Drugs. So I call you up and I say, drop what you're doing right now. Meet me at London Drugs.

[13 : 29] You've got to help me load up this TV in my car. And so you meet me at the entrance of London Drugs. And I'm just hopping up and down with excitement. And we hurry over to the electronic section.

And there you watch me come face to face with my heart's desire. Here it is in all its glory. Shane, show them the TV. There it is.

And all the light goes out of my eyes. What is this? What is this brown cardboard box?

I mean, that's it? I mean, I knew it would be in a box. But why isn't the box covered with this nice glossy picture of the TV? Why isn't the box covered with bright, vibrant colors?

How could a dull brown box be any good? Now, before you can open your mouth and say a word, a salesman sees me all agitated, you know, as you do in London Drugs.

[14 : 35] You get all agitated over a TV box. And he rushes over. He says, oh, don't worry. Don't worry, sir. This is an amazing box. Look, look. My young children, they love boxes like this.

They're so much fun to play in. And don't get me started about how much our family cat loves the box. This is such a good box. And I reply, don't tell me this is a great box.

I'm not a sucker. Where's the gold foil lettering, right, all over the box? Where are the shiny hologram stickers? And you're standing there in disbelief.

You're watching me arguing with the salesman about the quality of the box and haggling price for shiny stickers to put on the box and maybe make it look a little better. And finally, after a few minutes of this absolute nonsense, you jump into, you insert yourself into our debate with a single sentence.

It's not about the box. It's not about the box. The box can look like anything. Let it be a dull and brown and boring box.

[15 : 42] Let it be marked up and stained. Let it be beat up and damaged. It's not about the box. It's about the huge and beautiful and valuable TV inside of the box.

And you know what the Apostle Paul says that you have if you are a Christian, if you have Christ? You have a beautiful, valuable 65-inch TV set inside of a dull cardboard box.

God has lit up your heart with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God because Jesus Christ is yours and you are his.

And so the beautiful treasure, the surpassing power belongs to God. It doesn't belong to you. It is not about you.

It is not about how good you're looking. It's not about how impressive you are. It's not about how put together your life is and whether you're on the right track to live the American dream.

[16:50] It's not about the box. It's not about the box because God's life will have the final word. God's life will have the final word.

Look at verses 8 and 9 to get an idea of the kind of jar of clay, the kind of cardboard box that Paul had on display. Was Paul an impressive box with a beautiful glossy photo and gold foil lettering and hologram stickers?

No. Paul identifies himself and his companions as afflicted in every way, perplexed, persecuted, struck down.

Paul is not the kind of leader the Corinthians are looking for. He is a dull brown cardboard box that's been beat up, kicked around, shredded a bit, dragged through the mud.

Not the kind of thing you'd put on display in the middle of London drugs. Have you ever felt that your life is looking the way Paul's life looked?

[18:02] Ever felt like you're afflicted, hard-pressed in life? Ever felt perplexed? The word means you feel all turned upside down and inside out.

You're overwhelmed and at a loss and don't know how to make sense of everything and don't know what to do. And I'll hit pause there. A lot of people feel like if they're in that state, there must be something horrendously wrong with them.

No Christian ever feels that way. If you're a Christian, you should feel completely put together, always certain, always know what's going on, never confused, never overwhelmed.

Well, if so, the Apostle Paul was not a very good Christian. Certainly the Corinthians weren't impressed with him. That was their idea of the successful Christian life. But Paul says, he and himself, they were perplexed at times.

Ever felt like you're being harassed and chased by other people or by the devil himself? Ever felt like you've been knocked flat on your back and you can't get yourself back on your feet?

[19:12] I mean, I had the flu last week, so I felt all those things a little. But if this sounds like your life, welcome to life as a cardboard box.

Welcome to the ordinary Christian life. Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus. What the world around us wants, they want themselves to be a really nice cardboard box.

What impresses the world around us is a beautiful, shiny box with a glossy color photo and gold foil lettering and hologram stickers. But the good news that God has for us is a little different than that. It's not that he will make you into a really lovely cardboard box in this life. Because even if he does, I have a question.

I don't care, you know, if you were to buy a TV and it were a really nice box, what are you going to do with that box? You think you're going to keep it around? You think it's always going to look beautiful and perfect forever?

[20:24] What are you going to do? Put it on a museum display? No. We let the box age and weaken and grow old and pale and fall apart.

And that's what happens to us, doesn't it? The box will fall apart. The good news is that it's not about the box.

Because the death of Jesus that is at work in you, it is not the final word. Paul writes in verses 8 through 10, We are 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 manifested in our bodies.

As our jars of clay, as our cardboard boxes get worn down and beat up and less impressive with every passing year, what's happening is on purpose.

