

Out of Africa

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Date: 30 September 2012

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[0 : 0 0] First of all, it's a great pleasure to be here. And Vanessa sends her apologies. She sends her love. She really wanted to be here, but she's just incredibly tired. As I said to Chris and to you earlier, we got off the plane late Friday, so we're both suffering heavily from jet lag still.

So as Paul asks the Ephesians to do in chapter four, please bear with me. Now, I'll just read this passage out to you.

Ephesians chapter four, verses one to 16. As a prisoner for the Lord, then I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle. Be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body, one spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called. One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all who is over all and through all and in all.

But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ has apportioned it. And this is why it says, when he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.

[1 : 1 3] What does he ascended mean? Except that he also descended to the lower earthly regions. He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens in order to fill the whole universe.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ.

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work. Now this is the word of the Lord. Let's move that out of the way.

So Vanessa and I have been working, as many of you, most of you will know, with African Enterprise. Initially we started working there in 2007 with the Pan-African Missions Department from the Malawi office and in 2010 we moved down to the city of Peter Maritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

[2 : 4 6] And last year I volunteered for the Leadership Training Centre and Vanessa continued her work on in the Communications Department, heading up the international communications for the organisation.

And we decided that, well we both really felt that the Lord was telling us that it was time to finish our time with African Enterprise.

As many of you will be aware, African Enterprise has just celebrated their 50th anniversary of ministry in Africa. And to celebrate that, in conjunction with the local churches of Peter Maritzburg, they held a city-wide mission in the city where it all started back in 1962 with Dr. Michael Cassidy.

And the Lord really said to us that he wanted us to actually be there for the city-wide mission and help out as much as we could. And then after that we would move on. And it was then we had the offer.

Well first of all it was then we actually found out that Vanessa was pregnant with Benjamin. And it was then also we had the offer to move to Cape Town and work alongside George Whitfield College.

[3 : 55] So it's a great time of heavy changes for us. And it has been a very interesting time in post-apartheid South Africa. South Africa, there is no doubt it is still suffering from a heavy hangover from the apartheid regime.

And that regime really goes back to the 1700s where the Boas came in and started taking over the land from the Bantu and the Koi people and with the force of shotguns.

And because they had their land taken off them which was their livelihood and everything they had they were forced to work for these new white people who then basically lauded it over them and the rest is history.

In 1946 75,000 people went on strike because miners black African miners were receiving a twelfth of the wage that white South African miners were receiving.

75,000 people went on strike an unarmed protest and the police met it with violence and a thousand people were killed or injured during that uprising to try and get more wages for black South African workers.

[5 : 13] In August 2012 3,000 people who were miners they were getting paid very little money and they were really being discriminated against in the wages they were receiving they were marginalised they were being unfairly treated and they stopped work 3,000 of them went on strike and the police responded to their protests by killing 34 of them shooting 34 of them dead and another 80 of them were injured and wounded so South Africa is suffering heavily from a hangover from apartheid and needs your prayers desperately that that nation will be able to get through the resentments and the bitterness of the past which leads to so much hatred and violence within the country.

But South Africa the secular world is not the only place that that resentment and bitterness can be found and unfortunately that has gone through into the church and while we were there in the lead up to the citywide mission many of the churches who were involved in the citywide mission came together the pastors from the church's assorted denominations and assorted colours to meet with a fraternal a black South African fraternal known as the Indemasa Fellowship and the meeting was because the Indemasa Fellowship did not want to actually minister alongside the rest of these guys because they felt that during the apartheid era that they had been mistreated by the other pastors that these pastors had supported apartheid and there was still bitterness and hurt and resentment between and enmity between the actual racial groups within the church and this meant that they then went through a process of reconciliation which started before the mission and is continuing on and will continue on hopefully for a couple of years to come but the good news is the process of reconciliation has begun but even

