

Mission Month INF Phil Morris

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: 14 June 2015

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 0 0] the International Nepal Fellowship, before. I hope that from the short films you saw earlier, you've got a little bit more of a sense of what we do and what we are as an organisation.

But I just want to go back a little bit and just some of the history that exists between St. Paul's here in Chatswood and INF. Now, the vision for INF was given to two medical missionaries way back in 1936.

They were serving in India, but they really felt called to serve the people of Nepal. At that time, Nepal was a closed country. Foreigners would have been killed on site.

And there were no known Christians in the country of Nepal. So those missionaries, they set up a clinic close to the border between India and Nepal.

And they treated anyone who came over the border, especially focusing on Nepali people. And they prayed. And they taught.

[1 : 0 1] And they disciplined. And they slowly built up a band of Nepali believers. And they continued to pray. For 16 years, they served.

Before finally there was a change in the king in Nepal, and they were granted permission to enter the country. Now, during those 16 years, they'd shared their vision with others around the world.

And several people came to serve alongside them, including an English nurse called Jean Radden. After many years in Nepal, Jean retired to Australia and settled here in this church.

Some of you may remember her. She passed away about, I think, about six, seven years ago. We continue to have strong links between INF and St. Paul's.

They're quite apart from our office being down there. Our former treasurer still attends here. The Green family have been fantastic supporters of INF.

[2 : 0 2] And I know that many of you pray for the work of INF and also support us financially. And I want to thank you for that. So there is here in this place a great heritage of prayer and mission and many connections with Nepal.

So going back to the history then, in 1952, with permission to finally enter the country, a small group of Nepali Christians and foreign medical missionaries walked in to start the first church in Nepal and the first hospital outside the capital, Kathmandu.

And that has been our model ever since. Serving with the love of Jesus, Nepali Christians and foreign medical missionaries working alongside each other, supported by a band of supporters and prayers from right around the world.

There to serve the physical and spiritual needs of Nepali people, particularly focused on the poor and marginalized. The church in Nepal is now recognized as one of the fastest growing in the world. There are over a million Christians in Nepal and you can find churches operating openly in almost every town across the country. Isn't that just a miracle in a country where 20 years ago you could be imprisoned for your faith?

[3 : 2 6] So our vision, that is what we want to see happening, what we understand is the purpose of our organization, is to see Nepali people in Nepal but also right around the world serving alongside people from all nationalities to bring about fullness of life, to bring about the kingdom of God that Jesus talked about.

Personally, I feel like it's a great privilege to be a part of INF with the heritage and example that we have from our early missionaries. We still work very closely with the church in Nepal and the worldwide church and there are many ways in which you can be a part of that too through your prayers, through giving financially and maybe even through going out to Nepal to serve.

Just in the last six weeks since those earthquakes, I've been really humbled by the response to what happened in Nepal. Certainly I was conscious that people were praying and giving to

supporters but in the last six weeks we've just received thousands, literally, of phone calls and donations, people wanting to be a part of what is happening there.

And just on Thursday, I had the privilege of going to the bank down here in Chatswood and transferring a quarter of a million dollars over to Nepal to support the work there that will play a huge part in the response that you saw mentioned up on the screen.

So thank you very much to those of you who've been a part of that. The passage that Sam read earlier is from Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth.

[5 : 05] In Paul's time, Corinth was a major center for trade and industry and Paul was a missionary traveling, preaching, teaching, discipling and working.

He taught and worked in Corinth for over a year before moving away and this letter was written in around 55 AD, so around 25 years after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Now Paul had a difficult relationship with the church in Corinth. Paul, he was different from the missionaries that we send out to Nepal. He spoke and taught with the authority of an apostle. But people in the church still struggled to leave behind their bad habits. They rejected Paul's teaching and they questioned his authority. So Paul is writing here just to remind the church of what they believe and to prepare them for hard times ahead.

Paul starts the chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians with a therefore. Therefore, therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.

[6 : 14] Paul's referring to the new covenant of forgiveness through Jesus and the gift of his spirit in us. This is the foundation that Paul keeps coming back to. Jesus.

Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. And like Paul, it's really important that we store up in our hearts what is really important. What is our motivation? What do we believe?

Time and again, we just need to keep coming back to the basics of our faith so that we don't lose heart, so that we don't lose courage. What's your therefore? Why do you do what you do?

Paul goes on. Rather, we've renounced secret and shameful ways. We don't use deception and nor do we distort the word of God. And sadly, it's common in many churches to hear a distorted version of the gospel.

If you believe, God will bless you with health, wealth and happiness. If you give to this church, God will give back to you. Unfortunately, this is not from the Bible.

