

Paul and POVs

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[0 : 00] We can turn back together to our reading in Galatians chapter 2.! We look together this evening at verse 1 to verse 10.! Here we find, as you read in verse 1, after 14 years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas taking Titus along with me.

The Lord has guided Paul back to Jerusalem and it's a report he's giving back there to the church. In Jerusalem to those in authority in the church there.

We read of James and Cephas and John down in verse 9 there who Paul is reporting back to about his ministry, about what he's been involved in the gospel ministry.

Perhaps you've looked at the title of this evening's sermon and you're wondering what it means. Paul and POVs.

POV sometimes stands for point of view. But that's not what we're considering this evening. We're not going to be thinking about Paul and his different points of view on different things.

[1 : 13] But something slightly different and something that we will be hearing a little bit more of in these coming weeks ahead. Because as a congregation we are due to have a POV visit from presbytery.

And POV actually stands for, in this context, Presbytery Oversight Visit. And I just want to think about this that's coming up in the near future.

We'll be hearing more about it in the coming weeks. But just in a way of preparing ourselves for it. How should we approach it? Does it matter? What does it have to do with the preaching of the gospel?

What's it got to do with the Bible? And why do we do these kinds of things? Is it just another exercise to go through that's of no real value? Well, as you think about, and as we look at this together, a presbytery oversight visit is really grounded in the scriptures.

And that's the kind of thing that we see here with Paul being held accountable as he comes back to Jerusalem. And we want to think of ourselves and how we are going about our gospel ministry.

[2 : 28] And we have times of examination in our own lives. We think about coming up to another communion season. And we speak about examining ourselves, where we are in light of our faith and our relationship with the Lord.

And it's important that we do that in light of coming to the Lord's table. But it's important in a wider perspective as well, as we think of what we're doing as a congregation, as what we're involved in, that we are held accountable in many ways because we are part of a Presbyterian church.

We're not just a congregation by ourselves here. We are part of the Presbytery of the Western Isles. We are part of the denomination of the Free Church of Scotland.

And therefore, as part of a bigger body, we have that strength and togetherness, but also that sense of accountability. And as we look at Galatians chapter 2, we get a little insight as to how Paul is reporting back to the church at Jerusalem and the kinds of things that they are looking at.

And there's a sense of encouragement for ourselves here this evening to think about why this took place and what came out of it. So as we read here in Galatians, you find that there's this big jump between chapter 1 and chapter 2, where 14 years have passed in Paul's experience.

[3 : 58] And he then comes back to Jerusalem. So what has he been doing in these 14 years? Well, much of what he has been doing, we read throughout his letters in the New Testament.

He has been involved in the gospel ministry. He has been proclaiming the gospel among the Gentiles, as we are told in verse 2.

So this has been what Paul has been going about. He has been proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. And what kind of ministry did Paul have?

Some people look at Paul as some kind of maverick. Someone who was just by himself, going out, doing his own thing, ministering in his own way.

Someone who would not listen to anyone else, but thought what he... If he thought it was right, then it was. Is that the kind of Paul that we see in Scripture?

[5 : 00] Is that the kind of Paul that God would have used in the growth of the church? Just a lone voice. Someone going out by himself. Is that the way God builds his church today?

Just by individuals going out to tell the gospel that they want to tell? Well, no. You see, Paul himself is part of the church of Christ.

As you see here, he has Barnabas and Titus with him coming up to Jerusalem. And he's also appearing before others, before James and Cephas and John. So he is involved in a wider ministry. He is ministering to the Gentiles. Peter is ministering to the Jews. And so there's a variety of ministries going on here. And together they are serving to proclaim the gospel far and wide.

And as you read through Paul's letters or the book of Acts, you see the great things that were happening as the gospel spread through all of these people, through all the churches, throughout all the lands.

[6 : 04] Faithful ministries, fruitful ministries were being seen throughout many areas in Paul's day, in Peter's day, in John's day.