African Enterprise was not exempt from the racial hurt and feelings of bitterness and feelings of resentment towards different people groups and it was so strong that in the times where I was asked to preach at devotions on three separate occasions the Lord put on my heart to preach on the topic of unity in the body of Christ and the first time I preached on the topic of what it was to be truly great in Christ and today I'm going to I'm not going to exegete the passages if you want to find a good exegesis on Ephesians 4 1 to 16 Reverend Chris Jones did a terrific one last year in November it's still on the website and I recommend you have a have a look at that or listen to that and also John Dunn has done some terrific studies before his health deteriorated on the book of Ephesians so you might want to get hold of that I'm not going to exegete the passage today but I just wanted to relate some of my own experiences which I felt had some similarities with what is going on here in the church at Ephesus the analogy is problematic so forgive me for that one is about two different groups of people who are racially different the obviously the black

South Africans and the non-blacks but the other is the Jews and the Gentiles who basically have different beliefs so the analogy is problematic but there's also a lot of similarities so the first time I preached on the topic of what it was to be truly great and I think this topic is very relevant to the passage here today because the passage here today Paul is speaking to a group of Christian believers in the church at Ephesus and he's speaking to them as a group but he is addressing them as to their individual responsibility within that group and so on preaching on true greatness what struck me is that often when we look at true greatness as Christian believers we look at the people who have got the Billy Grahams or the Michael Cassidy's or the great preachers up front or whatever it might be but in actual fact true greatness in the scriptures is a man hanging on a cross bloodied and wounded taking the sins of the world upon him that is true greatness in the scriptures and

I started to see that my criteria for judging what a truly great Christian was was actually very faulty and it was not based on the Bible and so I really felt that it was strong for people to understand that on that day when the Lord says well done good and faithful servant it won't be based on your position it won't be based on our position but it will be based on what we did with what the Lord gave us as it said in the parable of the talents where it wasn't based on how much they had but what they did with what the Lord had given them that's what really mattered so true greatness is about us living in the fullness of the calling that Christ has given us to live in no one is better at being Chris Jones than Chris Jones no one can be Chris Jones other than Chris Jones and no one can be Darian Clensos other than Darian Clensos thank God but my point is that no one can be better at being us than us we are designed to be who we are living at the maximum potential of who we have been called to be in

[11 : 14] Christ each one of us here today is a skin full of gifts and each one of us has received an incredibly high calling it is not a low calling it is not something where we should be thinking oh well I'm only a secretary or I'm only a cleaner or I'm only somebody who works in an office it is how we do those things for Christ with all our heart as in working for the Lord that's what true greatness is not the position of the person but how they live in that position so that was the first sermon that the Lord put on my heart to preach in the context of post apartheid South Africa to a wounded and divided group of people the second passage that the Lord put on my heart unity and we're in Galatians 3 and in Colossians 3 in both those passages let me read them to you

Galatians chapter 3 if I can find it Galatians chapter 3 where Paul says in verse 28 there is neither Jew nor Greek nor slave nor free male nor female for you are all one in Christ Jesus we have been brought together by the blood of Christ the book of Ephesians talks about how Christ has made us brought us into a new humanity he has destroyed the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile and brought them in together to make one people one people who will be purified and who are the race who will live forever the children of God the second passage was Colossians 3 where there is neither Greek nor Jew circumcised nor uncircumcised barbarian Scythian slave nor free but Christ is all and in all and so

I continue to say there is neither Afrikaner or Zulu or Koza or Indian or Colored or Australian or American but all have been brought together and are one in Christ Christ has destroyed that dividing wall and through his blood shed at the cross we brought into the new humanity filled with the one spirit worshipping the one God the father of us all the father and God of the Lord Jesus Christ and what an incredible calling we have been brought into and one of the things in the book of Ephesians is that Paul is always talking about where we have come from and what we have been brought into and the magnitude of that and the incredible future that lies ahead for the people of God and I often think when we get to heaven and we're standing around that throne and we're singing night and day and praising God we're not going to be praising God and trying to think of what we're going to sing next when we sing hymn 34 or what's it going to be

I think we are just going to have the praise pouring out of us it is going to pour out of us when we see what God has done for us we will not be able to stop rejoicing and praising him because we will be overflowing with such gratitude that is what God has got prepared for those who love him and that's what God has got prepared for us in the new heavens and the new earth and so Paul in the get your mind off the present and look to what God has prepared for you and what he has brought you into the magnitude of that and the future he has for you preach my heart out as I did the division still remained and so the third time I was asked to preach at devotions once again

