

Ordinary People

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 June 2019

Preacher: Neil MacMillan

- [0 : 0 0] Okay, right. I'm trying to find myself a comfy spot here. A couple of people have birthday today. You know, we love to celebrate stuff at Cornerstone.
- We're not going to sing happy birthday today. We've given up doing that because we're doing it every single week. But if it's your birthday today, happy birthday. We do celebrate the good things in life as well as pray for people who are suffering in hard things.
- We also have decided we're going to have a Bible study. So innovation is always happening at Cornerstone. So we're going to have a Bible study for the men tonight at 5pm at the Old Schoolhouse.
- A couple of people have asked me, is the Old Schoolhouse too dangerous? And the answer is not for men. Okay, so come if you can to the Old Schoolhouse.
- If you're brave enough, if you're hard enough, I'll see you at the Old Schoolhouse at 5pm for a Bible study. And then, just to say, we are in with the MUC people next week in the main sanctuary.
- [1 : 0 3] So pray for that. They're such kind hosts to us, so we want to be great guests. And we're doing a Pentecost service with them next Sunday.
- So I'm really looking forward to that. And if you can be here, fantastic. So, we're going to look now at Colossians, where Laird read to us just a little while ago.
- Well, what if... What if... Someone loved you...
- More than you'd ever been loved before? What if... What if someone loved you with a love that was so perfect and good...
- That they will never for a minute forget where you are or what you need? What if... What if someone loves you even when you fail to love them back?
- [2 : 1 1] What if... What if someone loved you even when you're at your lowest and your darkest? What if... What if someone loved you even when it's going to cost them huge effort and enormous pain?
- What if... What if someone said, I'm going to arrange the whole universe and everything in the world so that one day you and I can be together forever in loving and joyful togetherness?
- What if... What if... What if it was God himself who loved you in this way? Paul wants the Colossians to understand how much they are loved by the God who made them and gave them life.
- At the end of this letter to the Colossians... So, this is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to a group of Christians he's never even met. But he loves that group of believers.
- And even though he's in prison he's taking time to communicate with them. And he's got to the end of the letter. And you can read it. You know, you've got Tychicus and Onesimus and Aristarchus and Barnabas and Luke and Demas and Nympha and...

[3 : 33] Archippus. All these different people. And you can think, okay, this is just like, you know, tell Auntie Betty I love her. Say hello to Cousin Bill. And sort of dismiss this as a really irrelevant part of the letter.

But Paul really, because he loves them, wants them to know they are loved. God writes this letter through Paul because he loves you and because God wants you to know you are loved.

You are loved. That's one of the great, simple, wonderful, good truths of Christianity. You are loved. So in verse 12 he talks about a guy called Epaphras who's from that neck of the woods.

And he says, Epaphras is always wrestling in prayer for you. What does Epaphras pray for them? Well, in that prayer Epaphras is picking up on one of the themes of this letter that Paul has touched on a few times.

Which is this. Stand firm, Christian. Stand firm, human being. Don't let the world break you. Don't let the world crush you. Stand firm.

[5 : 01] Be fully assured, he says. Stand firm in the will of God. Mature fully assured. Fully assured of what? Fully assured of what?

You are loved. So this letter ends then with the story of very ordinary people.

We've just read their names. Loving people in very ordinary ways, but to an extraordinary outcome.

So that's what I'm talking about with you this morning. Ordinary people loving in ordinary ways, but to an extraordinary outcome.

Because this is the story of the church. Church. And, as you know, if you've ever been in a church, churches are full of ordinary people. Ordinary people who sin, suffer, struggle, hurt.

[6 : 04] Church is just full of people like us, who get stuff wrong, mess things up, let each other down. And if we have an idealistic expectation of church, then that's really disillusioning for us.

But these are ordinary people. And as we read what Paul writes here at the end, they love each other in very ordinary ways. They talk about themselves.

They comfort each other. They pray for each other. They work for each other. It's ordinary people doing very ordinary things.

Nothing flash is happening. But the outcome is extraordinary. To stand firm and live with a full assurance of God's love for them.

Fully, completely assured. Every week we do something called the confession of sin and assurance of pardon. So that's kind of a bit of a religious speak if you're not used to church.

[7 : 08] So that's saying, yeah, we're messy people in a messy world. We sin and do what's wrong. But then the assurance of pardon is just to say, yeah, we're like that.

But God's not like that. And he, be assured, sister, brother, be assured.

God still loves you despite your sin. And God will always love you despite his sin. And God can do that because he has taken your sin and himself to the cross and dealt with it.

And because of that, there's nothing you can do that will break his love for you. You can run as far as you want from God. You can shake your fists or stick your fingers in the air at God.

