

1 Cor 2:1-5

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[0 : 00] Over the years, TV news programs have changed their style.

I wonder if you've noticed that. You can pick up the difference very strongly if you watch an old clip of the news, or even a weather forecast for that matter.

Today, our newsreaders are very charismatic personalities. And we see them operating in a busy newsroom. So many things going on there.

Slick presentations. Amazing graphics that sometimes take away our breath. And the news content itself is often overshadowed by this dazzling display.

Only a week or so ago, I was watching a weather forecast. And I was looking at this weather map that was on the TV. And all I could see were snowflakes and raindrops.

[1 : 07] And I couldn't see a map that was behind all the snowflakes and raindrops. Well, that's sort of hiding the truth a bit, isn't it? Now, in verses 1 to 5 of Corinthians chapter 2, Paul described how he brought world-shattering news of eternal consequences to this city of Corinth.

And the news that Paul brought was not put in the shade by his personality or his glittering presentation.

The verses describe him as being an ordinary mortal man. But he had an extraordinary message.

A message, an amazing message, that is received and has to be received in a supernatural way.

So, when you hear the same message today, you need to remember, it's perhaps very obvious, that it's spoken by a man.

But that it's really extraordinary in its source and content. And it's really crucial for you to remember that a supernatural agency is required for you to receive this news properly.

[2 : 44] So, the Apostle Paul was a man like we are. He had his fears like you and I. Some of you have stood up with a stall at the Acton show.

And I suspect that as you were handing out leaflets, you were fairly unsure of yourself. You wondered what was going to happen, whether you'd be able to cope, whether people would be friendly towards you, whether they would rebut you.

And I know some of you have been out to speak at the Goth weekend. And perhaps you've gone out with fear and trembling.

Many more of you, perhaps all of you, have had to explain to your friends and relatives, workmates, what God has done for you in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you've had to give an account of the hope that you have in him. And I'm fairly sure that you are not brimful with confidence.

[3 : 53] At least I'd be very surprised if you were. And I'm fairly sure the sorts of things that would go through your mind would be something like this. What if?

What if I lose that friendship? What if they turn around and say something nasty to me and make me to feel like dirt in their presence?

What if they do something violent? Not just violent words, but violent speech. Well, the Apostle Paul would be like these things.

And so you need to remember that you're not alone. Now, just because you fear whether or not you'll be able to cope, if you wonder whether your words are going to be stumbling or mumbling, whether you're going to lose your concentration, not be able to think clearly, that doesn't mean to say that you should keep quiet.

The Apostle Paul came with fear and with trembling. He was very aware of the need to be accurate and clear in the things that he uttered to those around him.

[5 : 13] And he knew about the difficulties and dangers to his body, his mind, his emotions. He went to the Corinthians with his eyes open. If you like, he'd done a risk assessment, but he carried

on.

Listen how he described his personal experiences. He didn't make himself out to be a superhero.

Chapter 2, verse 3. I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling.

He wasn't a superhero. He was like you and I. He was aware of how hard the task was.

He knew his weakness. And so he asked his fellow Christians to pray for him. He asked them

regularly to pray for them. So when he wrote to his friends at Ephesus, he wrote these things.

Pray also for me that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me, and that I may fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel.

[6 : 28] And he urged his supporters at Colossae. Pray for me that I may proclaim the gospel clearly as I should.

Paul clearly felt inadequate for the task. He knew he needed strength and boldness. He knew that he needed a clear mind.

He knew he had to keep his head in all situations. Especially when he was in the midst of a crowd who would taunt him and even threaten him.

Very hard to think clearly when you're in the midst of those who angrily mock you and demand answers from you. Very hard for children even to talk about their faith in Christ when they're surrounded by their sometimes mocking friends at school.

And so our evangelists, our missionaries, they too feel inadequate and they need our prayers. Now the gospel must be understood to be believed.

[7 : 48] Clarity is needed. Accuracy is needed. Boldness is needed. So do you pray for our preachers, evangelists and missionaries?

But do you pray for new converts who find themselves faced with explaining to their family, friends at school, friends next door, about how they have come to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?

And what about those in other lands who face fierce persecution merely for meeting together? Paul was a man like you and I.

He needed help to point to the hopeless and rebellious where hope might be found. He was an ordinary man with his weaknesses, fears and feelings.

