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Editor's Introduction

We are now well into 2021 and hopefully you are well. I don't know what stage we will be in the fight against COVID-19 by the time you read this, but I am sure that it will still be on our radar. What an encouragement it is to know that 'the Most High rules in the kingdom of men,' Dan. 4. 17 NKJV, despite all the upheaval and uncertainty of the last twelve months.

This issue focuses on evangelism and preaching. It is essential that we remember the importance of preaching the gospel to our generation. I hope you find it as challenging as I did.

Stephen Baker

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YOUNG PRECIOUS SEED
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Paul's I am Series

BY ANDREW DUTTON, NORWICH, ENGLAND

'I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful', 2 Cor. 7. 4

'Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation', 2 Cor. 7. 4.

In our previous article, we briefly considered Paul's care for the Philippian believers. We now turn our attention to the Christians at Corinth. Although they were different local churches, both remind us of Paul's deep care and concern for the saints. With this comes the challenge relating to my concern for the people of God everywhere; just how much do I care?

We are going to consider why Paul could state 'I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful', particularly given that this joy was linked with tribulation. We'll start by getting a sense of what Paul was teaching in this section; then think about what he meant by his statement about comfort and joy, before drawing some practical lessons.

The setting in Second Corinthians

Paul's second letter to the Corinthians seems to follow a report from Titus about their 'earnest desire . . . mourning . . . fervent mind' towards him, 2 Cor. 7. 7, which caused him to rejoice. His first letter had followed a report from 'the house of Chloe, that there' were 'contentions among' them, 1 Cor. 1. 11. In it he had robustly addressed division and error in the assembly and as a result there had been good progress. Now, he could write with a rejoicing heart.

JOHN HEADING calls chapter 7 'encouragement after discouragement'¹ as it outlines Paul's rejoicing at the

repentance of the assembly. It is interesting that verse 1 concludes the previous section that deals with the character of 'servants of God', 2 Cor. 6. 4, ESV.

In 2 Corinthians chapter 6 verses 14 to 18, Paul

As a separate study, look at the lists of things beginning with the preposition 'in' from chapter 6 verse 4; these relate to the conditions for the servant of God. Then, note the occurrence of the preposition 'by' from verse 6; this relates to the qualities of the servant of God. Finally, the preposition 'as' from verse 8, relating to the acceptance of the servant of God.

teaches the Corinthians about practical holiness and separation from evil. He uses references from Leviticus and Isaiah to prove that those separated from evil to God will enjoy rich blessings. He emphasizes that as believers we must 'cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit', covering both external and internal aspects of life, and bring to completion 'holiness in the fear of God', 2 Cor. 7. 1, with the aim that no unholiness be present.

Against this backdrop of characteristics for the servants of God, plus cleansing and holiness for the people of God, Paul can say 'great is my boldness of speech toward you . . . I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful', 2 Cor. 7. 4. The Corinthians had received corrective teaching and made progress, so Paul could speak boldly, or openly; he could rejoice.

I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful

'Filled with comfort' has the idea of being encouraged and of grief being removed. The change in the Corinthian believers turned Paul's sorrow into

encouragement. Just as sin among believers should bring grief, spiritual progress among believers should bring encouragement.

The Greek word for 'exceeding', v. 4, *hyperperisseo* is only used in one other place in the New Testament; in Romans chapter 5, verse 20, 'where sin abounded, grace did much more abound', the same word is translated 'did much more abound'. STRONG defines the word as 'to overflow, to enjoy abundantly';² such was the extent of Paul's joy! It didn't reduce with difficult circumstances; this was a joy that lasted in spite of persecution.

WILLIAM KELLY writes 'Sorrow closes the heart, joy opens it; and now the apostle's gladness of heart was proportionate to the depth of his pain over saints so dear in the Lord'.³

Practical lessons

The response of the believers at Corinth to the word of God through Paul's first letter is a lesson to us. There was conviction, repentance, and change in their lives. Conviction without repentance has no lasting benefit; repentance without change is not true repentance! There is a challenge for us: how often does the word of God bring about conviction, but the moment passes and there is no change? There is a

danger that, over time, this can lead to hardness. Let us have teachable hearts, that we may diligently seek to respond to the word of God and adjust our lives.

