

Reflections on 7 Years at Bruntsfield

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening and let's pray together. Father God, we thank you so much for this time. We thank you so much for our chance to join our hearts together in singing your praise.

Father, I thank you for this time now to just reflect on your goodness and your faithfulness and your grace. To me and to all of us over these years we've got to spend together.

So, Lord, may this be helpful. May it be honest and may it be truly glorifying to you and helpful to each of us. Amen. Well, it hasn't gone at all as expected or if we're honest, as anybody would have wanted.

Seven years is a long time in a church. It all started with such vigor, such passion and such godly ambition. But looking now after seven years, it's turned into a nightmare.

Started as a dream and has become a waking nightmare. The church has descended into factionalism.

[1 : 18] There is pride everywhere. Selfishness has infected everyone. Legalism is the order of the day. Immorality left, right and centre.

Seven years is a long time in a church. It looks busy and impressive, vibrant and real. But under the surface, it is not at all happy.

And it is far from healthy. The church, it seems, is teetering on the brink. And unless radical repentance, drastic intervention and wholehearted devotion are employed, then it will soon be last one out.

Turn off the lights and lock the door. Feel it will not continue in its current state. And carrying on regardless will only bring devastation. Peel back the curtain and the superficial brightness quickly dissolves into doom, darkness and division.

Things must change or this church will not last. I am of course talking about the church in Corinth around 58 AD.

[2 : 28] It is about seven years since the apostle Paul was in Corinth. Paul strode into the city alone and with much fear and trembling.

He was there for about two-ish years. And he helped establish a real church of Jesus Christ. Right behind enemy lines in the pagan, promiscuous and perilous city of Corinth.

Now though, Paul has gotten wind via word of mouth and a letter that all is not well in Corinth. And from his prison cell in Ephesus in 58 AD, he writes a letter to call out their failings, mend the fissures and correct the faults of this flailing church.

It is going to be an explosive letter which will be tough to read and difficult to hear. It will catalogue the issues prevalent in the church which are legion.

There is division, quarrelsomeness, departure from the gospel, departure from the cross, departure from Paul, grievous immorality, pride, gracelessness, childishness, worldliness, arrogance, folly, conceitedness, lovelessness, exhibitionism, insubordination, super spirituality, asceticism, a crisis of leadership, false teaching, lawsuits, and stagnant immaturity to name but a few.

[4 : 00] Yet against this backdrop, Paul starts the letter to the Corinthian church in the most remarkable way.

As you think about this church and its problems and the pain and the grief that Paul feels for them and the state they've gotten themselves into, he starts the letter in the most remarkable way.

So if you've got a Bible, please turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 1. And Paul writes this, Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and our brother Sosthenes to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.

For in him you have been enriched in every way with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge that God, thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you.

[5 : 32] Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will also keep you firm to the end so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

God is faithful. He was called you into fellowship with his son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. And it's this eight verses that I want to just, nine verses that I just want to focus our time on this morning. Evening. See at the outset that though Paul is going to give them an epistle-flavored apostolic rollicking over the course of the next 16 chapters, he starts in an incredibly gracious, incredibly positive and incredibly conciliatory manner.

Just see that nine times in these nine verses he talks about Jesus. This opening is absolutely saturated and centered upon Jesus Christ.

It is an introduction I think that helps us review our last seven and a bit years together. In a way that allows thanksgiving but also propels us all on into all that the future will hopefully hold.

[7 : 01] So look with me at verses two and three. Paul says that this is a real church. It is a real church.

Look how he addresses them. To the church of God in Corinth. Paul does not say that they are a church. Or a part of a church.

Or pseudo church. Or quasi church. Or church light. Or looks like a church, sounds like a church but actually isn't a church. He is very confident to the church of God in Corinth.

He says that they are bona fide, legit, absolutely church. And they say as a real church.

They are marked by three things. It is made up of those that have been sanctified in Christ Jesus. That is, they are justified in the past.