You can curse him. You can go so far. But you can't make him stop loving you. Which may be annoying for some of you. But it's the truth. So, ordinary people loving in ordinary ways to an extraordinary outcome.

[8 : 12] So, I'm going to start with saying, first of all, Jesus is enough. Okay, Jesus is enough. And then I'm going to say we're enough. And then I'm going to say Jesus is enough.

So, that's three simple points. Jesus is enough. We're enough. Jesus is enough. So, it's a very complicated sermon. So, what's the problem in Colossae? Just to kind of recap briefly.

Well, the people in Colossae, it's like having a million dollars. Having all the wealth in the world and saying we're going to trade it for a McDonald's milkshake. Something cheap and not very nice.

Because they have Jesus. But they're not sure if they still want Jesus. They're starting to think there might be something better out there.

And there are various experts and specialists and counselors and people who are saying to them, Well, you know, we can offer you something better than Jesus.

[9 : 09] We can give you a depth of insight, a happiness, a contentment, a joy in your life that you can't get with Jesus.

Because, look, you're still struggling with each other. And you're still struggling with life. And things in your church aren't always that perfect. And things for you aren't all that perfect.

So, there's something still missing. Let us fix it for you. And Paul's response to that is rubbish.

Don't believe the hype. Don't believe the lie. Don't believe the lie. Because Jesus is enough. What's missing in your life, Paul says?

Well, at the level of how we feel, often it feels and seems as if there is a lot of stuff missing for us, doesn't it? You know, I don't have this, I don't have that. I'm worried about this, I'm worried about that. But when we peel past our feelings to think about how God has structured the world on our behalf, then at the level of truth and fact, what Jesus says is, if you have me, you will lack nothing good.

[10 : 25] Because everything good is actually to be found in me and through me. So, in the letter, Paul says things like this in chapter 1 verse 19, God is pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus.

All his fullness dwell in Jesus. In chapter 2 verse 9, In chapter 1 verse 27, In chapter 2 verse 13, In chapter 3 verses 1 to 2, He says, Focus your life on Christ because Christ is your life.

So, he's saying Jesus is everything. He's the fullness of the God who fills everything in every way. And in Christ, you are made full. You're made complete.

You're not going to be made complete by cash, by career, by success, by family, by whatever dream you've painted for yourself, or by whatever dream the experts are telling you.

You've got to have this to be complete. Jesus is saying, No. All that you ache for and long for is found in me and in what I will give to you.

[11 : 56] So, instead of moving away from Jesus to try and find something better beyond Jesus, Paul just says, Let's all steer ourselves back to the Lord Jesus Christ because in Jesus we meet God himself.

The maker of life, the giver of life, the rescuer of life, the saviour of life, it's all found in him. When you've got Jesus, you've got everything.

There's a psalm, Psalm 23, The Lord is my shepherd, it says, I shall not want. I will lack no good thing. He makes me lie in green pastures and by still waters.

God restores my soul. God comforts me. He feeds me even in the presence of enemies. With God, even when I'm in a battle, my cup runs over.

Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Because when you've got him, you've got everything.

[13 : 05] So to begin to think that God is not enough is to get your view of the world askew. There is nothing better than Jesus.

There is nothing bigger than Jesus. You know, sometimes life disappoints us. We open the fridge door, we look inside and all we see are a few wee sad bits of lettuce.

But if you're a Christian, you open the fridge door and it's full of steak. Or, I don't know, tofu if you're a vegan or a vegetarian. But you know, God has supplied everything.

Everything you need. Not always what you want. Sometimes, isn't this bizarre? The architect of the universe decides to plan your life differently from the way you've planned it for yourself.

And yet we know his plan is better. Not easier, perhaps. But better.

[14 : 15] Because he's everything. And in all the struggles of your life, what he's trying to give you is more of himself. So when the suffering of life feels like it's swamping you, when you can't see where Jesus is because of the mess in your head and the mess in your life, and the voices start to say, Jesus is not good or Jesus is not enough, you need to hear what the Bible says, which is, yeah, he is the fullness of God who fills everything in every way.

You are alive when you're in Christ. And the whole of chapter 3 in this letter is about how when we are really struggling with the brokenness of life, we get more of Jesus.

So that's the message. Jesus is enough. You need Jesus. I need Jesus. We point people to Jesus. Everything's about having Jesus at the center personally and together.

It's not about controlling people. It's not about rules or ministers or priests. You don't need Neil McMillan. You need Jesus.

Salvation is in Christ alone through faith alone by grace alone. So in church we say it's about Jesus. Jesus. And it's always about Jesus and it's only about Jesus.

[15 : 49] And everything we do in church is to help each other have more Jesus. So that's the first thing. The second thing is this then. Jesus is enough and then we are enough.

