

## **VISION SUNDAY: A CHURCH PASSIONATE FOR OTHERS (Rom 1.15,16)**

*Central Baptist Church, Sunday morning 1 September 2013*

### **1. LET'S BE EAGER TO TELL OTHERS OF JESUS**

Like every parent, I am proud of my children

And like every grandparent, I am even more proud of my grandchildren: Jemima and Raphael, Felix and Clara, as also David Aneurin in Vancouver, are the absolute tops as far as I am concerned!

As a result I don't have to take much urging to talk about them

What's more, I don't have to know people very well before I talk about my grand-children.

I can happily talk about them when queuing up at the till in Tesco or wherever.

Yes, talking about those we love is very natural.

So why is it that sometimes we are reticent to talk about Jesus to others?

This reticence is all the more strange because, as part of our church's vision statement, we say: "*We want to be a strong and vibrant city-centre church where every member is passionate for others*" – passionate, that is, to share Jesus with others.

Perhaps we have something to learn from the Apostle Paul.

For Paul was a passionate man - passionate to share Jesus with others.

Listen to him as he says in Rom 1.15,16: "**I am eager to preach the good news to you... who live in Rome. I have complete confidence in the gospel: it is God's power to save all**" Literally, he said: '*I am not ashamed of the Gospel*' (NRSV).

Or as Eugene Peterson puts it in his paraphrase: "*I'm most proud to proclaim this extraordinary Message of God's powerful plan to rescue everyone who trusts him*".

Paul knew that the Gospel and Rome were two incompatibles:

- To proud Rome, which regarded itself as the hub of the universe, nothing could have appeared more insignificant than the Gospel centring around a carpenter's son, executed by a minor civil servant in a troublesome little country right on the very edge of the civilised world
- To powerful Rome, capital of the mightiest empire the world had ever seen, nothing could have been weaker than to talk of the power of God's love. Why, Rome had conquered the world by the sword and the strength of her legions – force, not love, was the key.
- To sophisticated Rome nothing could have been more ludicrous than to talk of a man rising from the dead. Why Festus, the Roman procurator of Judea, when he heard Paul preach, had remarked that Paul had become mad by his learning.

And yet Paul said: "**I am eager to preach the Good News to you... who live in Rome. For I have complete confidence in the gospel.... to save all who believe**" (GNB)

All that was 2000 years ago.

The power of Rome has come and gone. We live in a very different world.

And yet for all the differences, our society is just as sceptical of the Gospel.

Christians are in a minority here in the UK – we have become a 'peculiar' people – as a result the media poke fun at, if not look down upon, committed Christians.

As a result, if we are honest, there are times when we are tempted to be ashamed of the faith we profess.

Let me ask you: do your neighbours know where you are this morning?  
Do your colleagues at work know that you are a churchgoer?

This morning I want to encourage you to make a stand for Jesus, and share your faith with others.

I want to encourage you to be confident in the difference Jesus has made to you, so that you, like Paul, can be eager to share the good news of Jesus.

But how, you might say, can I share my faith with others?

One simple way is to invite them to church one Sunday morning.

We have a host of special services ahead of us:

- Next Sunday morning is a baptismal service
- The following Sunday is an all-age service which could well appeal to families
- The 22<sup>nd</sup> is The Big Welcome Sunday – a Sunday when up and down the country people are inviting people back to church
- Then on 29<sup>th</sup> we have another Big Welcome Sunday with a focus on Harvest

What's more, on autumn Sunday mornings we are looking at some of the objections people have to the Christian faith:

- *All religions lead to God*
- *This world is all that matters*
- *Christians are a bunch of hypocrites*
- *Jesus was just a good man*
- *Death is the end*
- *No God would allow suffering...*

Or if you feel a Sunday morning service is over-facing, then what about the International evening with an African flavour at the end of the month, Sunday 29th? This will be a lot of fun – and I am sure that there will be great food too

Or Word Alive on the first Sunday of October where we will be focussing on Sri Lanka in the aftermath of the tsunami?

Or what about one of the midweek courses we will be running?

- Well-being, for older friends, starts on Friday morning 4 October.
- Alpha, for anybody wanting to know more about the Christian faith, starts on Monday evening 10 October

Let's be eager to tell others of what Jesus means to us

Let's have **confidence in the Gospel**.

## 2. EVERYBODY NEEDS JESUS

The fact is that everybody needs Jesus – for everybody needs to be saved.

Listen again to Paul: “**The gospel... is God's power to save all who believe**”.

Immediately Paul goes on to describe how the whole human race lies under the judgement of God. **“God’s anger is revealed from heaven against all the sin and evil of the people whose evil ways prevent the truth being known”** (1.18).

He then goes on to depict the wickedness of the world in which he lived.

Frankly, the second part of Rom 1 is not the kind of stuff to read to children.

For along with such sins as **“evil, greed... jealousy, murder, fighting, deceit and malice”** (1.29), he is also pretty explicit about sexual promiscuity and sexual perversion:

All of these sins he traces back to the ultimate sin of men and women turning their backs upon God: **“Ever since God created the world, his invisible qualities, both his eternal power and his divine nature, have been clearly seen; they are perceived in the things that God has made. So these people have no excuse at all!”** (1.20).

Then comes the chilling statement that as a result of people turning their backs upon God, God has turned his back upon them – or rather, he has let them stew in their own juice by giving them up to the consequences of their own sin.