And the gospel was spreading far and wide. And so to this day, that is the way that the gospel spreads. Through faithful ministries, through faithful members in ministry, through people working together, through congregations and churches and denominations, proclaiming the gospel.

The one God who is able to save through one Savior, who is Christ Jesus, by one Spirit who leads us to know Him.

And so that's why this section is important for us. Even as we prepare for a POV ourselves, a presbytery oversight visit, we see the need for it in terms of being held accountable, being challenged in many different ways, but also to encourage one another and to strengthen one another in the midst of all the challenges that we have, that we remain faithful to the gospel, that we keep the main thing, the main thing.

And we are all entrusted with this gospel. We are all part of this congregation here together. We are all part of the same presbytery, the same denomination. We are entrusted with this gospel.

[7 : 35] So every aspect of the ministry we are involved in, whatever we are doing, we are all workers in the gospel. And what is our key aim in this work?

Well, it's that God is glorified in all that is done, that people hear the good news of Jesus Christ, and that the work goes on day by day, strengthened in prayer, encouraged and going on in the strength of the Lord.

And so as we prepare ourselves for a presbytery oversight visit, it's not something to be afraid of. It's not something to distrust in any way.

It's not something to think either that it's not important and has no impact on us. Done right and done well, they are there for our strengthening and our encouragement.

And there's three things that I feel we can take from this passage this evening and apply to the process that we are going to be involved in. Reminding us of what we are about and who it is that we are serving.

[8 : 47] We are serving our God. We are making Jesus known. And we are seeking the Spirit's blessing on all that we do. And so three things that we see with Paul here that we can apply to ourselves.

The first thing is accountability. And especially accountability to being obedient. The second is examination. And the third is encouragement.

So the first thing is accountability. And especially accountability to obedience. As I say, it's been 14 years, we see here, since Paul was at Jerusalem.

And now he's coming back to Jerusalem once again. Again, the Lord met Paul in a great way. When we read of Paul's conversion, it's an amazing experience.

Here he was, someone who was persecuting the church. But the Lord met with him on that Damascus road and his whole life was changed.

[9 : 55] But we don't need a Damascus road experience for our lives to be changed. All we need is to meet with the Lord Jesus Christ. When we come to know him by faith, as we hear of him through his word, and as we come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the same Lord on our side

as Paul did then.

And so our same desires should be changed as well. Paul's life had been completely transformed. As he says in the letter to the Philippians, what things were gained to me.

All that he had in his life, his attainments in Jewish religion. He says, those I counted loss for the sake of Christ. So his life has been transformed.

He was zealous for the traditions of his fathers before him. But now he is zealous for Christ and his kingdom. That is what matters. That is what counts.

So that instead of trying to destroy the Christian faith, he is now seeking to proclaim the gospel. So the Christian faith will be strengthened.

[11:11] And so there's been this transformation in his life. And it comes about from obedience. He has been obedient to his calling. He has been obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And it's not just for a short time. But down through all of these years, you could say for these 14 years, he's gone on in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so there's the challenge for ourselves as a people. Are we being obedient? Are we being obedient in our ministry? Are we being obedient to our Lord Jesus Christ in how we serve him? In how we honor him? In all that we do. As you see Paul here coming to Jerusalem, what was the purpose in it?

What's the purpose of a paraispatri oversight visit, a committee coming to our congregation? Is it to ask, are we obedient to them? Is that what Paul is encountering here?

[12:17] Is he being challenged? Is he obedient to Peter or James, Cephas or John? Is that the ones he is being accounted to as being obedient to them?

No, it's, is he obedient to God? And that's what this visit will be about for ourselves as well. Are we being obedient to the Lord in all that we are doing?

Every aspect of Paul's life was given over to serving him. It had not wavered. It had not wavered through challenges, through ups and downs, through every experience that he went through.

