

Planning to Share the Gospel

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Date: 10 October 2010

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn now for a little to the chapter we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 16. Last chapter, 1 Corinthians chapter 16.

We read from verse 5, verses 5 to 9. I will visit you after passing through Macedonia, for I intend to pass through Macedonia, and perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey wherever I go.

For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

And we know that this church in Corinth was a church that was, you could say, it was a real mixed bag. Corinth, as we know, was a place that was awash with every kind of sin possible.

It was a place that had every kind of religion, every kind of philosophy. It was a city that was motivated by the love of power, the love of money, of greed.

[1 : 2 6] It was the kind of place where marriage was cheap. It was the kind of place, really, where whatever you wanted to do, you could do.

It was that kind of city. It was the kind of city that if you wanted a license to do anything at all, you could do it. It was the kind of place where it didn't matter what the consequences were.

Just if it felt right, you could do it in Corinth. It was that kind of place. And it would be very easy, I suppose, to say, well, what is the point of trying to plant a church in such a place?

And I'm sure that there have been many people today who would say the same about some of our cities, in our own land and throughout the world. You might look at them and say, well, if you went into some areas within the cities and say, well, this seems to be just a completely broken down society.

There doesn't seem to be any moral restraint of any shape or form. I wouldn't even know where to start. It would be madness. There's no point.

[2 : 3 4] And it would be very easy to be filled with negatives and think, well, there is no point. And if Paul had thought like that, if that's the kind of attitude that Paul had, then Paul would have just stayed at home.

But Paul didn't have that kind of attitude. Because Paul looked at the cities that he went to through the eyes of Christ.

And I think there's a great lesson for us as well in that. How do we look out? How do we view our communities, our villages, our towns?

How do we view the cities of our land, the cities of this world? Very important question. When you look at our Savior, you see Jesus weeping over the city Jerusalem.

He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. He saw them as souls rejecting himself. He saw them slipping into hell.

[3 : 35] And it broke his heart. He was crying over the city. And he was saying, oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem. I would love to just take you to myself. Just to take you in the same way as a hen gathers its brood to itself.

It gathers the little chickens to itself. That's what I would like to do with you. Do we have that kind of heart as we look out tonight? Or does it concern us at all when we see just the vast majority in our land of no great concerns, no great thoughts, or appearing to have no great thoughts about their salvation?

Well, if we keep our eyes fixed on the people, on our cities, on the problems, on the difficulties, on the issues, and never look up, then we will become paralyzed.

And we'll say there is, there's no point. But if we focus our eyes like the apostle Paul did upon Christ, and that was the key to Paul's ministry.

He had a passion for Christ. And he saw every situation through Christ. And when he looked like that, he saw possibilities. He saw potential.

[4 : 57] He didn't see the negatives. Yes, he knew there were difficulties, and he experienced them. Nobody experienced opposition in the church work like the apostle Paul.

But he looked beyond the difficulties and beyond the obstacles. And as he looked to the Lord, he saw the possibilities and he saw the potential.

If you see possibilities, if you see potential as you look out, even in our town of Stornway tonight, then you are looking, obviously, with an eye of faith, you're looking through the eyes of the Lord, and you are seeing, you are seeing the field.

That's what the Lord said to us. He said, lift up your eyes. Look, the fields, he said, are white and ready to harvest. Is that our attitude tonight?

Or are we saying to ourselves, ah, you know, I used to hear about how it was long ago. It's gone now. The good days are gone.

[6 : 00] My friend, they're not. And we have seen the Lord at work. The Lord is at work year after year after year. And the fields are white and they're ready to harvest. So we need to have this vision to be able to see in the way like the apostle Paul saw.

And as we said, the key to Paul's ministry was that his eyes were fixed upon the Lord. Paul had a passion for the things of Christ. Because Paul had been radically changed.

He knew himself the power of God. And that's why the apostle, for instance, writing to the church in Rome said, you know, he said, I'm not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.