[8 : 06] They have placed their faith in Jesus, placed both their feet on the rock of Jesus Christ. And through their faith they are justified before God forever. They are sanctified.

Past tense. In Christ Jesus. This church is made up of Jesus trusting people. Note that they have a present as well.

That is the past. This is the present. That those who have been sanctified are now called to be his holy people. That their personal righteousness is to catch up with their positional righteousness. In God's sight they are clean but on the ground. They are to be working towards sanctified. To be holy. To allow the work of the Holy Spirit to change them from the inside out.

That is those that have trusted Jesus they are now to be set apart for him. To be God's holy people. To be who they are in Christ.

[9 : 10] And see thirdly that they are a united people. They are those that are together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Their Lord and ours. That everyone who knows the Lordship of Jesus is a member of the church. Together unity not in a class or a language or a race or a standing or an ethnicity or an opinion or a tradition.

But one in Christ. Corinth is a real church. Paul will actually say in 1 Corinthians chapter 9 verse 2. That the Corinthian church is the seal of his apostleship. He says if you want to know that I'm a real apostle let me show you the Corinthians. Not many of us would show people the Corinthians. We'd be going have you met the Philippians? These two women that don't really get on but the rest is pretty good. But not Paul. He says Corinth is the seal of my apostleship.

[10 : 17] And I think similarly as I look back on seven years at Brunsfield. I'm so thankful that this is a real church.

That we haven't just been wasting our time. We haven't just been dressing up on a Sunday and going through the motions. But I am so thankful that it's a real church that's all about Jesus. That's made up of people who have trusted Jesus. Who are trying and pursuing godliness in the present. And who are not cultish.

Or exclusive. Or narrow minded. But are united with everyone everywhere who calls on Jesus Christ as their Lord.

And this has been the thrill to be the pastor here. It isn't this building magnificent as it is and getting more magnificent by the month.

[11 : 18] It isn't our music. That is just so helpful to me. It's not our activities. It's not even your trade breaks appreciated as they have been.

The perpetual thrill for me as pastor of this church has always been Jesus. It's been his person, his work, his glory.

And to have a front row seat to see the impact he's had on people's lives. That has been the joy of the last seven years. To see Jesus be the anchor in hardship.

The joy in good times. The hope in death. And the Lord of lives. That is why I look back on Brunnsfield with such fondness. That will be my lasting memory.

That this is a real church where Jesus is the most important person. I remember at my induction. I read from Luke 10 verse 20.

[12 : 17] When Jesus has sent out the 72 and they return. And they're so excited about all that they have done and seen. And Jesus says this. Do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you.

But rejoice that your names are written in heaven. May we, may I, may you. Never lose the joy of that salvation.

Or become inoculated to the glory. And the hope that is ours. In Christ Jesus. I also think that there's a wonderful unity at Brunnsfield.

Over seven years I've had the chance to visit quite a few churches. It's like being on day release. And there is something special about Brunnsfield.

That you look out on grey hair and no hair and brown hair and black hair and blonde hair. And everyone just sticks together. I look back on seven years and I can't think of one person that's left under a cloud.

[13 : 24] That we can testify that grace has been sufficient. That we have been together as those who call on the name of our Lord Jesus.

Their Lord and us. I'm also delighted that Brunnsfield is knitted into a wider network of brothers and sisters in the city.

I remember going to a pastors and leaders lunch down in Pilrig Street. About the probably third week I was here. People asked me who I was and what I did.

And I said, oh, I was the new pastor at Brunnsfield Evangelical Church. I honestly thought they were going to have to teach me how to use a knife and fork. Because nobody knew anything about Brunnsfield.

Really, from the people that were there. And yet I'm so pleased that over the seven years we have hung out with, labored alongside, rejoiced with, prayed for, mourned with.

[14 : 28] Those from across the city who call on the name of the Lord Jesus. And we've done it together. That it seems as the air turns toxic. As hostility towards Christianity crowds in.

