



Great Expectations 2 Cor 4:13-5:1

At school, we were exposed to the works of Charles Dickens and the particular one I remember is the one we had to do for O Level: Great Expectations. Actually I always found Dickens a bit long-winded but what brought it to life was the film starring John Mills as the older Pip who made it in life due to an anonymous benefactor who had great expectations of him. They turned out to be well founded as he became successful in London. Of course the twist in the story was that he thought that his benefactor was the rich but very eccentric Miss Havisham whereas he was bankrolled by the criminal he helped as a boy, Abel Magwitch who had been transported but returned to Britain to find out how his young beneficiary had done!

No twists in the tale in tonight's story. The great expectation that Paul had was that his trust in God was complete and he had great expectations of glory – no catches, no twists: *for we know that when this tent we live in--our body here on earth--is torn down, God will have a house in heaven for us to live in, a home he himself has made, which will last forever*

I found this passage topical as it has been along the lines of what I have been preaching about in the morning services. It's because it deals with the important notion that good mission is essential to the spiritual growth of the church. If people are coming to Christ, then it makes a huge difference to our perspective on life and worship.

To recap on previous sermons, Paul is being forced to defend himself to the Corinthians because of the criticism of some about his motives for preaching. He uses a passage from the Old Testament to describe why he shared the good news despite the criticism of others and the dangers that he faced. He quotes Psalm 116:10 I believed therefore I spoke. Speaking is a consequence of trusting Jesus. *I spoke because I believed.* I find the rest of that verse in the LXX quite biographical for Paul Ps115:1 LXX (116:10) *I believed therefore I spoke but I was brought very low.* There were many occasions where Paul faced dangers and criticisms for what he did. He was brought low and elsewhere in this letter he describes his trials for the gospel more fully. Why didn't he give up – because of his great expectations!

But there's more: *14 We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus to life, will also raise us up with Jesus and take us, together with you, into his presence.* We speak out because we believe. It's all about the amazingness of trusting Christ makes us speak. We are going to be raised up and we are going to spend eternity together in the presence of Jesus. You'll remember that I preached on Romans 10:9 a couple of weeks ago. There were two ideas to that verse. Confession and belief. And the believing was that God had raised Jesus from the dead. And we have it again here: *We know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus to life, will also raise us up with Jesus and take us, together with you, into his presence.* Trusting Jesus isn't just about our sins being forgiven, but the promise of eternal life. There's glory at the end of all this. That's why if you look at the book of Acts, the resurrection was so central to his preaching. It was an antidote to the fatalism of much Greek philosophy and it remains an answer to the fatalism of many in our own society. Death is not the end. We will be raised to eternal life!

I find verse 15 even more interesting. *All this is for your sake; and as God's grace reaches more and more people, they will offer to the glory of God more prayers of thanksgiving.* Paul does not just preach because of what's happened in the past to him and what is going to happen to all who believe in the future. He sees that presently, as more and more people receive God's grace, the result is thanksgiving rising to God. Mission is worship – because Paul shared the good news and they came to faith, more praise raised up to God. That was his motive for mission – to see others worship God. Mission and worship are intimately bound up. As we understand what God has done for us, it should make us confess with Paul that we speak because we believe.

A true experience of worship should encourage us to speak out because true worship should be a dynamic encounter with God. Communion is something God has given us to facilitate a dynamic encounter because it should be a graphic reminder of what Jesus has done for us. But it's more than that, the end sharing Jesus with others is that more voices are raised in worship to God. Mission is a worship producing exercise because people raise their voices in worship as they are brought to the foot of the cross.

So there are two things we can say about mission and worship from this passage. We speak because of what we experience in worship and we speak so that others might have the same experience.

We don't become discouraged – because we see God transforming lives. There is nothing more discouraging for churches than not to see people coming to Christ. If we do not see the power of God transforming lives, we start to accept lower standards of everything else. We cease to expect to see amazing things happening in our own lives and in the church. And worship becomes routine and uneventful.

Worse we lose the context of what God has saved us for – that eternity ahead of us. We get swallowed by our problems rather than having Paul's attitude: *17 And this small and temporary trouble we suffer will bring us a tremendous and eternal glory, much greater than the trouble.*

The challenge we have ahead is reaching our community here in Walton and Felixstowe in a fresh way so that the lives of people will be transformed. As a result our worship will be transformed and so will our expectations of what God can do in our lives and the lives of those who hear Good News.

Let me finish with the verse we started with: *5:1 For we know that when this tent we live in--our body here on earth--is torn down, God will have a house in heaven for us to live in, a home he himself has made, which will last forever*

Mission's Flame

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