It's a great thing that. Because there is a tendency to shame within us. Part of the legacy of the fall causes us to be ashamed of Christ.

To be ashamed of the cause. And you might say to yourself, well, I'm not that ashamed. But, you know, it's a funny thing. People are often ashamed to say grace in public.

[7 : 12] People are often ashamed to be seen walking to church. People are ashamed to be seen reading their Bible. Why? It's the most illogical thing in the world.

Why should anybody be ashamed of thanking the Lord for the food that he has provided? For giving us the ability to enjoy the food provided?

It's the Lord who has given us the taste buds so that we are able to enjoy and be stimulated in what we eat. He's given us an appetite for food. He's given us all these things.

Of course we should thank him. And again in all the different situations. And yet so often people are ashamed. And I suppose part of it comes about because there is a shame attached to the cross itself.

The very cross of Christ is something of shame. The very crucifixion was shame. Everything about it. To a certain extent there is a shame in it. And yet it's a glory.

[8 : 18] And that's why Paul was always saying that he was not ashamed. And I suppose when you consider or compare or contrast the glory of this world and the glorious events of this world over and against Christ in this world.

We see the events of this world as being tremendously spectacular. And we see the mission of Christ in a very different way. Because you see when Jesus walked this world the glory that was his was veiled.

The glory that belonged to him was not seen. He was looked upon just as an ordinary man. They weren't seeing him as a God man.

And you look at the many of the great events in this world. Supposing it's the opening ceremony of say the Olympic Games or the World Cup. You look at the inauguration of the American President or the changing of the guard at Buckingham Palace or any of these things.

And it's spectacular. Costs a fortune. And it's the sort of thing. It's eye-catching. It stimulates the eyes, the ears.

[9 : 31] All our senses are stimulated by these things. And you say, wow, what glory. And then you look and you say, well, where is the glory of Christ in this world?

Where is it? The glory of Christ is in his people. And then you look at the Christian. And you say, is that it? Well, if we could see, my dear friends, if we could see what we will be like.

Some years down the line. Because we are told in Scripture that the believer is going to be changed.

It tells us in the Bible, it does not yet appear what we shall be. But we shall be like him.

Isn't that extraordinary? Are there more amazing, glorious, spectacular words in the Bible anywhere? That we will resemble Jesus, our Lord, our mediator.

[10 : 37] We will be like him. That's how we will be radiating that splendid glory throughout eternity. And all the glories of this world put together won't come anywhere near that glory.

If we could see, if we could just get a glimpse of what we will yet be. And so Paul is not ashamed of this gospel.

Because Paul knows that it is. Remember what he says. I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. Because it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes.

The power of God. So we know that, we've said this before, the dynamite of God. It's the power of God. And Paul knew that. Paul was somebody who hated Christ.

It wasn't that he was apathetic. It wasn't he wasn't the kind of man who was indifferent. It wasn't the kind of person if you said, hey Paul, there's a meeting going on. There's a group of Christians meeting here. And we would like you to come along and share in our fellowship and hear something about Jesus.

[11 : 44] And he would say, if you'll excuse me, I would rather not go. That wasn't the kind of man Paul was. If you told Paul there's a group of Christians meeting in there.

What? Right. And he would muster up all the people that he could get. And he would go and he would wreck the meeting. And he would be ready to kill the people in there.

Or at least take them so they would be imprisoned and tortured. He hated every Christian with an irrational hatred. And he hated Christ.

And yet Jesus revealed himself to Paul. Or as he was then Saul. And Saul got one glimpse of Christ.

And the old attitude was broken in a moment. The hatred was smashed. And he went from his high horse. Riding in fury against Christ.

[12 : 43] And he fell down a broken man. Lord. What will you have me to do? One glimpse of the risen Savior changed Paul.

And Paul knew the reality of that power. Paul wasn't talking about things he didn't know. And that's why he was able to say. I'm not ashamed. I am not ashamed.

