

1 Corinthians 2

2 And so it was with me, brothers and sisters. When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God.^[a] **2**For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. **3**I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. **4**My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, **5**so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

God's wisdom revealed by the Spirit

6We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. **7**No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. **8**None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. **9**However, as it is written:

'What no eye has seen,
what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived'^[b] –
the things God has prepared for those who love
him –

10these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.

Let's imagine we have a countdown clock I'm just going to start the clock but rather than giving you some letters to make a word up I'm going to give you 10 seconds to think of a verse from the bible. Clock starting – 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 time up.

I wonder why that came to mind?

I did this exercise at home and had this verse Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives from John 14:27, Jesus's words, where he is speaking to his disciples at the Last Supper. Why did it come to mind and do I ever share it's meaning with others?

Friday night at 5 o'clock UK time the funeral of Billy Graham was broadcast across the world. It was billed as his last crusade – not taking place in a stadium but across the internet. I think that my bible verse came from 1984. Let me explain.

On 10 June 1984 Gary and I went to hear Billy Graham speak at Carrow Road. My reason for going was mainly because my grandmother, who had died several years earlier, had heard him and my mother had told me time and time again, "she couldn't get me along to hear years ago". I don't remember every single word he preached at Carrow Road but I do remember responding to Billy Graham. His message resonated with my heart. I felt compelled to respond. In fact when I look back at the documents I was given and went through on the Carrow Road turf, God's peace is mentioned several times. Billy spoke a powerful message but it was plain preaching that I could understand. He was spirit inspired – although I didn't recognise it at that point. I heard God's message and I responded. At his funeral, Billy's children reiterated that Billy Graham didn't come to preach Billy Graham, he came to preach Jesus and him crucified.

Billy said of himself:

I'm not a great preacher, and I don't claim to be a great preacher... I'm an ordinary preacher just communicating the Gospel in the best way I know how.

Also

I have had the privilege of preaching the Gospel on every continent in most of the countries of the world, and I have found that when I present the simple message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, with authority, quoting from the very Word of God... He takes the message and drives it supernaturally into the human heart.

Or

I preach a gospel not of despair but of hope for the individual, hope for society and hope for the world.

Or

When I preach – no matter where it is in the world – I can always count on five areas of human need that afflict all peoples. Emptiness, loneliness, guilt, fear of death, deep-seated insecurity.

Or

Effective preaching must be biblical preaching, whether it is the exposition of a single word in the Bible, a text, or a chapter. The Word is what the Spirit uses

Or

I am counting totally and completely on the Lord Jesus Christ and not on Billy Graham. I am not going to heaven because I've read the Bible, nor because I've preached to a lot of people. I'm going to heaven because of what Christ did.

This is echoed in the verses in our epistle reading today. Paul starts by saying he's come to proclaim the testimony about God. It's not about Paul, he's come to talk about Jesus. Jesus who was crucified. Jesus who he persecuted through his treatment of Jesus' followers. Jesus who met him in a dramatic way on the road to Damascus. Jesus stopped him in his tracks. Paul says he came in weakness and fear, much trembling to the Corinthians. Well that's encouraging, because I feel like that when I'm preaching or when I'm about to share the good news of Jesus with someone. I tremble. I feel weak. I feel inadequate. I feel overwhelmed. I struggle to write the words for a sermon. I struggle to get the words

out when I'm talking to someone. I get an opportunity after most weekends at work when I'm asked the question, What did you do this weekend? Or on Monday it will be, how was Harrogate? How do I respond? What can I say that doesn't just give them information like I went to church? Could I say, well Jesus reminded me that Jesus wants us to stay with him. Or one of the speakers reminded us of how Jesus walked on the water and that even in the middle of the storm, he was there. Jesus is with me when life is difficult. He knows what it is like to be in difficult situations but wants us to remember that he stays with us. Is that a simple message? A testimony that points to Jesus and him crucified?

Paul goes on to say his message was not with wise and persuasive words. This is someone who was educated, who could have used long complicated words but instead spoke "with a demonstration of the Spirit's power". Every now and then at work we come across a word we haven't heard of. We all hit the Google search button to find out what it means and it ends up with us concluding oh well really that means x or y or z, we simplify it. Paul here is saying he spoke, he has a message but as Billy Graham says "Effective preaching must be biblical preaching, whether it is the exposition of a single word in the Bible, a text, or a chapter. The Word is what the Spirit uses" – the Holy Spirit takes it and speaks through it.

Those first five verses in 1 Corinthians 2 are about what Paul did. How he came to them. What his testimony was to Jesus? What's your testimony to Jesus? Have you carried on practising your story or told your story after John McGinley's weekend? Have you explained what difference Jesus has made in your life?

The other five verses take us a little deeper. I is replaced by "we". Is he now trying to tell them where the collective wisdom of the

followers of the Way comes from? Not an individual, not Paul, not a celebrity evangelist but as the NIV heads this section, Wisdom from the Spirit. We are called to speak a message. All Christians, not just the Corinthians (for the letter wasn't just written for them if you look at the first verse of the letter), all Christians are called to speak a message not of the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age but of God's spirit, for the Spirit searches all things "even the deep things of God". Human wisdom is not pure wisdom. Look at how people have acted in the snow. Look at the leaders of the world – are they always wise? Human wisdom. It's not perfect, only God is perfect, only God. The spirit is God's mysterious wisdom.

When I came forward I responded humanly to that message delivered by Billy Graham, I thought. But I can now see that it was the Holy Spirit who spoke. The Spirit, opened my eyes, my ears, my mind to the deep things of God. He took what was spoken and made it relevant to me. I didn't have peace when I entered that stadium, but after I responded I had peace. Over the ensuing months, in spite of ridicule from others, including my family, I had God's peace. That verse came alive.

That verse you had at the beginning of this sermon. If that is your favourite verse can you weave that into your testimony? If not is it a verse to share with someone today? Or is it a verse for another reason? God knows. So, as I finish, let us be quiet and ask: Father we believe you reveal yourself through your Holy Spirit. We ask that you will show us how you want us to share those words, for your Son's praise and glory. Amen