

**2 Cor 2:12-3:5**

**CC 9 & 10.30 19<sup>th</sup> Jan 2014**

As you may know I do play quite a bit of cricket in a year both indoors and outdoors. One of the things I really enjoy in the summer is watching one of our batsmen bat. I don't like the fact that I'm often umpiring as I do it but I love watching him bat. The ease and grace of his batting is just great and then, should I go out to bat, I think crumbs I am not in the same league and don't deserve the title batsman.

As we look at Paul we see the great apostle and evangelist. We see him sharing faith in Jesus Christ through Asia and into Greece, seeing people come to faith and seeing churches established. As we do so we inevitably think crumbs I am not in the same league as Paul. Now that in a sense is true because he was called and gifted as an apostle which we are not and yet we are the same because we share in the same gospel ministry as Paul and as we continue looking through 2 Corinthians we see how we can learn from Paul as we continue that gospel ministry.

As we have been seeing in the first couple of weeks looking at this second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul had a problem with these Christians looking at him and thinking he's not up to much. He claims to be an apostle but he's nothing much to look at, he's no great orator and, as we saw last week, he doesn't always do what he says he is going to do.

So Paul's concern through the letter is to show them that he really was God's apostle, God's sent one and that his ministry was authentic.

In these verses today we see something of his ministry and we see some marks of gospel ministry.

### **1. Gospel ministry is about people v12-13**

In these verses Paul told them about how he had gone to Troas on an evangelistic mission and seen the opportunities. However, there had been an inner restlessness because Titus wasn't there. Paul had sent him to Corinth to see how the church was doing. While waiting to hear Paul was concerned for the church and for Titus. So he left Troas and popped over the Aegean Sea into Macedonia so as to meet Titus more quickly, which we don't find out about until 2 Cor 7:5.

But why did he bother telling them this?

The short answer was because he was concerned for people, people he knew. He was concerned for them, that is the Christians in Corinth, and he was concerned for Titus.

Yes there were things for him to do in Troas, opportunities to share the gospel but his concern for people was greater. So he left though we should note in God's grace that later he would be able to return to Troas for a week (Acts 20.9).

People and especially people Paul knew and cared about were top of his agenda.

I have found over the years as a Minister that the diary can be a help and a curse. Sometimes it can get in the way of people – we are too busy to see people. We are not available when people need us. I have to say I hate it when people say to me “I would like to see you if you are not too busy.” I think one of the spin offs from Paul showing to these Christians that they mattered to him is to raise the issue about people before things.

People matter and gospel ministry is about people. I try to hold that idea in what I seek to do but I hope all of us recognise the need to be spending time with people, with those inside the church so we can support and encourage each other, and those who are outside the church so that we can help point them to Jesus.

## **2. gospel ministry a matter of life or death v14-16a**

Now even as he wrote Paul might well have been thinking that the Christians in Corinth would use his leaving Troas as a stick to beat him, another sign of his double mindedness as they saw it. However, immediately he speaks of triumph, not something which the Corinthians associated with Paul. He wrote, “But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ” (v14). Paul used this picture of the Roman triumphal procession, where the commander of the Roman army returns to Rome and there is a triumphal procession with the commander at the head, his troops following on enjoying the adulation of the crowd and the prisoners of war being dragged along in ridicule.

It is possible that Paul’s opponents in Corinth knew of him leaving Troas and used that against him as showing his lack of consistency. However, Paul, using their language of triumph and success, pictured himself and his colleagues in that triumphal procession behind Jesus the commander. As such I suggest the picture is not of Paul as a prisoner in the procession but a soldier of Christ. In Christ no matter what happens or how bad things are we are on the victory side.

Paul and his colleagues are in the victory procession because through them God had chosen to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ like a fragrance, an aroma.

A friend was telling me how he had a period that whenever he went to dances the girls he danced with would ask him why he smelt of chocolate. He said it was because he was working in a chocolate factory and so he carried the aroma of Cadbury’s with him.

What Paul was saying here was that the gospel was not just what they said but part of them and their life that they, as it were, carried the fragrance of Jesus Christ wherever they went. In v15 he spoke of being, “to God the aroma of Christ” that is as the sacrifice of Jesus was pleasing to God the Father so Paul’s suffering and ministry we pleasing to God.