[21:42] What's happening to you as that takes place is that we reenact the death of Jesus before a watching world.

The world watches us dying. The world watches us falling apart. And at the same time, the world watches us come alive.

Because the life of Jesus shows up in us and through us, even as we are dying. The cardboard box falls apart, but only so that the life inside of us shines brighter than ever through all the holes and the tears in the box.

That was the sort of billboard message that Paul's own life communicated. He writes in verses 11 and 12, Paul is saying that as long as we live, death keeps showing up.

We keep looking like a beat up, falling apart cardboard box. And we look this way for Jesus' sake.

[23 : 13] Why? So that the resurrection life of Jesus might show up in a visible, tangible way for other people to see.

Death is at work in us. And it is through this death that the light of Jesus Christ brings life to us. And life to everyone around us who hears the good news of a Savior. A Savior who has triumphed forever over the power of death. It's a little bit like Mary, the mother of Jesus.

She spent nine months pregnant outside of wedlock, subject to public shame in a culture where something like that was a scandal and a reproach.

But hidden in her womb was a life, a glory. The final word that answered all the shame that she was experiencing.

[24 : 15] All the death to the community. All the death to a public life of honor. And so it is with you. Whatever shame you carry, whatever death you were dying, you carry within you a treasure, a light.

The presence of Christ. The good news of Jesus Christ. In you, God's life will have the final word. Second, it's not about the box.

Because God's power will have the final word. God's power will have the final word. When God shows up with new life, his power appears in mysterious and unexpected ways.

Paul writes in verses 13 and 14. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, I believed and so I spoke.

We also believe and so we also speak knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

[25 : 25] Paul says that he has the same spirit of faith as the author of the psalm he's quoting. That's Psalm 116, which David Corrente read earlier in the service.

And in this psalm, the author tells us how the death of Jesus has showed up in his own life and his own suffering. He writes, It is from the state of powerlessness.

From this state of powerlessness. From feeling caught in a trap. From feeling squeezed by terrible pangs. From this state where he knew that he could not save himself.

From this helpless state, he called on the name of the Lord. By faith he cried out, Oh Lord, I pray, deliver my soul.

And the Lord did not leave him abandoned forever. In his helplessness. Instead, the psalmist writes, For you have delivered my soul from death.

[26 : 47] My eyes from tears. My feet from stumbling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living. And it is from this confidence, from this life in the midst of death, that the psalmist speaks with confidence.

The same confident trust in the God who saves. That is what the apostle Paul, that is what his companions shared as well. He writes here in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 13, We also believe, and so we also speak.

Why? Because he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus. Because the resurrection of Jesus Christ is what really matters.

Did Jesus rise from the dead or didn't he? That's the question. That objective historical fact of the resurrection is something you can sink your teeth into.

Even when everything else feels like it is going astray and turned upside down and topsy-turvy. If Jesus really did rise from the dead, then that same power is available to you as well.

[28 : 10] Paul felt that hope. That sense of assurance and confidence in the power of God. Because he says, he will be raised with Jesus.

That wherever Jesus goes, there Paul goes too. He dies the death of Jesus in this life. And the God who raised Jesus with power will raise up Paul with that same power one day.

And not only that, but Paul says in verse 14, as he writes to the Corinthians, he says, God will bring us with you into his presence. Paul is saying to them, I am not going to be raised alone.

You're coming with me. You're coming with Jesus. You're coming with me into the presence of God, the judge of all.

Remember that this life you live is not just you and Jesus. It's us and Jesus. We're in this together. [29 : 23] And where Jesus goes, we go together. That's what it means to be a Christian. You do not live an isolated life. You gather with God's people because these are the people.

You're going to walk into the presence of Jesus, into the presence of God, the judge. You're going to walk in with them together. That's the power that is already at work in you, already present in you, oh, Christian.

Plug that big shiny TV into the power outlet in your wall. Watch the electricity run through it. Turn it on.

Watch it come alive. Watch the picture of hope pierce your soul with a million lumens of brightness. And when that TV is mounted on your wall and filling your house with light, you'll find that you can't help but say, it really wasn't about the box at all.

This whole time. It's about the light and the life and the power that was hidden inside the box. You carry within you a treasure, a light, the presence of Christ, the good news, not about you, but the good news about Jesus Christ.

[30 : 45] In you, God's power will have the final word, no matter what happens to the box. Finally, it's not about the box, because it's God's glory that will have the final word.

God's glory will have the final word. In verse 15, Paul writes, for it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God.

God has set everything up this way for a reason. You're a jar of clay. You're a cardboard box for a reason. Why?

