

# The importance of being earnest

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Preacher: Rev Alan Montgomery

[ 0 : 00 ] This morning is from the New Testament, from 2 Corinthians, and reading from chapter 7. That's 2 Corinthians, chapter 7, verse 1.

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

Make room for us in your hearts. We have wronged no one. We have corrupted no one. We have exploited no one. I do not say this to condemn you.

I have said before that you have such a place in our hearts that we would live or die with you. I have great confidence in you.

I take great pride in you. I am greatly encouraged. In all our troubles, my joy knows no bounds. For when we came into Macedonia, this body of ours had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn, conflicts on the outside, fears within.

[ 1 : 25 ] But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus. And not only by his coming, but also by the comfort you had given him.

He told us about your longing for me. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.

Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it, I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while.

Yet now I am happy. Not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended, and so were not harmed in any way by us. Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret. But worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you.

[ 2 : 36 ] What earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourself, what indignation. What alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.

At every point you have proved yourself to be innocent in this matter. So even though I wrote to you, it was not on account of the one who did the wrong, or of the injured party, but rather that before God you could see for yourselves how devoted to us you are.

By all this we are encouraged. In addition to our own encouragement, we were especially delighted to see how happy Titus was, because his spirit had been refreshed by all of you.

I had boasted to him about you, and you have not embarrassed me. But just as everything we said to you was true, so our boasting about you to Titus has proved to be true as well.

And his affection for you is all the greater when he remembers that you were all obedient, receiving him with fear and trembling.

[ 3 : 50 ] I am glad I can have complete confidence in you. Amen. It's true to say that the Apostle Paul had a great love for all the churches which he was instrumental in establishing.

And you may remember the first church you were in. And look back with thanksgiving and praise at how you were nourished and fed and brought into the Christian faith, became a Christian, and grew in stature.

Paul had spent some 18 months laying the foundations, building the faith, establishing the witness of the Corinthian church before moving on.

And when he moved on, he always thought it necessary to keep in touch, either by return visit, by a letter, or by both.

And I believe the second letter to the Corinthians is the most moving document Paul has left us. In the one hand, he is birthing with relief at the reconciliation that had been effected with the Christian congregation at Corinth.

[ 5 : 33 ] And on the other hand, he has come through a fearful experience to emerge alive.

You see, there was a certain element in the church who tended to discredit his ministry and authority. And we mustn't think of ourselves as above reproach.

Any leadership in the church, any Christian in the church, we should not think of ourselves above reproach. but when someone comes and challenges us or asks for clarification, we should be prepared to answer that from God's Word.

And so Paul writes in this letter and dwells fundamentally on the ministry committed to himself. And it's as you survey the letter as a whole, we understand why Paul places so much emphasis upon suffering as a mark of a genuine apostle.

[ 6 : 59 ] You see, it's a recognition of his ministry which claimed to be apostolic. And that apostolic ministry must follow in the steps of his Lord as it should in all of our lives.

Follow in the steps of Jesus. Life of the One. In accordance to the gospel which centers on the cross.

And so this morning we want to think very briefly about the thought of the importance of being earnest. I'm not talking about Oscar Wilde.

The importance of being earnest. Earnest in speech. Earnest in action. Earnest in character. Earnest in faith.

And earnest in life. You see, the apostle Paul, as he wrote to this church, we see in verse 11. I can't find it.

[ 8 : 15 ] I need my glasses. See that what this godly sorrow has produced to you.

What earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done.

At every point, you have proved yourself to be innocent of this matter. So he calls the Christian church at Corinth to be earnest.

And that's an important thing we need to remember. And when we center our lives around the cross, we move forward with earnestness.

and as we center our lives around the cross, knowing that we are forgiven, you see, it's not just about saying sorry and then forgetting what we've done.

[ 9 : 29 ] It's about saying, Lord, forgive us and as we have been forgiven, to move on, knowing that the past has been forgiven. and asking him for the strength not to do those things again.

True repentance, like all good things, is a gift from God. Nothing less than unconditional surrender is a fitting response to Christ's sacrifice for me at Calvary.

Now, in saying that, I'm making myself vulnerable because I say those words openly and you can challenge me in any walk of life, in any action.

You can say to me, Alan, you said but your life is not living up to your words. and that's surely the same for each and every one of us.

Our life has to live up to what we say. He that loses his life for my sake shall find it. A life poured out for him is life found, saved, enjoyed, and kept for eternity.