He was still there to proclaim the gospel among the Gentiles. And so as he appears here in Jerusalem, as it says in verse 2, that I proclaim among the Gentiles in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

So his appearing here is to show that the gospel that he was proclaiming was the right gospel, that it was being done well and everything was in order.

[13:28] And so that's what we are being challenged about as well. Are we being obedient in this way? It was Thomas Kempis who once said, instant obedience is the only kind of obedience there is.

Delayed obedience is disobedience. Whoever strives to withdraw from obedience withdraws from grace. We could apply that in so many ways into our lives individually and collectively.

Instant obedience is the only kind of obedience there is. Are we being obedient in the work of the gospel?

If we withdraw from it, whoever strives to withdraw from obedience withdraws from grace. So if we pull back, if we're not obedient, we are losing out on the grace that God gives.

Because grace is given in obedience. Disobedience. We can apply that individually. Are we obedient individually to the call of God in our lives?

[14:46] To following him? Because if we're saying we'll put it off, that is disobedience. And you miss out on grace. And so it's first and foremost, are we putting our faith and our trust in the Lord Jesus Christ?

But then collectively too, are we being obedient? Are we being faithful in the gospel ministry that the Lord has given to us?

Because if we are pulling back, if we are disobedient in it, we are missing out on the grace and the provision that God is able to give. And so as Paul is appearing here in Jerusalem, he is appearing as one who has been obedient.

One who has known the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ with him. What Paul is preaching throughout this letter, as we see as you read on in this chapter, he is preaching all about Christ crucified.

It's not about works, as he says, but it's about the grace of God. In verse 21, I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

[16 : 05] It's all about the grace of the Lord and faith in him. And where do we see the greatest obedience of all? It is through Christ and Christ crucified. You think of how he went to the cross for our sins and how he bore our sins there, but before he came to the cross, as he was in the garden of Gethsemane, what did he say as he prayed to his father?

In Matthew 26, verse 39, there it says, There is the obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ. Not as I will, but as you will. And is that our prayer? When things are difficult, when things are hard, we might say, oh, just leave it just now.

Let this pass by for this moment, instead of seeking the will of God for the gospel flourishing here. God entrusts the work of the gospel to his church, the proclaiming of the gospel, the church that has been purchased at such a great price that God gave his own son.

And so therefore, are we obedient to our calling to be a gospel church? That's the purpose of this Presbytery visit.

[17 : 40] Not so much are we obedient to them, but are we obedient to the Lord our God in the work of the gospel? It's a question for us all.

Are we a people who are obedient? And is our greatest desire obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ? Are we a faithful people?

So let us ask ourselves that as we prepare, as we think of preparing for the Lord's table, as we think of preparing for the coming of this Presbytery Oversight visit, are we obedient?

Are we faithful? Are we committed to the Lord Jesus Christ? The second thing we see here is that Paul was examined.

And that is part of the process that we will go through as well. We will be examined by those who come. Examined in so many aspects of our congregational work.

[18 : 41] Individually, I meet with our committee, the Kirk Session, the Deacons Court, members and adherents. There are various meetings that will take place with this committee, so everyone will have a chance to come under examination from them, but also to examine the work that we are doing ourselves as well.

And so it's important to see just who it is that we're being examined by and how we're being examined. When Paul arrived here in Jerusalem, he found himself under examination.

But there was two kinds of examination that he became under. One was public and one was private. And you find the public one was more to condemn his ministry.

In verse 4, yet because of the false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ so that they might bring us into slavery.

You see there, they were there to condemn his ministry, to bring him back out of the preaching the gospel to preaching what is not the gospel. And so that's not the kind of examination that we will come under, but it's the kind of examination that we can come under in a public way as well, where people will tell us that the gospel doesn't matter, that the gospel is not true.

[20 : 04] The world will condemn us. When you say that there is only one Savior and one way to salvation, that that is faith in Jesus Christ.

