

The Real Deal

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- [0 : 0 0] Thank you so much, Johan and Amy and Zachy back. Zach's back. Well done, buddy. And love that you came up and the first thing you did was offer a handshake.
- It made me more determined to give you the biggest bear hug after the service as well. We do hugs here, not handshakes. But great to see everybody. And what a special morning. These really are just highlights in our church calendar.
- And what we're going to do now just for the next 20 minutes or so is just turn to the Bible. And this is what we do as a church every Sunday morning as we gather. We just work our way through a different book of the Bible.
- It's one of the core beliefs that we have, that when we open our Bibles, that this is no ordinary book. No, we hear the voice of the living God. We hear the voice, the word of our creator.
- And the Christian is someone who's found that to be true. Or here's how a man called Christopher Ashe, he puts it, the word of God gives us the only reliable map of the world as it truly is.
- [1 : 0 9] In fact, I wonder if you heard the survey that was done a few weeks ago. I remember driving home a few weeks ago listening to Radio 2 and they were reporting the fact that, did you know the number of the Bibles bought in the UK between 2019 and 2024?
- In that period, it increased by 87%. Now, that's just fascinating, isn't it? All sorts of reasons people would want to buy a Bible, but we'd be naive, I think, to reject that conclusion that there's something going on in our culture right now as people regain an interest in spiritual things.
- But this is what God's word claims to be, claims to be his voice. And so that's why we open this every single Sunday morning. And particularly to all of us today, particularly if you're here and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, maybe you've come, you're one of Zach's friends or family, maybe you've just come along this Sunday.
- We'd love that you're here. But here's the invitation to come to the Bible and to taste and see that the Lord is good. And so we've been journeying through this letter of two Corinthians together since the autumn.
- And this is the final installment in this little series that we've been in. This letter written by a man called Paul. And he's written it to a church that he founded, made up of people that he knows and loves living in the city of Corinth.
- [2 : 3 7] And Corinth is a city that loves the impressive. Loves the impressive. And Paul's big idea to this church is that they've been dazzled by these super apostles who've offered to them a Jesus who's on the world's terms, if you like.
- And they're beginning to buy it, beginning to think about it. And Paul's been pleading with them, no, no, come back to me and my gospel. Maybe you can think about it like this. I remember well my cousin returning from holiday a few years ago.
- And she's parading a brand new pair of sunglasses. And ones that she was telling everyone that she'd got at a bargain price. But on closer inspection, what she'd actually been sold weren't a pair of Ray-Bans.

They were in fact a pair of Ray-Bombs. But she knew exactly what she was doing and we all had a good laugh at this. But have you ever had an experience like that in your life? You've been left asking yourself, saying, hang on a minute.

Is what I've been sold? Is what I've got in my hands? Is it the real thing? Paul knows that that's exactly what these Christians in this church in Corinth are asking themselves when it comes to the message about Jesus.

[3 : 57] That he's passed on to them and that they've got in their hands. They're asking themselves, is this the real deal? The reason they're asking the question is that a group of people that Paul ironically calls, if you've got the text there, verse 11 of chapter 12, he calls them the super-impostles.

And they've infiltrated this church family and they're spreading a different message about a different Jesus and what it means to follow him. One which elevated them in their claims to higher plane spirituality.

And at the same time, it undercuts and downplays Paul and his message of weakness and a crucified Jesus that he's been offering to the Corinthians. And you'll see a concise summary of that in verse 4 of chapter 13.

Paul's speaking about Jesus. And what's the crux of his message? It's that he's been crucified in weakness. And that's the truth, isn't it?

That the Christians follow a king who came to earth, was rejected by his own, and who was ultimately handed over to death. This is our king. This is the king that we follow.

[5 : 11] The cross, the place where he dies. It looks to the watching world. It did then, it does now. It still looks like utter foolishness, weakness, and it looks like defeat.

And yet, see Paul write this about the same Jesus who rose from the dead. He says, he now lives by the power of God. And when we put our faith in this Jesus, and that's the invitation to all of us this morning, when we put our faith and trust in his work on the cross for us, like Zach was saying, the place where he goes, he bears the punishment that our sins deserve on himself.