He wasn't superhuman. He wasn't making great claims for himself. If you turn to his next letter in the Bible, chapter 4, verse 7, he described himself as an earthenware vessel or jar holding treasure inside.

[9 : 10] That treasure was the news he carried. It wasn't himself. It was Christ that he exalted. Christ is the treasure. In him, all the treasures of wisdom are found.

And Paul was conscious of his weakness, but he was conscious too of who he was speaking about. But he wasn't by himself.

Remember how John the Baptist spoke of our Lord Jesus Christ. John chapter 1, verse 26, John the Baptist said that Christ is the one who comes after me, the thong of whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie.

Now, as you get older, I don't know whether you've noticed that a problem comes. It's very hard to bend down and fasten your shoelaces.

Now, in ancient times, if you were sufficiently well off, you would hire a slave, or you'd call a slave, come on, fasten my shoelaces, you, or sandals, and the slave came to that very menial task.

[10 : 27] Now, John the Baptist said he wasn't good enough even to act as such a slave to the Lord Jesus Christ. Later he said, he must increase, but I must decrease.

And the Apostle Paul was like John the Baptist. He didn't exalt himself, but he magnified the gospel he preached. Again, 2 Corinthians in chapter 4, for we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord.

That's a challenge to those of us who preach, but it's a challenge to you too, if you have a favorite preacher, and you let all the world know what an amazing preacher you have.

If you boast in your preacher, rather than your gospel, rather than his gospel, you're doing Christ a disfavor, you're doing your preacher a disfavor.

It's a challenge to Christians who boast in their pastor as opposed to another, and who compare him to others.

[11 : 39] It's not the man that's important. It's the message that he proclaims. So what exactly was the message?

What was the extraordinary message that Paul preached? Now, Corinth was a very immoral place. You might think that the apostle Paul would confront the immorality there, and confront the religious perversion, the sexual perversion, unfaithfulness, and so on.

You read about greed, and gluttony, and deception. Now, Paul did not come to Corinth, and say to the people, no, pull yourselves up.

Saw yourselves out. He didn't do that. Now, it wasn't the message that he brought to Corinth. Corinth was a city of culture.

Corinth was a city where there were amazing public speakers, speakers, orators, who could sway hundreds, perhaps thousands of people at a time.

[12 : 55] So did Paul think, I've got to compete with those speakers, and do an even more outstanding speech, as it were?

The Corinthians loved embellishments for talking and flowery language. Paul didn't copy them. He avoided that. He didn't come, if you look at verse 1 of chapter 2, didn't come with eloquence or superior wisdom. So what did he come with?

Well, he tells us, I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. Or as it's put in some translations, I proclaimed to you the testimony of God.

Didn't project himself, but God. He preached God's message. He preached what God had done. He preached what God had said.

[14 : 04] Many years ago, in this country, if you went and walked past a town hall or some government building, every now and again, you would see a man dressed rather unusually, perhaps with very sort of red clothing, rich clothing, have a bell, he'd ring the bell, and the town crier, as he was called, would ring his bell and then announce a really important message.

It might be that the government had won a great victory in battle over some feared enemy. It might be that the government had brought out some new law that everyone should listen to and obey.

And if you challenged him, he would point over his shoulder towards the town hall, towards the government building and he would say, they sent me. That's why you should listen to my message.

That's why I'm speaking with authority for you. It's not my message, it's their message. And so the apostle Paul came with a testimony of God.

What God had said. What God had done. And that's why he was able to speak in the way he did.

[15 : 33] Despite all the difficult circumstances that he faced, it was that that gave him the courage, it was that that gave him the perseverance to carry on.

So what has God testified to? Jesus claimed that the whole of the Old Testament testified of him. But you might remember one occasion in the New Testament, early on in the New Testament, and I'm coming back to John the Baptist again, at the beginning of Matthew's Gospel.

Matthew 3.16 speaks about John the Baptist and his baptizing the crowds who came to him with repentance.

Now, Matthew says this, as soon as John, as soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water, and at that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him, and a voice from heaven said, this is my Son whom I love.

[16 : 50] With him I am well pleased. He is unique. God couldn't say that of you or I. He couldn't even say that of John the Baptist.

But he spoke of Jesus and said, he is my Son. With him I am well pleased. That was the testimony of God. It was a noise coming down from heaven.

And if that loud testimony wasn't enough, the Holy Spirit came down on the Lord Jesus Christ in the appearance of a dove, an emblem of peace for the Prince of Peace.