I felt strongly the need to preach on unity this time I preached on loving one another and being one in Christ and I preached on John chapter 13 where Jesus says by this will all men know that you are my disciples if you love one another not by our doctrine not by the church we go to not by the social group we are in or whether we go to summer school or whatever else it might be but by this disciples if you love one another Jesus says a new commandment I give to you that you love one another as I have loved you it's not an option it is a commandment and so Christ is commanding them to love one another he's commanding us to love one another and in John chapter 17 he prays to the father and he says may they be one as you and

[16 : 26] I are one what an incredible responsibility that puts on us to be one with one another to be tender hearted forgiving one another being meek and gentle as I'm being gentle now but what a responsibility that puts on us to be meek and gentle to one another and to be one with each other because it's by that that people will know that the father sent the son in other words our oneness is what demonstrates to the world that Jesus is the real deal that he has come from the father that he's not just some guru he's not just another prophet but that this Jesus is the son of God as he says he is our oneness is what will demonstrate that our unity will demonstrate that our love demonstrates that we belong to

Jesus our unity demonstrates that Jesus was sent by the father I preached my heart out as I did the division still remained and I really felt the Lord had spoken to them through me and it didn't seem to matter that I had preached like I did and that the word of God had come through and that Myles Gilliam the head of African Enterprise had affirmed that that was that he really felt the Lord had spoken that day but as the mission came closer I started to see something which I think underlies everything that Paul is saying I think it is the thing that goes without saying in this passage and that is that there is without it goes without saying that the gospel is being proclaimed because once that mission came up all of a sudden this body who was so focused on their differences and their things which divided them and made them different and made them upset with one another and all their hurts and grievances instead of having their eyes on themselves all of a sudden everyone had their eyes on the one focus which was the proclamation of the gospel which was the word of God going out and new converts coming in and Paul when he talks here he says he says it was he who gave some to be apostles some to be prophets some to be evangelists and as

I got to that point some to be evangelists he talks about for the building up of the body and I thought well the only way the evangelist really builds up the body is that the evangelist is speaking the word of God and new people are coming into the church and what happens when new people church people are praying for them people need to be taught people need to be disciplined all of a sudden every part of the body comes alive and is doing its thing but without the proclamation preach as we may those divisions will remain now the mission to Peter Maritzburg was definitely not a faultless mission there were still difficulties from time to time but an incredibly divided community came together as an army for the

Lord who were focused on people who needed to come to know Christ and come out of their sins and come into the light now I know the situation in Sydney here is very different to what it is in Maritzburg and there is a hardness to the gospel I believe in Sydney but I still think the message of the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe and the proclamation of the gospel is what brings the body of Christ alive that's really the main thing I want to say today is that the proclamation of the gospel is what brings the body alive and I think every single one of us have got different roles to play some of us are evangelists some of us are people who work quietly alongside other people wherever the Lord has placed you do not think lowly of your calling because you are the

Bible that many people will read and you are the witness to Christ where you are through your life and actions and through your words and I just want to encourage you and encourage everyone today as a body of believers be encouraged to proclaim that word and just tell it where it is just go out and proclaim the lordship of Christ the cross of Christ and the forgiveness of sins because people throughout this city are stuck in their sin and they are living in terrible situations because of their sin I think many people have learned to live with their sins many people have learned to live a lifestyle which accommodates for their unbelief and their sin and their darkness but they are living in pain and they are living in torment and they are living in bondage to those things chains and we have the words of eternal life we have the message that can free them from those chains as we proclaim that word and as people come into the church and the body comes alive and the body is all doing their part evangelists are preaching the word pastors are ministering to new converts teachers are teaching the new converts people are praying for them people are organizing new groups for them to go to when all these things are taking place then the body is starting to become one with one focus and is being built up to reach the maturity that

[22 : 47] Paul talks about in the concluding part of this passage he says then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming instead speaking the truth in love we will in all things grow up unto him who is the head that is Christ from him the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament grows and builds itself up in love as each part does its work God bless you all and thank you for having me