There are people who will tell us that we are wrong, but we don't change the gospel. Because the gospel as we have it, as it is passed down, is the way of God to salvation.

And therefore, we don't just allow the world to examine us and to guide us. But what you find here with Paul is it wasn't those who came in secretly that he allowed to examine him.

They didn't count. But those who did examine him and who examined him privately in many ways, who he met with, as he met with James and Cephas and John, they were the ones who he truly allowed to examine him, to search him, to ask him questions.

Because as they were examining him, they were examining him in the Lord. And you find that there are these bonds between them, gospel bonds between them.

[21 : 15] And so what mattered to Paul was being examined in regards to the gospel that he preached. And it wasn't about putting people on pedestals, as you see in verse 6.

For from those who seem to be influential, what they were makes no difference to me because God shows no partiality. Or as it says further down when he's speaking about those who seem like James and Cephas and John, who seem to be pillars, he's not there putting them on a pedestal.

But it's more together, examining the gospel that they are proclaiming and how they are proclaiming it. And so as we get examined, it is not about who has done good and who hasn't, or all of these things, putting anybody on a pedestal.

But being examined into, are we doing the things that we need to be doing, the things that we should be doing, and what you notice here is that Paul, Barnabas, and Titus, they have their ministry going on.

They are ministering to the Gentiles. James and Cephas and John, they are ministering to the Jews. And it could easily have been an area of conflict, an area where they could have come together and said one is more important than the other.

[22 : 46] But they didn't. They saw that both were important. And that is the key to gospel ministry.

That there are various kinds of ministry that we are involved in. Various different people that we are engaged with. That at the heart of it all is that the gospel is being proclaimed.

that the gospel is being made known to all around us. And so examination is an important part.

They will come in and examine what we are doing and how we are doing it. And we will all have different ideas about areas of improvement, things we can do better.

They will always be there. And it will be a great time to get feedback and to discuss all of these things. How can we do things better? How can we be strengthened?

[23 : 44] How can we be more effective? What can we stop doing? What should we start doing? All of these things. It's a time of examination. But it's not a thing to be avoided.

It's not a thing to be afraid of. You think of your car. It needs to be examined on a yearly basis to make sure that everything is running in order. It has to go through an MOT.

Well, in many ways we could look at this as an MOT for ourselves as a church to see if there's anything that needs fixed, anything that needs improved or anything that's just working as it should. So examination is important. And it's important that we do look at ourselves honestly, openly, and not to be afraid of what that means.

Examination is important. But when you look at the third thing we see here, we see that examination is important in light of what we want the outcome to be.

[24 : 52] And what we see the outcome to be here with Paul is he was encouraged. encouraged. And we ourselves as we come through this examination we would want to come out of it encouraged.

And encouraged in different ways. Encouraged among each other. And encouraged by those who come to visit.

When you look at Paul and James and Cephas and John here in verse 9 onwards what you see is that there was this togetherness.

They seemed like pillars. Let me just read the verse 9. When James and Cephas and John who seemed to be pillars perceived the grace that was given to me they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. there was this sense of encouragement and oneness together. And what you see here is that sense of the humility of the gospel.

[26 : 06] It humbles us when we see that it's about serving people. That the gospel is about reaching out to all. And here you see it quite clearly the Gentiles are to be reached and the circumcised the Jews are to be reached.

That the gospel goes out to all. But there's encouragement and that's what we should take from this as well.

That we would encourage one another. That as we examine ourselves we do so in the right way. We do so seeking the good of each other.

The easiest thing in the world to do is to criticise and to find fault. And there's no doubt that in any examination that takes place and as this POV takes place there will be areas that there will be maybe criticism.

And areas where we need to improve. Rightly so. But what we want is it to be done in a right spirit. Where collectively we are thinking what is the greater good in this?

[27 : 17] And how can Jesus be made known through us as a congregation? Today I was over in Ness this morning and as Ewan was here I was driving over to Ness and you're driving on the roads and you're thinking to yourself there's some pretty poor condition roads here.