Interestingly Paul sees judgement of God taking place not just in the future, but also in the present. Hell can be today, and not just tomorrow.

The world is in a hellish mess – this is the presupposition underlying Paul’s pride in the Gospel. Yes, in spite of all her glamour, Rome was also full of every kind of vice.

As Tacitus, the Roman historian put it: *“Into Rome every foul and horrible thing finds its way sooner or later”*. Society was in a mess – and there was nobody able to help.

Our world is no better. Our society is in a mess.

You only have to read the papers to see how greed, violence, lust and promiscuity characterise so much of modern life.

In so many areas of modern life we offend God’s holy laws.

Today’s Western civilisation, like the civilisation of Rome, has become rotten to the core.

This is the context in which we need to share our faith with our friends, because they need to be saved from their sins. Otherwise the consequences are dire.

A godless eternity awaits those who turn their backs on God and his offer of love.

### **3. THERE IS NOBODY JESUS CANNOT SAVE**

Again, listen again to Paul: **“I have complete confidence in the Gospel: it is God’s power to save all who believe”**. Yes, there is power in the Gospel.

The word Paul uses for **power** is the word from which we get our English word dynamite – *dunamis*. The Good News of Jesus packs an amazing punch.

The Gospel is quite literally dynamite!

Dynamite today has been put into the shade by the power of the atom.

But nonetheless, it still packs a punch. It also offers a great analogy for the Gospel.

Just like dynamite has power to crack the hardest of rocks, so the Gospel has power to crack the hardest of hearts. The good news of Jesus has power to change the most resistant of hearts. It has power to transform the most degraded of sinners.

Paul knew that from his own experience. At one stage Paul led the opposition to the Christian church - he hounded the followers of Jesus.

We don't know the degree of suffering Paul had inflicted upon the first Christians, but clearly it was not inconsiderable.

It wasn't for nothing that Paul once described himself as "**the worst**" of sinners (1 Tim 1.15). And yet God had saved him – and if he could save him, then as far as Paul was concerned he could save anybody.

Do you believe that?

Do you have "**complete confidence**", as Paul had, in the power of the Gospel?

I sometimes wonder whether the reason why some of us are not as enthusiastic about sharing the Good News of Jesus is that we are not always certain that God can really save some of our friends or colleagues who seem to have no faith whatsoever.

Can the Gospel really crack these hard nuts?

Let me tell you of a woman I once knew. She was a hard woman. Life had made her hard.

Indeed, she had to be hard in order to cope with the incredibly tough life she had had.

When I first knew her, she was determined to have nothing to do with God.

She was so determined to have nothing to do with God, that she asked her neighbour round to witness the fact that she wanted an atheist's funeral – no minister was to call around, once she had died.

But she had a Christian daughter. This daughter prayed and prayed for her mother; she wept before God for her mother. And as she prayed and she wept, she believed God would indeed save her mother. The day came when her faith was rewarded and her prayers were answered – her mother put her trust in Jesus. A little later her mother died: and I had the privilege of taking that funeral.

The fact is that the gospel is 'dynamite' - it does have power – power to save even the most hardened of people. "**I have complete confidence in the gospel**".

Perhaps the challenge this morning is to for some of us to believe that the Gospel does have power.

#### **4. JESUS DIED FOR ALL**

**"I have complete confidence in the gospel: it is God's power to save all who believe".**

If there are no limits to God's power, then there are no limits to God's salvation.

God's salvation is for all who have faith, for all who believe

I never fail to be moved by Paul's incredibly large vision.

When the church was still in its infancy, when it was a small struggling group of people, Paul had the world in view: "**Our message is that God was making the whole human race his friends through Christ**" (2 Cor 5.19).

Paul was the great universalist: he looked for the salvation of everyone.

True, for the Gospel to be effective, it has to be met with faith.

But in principle Paul was quite clear: Christ died for every man, woman & child.

Do we believe this?

Do we believe that the Gospel is God's power to save all – to save every man, woman & child here in Chelmsford?

Almost 21 years ago I came to Chelmsford to preach with a view  
I preached on this passage at the evening service on 25 October 1992. .  
Let me quote from that sermon:

*“How large is your vision. Do you simply have a vision of a full church – or does your vision encompass all of Chelmsford?”*

*For me this point is absolutely fundamental. It links in with the issues of the future ministry of this church. What kind of vision do you have?*

*What kind of senior minister are you looking for?*

*Are you looking for a chaplain to keep you comfortable – or a leader with a passion for evangelism – who will constantly seek to mobilise this church for mission – who will never be satisfied with a packed church.*

*I plead with you to catch the spirit of Paul – to be proud of the Gospel – so proud that this week you will gladly and cheerfully this gospel with friends and neighbours – only in this way will they have a chance of experiencing God’s saving power”*

Today we have called a Vision Sunday

And yes, even in the final months of my ministry I remain a man of vision

My vision even at this stage is to see men and women, boys and girls, surrendering their lives to Jesus.

And when I say men and women, boys and girls, I do not mean people inside the church – but people outside the church.

Your friends, maybe, your neighbours, who do not know Jesus

I long to share my passion with you

Let’s be proud of the Gospel – let’s have confidence in the Gospel - **“it is God’s power to save all who believe”**.