[ 11 : 01 ] You see, God doesn't ask us to give us, to give him our spare time.

If we are committed to him, we give our all, nothing less than unconditional surrender. and so to center our lives around the cross means being resolute.

It means being determined, ready, firm, and purposeful. For you see, to the cross and around the cross and on the cross, Jesus was seen to be a man of determination.

And we need to follow that example. We need to emulate it. Remember, Paul says earlier on in 2 Corinthians in chapter 4 and verse 8, he says, we are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed, perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned, struck down, but not destroyed.

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

[ 12 : 44 ] Have you ever felt broken, crushed, in despair? Have you ever been persecuted, or abandoned? Maybe persecuted by somebody in the church, not knowing that they're doing that.

You see, we are in a spiritual battle. When we become a Christian and follow Jesus, when we give ourselves to him completely and unreservedly, we are facing a spiritual battle because that is not the place that Satan wants us to have.

he doesn't want to have an allegiance with Christ and he'll do everything in his power to make sure that doesn't happen. So beware, we are on a spiritual battle against the enemy.

When you're engaged in God's work, then you are on Satan's radar warfare, in spiritual warfare, but fear not.

God has short-circuited Satan's devices and it's all about trusting him. That is God for everything. [14:12] Simply letting go and letting go. That God, letting go and letting God. That's a wonderful phrase. God has short-circuited Satan's devices, so fear not.

And secondly, to center our lives on Christ means being zealous. being passionate, devout, enthusiastic.

It means focusing our attention on Jesus Christ, his words, his life, his actions for you and for me. Because enthusiasm makes a difference. Aren't you bowed up when you see a group of enthusiastic people?

When you see an enthusiastic congregation moving forward? You want to go with them as long as they're going in the right direction.

[15:31] As Francis Havergill once wrote in a hymn, we'll sing it at the end of this service. True hearted, whole hearted, faithful and loyal, king of our lives, by thy grace we will be.

You see, our enthusiasm should be genuine that we may please God. Not a sham to simply please others.

George Whitfield, who was born in the early 18th century in Gloucester, on one occasion, he asked the actor David Garrick, how is it that you actors are able on stage to produce so great effect with fiction, whilst we preachers in the pulpit obtain such a small result with facts?

And Garrick replied, I suppose it's because we present fiction as though it were fact, whilst you too often offer facts as though they were fiction.

We need to believe what we preach, what we say, what we share. Believe in our life, in Jesus Christ. He gives us a motivation, he gives us the enthusiasm, he fills us with his spirit, and nothing can be more powerful than a spirit filled life.

[17:23] Do you believe that? Do you believe that? And Whitfield were to discover that he had a passion for acting which would carry on with theatrical enactments of Bible stories told during sermons.

He preached in North America, for example, on revival that became known as the Great Awakening. And how we need to know a great awakening in our country today, in our land.

We need the Holy Spirit revival to come and fall upon us. Nobody will be missed out. In that early church, we read the Acts of the Apostles, all were filled.

Nobody was missed out. Would you want to be in a church like that? Would you want to be in a church where the Holy Spirit missed you? I'm sure not.

We would want to be filled with empowerment from on high. We are all ministers, every single one of us.

[18:45] You might not be an ordained minister, but you're a minister. I remember on one occasion, someone stood up in front of the congregation and said, will all ministers please stand?

And there were a few people who stood up because they were ordained ministers. I don't mean that, he said. Will all ministers please stand? And he got the whole congregation to stand.

Because God had empowered them and filled them with his Holy Spirit that they had a job to do, a task to do, to make him known.

And irrespective where you stay, where you live, what your job is, God wants to use you. Isn't that amazing that God wants to use us?

God wants to be excited. I hope you too will be excited that God has so designed and desired that you, a follower of him, are going to be used in his kingdom ministry with the help of Holy Spirit who can empower us to share the gospel in amazing ways.

[20:21] We need to let go of our inhibitions and let God. We often say, I've said it myself, I can't do that. And when I was down in Hoyk a number of years, a good number of years ago, doing some services for them and church conferences, devised a statement, don't let I can't stand in the way of I can.

Hold on to that. Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, whatever you're ministry, don't let I can't stand in the way of I can.

The power of the Holy Spirit can do wonderful things in our lives, in this church, in this community, in this outreach, from this place.

And he wants you to be involved in that, from youngest to oldest, full with his spirit and empowered to do amazing things for him.