We need each other. We can't just silo ourselves off or batten down the hatches. That we need others and others need us.

And it is great to be involved in a larger thing than just ourselves. Of loved being part of the East of Scotland Gospel Partnership. And the encouragement and the support.

And the fact that you get to see all sorts of different churches. And rejoice with them and share with them. Share in their struggles and pray for them.

It's been a great thing. That this church has been and I hope will always be. A church that is together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[15 : 33] Their Lord. And. Ours. Secondly I think verses 4 to 6. We see a real thankfulness.

Paul writes. I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way. With all kinds of speech and with all knowledge.

God thus confirming our testimony about Christ. Among you. Paul writes about his thankfulness for the Christians in Corinth. I don't think he's being sarcastic.

Even though he's going to write about all the ways. They're getting it wrong. And how they have caused him such pain. He says I always thank God. For you.

He says they're very gifted. Despite he's going to spend a lot of the letter talking about how they're using that gifting wrongly. He still rejoices for the grace they've been given. In Christ Jesus. He says they're a group of immensely gifted people.

[16 : 38] In whom Christ Jesus is at work. In whom God is supplying all of their needs.

As I look across Brunnsfield. For these seven years I'm overwhelmed and so thankful for the incredible people he has brought together in this place. It is a remarkable family of individuals.

From the seasoned saints who have been a wonderful model of prayerfulness and faithfulness over the long haul. I can't write or think of all the things I've learnt from Archie over these seven years. About what consistent Christian living looks like. And how it what it is looks like to keep on going over the long haul. There's many others. Who are just remarkably stable.

Who every day just take one step a little bit closer to Jesus. And it's wonderful. To have seen that and to learn from it. To have great joy about the couples who met in this very room.

[17 : 51] Who were now married and flourishing in their faith. On the first day I was here Rachel McClatchy now Towler arrived. And I remember after the breaking of bread service.

Going to talk to her to make sure she didn't leave. But would stay for the all age. How little did I know that there was also a certain young man in the church. Who had also noticed a young Rachel McClatchy.

And to have seen them grow together. Get married together. And now be ready to step out in faith. To go to Zambia together is wonderful. One of the things that's always been in my prayer diary. Is that may Brunfield be a place that not only supports mission. But sends mission. And I'm so excited that just on the cusp of my leaving. We're going to send two great young Christians to Zambia.

To turn it upside down medically. And spiritually. I'm so thankful for the exploding Sunday school. That this year at the Nativity Play.

[18 : 57] Everyone's not going to play six roles each. But we're going to have enough. To put on a full. Nativity Play. And they're so well served by Peter.

I've worked with Peter for five and a bit years. And I have learnt so much from him. I remember saying that perhaps we should hire a youth pastor.

And people thought that was a bit weird. Because we didn't really have that many children at the time. Then we were so thankful that Peter applied. And Peter was employed. Peter's almost as well been like my psychiatrist.

Over these five years. That when it's got a bit tough. I've gone through and sat on his couch. And he's told me that it's all going to be alright. It's probably due to his fellowship.

That we've made it to seven years. If I'm honest. But it's not just Peter. There are so many faithful Sunday school leaders. Who work tirelessly. To make it happen.

[19 : 56] It has been wonderful. And something I will be so thankful for. For many years to come. We've had musicians. Who have served us week in week out. With exquisite talent.

With great humility. And with remarkable faithfulness. And to be in a church that takes worship seriously. And sings well together is great. And on the days that I haven't quite been feeling it. To hear all of you sing along. Has been very very helpful to my soul. I'm so thankful for the elders. Who have shown great patience. And faith and care.

As we partner together in the gospel. They are remarkable men. To the many people who work so hard behind the scenes.

Making Brunfield work. And keeping the thing afloat. From those who polish the pews. Week in week out. To make sure that all our hymn books always fall off. To the many gallons of coffee that I've drunk.