But then we need to get our heads round the effect of this gospel smell in the world in which Paul lived. V15, “For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and

those who are perishing”. Can you see what he is saying? Note that the gospel comes to everyone. It comes to those who will receive it and be saved and to those who will reject it and be lost. Then v16, “To the one we are the smell of death; to the other the fragrance of life.”

It is dramatic language. Paul, as he lived and spoke the gospel, was to some like the smell of death. They were repulsed by the gospel. But to others he was the very fragrance of life itself the sound of the gospel drew people as the scent of a summer rose and the gospel gave life.

Gospel ministry is a matter of life and death as we live it and speak it we may well have the joy of seeing people come to faith but be very clear the same message will repulsive to others. You could say the gospel is like marmite you either love it or hate it. Marmite divides and so Paul says does the gospel. Do you know the joy of seeing a contact person being drawn towards Jesus almost as the smell of cooking can draw us into the kitchen? It is great to see someone beginning to see the light and to understand the gospel – thank God for that.

But then perhaps you have had the pain of seeing someone reject the gospel (Marshall Tuckey).

### **3. Gospel ministry is from God v16b-3:5**

Seeing that the gospel has such a profound effect no wonder Paul asks the question “who is equal to such a task”? Who is equal to handing out the offer of life knowing that to reject it brings death?

Who is equal to the responsibility of sharing the gospel knowing that some may reject it?

It is a very good question isn't it? I know many of us when we think about sharing our faith feel very inadequate. We feel we don't know enough or may not be able to answer the questions others have or that we don't live good enough lives.

Paul himself was daunted by the task and the responsibility.

In addition it may well have been that those who were undermining Paul in Corinth claimed to be equal to this task but Paul certainly, despite his track record, didn't seem himself up to the task of being a gospel minister and he perhaps knew that some in Corinth didn't see him as a true minister.

It may well be that they didn't like his message. As we look at 3:1, he didn't have letters of accreditation from other churches saying he was a great minister. Then his message was new and not fitting the Jewish faith and the Law, and he seemed weak and lacking in presence, oratory skills and so on. To their mind no wonder he asked who is equal to this task?

However, Paul had a confidence that he was competent but his confidence was based solely on God, “Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God” (3:4).

His confidence was not in himself and his own abilities but in God.

#### **a. He had a confidence in the word of God v17.**

The point he made here is that while others may preach for profit either wanting to be paid to preach or made themselves popular by watering down the gospel message to make it acceptable to

their hearers, Paul would do no such thing. He saw preaching as speaking before God – God is assessing the sermon! He saw himself as a minister as one sent by God and therefore sincerity or truth was the order of the day.

**b. He had confidence because he saw God at work.** Paul saw what God had done through the gospel. He may not have letters to testify to his abilities but he had these Christians in Corinth who were like living letters. The very fact that they were Christians was testimony to the power of the gospel and to the true ministry of Paul and his colleagues.

That ministry was fulfilling what God had intended from the beginning for, as he says in 3:3 it brought the Spirit of God into the hearts of people. This was what God had promised through Jeremiah, “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.” (Jer 31:33)

Paul was competent but only because God was at work through him.

Isn't that an encouragement to us in our own day and as we seek to share the good news of God's love in Jesus?

To share the gospel with others is to share in God's work, going back to v14 “But thanks be to God...who through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him”.

It is God who is at work in and through us, as Paul points out in 3:6 he has made us competent, that is he can take you and I and our lack of understanding and our feeble attempts to explain what it is we believe, the basics of the gospel, which if you remember we brought down to five points using the fingers of our hands, God, man, God what if you accept, what if you don't, and our poor efforts to explain why we are Christians and God can use these to help others to grow towards faith in Jesus.

God is at work through you and I so we should be ready and willing to share our faith.

Are you doing that? Are you looking for the opportunity as you meet up with your contact people to bring faith into the conversation? Are you ready to ask questions that will encourage your contact person to think about the bigger things of life? Have you got that gospel outline in your mind? Have you got your own story clear so that you can relate it to what is being said? “God...through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him”. Is that what is happening through you and through me?

Paul defended his ministry to these Christians in Corinth. He was an authentic gospel minister. We are not apostles but to us is given this same gospel ministry.

We are the aroma of Christ. Our focus in this ministry will be on people as we care for and support each other, as we share our lives and our message with people, being aware for some it will bring

life but others will reject the gospel message and we do it all in the power and strength of God who alone changes lives.