So many places that need repair or improvement. So one reaction could be I'm going to start complaining to someone about this.

That something gets done. The other way to react was to see the places where work is being done. Where there are many areas of the road that are being worked on just now or have been worked on

and have been improved and that improvements are being made.

That work is going on with the means that are available. There are two different ways of looking at things and we could do that with church. We can look at the things that we think that needs improving, that needs done better and we can start complaining about it.

Or we could look at it the other way and say well it's great that these things are happening. It's great that there's encouragement, that there's so much being done with the means that we have available.

[28 : 36] We all want things to be better. We all want things to improve. believe, but let us do it in a way where we're encouraging one another and seeing the gospel flourishing in our midst.

When you see Paul here being encouraged, he was encouraged by the right hand of fellowship.

There was this togetherness. They were encouraged and they encouraged one another in the gospel because they had a great gospel to proclaim.

And you also see that he was encouraged in verse 10, that together they saw a great need to help the poor. Only, it says in verse 10, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

So there was various aspects of this ministry that they were involved in. But it was all about people. It was all about people in various situations and to various degrees.

The gospel being made known and people being encouraged and helped and strengthened in every kind of need that they have. But they were encouraged to keep going.

[29 : 52] And so let us be encouraged as we approach this time of examination, encouraged in what we're doing, encouraged in the gospel that we have, be encouraged as we meet together to do everything in the right spirit for the greater good of the cause of Christ here.

So we go forward encouraged, encouraged with the gospel that we have to make it known to many around us that the glory of Christ would be seen.

Somebody once said this, flatter me and I may not believe me, believe you, criticize me and I may not like you, ignore me and I may not forgive you, encourage me and I will never forget you.

There are many around us who need encouragement. Many of us, we need encouragement and so let us encourage one another in the gospel.

So as we come to this time of presbytery oversight visit, may it be a time when we ask ourselves, are we obedient in the gospel? Are we a people who are being obedient to our Lord Jesus Christ?

[31 : 16] Are we being faithful to him? Are we being faithful to one another? Let us approach it in three ways.

Prayerfully, because we need prayer in all that we do. Humbly, thinking more of others than ourselves and graciously, thankful for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that we have through the gospel.

That Christ is who we serve because he served us and gave himself for us. So let us approach this time in these ways, seeking the goodness of God and the grace of God in our midst and in all that we do.

Let us pray. Lord, our gracious God, we do thank you for your church. We thank you to be part of it. And we ask that you will indeed build up your church here, that you will build us up as your people, that you will help us to obedience, that you will help us as we are examined, to be examined in light of the gospel of your son, Christ Jesus, but also to be encouraged, encouraged by all that we have through faith in Christ, and to all that we have to share with one another and to those around us, that encouragement and strengthening would be what we come away from all of these things with.

[32 : 58] So, Lord, hear our prayers, continue with us, pardon our sin, as we ask all in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to conclude by singing to God's praise in Psalm 117, the Sing Psalms version, Psalm 117, page 155.

It's a short psalm, just the two verses marked here, but a psalm reminds us of how great a God we have. Praise the Lord, O all you nations, all you people, sing his praise.

For his love is great towards us, his commitment lasts always. He is faithful now and ever.

Hallelujah. Praise the Lord.

The tune is Regent's Square, and we'll sing it through twice. We stand to sing to God's praise.

Praise the Lord, O all you nations, all you people, sing his praise.

For his love is great towards us, his commitment lasts always.

[34 : 25] He is faithful now and ever. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord, Lord. O all you nations, all you people, sing his praise.

For his love is great towards us, his commitment lasts always.

He is faithful now, love and ever. Hallelujah. Praise the Lord.

After the benediction, I'll go to the door to my left. We'll close with the benediction. Now may grace, mercy, and peace from God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit rest upon and abide with you all now and forevermore.

[35 : 30] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.