Of the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God. And to salvation. To everyone that believeth. Everyone who believes. Comes to faith in Jesus Christ. They come to believe in Jesus through this power.

And so. Paul. Who had been the great enemy. And the great blasphemer. Is now as we know transformed. By this power.

And from then on. Paul had this passion. To bring this gospel. This transforming gospel. Into other people's lives. And so.

[13 : 42] We find that Paul. Is dealing with this church. Now as we know. This church was a church. That was. Riddled with its own problems. There were loads of disagreements.

Disagreements about preachers. Disagreements about practice. Disagreements about theology. Loads of problems. And you know. That's one of the great things. About the letters. Is when Paul wrote these letters.

He. A lot of the aim. And purpose of the letter. Was to deal with the issues. And the problems. And such like. That were in the church. And so Paul is addressing. Many of the problems.

In this first letter. Here. But we see two or three things here. And just look at them. Very very briefly. In what's before us. And in these verses. We find first of all.

That. Paul is a man. And we find that. Not just here. But in his writings. Who always had plans. Paul was a man. Who always made plans.

[14 : 38] Now some people say. You know. It's not right for a Christian. To make plans. Christian is somebody. Who should get up each day. Be a free spirit. Go where God. Will tell him to go. And just. That. How do we know?

This might be our last day. Is it not presumption. To be making plans. And some people think like that. And they say. Oh Christian shouldn't be. It's not for a Christian. To be making plans. About this.

That. And the next thing. In the future. Well my friend. I don't know where people. Get that idea from. Paul was a man. Who was always making plans. Always making plans.

And part of his plan. Here was. What he was telling. The Corinthian church. What he was going to do. Paul was a man. With vision. And we're told. In the Bible.

That if people have no. If we have no vision. The people will perish. We need vision. Vision. Paul was a man. With vision. But the thing is.

[15 : 33] This. Paul's plans. Were always. Always subject. To the Lord's. Revision. And I think. We've got to lay hold. Upon that truth. Very clearly.

You see. Paul had hoped. To visit Corinth. Soon again. And he. He was wanting. To speak to them. In passion. He had planted. The church here. He had spent. About a year and a half. With them. He had gone away.

And now. He was wanting. To come back. And spend time. Not just pass through. But spend time. And so he says. I will visit you. But he says. If the Lord. Permits.

And that was always. The key to Paul's plans. Paul made his plans. But they were. Always. Always. Subject. To the will of God. Now this wasn't. Some kind of.

Pious language. Very easy to. Use that kind of. Pious language. And say well. And sometimes. You could say. In everything. You say. Well I'm going to go here. If the Lord wills.

[16 : 28] And I'm going to do that. If the Lord wills. And sometimes. People can. Just throw that on. Paul didn't use it. In that way. He said. If the Lord permits. This is what I'm going to do.

I'm planning to. Do all that. I'm set upon it. If the Lord permits. But the Lord might not permit. The Lord might have another plan. For me. And when you read.

The life of Paul. That's exactly. What happened. There were times. Paul was going to go this way. And the Lord said. No Paul. I want you to go. Completely.

In the opposite direction. Paul was wanting to go here. And go there. And the Lord was saying to him. No. You're going to go other ways. You've got. I have another route. For you to take.

And Paul's life was full of that. And so he had learned. To be subject. All was to the will. Of God. And my friends. We have to be the same. We have to be committed.

[17 : 24] To being where. The Lord wants us to be. And doing. What the Lord wants us to do. And I want to challenge. Everybody in here tonight.

It doesn't matter. How old you are. In the faith. Or how young you are. In the faith. Are you. Prepared. To be subject. To God's will.

Being worked out. In your life. So that if the Lord. Were to say to you. If it was to be laid upon your heart. And the word. And everything. Making it clear to you. And it's the. The direction you see.

Is that you're to leave. You're to go elsewhere. You're to do something else. Are you prepared to do that? Are you going to say no? Now I bedded myself down here. Whatever happens. This is how it's going to be.