Another lesson is the example of Paul in his state of joy. Although his overflowing joy resulted from the encouragement from the Corinthians' spiritual progress, it seemed to be his permanent condition of heart, regardless of the difficulties he endured, 'I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation', v. 4. The source of his joy was the Spirit of God and the 'spiritual blessings . . . in Christ', Eph. 1. 3, rising above the troubles and experiences of life. With the Lord's help, we can experience this overflowing joy!

'Every joy or trial falleth from above
Traced upon life's dial by the Sun of love:
We may trust Him fully all for us to do;
They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true!'

F. R. HAVERGAL

- 1 JOHN HEADING, *First & Second Corinthians: An Exposition*, Ritchie, pg. 347
- 2 JAMES STRONG, *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Hendrickson Publishers.
- 3 WILLIAM KELLY, *Notes on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Bible Truth Publishers, pg. 148.

Public Preaching

BY RICHARD BURDITT, NORTHAMPTON, ENGLAND

It must be about ten years since I first stood on a platform, red-faced and with shaking hands, to publicly preach the gospel. Here is some advice I would give to my former self, and to anyone else starting out in what can feel like a daunting part of Christian service. I have separated this advice into three parts: the content of the gospel message, how to connect with the audience, and how to present yourself.

The content of the gospel message

Perhaps the most important thing to consider when preparing to preach is the content of the message. There is a necessity to convey the foundational truths of the gospel. After all, no one can be saved without believing these truths and you cannot believe without hearing the word preached.

So, what are the essentials of the gospel? Paul boiled down the gospel message to its essence when he said, 'We preach Christ crucified', 1 Cor. 1. 23. He gives a succinct summary of the gospel in chapter 15 of the same book, 'Christ died ... he was buried, and ... rose again the third day ... he was seen', 1 Cor. 15. 3-5. The person of Christ, His death and witnessed resurrection form the very basis of the gospel message.

But gospel preaching is not just a history lesson or merely an explanation of **what** happened but also **why** it happened. Paul said that Christ died for our sins. The cross must be preached as the answer to humanity's sin.

The gospel also demands a response from those who hear it. As the crowd heard Peter's convicting message on the day of Pentecost, they asked, 'what shall we do?' Acts 2. 37. The answer was to repent and believe. The response required today is no different. God commands repentance from sin and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ.

As you prepare a message, ask yourself if this is the essence of your preaching.

How to connect with your audience

The next challenge is to preach this message in a way that connects with your audience. In the book of Acts, we read how the gospel spread out from the city of Jerusalem into all different parts of the world. Of course, this meant that the gospel preachers were addressing people of all different cultures, classes, and religious beliefs. It shouldn't surprise us that the message preached,

though unchanging in its core doctrine, varied in its presentation. Compare Acts chapter 2, where Peter preached to a Jewish audience on the day of Pentecost, with the latter part of Acts chapter 17, where Paul preached on Mars Hill to a Gentile audience steeped in Greek philosophy. Peter didn't need to tell his audience there was one God. That was fundamental to their belief. But that's where Paul had to start in an idolatrous city who raised an altar to the unknown god. Peter quoted Old Testament prophets whereas Paul, in addition to referencing scripture, cited Greek poets, but both led their audience to the same truths about Jesus Christ and the need for repentance. This is seen throughout the book of Acts. The preachers start where the audience are in their understanding and beliefs and then lead them to Christ. As much as we can gauge the thinking of our audience, we need to do the same.

How to present yourself

Let's now think about how we present ourselves when we preach. Depending on your temperament and personality, the idea of standing in front of a room of people to speak might seem like a daunting task. We might know people who ooze confidence and charisma and worry that we are not as cut out for public preaching as they are. It might surprise us, then, that Paul was not a confident public speaker. He describes himself as being amongst the Corinthians in weakness, and in fear and in much trembling, 1 Cor. 2. 3. Though his letters were weighty and powerful, his bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible, 2 Cor. 10. 10. Yet this was the man God used as a chosen vessel to bear the name of Christ before the Gentiles, Acts 9. 15. What God values is different to what the world values. God chooses the weak and despised to fulfil His purposes. Even if we do possess some natural ability to speak publicly, any fruit that comes from our preaching will be a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 1 Cor 2. 4. Therefore, our approach ought to be marked by humility, not being overly concerned with ourselves and our abilities, nor trying to adopt the style of other preachers, but relying on God's power to work through us as we are.