When we put our faith in him, we can know complete forgiveness of our past, of our present, and of our future sins. He takes our sins and he shares with us his resurrection life.

If you want to think about it like this, Jesus is the ultimate impact sub. The cross is the place. It is the place of the great substitution. He takes our place.

And by faith in him, we get his life. And he shares with us his spirit. Do you see Paul write that? Who comes to dwell, to live in, the believer.

[6 : 40] Changing us not from the outside in, but changing us from the inside out, and changing us to be more into the likeness of Jesus.

That theological heart of this letter, we saw a number of weeks ago, chapter 3, verse 18. And we, Paul writes, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, just means we look at Jesus, are being transformed.

And that's that wonderful caterpillar, two butterfly word, metamorphic, being transformed. We're being transformed into his image. With ever increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the spirit.

So this message of the crucified Jesus, dying on a cross, but risen, and living by the power of God.

Paul's saying, that's what my message of weakness does. And so before Paul comes back, verse 1 of chapter 13, do you see it? For the third visit, he wants the Corinthians to wake up and make their choice.

[7 : 58] No more sitting on the fence. No more foot in both camps. No more thinking that they can have their cake and eat it. The decision really is, will they continue to entertain these false apostles and their message of spiritual superiority, a Jesus in the image of the world, or will they be restored to and all in with his gospel?

It's the only thing that works, Paul's saying. It's the only thing that works. And here we are some 2,000 years later and hearing Zach's testimony this morning, being reminded that it's the only thing that works, that can truly transform a person from the inside out.

And so Paul says, as he finishes his letter, verse 5 of chapter 13, he says, examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith.

Test yourselves, which is code for stop, think, consider, and choose today who you are going to serve. And the Bible's full of those moments, isn't it?

If you know the Bible story, it's full of those moments where God raises up leaders who say, challenges people, which way are you going to go? Which way are you going to serve? That's Paul's plea.

[9 : 25] And yet here's the encouragement to them, verse 6, Paul wants them to know as they do this, that he has passed the test. Right? He's the real deal.

Compared to these super apostles, he's the real deal. Two quick things we see in this passage that show us that he is the real deal. Here's number one. It is how he perseveres with people.

So these Corinthians have seen in Paul the marks of a true apostle. And he says them at verse 12 of chapter 12, signs and wonders and miracles.

You can think of those things like God's public seal of approval on Paul and his message in the eyes of the watching world. And he never took money from them as so many speakers in Corinth did.

And they struggle with that. They're thinking to themselves that you don't take money. What's the catch? We've got in our culture that phrase. And growing up in the west of Scotland had this all the time. There's no such thing as a free lunch.

[10 : 28] What's the catch? What's the string? And Paul said, no, I just wanted you to see that what I was offering, my message, wasn't just another first century TED talk that the super apostles were doing.

It was something completely different. I wanted you to see it in your minds. And yet the Corinthians continue to question his credibility. And yet here he is, verse 13, talking about his plans, not once but twice, to go back a third time.

And you ask yourself, why not just give up on them at this point? Baseball umpire, strike one, strike two, I'm out of there on strike three.

Plenty more spiritual fish in the sea. Why does he not give up on them? Answer, because he loves them. Verse 14, the only way he can think to describe it is that he's like a parent.

Do you see it? He's like a parent. That's his heart for his children. That's how he sees this relationship. You know, our oldest girl turned 10 a few weeks ago struck me that I have now been a parent for a decade.

[11 : 39] And of all the mistakes that I've made and all the regrets that I have, I just say the old cliché is true. Where does the time go? But see if I had to sum it up in two words, the things that the Lord has taught me, sum it up in two words, joyful sacrifice.

Some days you're playing good cop, some days you're playing bad cop, but really at the end of the day you'll do anything for them. to see them continue to grow and flourish. And that's what he's saying here.

Verse 14. I'm not a one man traveling salesman that as soon as the interest is dried up, I'm moving on and getting a new patch. I'm just following the money.

What's Paul saying? I don't want your stuff. I'm here for your stuff. We live in a world like that, don't we? That so often that we wonder, why are people friends with me? Is there something that they're not telling me?

Is there something that they want? But he's saying, I didn't want your stuff. I'm genuine. I don't need your applause. I take it the super apostles, Paul knows fine well that that is tied up with their interest in the Corinthians.