I've mapped out my course in life. This is how it's going to be. I'm not prepared to change. The Christian can never do that. There has always got to be a degree of flexibility within our life.

[18 : 22] And God. God calls us into that. We are not masters of our own destiny. We never were. We're not in charge of these things. And God has a work for every single one of us to do.

And so Paul. Has opened himself up. To God working in him and through him. And that the reason that Paul is not coming.

At this particular time. Is because God. That's the next thing that we see. That the Lord had opened a wide door for effective work. And so Paul was going to grab the opportunity that was given to him.

And as we read about it. We read about it in the likes of Acts and so on. Paul was in the marketplace. And he was in the synagogue. And he was in the hall of Tyrannus. And he was preaching all the time. And you and I are to grab every opportunity that the Lord gives us.

Because God is often setting doors open for us. We often tend to think of. Working for the Lord and serving the Lord. Within a church circle. Or within the church environment.

[19 : 26] My friend. The field is everywhere. Everywhere we are. If you can help anybody. You do so. And you help that person in the name of the Lord. Sometimes we think.

That gospel witness is only what we say. That my friend is a vital part. Of our gospel witness. Telling people about the Lord Jesus Christ. But it's not the only part.

It's being. It's doing. It's very important. Sometimes it will mean rolling up our sleeves. And doing something. Helping somebody out.

The Lord puts you. Where you are. In order. Remember to work for him. That above all. Whatever you do.

Do to the glory of God. That is a very solemn searching question. Do you? Do I? All that we do. Do we do it to the glory of God? That's why we're here.

- [20 : 22] That's a purpose. That's the chief end of our existence. It's not to satisfy ourselves. And you know. There's a more that we do to the Lord. To the glory of God.
- The more we will enjoy God. And the more we will be fulfilled in this life. You think back. My believing friend. To the greatest times. In your Christian life. And it is when you have been living.
- In a. With a real sense. Of the presence of God. Living to him. And for him. You look back. And you reflect upon these times. And you know.
- The satisfaction. The fulfillment. That is part of what will make heaven. The wonderful place it is. Where we will be living in complete harmony.
- With the will of God. And with a complete ability to fulfill that will. In an environment that is all in keeping with the will of God. And we will be serving him perfectly.
- [21 : 18] It's a wonderful prospect. That's part of what makes glory. The wonderful place it is. And so we find that. The Lord has set open this.
- This door. And we've got. Excuse me. We've got to use the opportunity. And while I said it's important for us to be.
- And to do. It's also important to say. Because a lot of the people. A lot of the people here. For instance. In this town. Have a very wrong view.
- Of what Christianity is. They have perverted views. They have distorted views. You ask people. What is a Christian?
- And they. Many. Many. Do not realize. That it's about a personal relationship. With King Jesus. A lot of people have a really. Mixed up distorted views.
- [22 : 15] Maybe that's how you wear yourself. Before you came to know the Lord. Your views. Your ideas. Were all mixed up. I'm sure we could all say. To a certain extent. That is true. And that's why it's so important.
- To tell people. And I'm sure some of you. Will be able to say. You know. As I've spoken to people. People have. I've been quite amazed. They were saying. Well. I didn't know that. It's very.
- Very important. To engage. With people. To talk to people. We heard that from. From. Lewis. Who was with us on Wednesday. From Spain.
- He was saying. The importance. As he meets with people. And he talks with people. And engages with people. With the Bible. And eventually. Gets people to read the Bible.
- And begin to. See for themselves. The truth. Well. This is. Whatever was happening. For the apostle Paul. Paul. The Lord had opened.
- [23 : 09] A door. Of witness. For him. But then. We see. That despite. The opportunities. That are set out. We see. The last thing.
- That has happened. Paul says. For a wide door. For effective work. Has opened to me. And there are many. Adversaries. Side by side.
- With effective work. And gospel growth. There is always. The adversary. Satan. Satan. Satan is always there. To try and kick down.
- Everything. That is built up. For God. You be persuaded. Of it. My dear friend. You work. For the Lord. And Satan.
- Will be nipping. At your heels. Satan. Wants. To discourage. God's people. He wants. To make it. Difficult for you. And the more.
- [24 : 03] You do. For the Lord. The more. Satan. Will hound you. And hurt you. Or try to. Now. That's why. It's very. Very important. That we. Clothe.