Principles for Progress

BY ERIC M. BAIJAL, WICK, SCOTLAND

Evangelizing

Matthew's Gospel closes by recording that the risen Lord Jesus Christ commissioned the disciples to 'teach [disciple] all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost', Matt. 28. 19. The commission has not been revoked. We each have the privilege and responsibility to witness about the greatness of the Lord Jesus to sinners perishing around us.

It only takes a brief read of the book of the Acts to observe that the early church was active, witnessing to the saving power of the Lord Jesus. They preached and witnessed about their faith in the Lord Jesus. Growth in the church was evident with many souls getting saved. Can I ask – what do you know of being an evangelist, and witnessing to the saving power of the Lord Jesus?

Collectively, are we ignoring the great commission?

Where are the young men and women with a vision for the gospel and a desire for God to be glorified in souls being saved?

The Subject

We need clarity in our mission. The apostles were to be witnesses to the Lord Jesus. We are not witnessing to the Gospel Hall or even evangelical Christianity. They were not commanded to preach a creed or reformation of life. They were commanded to preach Christ, the risen Man at God's right hand. It is easy to get sidetracked into other issues, and sometimes there will be legitimate objections that require to be tackled; but never forget that first and foremost we 'preach Christ crucified'. The preaching of Christ must involve preaching about the reason for, and necessity of, His death. We know that the Apostle Paul, for example, preached and reasoned about judgement to come in Acts chapter 17. While we should not be too formulaic in our approach, it should also involve the preaching of the resurrection from among the dead as this is the basis for our justification.

Now, sometimes, I have been put off witnessing because I would not have an opportunity to preach the gospel fully. But I should not be put off! God can use one word to prick a conscience. The priority, however, is to try to get past side issues and to get to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, if we are given an opportunity to speak to men and women about eternal matters.

The Methodology

The first century was an age marked by apparent

enlightenment so far as secular thought and culture was concerned. Yet the gospel was not communicated through the music or drama of the day. Rather, the gospel was communicated by words. In Acts chapter 11 verse 19, we learn that the gospel was communicated by conversation. Saints reasoned with contacts and took opportunities in everyday life. So should we. Our meetings for public preaching should be 'the tip of the iceberg' of evangelical testimony. In Acts chapter 11 verse 20, we then read that the gospel was also communicated by the preaching (heralding) of the word of God. 1 Corinthians chapter 1 teaches us that although men may feel there is a cleverer way of spreading the gospel than preaching or declaring it as truth, it is the divinely approved manner. God is still pleased by His Spirit to bless the preaching of His word!

Our responsibility is to spread the word. We cannot stress enough, however, that in evangelizing it is God who does the convicting and saving! To be clear, though, preaching should be understandable and culturally relevant. The content of the message is offensive to the unsaved man, but the preaching ought not to be offensive in the way it is presented. Preaching is the divinely ordained method but it is not limited to a particular location or time.

Practical Issues

Do we have the faith to believe that in a secular western society God can still bless preaching with salvation? How burdened and prayerful am I about where I am? When was the last time I was involved in a sustained period of gospel outreach? Do I carry tracts with me to hand out? Do I pray that God will give me the opportunity to tell people about His Son?

Am I willing to devote the time (perhaps giving up holidays) to be involved in sustained and special periods of evangelism? Am I evangelizing those people that I have contact with, such as my neighbours and colleagues?

This article is a very limited call to action: please think about evangelism. I heartily recommend a book called *Everyday Evangelism* by PAUL MCCAULEY and DAVID WILLIAMSON, Ritchie, 2018, which deals with the practicalities of witnessing for the Lord Jesus.

May you make progress and be used in the strengthening of God's work in our day.



Not Important

BY PHIL RICHARDSON, HARROGATE, ENGLAND

There is a sketch in the *Calvin and Hobbes* comic book that pictures Calvin looking up at the stars and shouting, 'I'm significant!'. The next panel zooms out to show us a tiny handful of the stars framed against a small picture of Calvin in the bottom left-hand corner, while in the following frame Calvin is acknowledging in a small voice, 'Said the speck of dust'.