[12 : 47] He's saying, I don't want your stuff. I want you. In fact, verse 15, I will gladly spend and be spent for your well-being.

So why does he continue to go back? Why does he continue to have these Corinthians in his heart? Why does he continue to persevere with them? Because he loves them.

It's the mark of Christ's stamp of approval and the shape of Christ in his life that he perseveres with people.

And secondly, here's the second thing that shows you to the real deal. He's really serious about sin. Again, see Paul's heart for these believers, verse 19.

Everything that he does, everything he does is for their strengthening. You might have building up there. It's the same thing. The skin in the game is that he wants them to live lives that display to the world God's glory as they grow over time bit by bit, slowly by slowly, one step back, two steps forward, grow more like Jesus.

[14 : 02] And that's how he wants to find them on this third visit when he goes back. He doesn't want to find, do you see how he lists the things? A church full of discord.

Verse 20. A culture of jealousy, of rage, of selfish ambition, of slander, of gossip, of arrogance, of disorder, of sexual immorality.

Now, why does he name it all? That's what I've been asking myself this week. Why not just summarize it as unhealthy culture? I take it Paul knows that this stuff is endemic in Corinth, right?

You read 1 Corinthians, the one just before this, and you see it everywhere. Paul knows that this stuff is all over the place as the culture begins to seep into the lives of the church.

But I also, he take it, he names it so that when they examine themselves, when they stop, that they'll see it in their lives. It's like when we all get out of bed in the morning and we stand in front of the mirror and you see bed heads, makeup everywhere, stuff in your teeth and you just think to yourself, I need a shower.

[15 : 25] That's the kind of thing that Paul's saying here. When he shows them it, he's showing them the mirror and he's saying, do you see this stuff as you examine yourself in your heart?

Even if it's the roots of it, Paul wants them to nip it in the bud. And this is the truth, isn't it, that we're celebrating this morning and remembering that God has saved the Christian out of the old pattern of life.

He's called us out of and from the darkness to live in the light and to live for him. A Christian is not just someone who's made a few different life choices.

A Christian is somebody for whom Jesus has sought and bought and died for on the cross. The Spirit lives inside, the old has gone and the new has come.

And one of the telltale signs of the Spirit's work in our lives is that we see it for what it is. And the Spirit in us, he changes our desires.

[16 : 27] So the things that we used to love, we now think to ourselves, that is darkness. I once heard somebody talk about this like orange juice.

Many of us love orange juice, I imagine. However, I imagine none of us like it just after we've brushed our teeth. And why is that?

I take it it's because our palate has changed. And that's the kind of change that Paul's talking about here. When Christ has come and invaded your life, when the kingdom has broken in there, friends, he changes our palates, he changes our spiritual tastes.

The sin we used to find enticing and almost, can I say, endorphin producing, we now find odious. And I wonder if the super apostles are wandering around saying this stuff, it's not ideal, but it's okay.

It's just part of life. Maybe the Christians have found in these super apostles are more palatable Christianity. Really, they're like little children who run to mum and get one answer.

[17 : 41] They don't like that answer and then they run to dad and try and get a different answer. At least that's how it works in our house. But Paul says, if I come and see it, I'll be so grieved if I find that you haven't seen the word there, repented of it.

Why? Not just because he's got his tail up. It grieves God's heart. And out with faith in Jesus, friends, it brings God's judgment.

And so we've got to ask ourselves, where do we see ourselves in this list? I think so often my problem, friends, I wonder if it's your problem as well, is that when we see this stuff in our lives, we put out the bunting.

When in actual fact, we should be waving the red flag. We need people in our lives who will call us out in love on this stuff.

Paul is serious about sin. Because what's on offer here is life knowing the living God, life with the God who created us, and life lived the way that the God who made us designed it to be lived, where we don't run away from him to the darkness, but to repent, to find forgiveness in Jesus, what he's done for us at the cross, and turn back to the God who made us and loves us, who made us in his image, and who made us to live in relationship with him.

[19 : 11] That's what's on offer this morning. Paul's series about sin, verse 2 of chapter 13, he's warning them. Again, he's not mincing his words, is he? He's warning them.

