



GRACE CHURCH

Are You Ready?

2 Corinthians 13:1-14

Grace Church | 2.29.20

Today is Palm Sunday. That means that this week marks the time when the global and historic church enters into Holy Week, a time of reflection for us as we remember the steps of Christ that led him to the glorious pain of the cross and eventually to the triumphant joy of Easter. And this is a significant Sunday that I think is worth acknowledging, because what Palm Sunday is about, in many ways, is the coming of the king. When Christ came into Jerusalem, he rode on a donkey and did not appear outwardly strong, but yet the people acknowledged his peculiar glory. They welcomed his coming. But his march into Jerusalem would take stranger turns yet, as he did not come to triumph via the sword but via the cross. And so the same people who cheered him on Sunday abandoned him on Friday. They were not truly prepared for the coming of the king, because it upset their expectations.

In the book of Luke, we get a picture into what is truly going on when the people laid down their coats and palm leaves and shouted hallelujah in the streets. We read the first part of the narrative in our scripture reading today. But right after recounting the entry of Christ into Jerusalem, the book of Luke picks up on a different note in 19:41-44.

And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Right after receiving a humble but joyful entrance into the city, we read of Jesus' understanding of the somber reality: the people praise him for now, but in reality they do not know the time of visitation. They do not recognize what God is really doing, and for that we lament what is hidden from them. They were unprepared for Jesus' coming, and so the crowds who anticipated the salvation of the Lord with singing on Sunday missed the salvation of the Lord when it hung before them dying on Friday. They were not ready.



And in many ways, as we close our time in 2 Corinthians, we ask the same question. Are you ready for the coming of the king? Because a second coming, like a second Palm Sunday, is coming. The king will return again, and as we will see in our passage today, when he comes back it will be with outward power on hand. Not on a donkey, meek and mild, but on a charger, mighty and fearful.

In our text the Corinthians find themselves too in a situation of preparedness. They must be ready for Paul's return. No, he is not Christ the king, but the way they show themselves at his return will indicate whether they know the true king or not.

Last week we had the joy of running through all of our time in 2 Corinthians and remembering the truth of God we have found in this book. We remembered that the Paradox of weakness which is taught here is essential, and for our good, and for our unity and repentance. We remembered all of that because Paul wanted the Corinthians to remember that. He is coming again; this whole book is a letter attempting to prepare them for his third visit. His first visit was when he established and planted the church, and his second visit did not go well, he described it as "painful" because of the harsh rebuke he had to give. And now, preparing for his third visit, Paul does not want to come with rebuke at all. So if last week was his call to remember his purposes and his character, this week is his final exhortation to take his words to heart. We can call this Paul's farewell address, as he wraps up the purpose of his letter with both passion and compassion. And the heart of his farewell address is fairly simple: he wants them to be ready. So will find in this passage several elements that tie a bow on our time in this book: **a warning, a test, a change, and a blessing.**

The Warning (1-4)

Paul opens his farewell address by reinstating his planned trip in **verse 1**. He also wants to emphasize that when he comes, the charges against him by the super-apostles will not be proven. They have no witnesses to their accusations, but Paul does. We remember in chapter 2, Paul calls the Corinthians themselves his letters of recommendation. They are his witnesses, and their salvation validates his ministry. But look at how quickly he moves to warning here in verses **2-3**.

Paul is coming back soon, and he issues a sharp warning. He warned before, he warned them in letter, he warned them when he visited last, and now is his last warning. If those in the Corinthians congregation will not repent, he says he will not spare them. It is weird here to talk about Paul not "sparing" or Paul not holding back. What might he mean?

Well, I think what he has in mind here is that if he comes back the third time and some of the Corinthians have still not shown true repentance, then he realizes that what will be good for them is that he no longer bears with them in patience as he has done, but rather rebukes them and dismisses them. We find an example of Paul doing just this in 1 Timothy 1:20:

...some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.



The punishment that Paul has in mind here is that of withholding affirmation and comfort for the unrepentant. He knows that for those who have truly heard the comfort of the gospel again and again and again and yet not listened, what is good for their soul is not gentleness but discipline. And it's not as if Paul wants to do this. We see him say just the opposite in **verse 10**. Paul does not want to bring discipline on his third visit: this is exactly why he is writing. And yet, he still warns the Corinthians that he is not beyond it. He knows, as we should know, that warnings are so often for our good. Warnings are often the means that God uses to wake us up and keep us ready. Paul says just this in **verses 3-4**, using the example of Christ.

You see, Christ was crucified in weakness. He walked the road to calvary like a lamb, not uttering a word. But now, in his resurrection, he lives not in weakness but in outward strength. And when he comes again, Paul knows that it will be too late for those who teeter back and forth on the fence. And so this is why in the Scripture we have warnings to prepare ourselves for the return of Christ. He is a resurrected, victorious king, and when he comes again he will not spare the unrepentant. The first time Christ came, his humble weakness was our salvation. The second time, it will be the justice of his strong hand that will save us.

Listen, this is not in the Bible to scare you to repentance, as if Paul is using some spooky Christian Halloween play to force the hands of the Corinthians. We know that it is God's kindness that draws us to repentance. But what we forget is that it is because of God's kindness that he delays his return in the first place. 2 Peter 3:9, he desires that all would come to repentance. And yet, there is a day coming, and the warning of that day is the means of God's kindness towards us.

So in the book of 2 Corinthians, there exists throughout a thread of warning. Our lives are short, we don't have all the time in the world. So let us lean on Christ, forsaking the foolishness of self, embracing our weakness, and seek to please him now. Just because God has delayed his justice does not mean that it is not coming. Can we see the certainty of his coming again in power as a means of his kindness to wake us from our sleep?

Even this week, I feel as if some days I sleep through the day. Not actually, although I might sneak in a nap sometimes. I mean that I sometimes feel that I wasted it. That I had so many opportunities for holiness and so many opportunities to kill sin for the glory of God and to showcase the fruit of the spirit which praises him, but I missed it. And then when I feel conviction, I shrug it off. But friends, the sharp conviction associated with warning is not the Father showing his disappointment in you. It's him showing his love for you. He loves you too much not to warn you. He loves you too much to let you slumber though a life that could be lived with joyful pleasure in him.

The Test (5-10)



In his final preparations to the Corinthians, Paul does not only give a warning, but he also gives some instruction. We see the aim of his final address most clearly in **verse 5**: “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” You see, Paul is not wasting all of this ink in the Corinthians so that they can have some light reading while he is away. No, his goal, like any teacher, would be that they truly learn the truth of the gospel. And in order to learn, they must have a test. Their test, says Paul, will prove if they are ready for his return.

And the test he gives is very simple. It’s a test that only has one question: Is Jesus Christ in you? And Paul knows that only the Corinthians can truly answer that question for themselves. But it is not as if Paul doubts them. Remember, just because he is warning them does not mean he doubts them. We see what he is up to in **verse 6**. He knows, however, that if the Corinthians judge themselves to be in Christ, well that means that Paul and his associates also must be, since they were the ones who preached the gospel to them in the first place! As the Corinthians examine themselves and find themselves in Christ, they then are led to remember that Paul is not after their money and has no false motives: he himself is in Christ too. And if that is not clear by their self-examination, well then, he reminds them of his motives in **verses 7-10**. Paul reminds them that he is writing for their restoration, for their strengthening, even if he must appear weak to do so. He acts for the truth he says: he wants them to stand firm on the truth that they have heard from him. This is the reason his letter is so interpersonal: if they can accept Paul, the one who taught them the truth of the gospel, then they will also accept the truth of the gospel itself. He writes to build them up, so that their self-examination may prove their true faith in the end.

What does this mean for us? It means that just as warnings are often God’s kind way of waking us up to his goodness and grace, so too is self-examination. We must always be hunting out our blind spots, and trusting that as God’s word exposes them, it is for our benefit. If we are in Christ, any test of faith that is thrown our way is meant to show us again how Christ is powerful in us, to build our confidence in him.

So often we are afraid to examine ourselves because we are too busy examining others, comparing ourselves to others. But also I think our failure to examine and test our own hearts is because we are so quick to mistrust God before we mistrust ourselves. C.S. Lewis says it like this:

The ancient man approached God (or even the gods) as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man, the roles are quite reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock. He is quite a kindly judge; if God should have a reasonable defense for being the god who permits war, poverty, and disease, he is ready to listen to it. The trial may even end in God’s acquittal. But the important thing is that man is on the bench and God is in the dock.”¹

You see, by judging the apostle Paul, the Corinthians were really judging God. They were putting him to the test, they put him in the dock. But friends, it was never meant to be that way. Faith is the

¹ C.S. Lewis, *God In The Dock*



practice of letting God be the judge, and trusting that he is a good and right one. Just as he will not let the wicked go unpunished, he will make sure of it that all of those who repent of sin and put their life in the hands of Christ will be judged as righteous on the last day. So, when something like a virus pandemic circles the world, when we see pain and suffering so close, when we begin to doubt the ways of our King, when we see him as far off and never coming back and probably not caring, we become the judge of God. And we are bad, foolish, near-sighted judges.

Instead of judging others or judging God, our call is to examine ourselves. But we do so through the lens of gospel truth. My wife often helps me with this. I'll be down and have had a bad day, and so I am hard on myself, or saying things I don't really mean or believe. And she will remind me: "hey, that's not true. Examine yourself? Are you in the faith? Do you not realize, Christ is in you?" And that reality is such a balm for my soul. When you, a true Christian, who has forsaken all else to follow Jesus, go to examine yourself, you find Christ there. And Christ is who you need.

So how do we prepare ourselves for the coming of Christ? How do we take this paradox of weakness and apply it? We examine ourselves with eyes of faith. All those not in Christ are drawn to come to him, and all those who are in Christ find a weapon of truth.

The Charge (11-13)

Next we see Paul give the Corinthians a charge. This sums up his exhortation in the book with very simple positive commands. And here too he shifts his tone. Look what he calls them in **verse 11**. No longer is he speaking like a disciplinary Father, now he speaks as a brother. For all his talk of being their spiritual Father, in the end Paul knows that they are all in on this together. In the ancient world, to call someone not in your bloodline a brother or a sister was not common. It transcended status, what he does here. And to his brothers and sisters, he gives these charges: Rejoice, Restore, Comfort, Agree. We will go through these in turn.

First, **rejoice**. In all of this, Paul is proud of the Corinthians. They are in no way perfect, but the gospel they possess should lead them to joy. He knows that if they heed his warnings and examine themselves, then rejoicing will follow. He writes with expectancy, anticipating his arrival to be a joyous occasion. Even through his warnings with them, he has faith and does not doubt that joy will come. So too we must be a people who rejoice at every opportunity. When we can meet together again, that will be a day of rejoicing. When we see exactly what God is doing in this time, when we see all the fruit that comes from our suffering, that is a time of rejoicing. So we should expect it, church. Even Christ rode into Jerusalem ready to die, because he knew that on the other side there would be rejoicing evermore. He expected it, so should we. Never forget that.

Second, **restore**. Warning and self-examination are simply means to an end, and that end is ultimately restoration. Paul is eager to see himself restored to the Corinthians in full force. So we should be a people eager for restoration. For those who have harmed us, for those who we have harmed, for those in our body who are harder to love, who are needier, we aim always for



restoration. Because we remember that Christ is coming back and on that day all will be restored and no relationship will be broken forever.

Thirdly, **Comfort**. This is a great theme of this book. Our weakness is meant for our mutual comfort. As we heed together the warnings of Scripture, wake up and examine ourselves, and find we are in Christ, that brings a comfort to those in pain or doubt. So we should be willing and ready always to comfort one another with the comfort we have received.

Fourthly, **agree**. We must not be a people who fight over the small things or die on the wrong hills. Our weakness unifies us as people of truth who are united and stand on Scripture and by faith alone. We are not given to silly fights or quibbles or conviction without nuance. This is the charge of love, exactly what Paul expects from the Corinthians. He writes to remind them just how much they agree on. And so we agree on so much, and all we need, if we agree that all we need is Christ.

All of these charges wrap themselves up in this call to live at peace by greeting one another with a kiss in **verse 12-13**. No other authority in the life of the Corinthians would have told them to greet one another with a kiss. That greeting was reserved for family. This was not normal or widespread in their culture. Paul is saying : remember that you are family. Greet one another with such warmness. And he cannot wait fo the day when he comes back. He warns them now, but that day when he gets back and they are reunited, he will greet them with a kiss. And there is no greater warmth that I have experienced among so many different people than in the family of God. They will know us by our love, and they will see our love by our treatment of one another. THIS is not some insignificant footnote on this book. I pray our time apart will make us eager to greet one another so much more warmly when we are together again.

The Blessing (14)

And so church, this text and this book ends with perhaps one of the most beautiful benedictions in all of Scripture. It's a blessing for the road. It's a loaded theological bullet right into the hearts of the readers. It's a song of praise that sustains us. It's poetry. **Read 14**. Here Paul's Trinitarian language flows out like water. He can't help but describe the gospel as a act of the mighty three in one. And so he starts where every Christian starts: the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are in Christ, you have entered in by the grace of Christ. This takes us back to the sheer and undeserved mercy of God in not only sending his son, but sending his son to die. Today is Palm Sunday, and we picture in our mind the Christ riding on the donkey and we see grace itself. We cannot help but bow and get low and lay down our coats and the branches and shout Hosanna. The kind of grace has come, ready to die and bleed for us. Grace is his language, grace is his currency, grace is his method, and in his life and death and resurrection we are showered with it.

And it' sby this grace our eyes our opened to the love of God the Father. He sent his grace filled son because of the depths of his love. He loved us from eternity, long before we ever loved him. He chose us from the foundation of the world to lavish his love on us, and his love is so tangible and



majestic that when we see it rightly we can never be the same and we can never resist it. It is so lovely because he himself is love, not as if he possesses it, but he is it. It is because of the love of the Father that you are who you are and you are his.

Finally, we remember that our God did not leave us alone. He sent a comforter, one to make fellowship with us. By his Holy Spirit living in us we are sealed with God, taken up in the Trinitarian dance, charged up for holiness, guided into all truth. The Spirit is our constant companion, bringing us together as one body in fellowship as we share him together.

This is the gospel we preach. This is ultimately how we are made ready. The king will come again, and we will be ready for him. Not ultimately because of what we did, but because of who God is. He is grace, he is love, he is fellowship. So take that blessing church, and rest on that. Take all the truths of this book, and let them drive you to that fountain. As you go out, take this blessing for your journey, this truth for your nourishment:

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