Now, crowds of people went out to listen to John the Baptist and they heard this testimony of God. And those who were deaf saw the testimony of God, even if they didn't hear.

There was no excuse for not accepting the testimony of God, that he was well pleased with his one and only Son.

[18 : 01] Now, if you're struggling with anxious doubt about the gospel, listen to another testimony of God about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

It's mentioned by Paul himself in his opening to his letter to the Romans, to the Christians there at Rome. And the Apostle Paul pointed out that God had powerfully testified or declared Jesus to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.

And if you're not yet a Christian, remember the empty grave. Remember all those many varied people who saw the risen Christ.

In this letter, this same letter to the Corinthians that we're looking at, we're told that on one occasion, 500 people witnessed the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

What a testimony to the fact that he is a Son of God, that he is Lord. So listen to this testimony of God concerning Jesus Christ.

[19 : 18] Now the Apostle Paul was confident that he was preaching the testimony of God because he himself had met with the risen Christ.

Paul had been a zealous persecutor of Christians. He blasphemed the name of Christ. But he was turned round and became a preacher of Christ.

You remember he exchanged the role of a persecutor to one of suffering for Christ and for his fellow believers.

Why was that? Well, the Lord Jesus Christ, the risen Lord Jesus Christ met him there as Paul was on his way to Damascus to put Christians in prison.

And there on the road to Damascus he heard the testimony of Jesus who said, I am Jesus who you are persecuting.

[20 : 18] the humbled, bewildered, converted Paul then went on to proclaim the testimony of God himself.

In verse two we read that he preached Christ and him crucified. Paul writing to the Romans, chapter five and verse six said this, you see just at the right time when we were still powerless Christ died for the ungodly.

Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrated his own love for us in this, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

That's the testimony of God, isn't it? God demonstrated his own love for us in this, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Now others preached the testimony of God centuries before Paul was even born. The prophet Isaiah also proclaimed the testimony of God. God spoke through this prophet and revealed his mind and plan.

[21 : 46] God announced through Isaiah what he would do. Isaiah proclaimed the word of God. Isaiah 53 verse 5, he, the suffering servant, was pierced for our transgressions.

He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. Do you want peace with God?

Do you want God to be your friend? You might fear he's against you. Well, you can be reconciled to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. I mentioned John the Baptist earlier. he announced to his hearers that Jesus is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

Now, you'll know that the Old Testament priests used to sacrifice animals to take away the guilt of disobeying God. But it never worked because the people continued to keep on disobeying.

[23 : 06] Even the priests themselves who sacrificed the animals disobeyed. They too sinned. All disobeyed God. All fell short of his standards.

Something better was required than the blood of animals, than the blood of lambs and goats and bulls and so on. A much greater, much more vast sacrifice.

An infinite sacrifice was needed for the sin of the world, for your sin, for my sin. And Jesus died that our slate might be wiped clean.

Don't know how your MasterCard bill is, your Visa bill, or whatever. Well, if you're in debt there, we're all in a much greater debt.

That debt, that record of our sin, of our disobedience to God. Jesus paid off this debt.

[24 : 10] He wiped our slate clean. That's why Paul preached this, that Jesus Christ came into this world and Jesus was crucified for men and women.

This is the good news, the amazing news that he proclaimed at Corinth. This is the gospel that true Christian preachers rejoice in and believers too love to hear.

So has your debt been paid? Are you trusting in Christ? He experienced the judgment of God for your sake.

When he died on the cross, he was bearing your sin. He was bearing your guilt. He was carrying your sin far away, as far as the east is from the west.

So are you trusting in him? That's why the apostle Paul preached Christ and him crucified. I notice that the main story in the TV news is often repeated, repeated perhaps halfway through the news, because it's so important.

[25 : 27] People must hear this main point of the news. There was no doubt about Paul's main point. In verse 2 he said this, I resolved to know nothing whilst I was with you, except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

He said this near the beginning of his letter. And when you get closer to the end of his letter, 1 Corinthians 15, we read the same thing. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.

Parents warn their children about life and death matters repeatedly. How many times does a mother warn her little child, don't cross the road without looking both ways?

Not once, not twice. I don't know how many times a parent warns their child about this sort of thing. And recently, how often have you heard on the TV news, the environment agency or whatever, say, don't go near those waves crashing into the shore.