[7 : 23] In Nepal, Hindus offer sacrifices to their millions of gods in order to avert the God's anger or get their blessing. And it's easy for us to make the same mistake.

God, I gave to the church, therefore you owe me. Or, I've been a good person, therefore, why won't you heal my sick child? In the aftermath of disasters, like the earthquake in Nepal, it's very easy to apply our judgments and our values and describe them as a punishment for sin or as God's judgment.

Again, this doesn't come from the Bible. Jesus didn't do that. In Luke's gospel, Jesus referred to people who had been crushed in the collapse of a building. And he asked, do you think that they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem?

I tell you no. But unless you repent, you too will perish. So Jesus didn't apportion blame and neither should we.

But Jesus reminds us that judgment is coming for everyone and that we all need to repent. Now, INF doesn't serve in Nepal because Nepali people are greater sinners than we are.

[8 : 39] And the people in Nepal are not poor because of their sins. Again, the Bible tells us all have sinned and fall far short of the glory of God. But through faith in Jesus, our sins are forgiven and we can be right with God.

There is nothing that we can do to make him love us more and there's nothing that we can do to make him love us less. Jesus sought out the poor and marginalized, those who are suffering. He served them and he told them about God's love. Jesus is the model that we seek to follow within INF, serving the physical and the spiritual needs of the poor and declaring his kingdom both in word and deed.

And when I went out to Nepal in 2006 with my family, we traveled with an older couple who'd previously served with INF but had then returned to the UK.

And they were, so they were coming back to Nepal after a long absence. And soon after arriving in Kathmandu, they met someone who they used to know, who they knew from the community where they used to live.

[9 : 51] And as soon as they got into a conversation, it became clear that this person had become a Christian. And they asked, well, how did this happen? You never came to our fellowships. You never asked us about our faith.

And she said, we watched you. We watched you for a long time. We could see that there was something different about you, but we wanted to see if your life matched up to what you said. Now, because that couple didn't distort the gospel and they practiced what they preached, that woman and her family and many people in that community have become convinced of the truth of Jesus and serve him.

The same thing is happening in your community, in your workplace, in your family. People are watching you, measuring what you say and how you treat people. Now, of course, we're not saved by our actions, but our actions should be a window onto our relationship with God and the work that he's doing in our lives.

Paul continues and even if the gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

[11 : 17] Now, what is it that stops people believing? How can anyone see God's creation and the work that he does in people all around the world and not believe?

How can we see the historical proof of Jesus' life and death and read the Bible and not be transformed? Nepal is famous for its millions of Hindu gods.

It's the birthplace of the historical Buddha and it's also famous for its temples and shrines and the many animal sacrifices which are clear examples of idolatry.

But it's a huge mistake to think that we are any better. Now, what are our idols? Is it money? Health? Family?

Hobbies? Jobs? It's, in reality, it's anything that we put before God. Materialism is growing faster in Nepal even than Christianity.

[12 : 22] Mobile phones, overseas jobs, are quickly becoming the idols of choice for young Nepali people. And the evidence of development, of, of, of, the evidence of, of, of, of development in Nepal can be seen through rising levels of literacy, can be seen through fewer women dying in childbirth.

But unfortunately, this is also accompanied by corruption. It's accompanied by high levels of family breakup, of divorce, and even chronic disease. It's quite clear that the God of this age, the God of development, is not the answer.

So why is it that so many people are coming to faith in Jesus in Nepal while here in Australia so many people are drifting away or flatly denying that there is a God?

The God of this age has blinded the minds of believers as well as unbelievers. Our wealth in Australia insulates us from so much pain and fear but it's left us apathetic, unable to tell the difference between creation and creator.

Technology is not the answer. Money is not the answer. In Nepal, even earthquakes, earthquake-proof buildings and an end to hunger are not the answer.

[13 : 46] It must be Jesus. Now, Paul doesn't say you can be like us and it's essential that we don't do that either in our lives here or through the work of INF in Nepal.

In Nepal, we promote the development of local leaders in the church and in INF. Not that they will be perfect but so that the light of the knowledge of God's glory can be displayed through them. I've met many fantastic Nepali evangelists. The joy that comes from a right relationship with God just flows out of them and they can't stop sharing it.

God is doing amazing things among Nepali people and the time when Nepal will be sending missionaries to the rest of the world I think is coming. There are very few jobs in Nepal and every day hundreds, literally, of well-qualified young Nepali people are leaving the country and travelling overseas in search of work.

Many of them are coming to work in low-paid jobs here in Sydney. They've probably served you coffee. They've probably looked after your elderly relative in a nursing home and I know that some of them clean the church here on a weekly basis.

[15 : 09] While INF is working to create jobs in Nepal, we're also looking to create opportunities and hope. But we are working with Nepali churches as well and Christian student union groups, helping them to prepare believers who are going overseas to work and helping them to see it as a God-given opportunity to be a witness and to share their faith.