Okay, we are enough. So see if you recognize these fabulous lyrics from a well-known song.

So no one told you life was going to be this way. Your job's a joke. You're broke. Your love life's D-O-A. It's like you're always stuck in second gear when it hasn't been your day, your week, your month, or even your year.

But I'll be there for you. Okay, so that's the Rembrandts. It's the theme song for Friends. And Friends was a really popular show when I was a lot younger.

But still, people still watch it. So anyway, it's all about these five or six people. I can't even remember how many of them are right now. But Ross and Joey and Phoebe and people like that all hanging out in New York and having a great life together and being a wonderful community of friends.

[16 : 55] But it turns out that being friends is really harder sometimes than we expect it to be. And life is messier. Relationships are messier than we anticipate. We can't have too romantic a view of relationships.

And often church is kind of like slightly disappointing because you think, wow, look at these people. I mean, you're all very nice. But, you know, you're just ordinary.

I'm just ordinary. I'm just ordinary. And sometimes I'm actually not that nice. And maybe occasionally you're not that nice. I don't know. You're all nice to me.

But we're faulty, aren't we? We're faulty. And we're messed up. But you're the ones that God has chosen.

You're the one that God's invited to be his people, to enjoy his love, to build his kingdom, and to care for one another.

[18 : 07] When we started Cornerstone, it was about five or six years ago now, and we were a small group of people thinking about how do we create a nice church for Morningside in Brunsfield that will love people well and introduce people who don't know Jesus to Jesus.

And just before we were kind of getting ready to launch the church, somebody said to me, you know what we need to do? We need to hire an evangelist. We need somebody really special who can go out and bring in lots of people.

And I was like, no, I don't think that's what it's about really, is it? Because church isn't about special people or extraordinary people doing everything for the rest of us.

Church is just about ordinary people loving each other in ordinary ways. I mean, think who is in this little letter, this crowd of men and a woman who are mentioned at the end of this letter.

You've got the apostle Paul, he's a former killer, he's now in prison. There's also a runaway slave called Onesimus who's part of this group.

[19 : 24] You've got a man called Luke, he's an unemployed drifter who used to be a doctor. who else does Paul refer to here at the end of the letter?

Well, they're a motley crew, they're so racially diverse that they should never be left in a room together in case a fight breaks out. But God's taken the killer, the prisoner, the runaway slave, the failed doctor, the racially diverse group of people and he's tied them together in a family, he's turned them into a team and he's said to this group of weird, messed up, broken people, if you just do a few simple things together, you might change the world.

If you just do a few simple things together, you can really change people's lives. Because you can do something beautiful, you can help each other to stand firm in the gospel, deeply rooted in the beautiful good news of Jesus' love.

There's nothing better you can do for your fellow human being to enable them to know how loved they are and to stand firm in that love. So we are an imperfect, messed up bunch of people, very not special, but we don't have to be special.

Not doing anything special, but we don't have to do anything special. What Paul's saying happens here, Tychicus will tell you all the news about me. verse 9, Tychicus is coming with Onesimus.

[21 : 01] They will tell you everything that's happening here. So one simple step, they talk to each other. They talk to each other. They tell stories to each other.

This is what's happening to me. This is what life's like in my prison. Please, know what's going on in my life. Paul is keeping them in the loop.

Often in church and in relationships and in marriages and in families, we want to hide in the shadows and put up the shutters.

But Paul is in favor of rich communication, of storytelling, of sharing, of giving, not everybody perhaps, but giving some people an insight into who you really are and what you're dealing with in life.

We all want to be known and if we want to be known, we need to tell others what's going on. We want people to pray for us, so tell them what to pray for and listen to each other.

[22 : 08] Listen to each other's stories, ordinary stories. Encourage. Verse 8, Paul says that there, encouraging him or that they're going to encourage, sorry, that they're going to encourage them.

So he's sending Tychicus that he may encourage your hearts. Encouragement. So be positive to each other, okay? Be positive to others. Speak well, cheer others on, say kind words, do kind things, remind people about Jesus and the good news of the gospel.

Verse 11 is about comfort, how some of his fellow workers have proved a comfort to him. Be sympathetic.

I heard a really good talk last week at the Free Church General Assembly, which was entirely uninspected, okay? You don't normally hear good talks at the Free Church General Assembly. Somebody did a talk on imagination.

It was really interesting. God's imagination in creating the world. God's imagination in creating us. Our imagination and creativity as people. And one of the things he talked about was, I love this, he talked about sympathy as the exercise of your imagination.

[23 : 28] Imagine what life is like for her. Imagine what he is going through in his hospital bed. Imagine how his wife feels.

Imagine how their children feel. Imagine. You know, so often we've got no time to imagine what life is like for the other person, for the immigrant, for the unemployed, for those who don't speak our language and can't communicate easily with us.

Imagine what it's like for them and show that you care about people in simple ways. I'm going to give you one really little story about a nice way, a simple way of showing that you want to comfort someone.

About, I can't remember quite how long now because I've got a terrible memory, but anyway, my father-in-law lived in the Isle of Lewis and he passed away and I was asked to speak at his funeral.

So, that was quite a difficult thing for me to do. He was a good friend, a really lovely human being, but I wanted to sort of speak about him on behalf of the family and honour him and so I was in the pulpit in this church in the island of Lewis and I was trying to speak about my father-in-law and to do him a little justice and tell the story of Jesus and, quite difficult for me, but there was a minister sitting beside me who's actually in the room here today and he just reached out and he held my hand as I spoke.

[25 : 08] He's never held my hand before or since. Have you, Ian? I'm very disappointed. But I've never forgotten that because that was just a simple, lovely way of someone comforting me.

So, find ways to comfort each other. Right? You might think I'm not very good at any of that stuff. One last thing, greet everyone. Greet everyone. Greet.

Okay? How many times does it say greet? My personal fellow prisoner Aristarchus sends you his greetings. Okay? So that's in verse 10. Verse 11, more greetings.

Justice sends greetings. Verse 12, Epaphras sends greetings. Verse 15, Give my greetings.

So greet, greet, greet, greet, greet, greet. Not our Scottish greeting. Here, it's a bit more positive, cheery, upbeat. Salute, embrace, shake hands, reach out.

[26 : 17] Let other people know that you know that they exist. Greet them. Hello. How are you? Look them in the eye. Not avoid or look away. Greet people.

Especially greet those you don't know or haven't seen for a while. When we gather as a church, greet one another. This is obviously a big part of church life in the New Testament. Greet, greet, greet, greet, greet, greet, greet, greet, greet, greet.

So when we come, we don't come wrapped up just in ourselves, but we are greeting one another. Okay. Last thing.

Jesus is enough. So Jesus is enough. We're enough. Just do these simple ordinary things. Jesus is enough. I don't know if you've ever watched The Revenant, which is a sort of relaxing film focused on nature's beauty.

It's also a pain fest, isn't it? People call it pain porn. It's a brutal tale of vengeance. Leonardo DiCaprio sustains life-threatening injuries from a brutal bear attack.

[27 : 25] Then somebody kills DiCaprio's son and leaves DiCaprio lying for dead. So then he has to use his survival skills in the wilderness to crawl his way bleeding back to civilization.

What keeps him going? Vengeance. He's been betrayed and he's never going to give up and he's going to get the man who betrayed him and he's going to destroy him.

Sometimes you can read the life of the Apostle Paul and it's like pain porn. He's been beaten multiple times. He's been in prison. He's been shipwrecked. He's been near death so many times but he keeps going and he keeps going and he keeps going and even when he's in prison he's not filled with self-pity.

He's thinking. He's on a mission. He keeps going. Pushing on. DiCaprio in the movie the Revenant is driven by vengeance. Paul says in another of his letters I am compelled by the love of Christ.

Christ's love drives me onwards. It's the love of Jesus is enough to change his life and the way he lives his life forever.

[28 : 39] He's in prison so he could be depressed and turn inwards. He could be self-pitying. When we struggle in relationships or jobs when we lose our health when we lose our freedom when we lose opportunities we can turn inside and fixate in ourselves and hide in a dark corner.

But Paul's heart and life have been flipped in a different direction because he knows Jesus is enough. He doesn't have his freedom. He doesn't have comfort.

He doesn't have great health. He doesn't have a family. He's a single man. But Jesus is enough. How does he know that? Because he's experienced the love of Jesus personally.

He was a man who'd killed and condoned the killing of the followers of Jesus. He'd stood there and watched them die and bleed to death. And then on the road to a city called Damascus Jesus met him kicked him off his horse and knocked him to the ground and said now you are my servant.

He was loved. The love of the cross says Father forgive them. Jesus as he dies prays for his enemies Father forgive them.

[29 : 51] When Jesus rises from the dead having rescued the universe and become the true hero we're all looking for the first thing he says to Mary is why are you crying?

He loves. And Jesus is here today to knock you off your horse and fill you with love and to say to you press into that love move into that love take more of my love because it's there for you and as you take that love love others.

Right let's finish. I'm going to sing pray please don't let me sing I will sing with the congregation but I won't sing let me pray as the band jump up here Lord Jesus just pray that you would give us your grace love in our lives may your love and the power and depth of your love to each of us be overwhelming Amen Thank you Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen