

Christ Crucified

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[0 : 00] I would like us now, as we seek the Lord's enabling, to turn into words we read in our second reading in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and chapter 2.

First Corinthians and chapter 2. I would like us to consider the words as we have there at the beginning of the chapter, verses 1 to 5, but not confining ourselves necessarily to these words alone, but they are a benchmark for us for what I would like to do at the Lord's enabling this evening.

Let me read again from the beginning of that chapter, and I'm reading from the authorised person. And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or with wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God, but I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.

We don't read very far into this epistle before we come to realise that the apostle is addressing the situation brought out through the witness of this church, a church that he speaks of, of course, as belonging to the Lord Jesus, and anything that we might say about the Corinthian church must have that always in mind, because Paul addresses these people, he speaks of them unto the church of God, chapter 1, verse 2, which is, it calleth to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints with all that's in every place, call upon the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, both theirs and ours.

[2 : 02] Grace be unto you, and peace, and so on. Paul is addressing a church that, yes, he loves, it's a church that he knows has difficulties and problems.

And these churches, they're no difference to our own, they have problems and difficulties, and they are all at the same making man's interference and man's activity within the church.

Because man is, well, a hopeless case in some respects, and yet one has to be careful how you use that expression, because, although we might be in one sense a hopeless case, because we recognise our own failures, yet at the same time, we are saved by grace, through faith, and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.

But because these things, which are very exalted themes, are said and spoken of Christ's people, and no one dare take that away from his people, that still leaves us at one level kind of exposed to the reality that, yes, we are not what we could be as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And each of the churches to which the Apostle Paul have been writing, there were many issues that were coming up. And one of the issues, of course, was that of jealousy against the Apostle Paul himself.

[3 : 29] Well, after all, as we have been looking at by way of introduction to the prayer meeting last week, the Apostle Paul was a man who was hated, really, I suppose, to, and I say that in the best of sense, by those who were being persecuted by him.

And by the same token, Paul finds himself now with a situation where those who were of the Christian faith have got problems and difficulties.

And it all, again, boils down to man's, well, yes, and humanity to man, but much more so, I think, is man putting himself on a pedestal and thinking of himself about what he ought to think.

But in chapter one, Paul draws attention to a problem of division within the church. And that division, again, is all man's centre because some people, he says, follow Paul, some Apollos, some Cephas, and so on.

Some even follow Christ. So what Paul is seeking to do within this letter, and in the second method as well, is to encourage the Christian church to be at one with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[4 : 40] And by even setting out to do that in this letter here, he is putting himself in a very awkward position in some respects. Because he knows fine that there are going to be people there who are going to object to him and to his ministry.

They know that there are many people who will find fault with his ministry, and that is very true. And that's not the most difficult thing to do, to find fault in the ministry of any one. any one of us as preachers of the gospel, it can be very easy to do that.

Paul wants to take the focus back onto the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, and centre the attention and the affections of the people upon Christ alone.

It is Christ after all that is the great king and head of the church. And here there are four points that I want to just briefly bring out of this passage to you.

The first one is that I want to consider for a moment or two the subject of the Apostle Paul's preaching. And I want us to think of the object of the Apostle's preaching.

[5 : 49] Well, if Christ is the subject of his preaching, then the object of the Apostle Paul's preaching must be the Corinthians, you and me, according to the Spirit that works within each and every one of us in any generation.

The object of the preaching of the gospel is the believer, and yes, the unbeliever. To bring to the attention of the unbeliever the message of hope and salvation through the word and testimony.

And to bring to Christ's own people an assured message that in Christ is all our hope and all our confidence. And the other thing is the manner of the Apostle Paul's preaching.

I want us to think of that too, because, you know, if you ever ask a preacher, how does he cope preaching every Lord's day? How do we cope? Sometimes it's not very easy.

And Paul here wants to show his hand, pardon the expression, but he wants to show his hand and tell the people, look, he says, I count you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling.

[7 : 01] And you might turn around and say, well, we're from our sign, and that's in you. But that is not the case. Because when you are taking the word of God and seeking to expound it, you know finally you're answerable to God for what you say and what you do.

And it's so easy for preachers of the gospel to come out with a statement that is totally out of tune with the word of God. Not deliberately, but accidentally it can happen.

And maybe that's what Paul was afraid of at times. Coming towards these people, these Corinthians after all, they were full of what they thought with great wisdom. They were philosophers, they were all of these things.

that Paul, you find, he has something to do. And then the fourth thing that I want us to consider is this thing is the purpose of his preaching.

There is a purpose in Paul's preaching. There is a purpose always in the preaching of the word of God, no matter who's given the challenge to do it. No matter who is called to do it, there is a purpose.

[8 : 09] It is not to bring any aggrandizement to the individual that might be called to preach, but it is all to do with the message that he is proclaiming and for whom he is proclaiming it.

Let me go back for a moment or two to what I want to suggest is the Apostle Paul's turn of phrase with regard to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Corinthians need to have, be refocused with regard to their expression of their faith.

And this the Apostle brings out, where I dreaded, he says, for I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom declaring unto you the testimony of God, for I determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.

That's his determination, to know nothing amongst the people but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

What was revealed to the Apostle Paul and connection with the redemption of mankind is what Paul wants to do.

And it can be so easy and it can be so difficult sometimes when the church loses its focus. And that might be as a result sometimes of difficulties and trials through which the church might go.

[9 : 28] But we're not called upon as aware to dwell on these things. We have to refocus our attention, learn from what we have heard or seen or done or experienced, but to carry on in the faith looking unto Jesus.

Now what the Word of God is saying that there is only one object to the Apostolic preaching and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. When we think of that, how important that is in the present circumstances for the church of Christ.

I don't want to know anything he said. I don't want vain traditions of men. I don't want endless genealogies as he says elsewhere. I don't want to hear of things that make no use to the spiritual well-being of the church.

What I want to hear, he says, I want to hear all about the message of hope, the message of redemption, the message of salvation. and that is something we must never lose sight of. Even, I challenge myself so often with this one, it's so easy to get sidetracked. Even when you're preaching, maybe even to stories and illustrations, it can often be of little effect in relation to the subject matter that you want to get over to the people.

[10:48] What Paul wanted to do was Christ and him crucified. Let's focus on this Jesus. Well, if you were to meet Paul, supposing you were to meet Paul and say to him, asking the question, okay, Paul, what about this Jesus?

But then I ask you, okay, well, consider maybe what Paul was thinking, but ask yourself the self-same question. What do you think about Jesus?

What is your take on the Lord Jesus Christ? What is the significance of this person that has come into your life? That yes, in many respects, has turned your world upside down and has made a difference to you?

What do you think of Christ? And sometimes we will probably find ourselves stuck for words. What do I think of Jesus?

Well, one thing I know, once I was blind, as the hymn writer said, now I see. Now I see. Why? Because Jesus came into my life.

[12:03] He made a difference. He turned my thinking. He turned my world upside down, that world that I was focused upon, the world that is around us, the things of this world, the things of the heart and of the flesh that were untamed.

These were the things that I desired more than anything else. but asked Paul, what is it now for you, Paul? Christ is my all and in all, whom to know is life eternal.

There is none like unto Jesus, no, not one. What would be your testimony to anyone that stopped you in the street? Would you stutter? Would you find yourself at a loss of words?

Or would it be right there in your heart bursting to get out? Desperate to tell people not to, as it were, project yourself.

Paul is very much at pains at that. He needs to try and prevent people from projecting the self. In anything that we are doing by way of the cause and the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is to focus our attention on him.

[13:17] So what Paul is saying here, are suggesting to us, that I am determined not to know anything among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified? Nothing is going to distract him from that great purpose.

God has said to us. We have the object of the Apostle Paul's preaching. Now, of course, we have already stated that. The object was the Corinthian Church.

but the object is not just the Corinthian church the object is the church of Christ throughout every single generation the same message could be proclaimed to the Ephesian church to the Colossian church to the third churches at Bethlehem all of these churches had their own problems and difficulties but they were all believers in the Lord Jesus Christ and they all had experienced the tokens of Christ's love and favour upon them but let me take you somewhere else because I don't think I'm doing despite of what has been said here when I turn you to a passage like Ephesians because in Ephesians chapter 2 the Apostle Paul draws our attention to the people and this could be the Corinthians or the Ephesians or you and I it makes no difference listen to what he says and you he says who were dead in trespasses and sins when in time past he walked according to the course of this world according to the prince of the power of the air the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience among whom also we all had our conversation in time past in the lust of our flesh fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind and were by nature the children of wrath that's the picture that the Apostle Paul had in Ephesians at least that's the truth that's as it was before he came to faith in the Lord Jesus and what better person that's not the right expression to use but thinking of anyone at all who could come to a position like the Apostle is here in Ephesians chapter 2 verses 1 to 4 where he draws our attention to what we once were and then he bursts

open with the reality of what we are now now these Corinthians or Ephesians it doesn't matter but if we take it for the Corinthians it's exactly the same for them they were in time past yes in time past I love that phrase I love the word even pass it came to pass that life the old life is gone it was gone for the Apostle Paul or Saul of Tarsus and what is it?

it is a new life in Christ Jesus whatever we had our conversation whoever we had our conversation with in this world whatever the nature of that conversation whatever it might have been everything is now changed so when Paul is speaking to the Corinthians everything has changed he can now redirect his attention of the centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ straight to their heart and say look you are a new creation the old has passed away yes but he says in Ephesians but God he said who is rich in mercy for his great love for with thee has loved us even when we were dead and sinned says Quicken to get together with Christ by grace are you saved?

[16:57] but the Apostle Paul is addressing the subject of his preaching is those who have been redeemed but not just those not just those who have been redeemed but those who are still continually walking in the way of God because after all that's exactly what's happening here the Christians at Corinth yes they were on the road yes they could be on the same road as the road the two disciples on the road to Emmaus but they are on the road or they are walking but they are walking towards glory is that not the truth for each and every one of us?

we are not stagnant beings we are not stagnant statutes of some spiritual realm we belong to the body of Christ and we are moving forward and however so slowly it might be as we are moving forward we are learning more and more of the things of Christ is that not true?

that's what Paul is implying why he writes to these people in this way but I determine not to know anything whatever arguments they want to make bring to him whatever distractions that's one of the things that we are so easy bound up in doing we want to distract away from the things that really matter if somebody challenges us maybe with regard to our own behaviour as spiritual beings that maybe we are not what we should be we may not like to be challenged but the word of God is doing it to us all the time it is challenging us and I don't define it even if we want to try and as it were hide away from it well the object of the Apostle Paul's preaching is the church of Christ in the first instance everyone that has come to faith in the Lord Jesus and who is on exactly the same road as he himself is on let's face it the Apostle Paul is not just preaching out of a vacuum he knows experimentally in his own heart and soul he's been through it and he's still been through it he understands the activities of the evil one they are but for the grace of God why?

without Christ he has some well occasion busy the master's service but found himself with some kind of thorn in the flesh for which there is much theological division and debate about never mind the debate the important thing is as Jesus said to the Apostle Paul my grace is sufficient for you my strength is made perfect in weakness the consequence of that and the consequence for each and every one of us of the word of God coming to us is that it does make a difference each day we might not think that and that is the purpose of it I'll come back to that in a moment or two the manner of Paul's preaching is of singular importance I say this when your ministers have been on holiday enjoying themselves in the sun but you know when I think of it I think of all preachers I'm retired now at least I'm supposed to be but when I think about it it's not an easy thing to sustain a ministry I did it for 30 years and it can be quite difficult and quite heavy and I can understand what Paul said when he says I was in weakness and in fear and in much trembling that was the manner of his preaching he wasn't standing up there as it were in solid ground oh yes his teaching was but he felt as weak as a baby trying to walk falling about all over the place and I'm sure that's the case with all of us as preachers there are very few times that a preacher and it's better not to walk gaily into the pulpit and think oh I have it here in my hand and everything is going to be fine today the moment the preacher opens his mouth I've often said it to myself the first word that comes out of your mouth when you start preaching is the one that's going to set the stage for the whole of the service what you say and how you say it right at the very beginning and that is true do you know where we learn that from?

[21:38] Christ himself oh Paul could give us some lectures I'm quite sure on administering the word of God presenting the word of God and teaching the word of God but none more so than the Lord Jesus himself he is really our schoolmaster in more ways than one and he is the one that will really teach us of all of those things that are to our spiritual and eternal well-being what I'm saying here is that look the Corinthian church had to learn and understand that Paul came to them not as some person with some rod of iron in his hand to whip the people or to lash at the people his

concern was was to present the gospel to them and whatever they had against him well they had various things some people said that he was a poor preacher maybe he was but his message wasn't poor and that's the important thing a preacher might not have the best of deliveries and that may be true but what is more important than anything else is this it is what they are saying well

Paul came to these people in fear and in trembling yes fear and in great trembling weakness no minister of the gospel dare suggest to his congregation or to his audience that he has all the answers and that he will give it all eloquently or academically or theologically he won't but it is good to know that we have a hand in the word of eternal life and a hand to present to the people those things but I want to spend the last few moments just thinking of the purpose you and I come to the house of God and it is one of the great things of being retired you can sit in the congregation and listen to the preacher listen to the word of God would be proclaimed and not have to be standing up there in fear and in much trembling for the apostle Paul there was one thing that the preaching of the word of God had an end it had an end of course the first of all things was that Christ would be honoured and glorified is that not true we speak he says the wisdom of God and the mystery even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world and to our glory which none of the princes of this world knew for had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory but as it has written

I have not seen nor heard neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for them that love him but God has revealed these things those people to whom the apostle Paul is speaking he is saying to them this is my purpose I want you to grow in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ that's not diverting their attention away from himself far from it if he is going to be any good at all he is going to find that all the things that he is going to say he has gone through the bill himself in the preparation of that word the purpose of the apostle Paul's preaching is to do this one thing that those people would stand firmly in the faith of God my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom but in demonstration of the spirit and of power for this one great purpose that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God you see that Paul is honing in here in the big problem that the Corinthian church had they were living in dependence upon men what man would say what was the wisdom of man what was the great philosophical argument of the day what was the thing that would get people's minds going at a hundred miles of an hour

Paul says no steady back but we're concerned about more than anything else that we grow in grace that we would be steadfast unmovable always abounding in the work of the Lord knowing that your labour is not in vain so Paul is not in any way wanting the Corinthians to listen to his presentation he doesn't want them to think of how he's going about this argument whether it be point one B or C or D or point two and so on and more especially what is the content of it what is being said and it's not to entice it is to draw the attention of each and every one of us including himself to the centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ is that not true that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power of God to declare unto you the testimony of God the unsearchable riches of Christ Paul at the end of this epistle says if any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be an anathema in other words let not your minds be so fixed in the things that do not matter but in the things that matter most the purpose then of Paul's preaching is that faith of each and every one of us would increase in this sense that whatever you come across in life's journey you will be able to fulfill for Christ with respect of you let this mind be in you as he says to the church at Philippi let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus who thought it not robbery to be equal to God but made himself of no reputation taking upon himself the form of a servant being obedient unto death even the death of the cross the purpose of the preaching of the gospel of Jesus

[28 : 12] Christ as far as the apostle Paul is concerned is to stretch forth the hand of Christ in a spiritual sense stretch it forth to the people so that what they would do what they would want to do is lay hold upon him to lay hold upon the Lord Jesus Christ the altogether lovely one and the Prince of Peace one thing we have left and it was intended towards the very end and that is this he was there in weakness and in fear and in much trembling not with enticing words of man's wisdom no that was not his way he didn't want to do that but what he wanted to show was that everything that came from his lips was a consequence of the life that he now lived in the flesh he lived by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and who gave himself for me and that can only come as a consequence of the indwelling of the spirit of

Christ that's what he is suggesting to us he says my speech was not and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom but a demonstration of the spirit and of power now there is no doubt of course that the apostolic power and what was given to the apostles to do in the early church was different to you and I but the spirit is still the same the indwelling spirit is still the same that's what Christ gave to each and to every one of us the day that we came to faith the day that we entrusted everything to the Lord Jesus was the day that we received the power of the spirit of God from an eye for what purpose to languish in a body that wasn't in any way growing in any spiritual sense no the purpose was that you and I might glorify God and enjoy him forever that can only come through the power of the spirit of

God remember what Jesus said to the disciples and again this is before he went to the cross in John chapter 14 he said to them let not your heart be troubled you believe in God believe also in me in my father's house are many mansions of awareness so I would have told you I go and prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto myself that where I am there you will be also was that the last word no he promised the comforter the spirit of truth the one who would lead us and guide us into all truth the one who would lead us and guide us in the way that we should walk our conversation our style our whole being was now being mapped out not by selfish interests but by the indwelling of the spirit of

Christ and the mind of Christ being in each and every one of us I can understand a little bit of the apostle Paul is feeling this trembling sometimes I wish I had a little bit more of the indwelling of the power of the soul had there is no doubt that the Lord as we said on Wednesday evening he had a plan and purpose for us this Saul of Tarsus this Paul the great apostle he had a plan and purpose and that plan and purpose would include great suffering but what also would include is that Paul would be used by the Lord Jesus Christ to be a witness and to be a bearer of the testimony of Christ what is Paul saying to us then I don't want to know anything above the Lord Jesus Christ he is my all and in all he is ever the most important thing that ever happened to me and he wants to show it he doesn't want to reject himself but he wants to show the

Christ living in him shall be praying and those things however legitimate they might be in the world itself in the world in which we live Lord we pray that there would not be such a distraction that we lose sense of the person and the power and the privileges that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ Lord as we go from here we pray that those bring our thoughts around the

[33 : 49] Lord Jesus and help us to cast our every care upon him for he cares for us take away all offence loving us freely in Christ Amen I'm going to conclude by singing a psalm 130 in the same psalms version page 173 psalm 130 O Lord from the depths I call to you Lord hear me from on high and give attention to my voice when I call when I for mercy cry Lord in your presence who can stand if your sins record yet forgiveness is with you that we may fear you Lord I wait my soul waits for the Lord my hope is in his word more than the watchman waits for dawn my soul waits for the

Lord O Israel put your hope in God for mercy is within and full redemption from their sins his people he redeemed someone to your you sing some person your presence Lord Tom at end I call to you Lord hear me from on high I give my a if For in your Detroit, in your our students' grief, our■■■■, our lives, forgive and with you

That we may fear you, Lord I wave my soul with heart, dear Lord My hope is in His word More than the one sun with our dawn My soul with heart, dear Lord O Israel, your hope is not For mercy is with Him

And for redemption promises Let me forgive you And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ The love of God and the Father The fellowship and the comfort of the Holy Spirit Rest upon and remain with you And with all the history of God Both now and always Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen

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