All. Our work. In the kingdom. With prayer. You know. Sometimes. People say. You know. Don't need to pray for. Don't need to pray for. Minister. Don't need to pray for the elders.

Don't need to pray for. Our youth workers. Don't need to pray for. They're good. They're good. My friend. Nobody needs your prayers more. It doesn't matter. What sphere.

Or line of work. That you are involved in. In the kingdom. Be quite persuaded. You're marked. By. Satan. You're marked. And he will try. In whatever way.

Shape or form. To disrupt. And to spoil. And to mar. It's his great aim. And like. No sooner. Had God said. Declared over all this world. It's very good.

[25 : 00] Day after day. Of the creation. And it was becoming. More splendid. And more beautiful. And more awesome. Day by day. And God was declaring. Over it. It is very good.

That Satan was saying. I am going to destroy this. I am going to mar. I want to. I want to put a blight. All over. The glory of God. I want to ruin.

His handiwork. I want to destroy. What he has made beautiful. And he hasn't changed. And he's still at work.

My dear friend. If you're here without Jesus Christ tonight. Let me tell you something. He said you as well. It's not just at the Christian. He said you as well. And you know. His most powerful way of attack.

Is to blind. Your eyes. To the truth. The God of this world. Has blinded. That's what the scripture says.

[25 : 56] Has blinded our minds. Or blinded your mind. To the light. Of the glorious gospel. Of Jesus Christ. So that you don't see.

That somehow. You're not seeing it. It's there. But you're not seeing it. The light. Has not penetrated. You're still in darkness.

You hear the words. You may know they're true. But somehow. It's just passing you by. It's just like a cloud. That's whizzing by.

It's there. It's pretty big. You can see it. But it's gone. And often that's the way it is. With the word. It's there. But it's gone.

It's not having an impact. It's not having an effect. My friend. If that's how it is for you tonight. Do you know this? I would actually tremble. I would.

[26 : 51] Because it means that. I don't mean that you're in the grip of Satan. Not at all. But Satan. Is keeping your eye.

Your eyes closed. Your heart closed. Rejecting Christ. Will you tonight. Ask the Lord. Lord. Open my eyes to see.

Up till now. I haven't seen. I haven't seen enough. I haven't been able to see sufficiently. To believe. That Jesus. Died for me. Lord.

Make it personal. Make it real. Make it such. That it goes right into my heart. Give me Lord. The faith tonight. To lay hold upon Jesus. So that I can believe in him. May I go out of here.

Lord. Tonight. Different. To the way I come in. May I go out tonight. Having said. Jesus Christ. Is my savior. Lord's able tonight. To open your eyes.

[27 : 48] He did it for Paul. And Paul knows. That he can. That this same Jesus. Can do it for you. Will you tonight. Then. Ask the Lord.

To be delivered. So that you will see. That you will accept. That you will believe. And that you will know. The reality. Of Christ as savior. Let's pray.

Lord our God. We. We pray that. We might know the power of. Of God. As is discovered. In this gospel. Lord open. Any heart.

That. So far. Has resisted. The call. Of the gospel. May the inward call. Come tonight. Into hearts. Lord. Release. Any. Who are still in darkness.

May they come. Into the glorious light. Of the gospel. And we give thanks. For. The way that. Our hearts. Are opened. To see. And to bow.

[28 : 44] The knee. Before. King Jesus. May Lord. Tonight. You be our Lord. And teacher. Open our hearts. That we may understand. And believe. Be with each one of us.

We pray. And keep us in the way. Do us good. And watch over us. And take away our sin. In Jesus name. We ask it. Amen.