[20 : 57] Made by Sylvia and Alistair so faithfully over the years. And to the tons of tray bakes I have consumed. All done without anyone noticing.

But I've made a real difference. And I'm so thankful. To now be in a staff team of seven is great. So different from the days that I used to rattle around this place.

I remember about this time of year in the first year. I used to be in my office. We didn't have like timed lights in those days. And I used to like run down the corridor trying to turn off all the lights. Because when it was dark and empty I was really scared. And it was really creepy. And I tried to get out the door and not leave any lights on. And if I had I'd be very worried about going back in.

To turn them off. It's been great to hang out with the staff team. And they're great. They're a great bunch. They're a great team.

[21 : 54] And it's been great to learn from them and work with them. I'm also thankful that this is turning into a training hub. That we're investing in people.

And we're giving them opportunity and training. And then trusting that God will use them to do great things. Maybe in this church but maybe further afield. That we've taken an interest in expending ourselves for the Christian good of Scotland.

And I'm very thankful. So look back over seven years. I'm just so thankful for having been here. And so humbled to consider all the grace that God has poured into lives.

And been poured out for others in this place. I think there is great potential still to unlock. I think whoever comes in next. There's still a lot of work to do.

But it's been great to be with you for this part of this journey. Thirdly I think in this passage we see there's real challenge.

[23 : 00] It says therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait. For our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. Paul tells them that because of God's faithfulness to them they've not lacked anything.

They've never been in want. And I think that would be our testimony. That God has always supplied for our needs.

He's been there when we've needed him. We've always had enough money. We've always got through when we doubted we would. And we've stayed together because of him through thick and thin.

We can testify that we have not lacked anything. But I think there's a real challenge in this verse. Because it says we don't lack anything while we wait.

For our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. And the Bible is always clear that waiting time is a dangerous time. That we're not here waiting.

[24 : 07] We're not twiddling our thumbs. We're not waiting in some kind of waiting room for something to happen.

That we're waiting for the end. For the Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. And waiting time is testing time. Whether we're going to keep the main thing the main thing.

Whether we're going to hold this book tight. Whether we're not just going to assume it but we're going to proclaim it. Whether we're going to resist the drift.

Whether we're going to keep an eternal perspective in mind. Because we're waiting for the Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. And that will stop us feathering our nest. Or getting so preoccupied by the treasures of this world.

The waiting time is testing time to keep the Lord Jesus front and center. And not let him drift to the periphery. But waiting time is also working time.

[25 : 11] It's time as we keep the end in view. It's working time as we work on our personal holiness. As we prepare ourselves for all that eternity will be.

And as we look out on a lost neighborhood. In a lost city. In a majoritively lost country. It is time to make much of him. That waiting time is working time.

Waiting time has every chance of complacency drifting in. Of things becoming front and center that shouldn't be. Of heresy drifting in. Of wolves not sparing the flock.

But waiting time is to be working time. Waiting time is where we don't drop the ball. Where we don't free wheel.

Where we don't coast. Waiting time is to be a time where we double our efforts. And then redouble our efforts. Because the end will come.

[26 : 13] Jesus will wrap up history like an old garment. And at that point there will be no space for grace. But at the moment there is. And what this community needs.

What this city needs. What this country needs most of all. Is knowledge. About the real Lord Jesus. That in this.

Time of transition. There is a real challenge. That we eagerly wait. That we earnestly wait. That we zealously wait. For our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

And then finally. And with this I'm finished. I think as in a month's time we go our separate ways. I have real confidence.

Let me read verses 8 to 9 again. He. That is Jesus. Will also keep you firm to the end. So that you will be blameless. On the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[27 : 21] God is faithful. He has called you into fellowship with his son. Jesus Christ our Lord. It is very nearly time for Aileen and I to leave.

And as well as being thankful for our time here. As well as being so excited by our time here. We also leave with the utmost confidence.

That things will continue. That Brunsfield will go from strength to strength. That if Paul can have real confidence about Corinth. I think I can have real confidence about Brunsfield.