To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. This world, this entire world is set up to say it's not about you.

Your life, your life is meant to leave no one mistaken, that what's inside of you came by your own cleverness and your own wisdom and your own hard work and because you're a better person than others.

[32 : 02] Instead, when the light and life and power that was in the dull cardboard box, when all of that shines bright, that's the billboard message.

People don't crowd into your living room to marvel at a nice glossy cardboard box and all the shiny stickers that you've stuck on it.

Nobody cares about the box. It's not about the box. People crowd into your living room because you've got something way better than a cardboard box.

They come to bask in the glory and goodness of a stunning 65-inch 4K full array LED TV. That's what the marketing material said it was.

Those who are really seeking the face of God come to you for the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. If you want to attract people to the Christian faith, if you want to attract box lovers, make yourself look like a really good box.

[33 : 06] But if you want this church to be full of people who care about what's inside the box, who care about the light and the glory of Christ, then stop worrying about the box.

It's not about the box. That's not your selling point. Paul writes in verse 15 that his beat-up, kicked-around cardboard box is all for your sake.

It's all for the good and life of the Corinthians. All so that they can lift up their eyes and in Paul see this light. Because if Paul were this impressive, good-looking, amazing, dynamic leader, they would come away.

forgetting about what's inside the box. And Paul says, I don't want you to forget. I am a display. That is not about the box.

In this way, Paul says, grace extends to more and more people. God's favor, his goodness, it doesn't stay confined.

[34 : 18] It bursts outward. More people see and experience the goodness, the favor of the one true God as his light pierces their hearts also.

They too are filled with the Holy Spirit. They too are made new as they hear the good news, as they see that Jesus really is everything we say and so much more beside.

Paul says in verse 15 that all of this increases thanksgiving. It increases thanksgiving. Why?

Because when people are filled with light, then they are filled with gratitude.

gratitude. You know what? It's good to be a cardboard box. Because when you are a cardboard box, you discover that all of that hollow space inside of you was meant to be filled with a light and

life and glory and power.

It is good that it is not about you. That it's about the glory of God.

[35 : 33] It's about him, his goodness, his greatness, his power, his life. This world is a showcase of the glory of God.

When you step outside and look around you, the glory of God is on display. And in your life, as you are dying and as light shines through you regardless, you are a showcase and a billboard.

It was never really about you at all. All your dreams, all your ambitions, are shiny little stickers on an aging cardboard box.

God's glory is what will have the final word. If you are not a Christian today, I have some very good news for you.

You think that your life is all about the box. All of your cares, all of your worries are wrapped up in making that box look and feel good, keeping it bound together.

[36 : 49] And it's a losing battle against time. You're going to lose it. It's going to pass away. That box is not going to hold together.

The good news I have for you, it's not about the box. If you make it about the box, your fate will be bound up in the box.

You will stand before God and give an account of your life. A little farther down in chapter 5, verse 10, Paul writes, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

If you want to make it about the box and you're going to be judged on how good a box you are, and let me tell you what, you're not good enough. There is no box that is worthy.

No box that is put together enough. The only way to be saved on that day of judgment is if you can truly say, yes, Lord, it isn't about the box.

[37 : 59] If your merit comes not from how good a box you are and how many stickers you've got on you, but if your merit comes from the glorious, the glorious presence of Jesus Christ within you.

If you stand before God and you say, I'm just a box, I don't have anything going for me, but this, I'm with Jesus. He's the only good I have.

I am his, and he is mine. It's about him. I stand before God, and I plead Jesus Christ.

If you are a Christian today, I have good news for you, the best news in the world. This news is a reminder. You already know this, but you've spent this last week forgetting, haven't you?

Maybe you've spent the last few weeks or months or years forgetting. You forgot where your life is. You forgot where the power of God is.

[39 : 12] That is about the glory of God. That is not about the box. Remember this. The surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

Remember this. He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. The good news is it's not about the box.

And the better news is this. It's about God. And he has the final word. Let me pray. Lord God, I confess that I myself am the first to forget these things.

Oh, Lord God, our eyes get so easily swayed and keep obsessing over all the wrong things.

Things that are of some value and of some importance, but they're not what really deeply matters.

Lord, we confess that we have tried to win other people over to Christ by showing off really nice boxes.

[40 : 28] That's just not about that. It's not about how good or how lousy your box is. What does that matter when we have Jesus? Oh, Lord God, let this sink deep into our souls.

This is what we were made for. That God set up this whole world to honor and glorify his own son. That's the whole reason anything exists at all.

This is what we were made for. This is what everything was made for. Lord God, turn our eyes on Jesus.

May we find confidence, hope, and life in him. Amen.