And to center our lives on Christ, we are to realize our importance. We are significant.

[ 21 : 48 ] You're significant. Whatever position you hold in the church is a significant one. As Jesus said to those disciples following the resurrection, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations. All authority has been given to me, and I'm giving it to you, he said. Go and make disciples of all nations.

And we think, well, it's only the people who go abroad. No. They started in Jerusalem and moved out.

And as Jesus gave those disciples all authority, nothing has changed. Because when we come to know him and believe in him and trust him and have a changed life, all authority is given to you. Because not only do we receive his authority, but we are sent with his authority. When you walk out of this church today, you are being sent by Jesus with his authority to let others know you're a changed person.

[ 23 : 17 ] Someone has once said that those who have the world as their parish cannot feel restricted. it. And you might say, well, I don't have the world as my parish.

Look around you. Look around this city today and see the many different nationalities who are here. And when God places you in a position, he places you there to do something for him.

And those of us who have this great commission have a significant message. and if you are a follower of Jesus, you are significant.

Do you believe it? You're significant. You're important. Important to him and important to the message you're going to proclaim to others.

[ 24 : 37 ] We should never underestimate the importance of one. and the importance to God and the important part each of us has to play in the working of the local church.

We all have gifts which complement each other's gifts and work together.

Never underestimate the gifts God has given to you. Never underestimate the gifts God has given another Christian.

gift to us to work our plans, to work his plans, not ours.

We are gifted to complement our fellow brothers and sisters in this congregation. let's use them for that purpose.

[ 25 : 59 ] Esther is a prime example of this, the significance of one. Her adoptive father held the key when he said this, if you remain silent at this time, you and your father's house will perish.

Chapter 4 and verse 14. But what got her attention was his final words. And who knows whether you have attained royalty for such a time as this.

Those words are important for such a time as this. we all have different things in our lives. We all have different times, positions, places, and we are important and significant.

God has made us significant to take that message to those whom we come into contact with. And Esther made her voice made, heard rather, one woman one voice saved an entire nation.

Now, gentlemen, listen to that. One woman, one voice don't put down the importance of women in our churches.

[ 27 : 35 ] women in ways. And because God thinks we are important, he sent Jesus and empowered us with his Holy Spirit.

We are called, in 1 Peter 2 and 9, we are called a royal priesthood. Wow, fantastic.

You have royalty in your blood. Do you believe it? a Sunday school teacher was talking to her class one day about the armor of God, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and she said, there's something else we must carry with us.

Asked the class what that might be. Of course she's thinking about the sword of the Spirit, but she's wanting them to respond. And when no one answered, she said, well, it's very sharp.

Oh, one little girl said, Pismas, is it the axe of the apostles? No, the sword of the Spirit, he gives that to us.

[ 29 : 07 ] He is our defense. that's our armor. And we are told to put on all the armor of God, all of the armor, not just the bit we want, or the bits that's comfortable.

If he gives them to us, he gives us the Spirit and the strength to carry them with us. And lastly, to center our lives on Christ, we are to be solemn.

what does that mean? We are to be thoughtful, thoughtful in the words we speak, our thoughts, our actions, not pretense or misunderstanding.

Remember that old chorus you learned in Sunday school? Be careful little lips what you say.

There's a father up above, looking down, in tender love, so be careful little lips what you say. You see, some people often misunderstand and fail to hear what Jesus was saying to them through the cross.

[ 30 : 27 ] Those people stood around the cross. Only one man said, surely, this is the Son of God.

We should be able to let people see and hear Jesus through us. We require to daily place ourselves in all he has done and as we do so, realize our importance.

Because, let me just remind you, you, this morning, are important. You're significant. you were created for something greater than yourself.

You were formed for something awesome and significant. Take that and with the sword of the Spirit and the armor of God, go into your neighborhood believing that God wants to use you.

Those little things you say, those little actions you do, God can take. And as you speak God's word, the Holy Spirit helps that person to understand.

[ 32 : 11 ] And as they understand, they come to faith. all because of what you have done in your Christian life. The importance of being earnest, significant, this morning, and every other morning, and afternoon and evening too.

God bless you. Father God, thank you that you have given to us such an amazing Savior in Christ, who died for us, who rose again, who promises to come and take us with himself, but in the meantime has left us his great gift, the Holy Spirit.

it. And may we remember and realize this morning that we are significant with you at the helm and important with the message we have to share with others.

So help us to do that, to bring you glory and honor and praise. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen.