

# 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, the summer is just about over. I don't know in terms of the sunshine, hopefully not, but in terms of the summer holidays, they are coming to an end. Perhaps many of us have had our own holidays and they're also coming to an end or have come to an end.

And schools start back in a week's time. And within the congregation, some of the activities that have been suspended over the summer will be kicking off again very soon. We've already prayed this morning, this evening for the holiday club that starts tomorrow and the different aspects of that. That also serves as the occasion for little lambs to kick off and then work with the primary children, with the teens. And then in the following days, other activities, other ministries will also be kicking or starting again. So Sunday school, neighborhood fellowships and other stuff as well.

One of the things that we have set up just in the past few months as a result of the strategy review are two teams, one looking at Christian education and training and one looking at mission and evangelism.

And those teams are also about to launch or begin one or two initiatives in those areas. So in the case of Christian education, starting again with our adult Sunday school, we'll soon be announcing dates for the different explored courses. And one new one that we haven't done before, life explored, Christianity explored, discipleship explored, not in parallel, but in that in that sequence. And many of you will know that on Wednesdays, we have a food bank that operates here in the foyer. One of the interesting things about that has been because of how visible the foyer is and the passing traffic. And I think it'd be fair to say those who are involved week by week would be able to give a more accurate account. But I think it's fair to say that maybe on a given Sunday, maybe half of the people who drop in aren't actually coming with a voucher for a food parcel, but simply to have a chat, have a cup of tea. And it's been seen that, you know, that that space at the front of the building is a very valuable resource. And so we're looking at the possibility of having another time during the week, not as a food bank, but just as a drop in cafe. And once that's all decided in terms of when's the most suitable time, we hope that would be starting up soon as well.

And there are one or two other things as well that I won't mention now, but hopefully we'll soon be kicking off. At neighborhood fellowships, I mentioned that we'll be starting back at neighborhood fellowships soon. And the study material that we're going to be using on this occasion is focused on personal evangelism. It's a little bit different to the study guides we've used previously. And the guide's Bible study actually went through this course, if we can call it that, and found it very helpful. And so they were our guinea pigs and we decided that we'd extend it for the congregation. And really the reason why we thought that would be a good thing to do is it's all very well organizing evangelistic events. Say a course like Christianity Explored, it's a good thing.

[ 3 : 36 ] It can be a valuable and helpful thing. But ultimately, our evangelism is the responsibility of all of us. It's really about people. It's about you and me sharing our faith with others. And I think if we're honest with each other, we would acknowledge most of us that that's something we find quite difficult. We're quite tentative in doing that. And the idea is that what we're going to be thinking about at Neighborhood Fellowships would help us in that regard. And in the light of all this, I thought it would be helpful to reflect on what the Apostle Paul has to say about knowing Christ and making Christ known. The verses that we read there in 1 Corinthians 2, you find these two aspects highlighted by the Apostle knowing Christ, but also making Christ known.

And we want to focus on what He has to say in that regard in these verses. Well, we've read the passage already. And I think one way that we could consider the passage is to notice how in these verses we find what we might call, first of all, a twofold resolution. But then also, and connected to the two resolutions, there's also a twofold recognition. And we'll see how the two connect, one with another in a moment. In terms of the twofold resolution, there's first of all, a resolution to know Christ. For I have resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ. So, a resolution to know Christ, but also a resolution to make Him known to others. So, that's what we could call the twofold resolution. But also, in that task, and perhaps particularly in the task of making Christ known, there's a twofold recognition. First of all, a recognition of our weakness. In the case of the passage, it's Paul acknowledging his weakness. But we very much sympathize with Paul and acknowledge that as he was weak, so we certainly also are weak. So, a recognition of weakness, but also, and that recognition of weakness must be accompanied by a recognition of God's power. So, a twofold resolution and also a twofold recognition. Let's think about these things just briefly one by one. First of all, Paul here speaks of a resolution to know Christ. And we can consider that resolution from a number of angles. One of the first things that we can say about it is that Paul expresses here the priority of knowing Christ. That's the first thing we want to say about this resolution to know Christ, and that is the priority of knowing Christ.

Paul is writing about his preaching ministry in Corinth. He's thinking back to when he was among them. He's writing this letter having moved on. He's elsewhere, and he's remembering how it was when he arrived in Corinth. So, he's remembering that. And in that, given that he's speaking about his preaching ministry, you might have expected Paul to express himself maybe along these lines, for I resolved to preach nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

We kind of read that verse and assume that's what he means. You know, he came to Corinth to preach, preach, and what did he preach? Well, he preached Christ and Him crucified, and he resolved to preach nothing else but Christ and Him crucified. Now, I'm sure that's true, but it's not actually what he says. He says, for I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

It doesn't say I resolved to preach nothing else, but to know nothing else. I think that's significant, his choice of words. Why does he express himself in this way? Because Paul knows that even before preaching, his priority must be knowing. You can't preach what you can't, what you don't know. Notice also there in verse 1 the presence of this word testimony.

[ 7 : 54 ] When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom, as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. That word testimony is a word that sometime, depending on context, translated witness. It's the Greek word *marturion*, where we have the English word or derived from it, the English word martyr or witness. We are witnesses, and witnesses can only testify to what they have seen, to what they know. You could imagine in a court of law, a witness being called. There would be no point in calling a witness if they had nothing to say, if they hadn't seen anything, they hadn't been part of whatever it was that was being considered. They'd have nothing to say.

There'd be no point in them being there. And Paul is conscious of that. He says, well, I'll have nothing to say if I don't know Christ. I need to know Christ in order to make Him known to others, in order to preach about Him. I need to, first of all, know Him. Our priority must be to know Christ.

But what does that mean? The lexicon that gives us, you know, possible meanings of words. You know how words can have different meanings, usually very overlapping meanings, but nonetheless, slightly different ways in which a word can be used or the meaning that it can have. And the word that Paul uses here, to know, also has that breadth of possible meanings. So, let me just mention the different possibilities. And I think, really, we don't need to choose one or other. I think the three that I'll mention kind of together give a composite picture of what Paul has in mind. So, the verb to know, it can have the sense of to know about. It can have the sense of to be intimately acquainted with, which is, you know, quite different to simply knowing about somebody or something, but to be intimately acquainted with, in this case, a person. And also the sense of coming to know, of understanding, of a growing appreciation of, in this case, a person, who they are and what they're like.

And I think all of these senses fit with what Paul is saying when he says that I resolved to know nothing else but Jesus and Him crucifying. So, you have this priority of knowing Christ as part of this resolution. But I think you, when also, we can also look at it from the angle of the content of knowing Christ. What is there to know about Christ? Who is it that we need to become acquainted with? Who are we to come to know and understand ever more deeply? And in the passage here, Paul speaks of knowing Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Jesus Christ and Him crucified. And in these very brief words, we really have the heart of the matter. We have the person of Christ, Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ, and we have His work and Him crucified. His identity and His mission, who He is and what He has done, captured in these few words that Paul uses to express what it is that he wishes to know, that he resolves to know. Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Let's think, first of all, of the person of Jesus, His identity, Jesus Christ, or Jesus the Christ, Jesus the Messiah, Jesus the Anointed One, who He is. This very matter of who Jesus is, is what occupied and was at the heart of Paul's preaching in Corinth. And we see that when we have recorded when he was in Corinth preaching, and we find that in the book of Acts. So, in Acts chapter 18, and in verse 5, we are told what it is that Paul preached about in Corinth. So, Acts chapter 18, the chapter entitled, In Corinth. So, Paul's in Corinth. And what do we read? Paul himself sharing with us what he did. We read in verse 5, when Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ.

[12:16] That was the content of his message, who Jesus is, that Jesus is the Christ, Jesus is the Messiah, Jesus is the promised Redeemer. So, the content of knowing Christ begins with who He is, with His very identity. And here is a rich vein for a lifetime of exploration and discovery, the person of Jesus Christ. But Paul doesn't just say Jesus Christ. He says, Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I resolve to know nothing else but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

When we consider the work of Christ, there's so much that we could profitably focus on. His incarnation, His teachings, His miracles, and there's a time and a place to consider all of these things. But the crux of the matter is the crux of Christ, the cross of Christ. The heart of the gospel message is Christ crucified, Christ dying for sinners, Jesus Christ dying for your sins, Jesus dying in your place, Jesus paying the price of sin demanded by the righteousness and justice of God.

The very matter that many find so distasteful, the cross. A few years ago on the one show, I'm not an avid viewer of the one show, but occasionally it's on, you know, when I happen to be in the room. But they had Jimmy Carr as their guest. Now, if you don't know who Jimmy Carr is, you're really not missing much. I hope that's not harsh, given what I was preaching on this morning, but not speaking against anybody, I've got to be careful. Let's just say that his material isn't particularly edifying. That's fair. That's a fair judgment without saying anything about him as a person. So, you're not missing much. But anyway, he was being interviewed, and it was at Christmas time. And not that that would mean or guarantee that they'd be speaking about Jesus, but as it happened, Jesus came up in the interview. And Jimmy Carr said something really quite striking, quite interesting. He said, I like Jesus, the early years. You know, that's a direct quote. I like

Jesus, the early years. The manger, but not the cross. And really, the manner in which he expressed himself is true of so many. Indeed, there's nothing new in that opinion in this very letter. Paul has already acknowledged that this is what many people thought in his day. In chapter 1 and in verse 23, we're familiar with these words. Paul says, but we preach Christ crucifying, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. So, it's ever been so. It was so in Paul's day, and it's so for us.