It's dangerous. dangerous. It's dangerous to leave aside this gospel. And that's why the apostle Paul preached it time and time again.

[27 : 06] To escape the judgment of God for your sin, come to Christ. Believe in him. Believe in him. Crucified.

So the apostle Paul continued to preach this gospel. When he was at Corinth and he was there for a year and a half, what did he preach?

I resolve to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And so when he writes this letter to him, to these people at Corinth, what does he say?

Well, he reminds them of what he did. I resolve to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. He was of first importance.

Everything else paled away in significance. And sort of two thirds of the way through his letter, he brought to their attention the celebration of the Lord's supper, the bread and the wine.

[28 : 20] And he said this, for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

So Christian preachers proclaim the message of the cross and Christian believers proclaim the message of the cross. Christ. And those rich symbols are so important to us, lest we forget.

And it has to be said that churches do forget. Remember a chapel that I attended years ago and across the front of the chapel were these words, we preach Christ and him crucified.

that chapel had been built in a day when lots of people were converted and turned to Christ. And the words were painted there at the front of the chapel to remind preachers and hearers alike what the gospel is, what the gospel should continue to be proclaimed, lest they forget.

And that congregation forgot. They rejected the testimony of God. preach to the things such as be good, be a good citizen.

[29 : 49] Well of course that's true. Preach, don't go into this place, don't go to that place, don't eat this, don't eat that. Experience this, experience that. And the people lost interest.

People stopped going because the gospel that saved men and women was no longer preached. there was just moralism at best.

It wasn't the testimony of God. And the man in the pulpit merely uttered the thoughts and dreamings of men who he considered to be wise.

So why did the congregation adrinkle? The people forgot that the preaching of Christ and him crucified is foundational. chapter 3 verse 13 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that's laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Do you remember those flats in Newcastle about a year ago? They poured down with rain just like it's been pouring down recently. Do you remember what happened to the foundation of those flats?

[30 : 59] It's washed away. The culvert broke its banks and the foundations went and the flats went down and recently adjoining flats were also pulled down.

The message of Jesus Christ and him crucified is foundational. Paul the man broadcasted this foundational, amazing, powerful message across ancient Corinth and many believed, just as many of you have believed.

But not all believe. people believe. So why are you different? Why do you trust in Jesus Christ and him crucified?

Why is it more to you than just a piece of information? Why were the Corinthian believers different? people? Why are you doing it? Well, it was more than just a news item to them. See how Paul puts it in verse 4? My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.

[32 : 17] You get the same thing happening when Paul wrote to the Thessalonians. He said this, We know, brothers, loved of God, that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction.

salvation. Why is it that when television programs are sent out across the land, they're only heard in some houses?

Quite simply, the silent TV sets are not turned on. They don't have the energy. In a sense, there's no life in them.

The Apostle Paul said, Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction. So why were you brought to the point that you saw that you were lost apart from the Saviour?

The Holy Spirit convicted you of your need. The Holy Spirit led you to see that Christ alone is the way for you. The Holy Spirit's anointing opened up your understanding that complete forgiveness is found in Christ Jesus and him alone.

[33 : 46] Some just hear with their ears and it stops there. But in your case, it was for real. You trusted in Christ. You saw him as a foundation.

You saw him as the wisdom and power of God. God. You accepted the testimony of God the Father. You believed in God the Son who came into this world and died on the cross.

And you were given new life and sight and hearing by the Holy Spirit. verse 30 of the previous chapter.

It's because of him that you're in Christ Jesus who has become for us wisdom from God. That's our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

What staggering news. Why did Paul write this? Well, the people of Corinth were making idols of their preachers.

[34 : 46] They were quarreling over who was the best. Paul deliberately pushed himself into the shade that the Corinthians would worship God and trust in him alone, not the preacher.

Our confidence should be in the testimony of God and the power of God, not in men. Paul said in verse 5 that your faith might not rest on man's wisdom but on God's power.

So what you should do then? Remember that preachers are just men. You should pray for them and not boast in them.

Remember the amazing message of God concerning Christ crucified. Remember not to boast in yourselves, your gifts, your preachers.

All this sort of thing leads to pride, jealousy, division, bitterness. Don't divide over these things.

[35 : 52] Don't boast in these things. So can you boast in anything? Paul summarized it in these words.

Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. so be him. And now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now and forevermore.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.