Now sadly, many Nepali people come to Australia and they never experience the light of the gospel. They're blinded by the God of this age and their hearts become hard.

Please pray for Nepali people here in Australia that each of them would experience the light of the gospel and that each one of them would have an opportunity to know Jesus.

And please also pray that God would reveal your idols to you. What is blinding you to the light of the gospel? move on now to this famous analogy that Paul uses of our bodies being jars of clay.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. Now in Nepal and India it used to be common to buy tea from roadside shacks in little disposable clay cups cheap and simple and locally made and also biodegradable.

[16 : 44] But you had to drink your tea quickly in case they dissolved and deposited the contents all over your lap. But unfortunately they've been replaced largely by plastic which doesn't degrade but it also litters the roadsides in many streets in Nepal.

Now in Paul's context clay jar was a simple and a plain container that housed something of much greater value. And the treasure that he refers to is the knowledge of the glory of God.

But as sinful and broken people we waste it and spoil it every day. We don't work in Nepal because we have all the answers.

We work in Nepal because we are blessed with knowing God. And we want to serve him and be a witness to him. But even so we so often get it wrong. The Sydney Missionary Bible College recently did some research on why people became missionaries.

The most common factor in people becoming missionaries was the realisation that actually missionaries are ordinary people. A quote from this research.

[17 : 58] This guy came and he spoke at our church and he was very ordinary. he was the worst orator on the planet. I don't think I've met this guy. I don't think he's referring to me but he could be.

He was an ordinary guy. He really encouraged me because I didn't think I could, I had to attain to a standard that was beyond me. I could relate to this guy. I could identify and I thought if God can use that guy, he can use me.

And I thought perhaps God can use me in this. how tragic that what we have here in Australia and the West, which is just amazing access to church and to the Bible and to the knowledge of the glory of God, is no longer seen to have value.

We're focused on living longer and preserving our lives rather than our souls. We seek short-term pleasure over eternal glory.

And we're throwing out the treasure, trying to preserve this rough clay pot that contains it. We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed.

[19 : 15] Perplexed, but not in despair. Persecuted, but not abandoned. Struck down, but not destroyed. The very physical language that Paul uses is particularly apt in the aftermath of natural disaster.

And there's real pain and fear and suffering in Paul's words. During my recent visit to Nepal, I spent a lot of time talking with our people, and I could sense their fear and their uncertainty.

They were hard-pressed. They were perplexed. They were struck down. Jesus promised that there would be hard times ahead, and most of his disciples paid with their lives.

Now, our workers going over to Nepal have made huge sacrifices. Most of them are highly qualified people who have given up good jobs, family, and all that's familiar to live in Nepal.

To begin with, they can't speak the language. They have no control over their surroundings. They become as dependent on others as my three-year-old son. And this can be a deeply unsettling experience.

[20 : 31] And these verses of Paul's would ring true to most of them. But with the deep foundation of Jesus as their rock, they can say, we are not crushed.

We are not in despair. We are not abandoned. We are not destroyed. God is at work through the hard times. The Bible uses the analogy of gold being refined through fire.

And most of us have had times when all we thought we could rely on was stripped away, when money or education or houses couldn't help. And that is so often when we turn to God.

A lady called Julian of Norwich lived in England in the 14th century, and her writings often reflect on pain and suffering. She wrote, we need to fall and we need to be aware of it.

For if we did not fall, we should not know how weak and wretched we are of ourselves, and nor should we know our maker's marvellous love so fully. This is what is unique about the Christian

faith, and this is what is unique about Jesus.

[21 : 45] This world is broken, but God is coming back, and he will restore it. Our bodies are crumbling, but God promises us new bodies. Our faith is weak, but we know that someday we will stand before him.

We are sinful, but God calls each of us to be a part of his perfect work in this world. The kingdom of God is near, and Jesus came to reconcile us to himself and to each other and to bring us life in all its fullness.

Like Paul, we need a therefore. We need a solid foundation, a deep trust in God's goodness and faithfulness, and a certain knowledge that we are right with God.

With that solid foundation, we can keep hardship in perspective through uncertain times. We can use the gifts and opportunities that God has given us to serve him, whether that's here in Chatswood or in Kathmandu.

We can share God's love with those around us. We can pray God's kingdom come, his will be done.

We can use the resources, whether that's time or money, for his glory.

[23 : 07] And through our day-to-day relationships and interactions, we can seek to serve God and glorify him. I'll close now with the final verses of this chapter, reading them again, which Paul prefaces with another therefore.

Therefore, we do not lose heart, though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, and what is unseen is eternal.

Praise be to God. Amen.