So, when we're talking about this resolution to know Christ, there's this sense of the priority of it. There's this sense or this aspect of the content of it. But also, I think we could notice in this passage what we might call the need to grow in knowing Christ. And where I'm drawing this out from is simply this observation. Do you think that when Paul arrived in Corinth, which is what he's speaking about? He says, when I came to you in Corinth, do you think that when he arrived in Corinth, he, for the first time, resolved to know Christ and Him crucified? That seems highly unlikely, indeed inconceivable. It can't have been the first time that he resolved that this would be his great priority, to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified. No, I'm sure on other occasions, Paul had taken a step back, as it were, had considered his ministry, his life, and determined, no, it's time to focus on the main thing. And he resolved to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified. This sense of growing and deepening in the knowledge of Christ. So, a resolution to know Christ. And one final thing we can say about that is what we might call the result of knowing Christ. It's not something that is mentioned explicitly in these verses in 1 Corinthians. But Paul, in other parts of the New Testament, in his letters, does make this point, that the result of knowing Christ is that we become ever more like Christ.

[ 16 : 55 ] The words that he addresses to the Christians in Philippi come to mind, where he connects these two things, knowing Christ and becoming like Christ. And I'll just read the verse in chapter 3 and verse 10, I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death. We're not going to think about all that that verse is stating, but simply noting the connection between knowing and becoming like. So, this is the first resolution. He resolved to know Christ. But then the pair, if you wish, and they go together, the accompanying resolution is the resolution to make Christ known. Indeed, the purpose or a primary purpose and consequence of knowing Christ is to make Him known. We are, as we've already noticed in the language of the passage, we are witnesses. We testify to what we know, to what we experience, to what we discover. What is it that we make known? Well, in the language of Paul here, the testimony about God.

There you'll notice in verse 1, I proclaim to you the testimony about God or the testimony of God, as that expression is sometimes translated. And in the language that Paul uses, I think he's identifying two necessary strands of our proclamation. First of all, that the message comes from God.

It is the testimony of God. But then the other strand is that we are the ones who are to announce it. The message comes from God, but it is entrusted to us the task of making it known. And Paul resolves to make known this testimony. And of course, the message is that which we have resolved to know, Jesus Christ and Him crucified. This is the message. We have no other message. It's really a matter indifferent, or perhaps not indifferent, but certainly immaterial. If our message is deemed unpalatable or not user-friendly or not likely to be believed, all of these things may be true.

It may be the view, the perception of those around us, but that's immaterial. We have one message for every age, for every culture, for every man, woman, and child. Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

Now, as it happens, it's a great message. It is good news for all. This is the message that we are to proclaim. And this task of making Christ known is the task of all who know Him. Now, in our passage, the focus is on Paul's preaching. That's what he's speaking about. But it's clear that Paul understood speaking about and for Jesus as every believer's calling. Notice how the letter begins there in verse 2, to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy together with all those everywhere who call in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours. So, the letter is for everybody, for every believer in every age. And it's clear in what he goes on to say that it is his expectation, he takes it as a given, that all will be involved in this task of knowing Christ and of making Him known.

[ 20 : 25 ] Notice how he expresses himself just a little bit further down in that chapter in verse 4. I always thank God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus, for in Him you have been enriched in every way, and especially what follows, in all your speaking and in all your knowledge.

Let's just invert the two words there. Your knowledge, knowing Christ, and your speaking, making Christ known. And this is something that Paul is saying of everybody who is reading the letter. And so, that's the other side, if you wish, of this twofold resolution, a resolution to know Christ and then also a resolution to make Christ known. But then that brings us on, and more briefly, to what we've called or described as a twofold recognition. First of all, a recognition of our weakness. Notice what Paul says in verse 3. I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling.

So, again, Paul is remembering the occasion when he arrived in Corinth, and he says, that's how I felt. I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling. Now, what is this weakness that he's speaking about? What does it refer to? Well, I think it's reasonably understood, and most, in the context, the most obvious understanding of it is Paul's sense of his own inadequacy to do justice to so great a message and to so great a task of making known Christ and Him crucified.

It was such an important task, such an onerous duty in some ways, that he was very conscious of his weakness, of his inability, of how far short he fell in the task that he had been given to perform, to make Christ known to the Corinthians. So, he was conscious of, he recognized his weakness for the task. Well, if it was true of Paul, as so often has been the point that's often been made, if it was true of Paul, then it's certainly true of us. We are weak. You're weak. I'm weak. We know that.