While the two statements may seem paradoxical – individual specks of dust are not significant – they are both true. In relation to the grandeur of the universe, human beings seem nothing more than tiny bodies of matter existing in a tiny space of time, 'a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away', Jas. 4. 14. Nevertheless, we are significant enough for God to number the very hairs of our heads, Matt. 10. 30.

The psalmist captures it best when, considering the stars, he asks, 'What is man, that thou art mindful of him?' Ps. 8. 4. His question acknowledges the two separate truths Calvin struggled to reconcile: that man is significant, but also that he is insignificant.

Biblically speaking, it is true that man is nothing; he is described early on as dust, Gen. 3. 19, and later as the grass that withereth, Isa. 40. 6. This explains the query, 'What is man?' – the word 'man' here being the less dignified Hebrew noun, *enosh* emphasizing his mortality and therefore his smallness in comparison to an immortal God. This comparison is further

emphasized by the psalmist as man is juxtaposed with the vastness of the universe in verse 3 and against the authority and character of God in verse 1.

Like the Psalmist, though, I do not want to focus on the smallness of man. The psalmist spends less than one verse on this topic and even that verse ends with the reminder that God is 'mindful' of man, v. 4. He focuses rather on the significance God has placed on him and the effect this should have on us.

From the beginning, God gave man a special position. The Bible starts, 'In the beginning', Gen. 1. 1. I believe that the beginning referred to is the start of God's special relationship with mankind, the same relationship seen right through the Bible until the last recorded words of the Lord Jesus, 'Surely I come quickly', Rev. 22. 20. John chapter 14 verse 3 tells us the reason for His return is to 'receive [us] unto [himself]'. So, the Bible begins and ends with God's concern for man; in fact, the Bible as a whole is evidence that God is mindful of us.

It is John – the 'disciple whom Jesus loved', John 21. 20, a title that highlights man's special position with God – who states that the purpose of his Gospel is 'that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God', so that we might have 'life through his name', John 20. 31. The main aim of the Bible is to reveal God to sinful creatures who have no claim on Him, and its very existence is proof that God loves us.

Man's special position can also be seen in his unique creation. Adam's creation is carefully distinguished from all others in that it is exquisitely intimate. God created everything else simply by speaking, but He took time to form man's body and breathe him into existence, Gen. 2. 7. There are several differences with the creation of man in chapter 1:

1. There is a discussion within the Godhead about man's creation, 'Let us', v. 26.
2. Man is made in the image of God, v. 26.
3. Man is made in the likeness of God, v. 26.
4. Man is given dominion, v. 26.
5. Man is instructed, v. 28.

The relationship that began with our unique creation in Genesis chapter 1 is continued with all redeemed people today; in His intimate tenderness, the Lord is the 'friend that sticketh closer than a brother', Prov. 18. 24. In a day when evolution is held as scientific fact even by some professing Christians, we must remember that man was specially created by God, for God, and with the purpose of obeying and honouring God. To believe otherwise is to undermine the entire foundation of our relationship with God.

Going back to the Calvin illustration earlier, it is worth observing that he wasn't talking about mankind as a whole, but about himself personally: 'I'm significant'. The psalmist comprehends both. Not only is mankind as a species significant, so too are individual human beings. The 'son of man' here refers to any individual born since Adam, indicating that God is not just concerned with the human race but with each person who makes up that race (seeing that 'son' is singular). In fact, God is only 'mindful' of man, which suggests a mere remembrance of man, but when referring to God's relationship with the individual the psalmist uses the more intimate 'visits' which implies a greater interest. To 'visit' in this context means 'to care for and watch over'. It is a privilege that God remembers mankind as a whole; how much greater it is that He actively cares for individuals like you and me.

We may take as an example the man beside the pool of Bethesda in John chapter 5. His unimportance is highlighted by the fact that he is given no name, being merely 'a certain man', v. 5, who has 'no man . . . to put [him] into the pool', v. 7. He is so insignificant

that, over the course of thirty-eight years, he has been unable to find anyone to help him. But Jesus 'saw him' and 'knew' him. Jesus saw a man no one else saw and, more importantly, 'knew' him, a word indicating intimate knowledge, hinting at the care Jesus displayed.