See how Paul ends the verses. This church that has tied itself in knots. That has so many wrinkles and wrongdoings. And yet he says with such confidence that he has real hope for them. Hope not in them. But hope in his God. He says Jesus will also keep you firm to the end. Jesus. We don't have to get ourselves through.

[28 : 31] We don't have to pull our socks up. We have to remain in Jesus. If we do the John 15 thing of remaining in him. We will bear much fruit.

And he will get us to the end. Then look at verse 9. If we needed more confidence. God is faithful. I met a good friend of mine on Monday. A pastor. He's the pastor of another church in the city. And he asked me. Was I worried about leaving Brunsfield?

And I could honestly say I'm not. I don't have a single fear. Except unemployment. I don't have a single fear.

Not because of the leadership team that will remain. Although you're in good hands. I don't have a single fear. Not because of the culture we have built.

[29 : 33] Although I think it's a good culture. Where we take the Bible seriously. And try to live it out together. The overwhelming reason I have absolutely no fear.

Is because Jesus will keep you firm to the end. And that God is faithful. That the things he starts he always finishes. That his church will be built.

And nothing can stand in his way. The overwhelming reason that I leave with great confidence. And excitement to see all that will happen here.

In the coming days and weeks and months and years. Is because Jesus will keep you firm to the end. And that God is faithful. When I finished up mission service in Lebanon.

I was also finishing with the guy who had been there. Since the foundation of the school. And I said to him. Are you worried? About leaving what will happen to the school? He said to me. John. If I thought it depended on me.

[30 : 34] I would have never come. And I think I can leave. With the same thing. In my heart. The pastor also asked me.

And with this I finish. How I'd like to be remembered at Brunsfield. And I think it would be in accord with Acts 20 verse 35. As Paul concludes his pep talk.

To the Ephesian elders. He says. And I hope this. For my time here. I hope this would sum it up. That by this kind of hard work.

We must help the weak. Remembering the words of the Lord Jesus himself. It is more blessed to give. Than to receive. It has been great work.

It has been hard work. It has been long work. It is work. It is work. I am so thankful for. It is work. That I am still excited.

[31 : 34] By. And it is work. That I'll be looking on from a distance. To see it go from strength. To strength. Let me pray. Father God. Father God.

I am so thankful. For this family of people. In this. Your church. Father. I thank you that it's all about Jesus. Father.

It's all for Jesus. It's all been done by. Jesus. And so. Father. I hope with that in mind. It would have borne fruit.

That will last. Father. I'm so thankful. For Brunsfield Evangelical Church. For all the work. That you've been doing. And for the great vantage point.

I've had. To see all that you've been doing. Lord. I pray that we would hear the challenge. As we go on into the. Future. Lord.

[32 : 30] That we are to eagerly. Wait. To faithfully. Wait. To servant heartedly. Wait. For our Lord Jesus Christ. To be revealed. And Father.

As that day draws near. We might redouble our efforts. We might look out on this lost community. In a lost city. And that you might break our hearts. And that we might hold out the word of life.

The Lord Jesus. Who has a complete monopoly. On saving grace. And Father. I thank you that. As this season. Draws to a close. Thank you that we have absolute confidence.

Not because of who we are. Or what we have done. But because of who you are. And the fact that Jesus Christ. Will keep us.

To the end. So Lord. May this continue to all be about him. May all our trust be in him. May all our hope be about him. May all our joy flow from him.

[33 : 31] May he truly continue to be. Our all in all. Father. We pray all this in his name. And for his glory. Amen. Heath ■■ beach. Amen. Tonight.

Bill. Not today. Bless himself. Will it be his love? Otherwise. Well, never send this time. Money. Life brother. Nothing much Thomas. but God. If you run on the woman, we just want to do everything on Earth.épest. Yeah.

Yep. Alright. Hunt the man. It'll only step down there. Literally step Mole. Yep. May all our hope. Pray all. But God. Let us know what I know.