And we're maybe sometimes proud to not want to acknowledge weakness in one or two areas of our life. But I think in this area, most of us would be pretty willing to acknowledge that we are characterized by weakness in this matter of making Christ known. But once we acknowledge that, we can maybe ask a supplementary question, and that is, is our weakness, or is that recognition of weakness, a weakness? It sounds a bit of a tongue twister. But in the light of what we read in the Bible, indeed, in this very letter, we could see that our weakness, or certainly a recognition of our weakness, is our greatest strength. What does Paul say in the first chapter? In chapter 1 and verses 27 and 28, which really is part of the same section that we've read from chapter 2. Well, let me just read what he does say there in verse 27. So, we're in chapter 1, verse 27. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

[ 23 : 50 ] He chose the lowly things of this world, and the despised things, and the things that are not, to nullify the things that are. And he goes on. And so, what Paul is saying is that weakness is, in God's economy, a strength. Now, that's not an excuse for not dedicating ourselves to the task of knowing Christ more and more. It's not to be used as an excuse for being careless in performing our duties of making Christ known. But it is to acknowledge that that honest acknowledgement of our weakness for the task commended is, in God's sight, a strength. He uses the weak. He uses the foolish to perform His purposes. Our weakness conforms to God's purpose, as we've read there in these verses. And our weakness also drawing to the matter from elsewhere in Paul's writings. In fact, his second letter to the Corinthians. Our weakness not only conforms to God's purpose, but it also magnifies God's strength. You remember how Paul expressed himself in 2 Corinthians in chapter 12, in the context of the thorn in the flesh that he was suffering. And he shares how the Lord spoke to him in that context, and what He said to him. But He said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, and insults, and hardships, and persecutions, and difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

So it's okay to be weak. In fact, it's a necessary condition for knowing Christ and making Him known. But recognition of our weakness must go hand in hand with a recognition of His power. And there's a symmetry there. We recognize our weakness, but we also, in parallel, recognize His power. That was true of Paul.

Notice in verse 4 what he says, My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on man's wisdom, but on God's power.

Paul is conscious that despite his own weakness, or in the midst of his own weakness, his preaching was powerful. But powerful in what sense? Well, the language that he uses is this expression, that it was with a demonstration of the Spirit's power. Now, what does that mean? What do we understand by what Paul says here? That his preaching was with a demonstration of the Spirit's power?

The word there translated demonstration carries the idea, the meaning of rigorous proof. Paul's preaching was accompanied by rigorous proof of its power. And what was that proof? It wasn't passionate delivery, though there's a place for that. It's a perfectly good thing that there ought to be, or that there can be.

[ 27 : 12 ] Different preachers are different in terms of delivery. But that's not what he's talking about. He's not talking about powerful delivery. Like we might say, oh, he's a very powerful preacher. And what we mean is that, well, he's very passionate in the manner in which he communicates his message.

That's not what it's about. It's about spiritual results. The Corinthians were brought to faith. Sinners repented. Men and women and boys and girls were converted. This is the demonstration of the Spirit's power that Paul is referring to. He says, I was weak. I didn't have wise words. I didn't have persuasive words. But God worked. People were converted. The church grew. Men and women repented of their sins. That's the power that I'm talking about. And nothing has changed. The demonstration, the Spirit's power is what is needful today as in every day and in every age. In our preaching, in our testifying, in our speaking, in every ministry in which we are involved as a congregation, whether it be teaching at Sunday school, whether it be helping at a holiday club, whether it be helping at a Christianity anti-explored course or at food bank or at lunch club or whatever it is, if we are seeking to make known

Jesus and share with others the good news concerning Jesus, that activity or that task will only prove effective by the Spirit's power. But we can be encouraged in that regard because we are persuaded and we believe and we know it to be true that the Spirit of God is among us and He is among us to say. The Spirit of God is no reluctant participant in our witness, in our ministry to a sin-sick and needy world. And so that twofold resolution to know Christ and to make Him known, accompanied by this twofold recognition, a recognition of our weakness, but also a grateful recognition of God's power. And so I guess the question that we end with is one that we pose to each of you as I would pose it to myself, will you resolve to know Christ?

Will you resolve to make Him known? And if your response is, but I'm so weak, well that's good. Gladly recognize your weakness and joyfully recognize and rely on the Spirit's power.

Well, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank You for Your Word. We thank You for Paul's honesty in sharing with the Corinthians his experience of arriving in that city and overcome almost by a sense of inadequacy, by a sense of weakness and of fear, trembling, and yet mightily used by You.

[ 30 : 26 ] Yet he could look back and gratefully and joyfully acknowledge how God had used him and others as the good news of the gospel was made known and proclaimed in that city. And we pray that we would be like Paul in that regard, that there would be in us that heartfelt resolve to know Christ more deeply and to make Him and to make Him known and that as we so resolve, we would do so conscious of and acknowledging and recognizing our weakness, but leaning on and relying on Your power.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.