The implication is simple: even if you don't feel it, you are significant. The Bible is full of 'unimportant' people who are important to God: the servant girl who told Naaman to visit Elisha, the woman the Lord healed of a twelve-year disease, the young virgin given the honour of being the mother of Jesus. It doesn't matter what others think of us, nor what we think of ourselves, but what matters is what God thinks of us. And that information is found only in the Bible. Believers of all eras cling to this revelation, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love', Jer. 31. 3.

Christians should always remember their humble origins and smallness as tiny drops in the vast ocean of time and space, but this should only throw into relief God's care for them and His willingness to use them to accomplish His programme in the world. At the National Prayer Breakfast in 2016, Senate Chaplain Dr. Berry Black said this, 'the value of an object is based on the price someone is willing to pay, and when it dawned on me that God sent His only begotten Son to die for me, no one was able to make me feel inferior again'.¹ If you feel belittled, remember you are valuable to God. If you belittle yourself or another Christian, remember that you are belittling someone God deemed so valuable that He sacrificed His Son for them. And being reminded of the value God sees in us, may we be compelled, like the psalmist in verse 9, to claim Him, 'O [Jehovah] our Lord', to give Him glory, 'how excellent is thy name', and spread His name to all we meet, 'in all the earth'.

Next time you look at the stars and, like Calvin or King David, question your significance, pause to hear heaven's reply, 'chosen' by God, Eph. 1. 4, 'loved' by Christ, Eph. 5. 2, and 'adopted' into the family of heaven, Rom. 8. 15. As the children's chorus puts it: 'He made you someone special. You're the only one of your kind'.

¹ [youtube.com/watch?v=zyvNg1kk9tQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zyvNg1kk9tQ)
14/6/2018.

The young believer and career choices – teaching

BY LUKE HOWDEN, HELIONS BUMPSTEAD, ENGLAND



I can't remember a time when I didn't want to be a primary school teacher – so the disclaimer at the outset is that I cannot speak for high school teachers.

Main commitments in work life

Teaching is like any other job – if you want it to take over your life, it will. The stereotypical teacher is caricatured as someone who won't stop talking about their job, but it doesn't have to be like that! A work-life balance is essential, and if you put boundaries in place early this job will not take away from church, family or social life. Time management is key; you must make the most of the time you have at school. I try not to take books home to mark – if that means working through part of lunch, so be it. I'd sooner come home and spend time with my wife, than look at books I could have marked at school. Ensuring you are prepared for the next day's lessons before leaving is also a great idea and means that, overall, your work can stay at work. With career progression, this would obviously change in line with increasing responsibilities and accountability.

The benefits of the job

The school holidays are obviously a huge benefit to teachers. The thirteen weeks of every year are an inarguable luxury. Although much of this is 'time off work', be under no illusions, there is always planning to be completed for the incoming term, policies to write, classrooms to tidy, and resources to be gathered as well as numerous other tasks.

This is a responsible job, but with that responsibility comes a tremendous opportunity. As a teacher, you are *in loco parentis* of other people's children for around 200 days of the year, seven hours a day. Pause for a moment and think of the influence for good that Christian teachers can have on the children in their care. I don't mean that we preach

the gospel to our class – it is not the role of the teacher to enforce their personal views on minors. We can **live** the gospel in front of them though. Remember the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5? There, the Lord Jesus taught that His followers are the light of the world and told them, 'let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven', Matt. 5. 16. The way you interact with children, care for them, learn with them and even discipline them is a witness in itself to the love of Christ.

The downsides of the job

The National Curriculum dictates what teachers teach – and whilst on the whole, purely academic and harmless, occasionally it throws up some difficulties. For example, in Year 6, children are taught about the basics of evolution. Having taught in Year 6, this can be taught as a **theory** because, after all, that is what it is. As a Christian teacher, I have no issue with **informing** the class about the theory, because they are going to hear about it sooner rather than later. Similarly, the issues that arise in sex and relationships education could cause concern for Christian teachers, but in these cases seek advice from more experienced Christian teachers if it is something that is concerning you. Having said this, very rarely do topics come up in primary teaching that cause any issues to Christian teachers.

If you are looking to embark on a career in teaching, I would highly recommend it. It is hard work, but you will have time for church responsibilities, family and a social life. The most important thing is to choose the right school with the right leadership. As with any workplace, the people at the top can either make it a great place to work – or they could make your life as a Christian a misery. Be prayerful. Take advice. Get into teaching!