And if he returns and he sees blatant sin in this church family, he will not spare calling it out, calling a spade a spade. Why? Because he loves these people and he loves the Lord and his glory and renown.

He's not afraid to say the hard thing and make the right call. Verse 10, he does it all under the authority given him by the risen Jesus. And just notice, just as we finish this morning, how counter-cultural and otherworldly this is.

When our world says, let your heart and passions run free like wild bison on the plane, Paul says, cease sin for what it is and put it to death.

In our world says, you need to live your truth. Paul says, you need to hear God's truth. No matter how unpopular it makes me, no matter how much you want me gone, because Jesus says, the truth will set you free.

[20 : 28] Now here's the question as we bring this together this morning. Who does Paul remind you of here? And the answer is Jesus. The great pursuer of wayward souls.

You know, there was once an English poet called Francis Thompson. Do you know what he once called Jesus in one of his poems? He called him the hound from heaven. Jesus came from heaven.

He came with our scent in his nostrils. He came to seek us and to save us. And the wonderful truth for every single believer is that Jesus came looking for us well before we ever went looking for him.

And the truth is, and Zach, you hear this this morning, that Jesus doesn't give up on us. Faith in him means that no matter if you are struggling this morning, friends, know that his grip on you is way stronger than your grip on him.

Jesus is not like an employer who having hired someone is saying to himself a few months in, I wish I'd asked a few more questions at interview.

[21 : 42] When he died on the cross, he died for all of our sin. He knew exactly what he was taking on. And the truth is that we have given Jesus ample evidence for him to give up on us.

And yet the wonder of grace is that none of it has changed his mind about us. And so Paul warns and he loves and he woos and he says to the Corinthians to be restored to my gospel is to be restored to Jesus who loves you and holds you.

You know, just as we close, I remember one of my first Sundays at Brunsfield nearly 13 years ago and some of you might have been around then to have witnessed this event. There were three Chinese girls who came to Edinburgh for a university placement and they were here before heading home.

And as I got here, I remember hearing stories about how they'd come to faith during their time in Scotland and I witnessed their baptism. It was a wonderful morning seeing three people being baptized but I remember in particular one of those girls who will just call Jay because of the live stream meeting this girl called Jay and Jay was so aware of what it would cost her to go back to China and to declare that she followed Jesus.

What it was going to cost her in her society, what it was going to cost her in terms of her family, what it potentially could have cost her in terms of her career aspirations and being really blown away by this girl who was really prepared to count the cost for following Jesus.

[23 : 28] But here was the million dollar question. Is he worth it? Is he worth it? And we knew we wouldn't hear from her for a long, long time just because of the risk involved in communication but a few years went by and I remember the day when John and I, John who I worked with at the time he used to be the former pastor here, got the shortest of emails from her and he just simply said, got engaged, husband and I going to Bible college hoping to plant a church and that was it.

Please pray. But he was this young girl who moved to this country, fell in love with Jesus, found in Jesus someone who knew her, who had died for her, who loves her and was holding her and thought, I want to follow him with the rest of my days when I go back home, fully prepared to count the cost of following Jesus, our crucified king.

And so let's be encouraged as we hear Zach's story this morning. Is he worth it? Is he worth it? You know, together resoundingly we say, don't we, as we come together on a Sunday morning, yes he is.

So let me just close then by reading these words as we pray from verse 11. Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice.

Strive for full restoration. Encourage one another. Be of one mind. Live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

[25 : 08] Greet one another with a holy kiss. Zach, you'll get one of them later. All God's people here send their greetings and here's how we leave it. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen. Amen. And so Father, we thank you for this morning and we just thank you for being reminded again that you, Lord Jesus, are the one who came to seek and to save.

you are the one in whom there is life and life to the full. And Father, we thank you this morning for being reminded of the challenge to make the decision but also being reminded of the encouragement that it is that there is none like him.

Father, convince our souls this morning whatever's going on in our lives as we contemplate that question, is he worth it? to follow this crucified king, to embrace the pattern of weakness being the way of strength.

Is he worth it? Father, convince our souls this morning. Yes, he is. And so it's in his strong and in his mighty name we pray. Amen. Amen.

[26 : 24] Amen. Amen.