

I Am Ordinary

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[0 : 00] Okay, for the month of August we're doing something slightly different, or I'm doing a different series, a short series of four sermons. We took a break before the summer from Romans, and we'll go back to Romans in September.

But we're taking a break morning and evening doing something, going through Philippians, whistle stop tour of Philippians this evening. But this morning we're looking at a theme of ordinary Christians.

So today the theme is I am ordinary. Next Sunday morning, God willing, it will be I am a spiritual cynic, and then I am a spiritual failure, and then I have nothing to offer.

Good, bright, encouraging stuff, you know? And these are the themes that we're going to look at under the term of being an ordinary Christian. Why did I choose this theme?

Well, I guess ultimately because I believe God led me to consider it. But I don't think it's something that's preached about very often in our popes.

[1 : 04] These are matters that I battle and struggle with, and so I guess most of us do also. And it's something that, passively, I hear a lot from people in their lives, these kind of issues, paralysis spiritually, guilt, misunderstanding of what it is we possess and what it means in our lives to be a Christian, and what our expectations are of being a Christian.

I'm just ordinary. That's all I am. I'm plain and ordinary. And that's what we say so often, isn't it? You can't expect of me. I'm just ordinary.

And I'm just wanting to ask, is that a bad thing? Is that a bad thing before God and is it a bad thing spiritually? What are you wanting to be? Are you wanting to be extraordinary?

Are you wanting to be super special? Do you look at your Christian life and spend your time comparing yourself with others? Badly. I'm not like them.

I'm not as good as them. I can't be like them. I fail in what I am. Or do we sometimes use the ordinariness as an excuse for behaving badly?

[2 : 15] Well, I'm just an ordinary Christian. You can't expect me to be holy or separate or different. Maybe we grade people into ordinary and extraordinary or plain and simple and then important and significant.

Maybe particularly in this age and generation of the internet where we were constantly bombarded with amazing Christians and amazing spiritual leaders.

It could be that we use it to deny our responsibility or a genuine feeling of inadequacy. I'll probably be coming back to that in and out of this series because that's no bad thing, is it?

It's no bad thing to have a genuine sense of inadequacy depending on what we do with it, depending on where we take it. And really that's what the direction that I would look to be going in through Scripture over these few weeks.

And I want to say today, God is happy with ordinary. God is happy with ordinary. And I want to use the example of Peter and John to defend that thesis that God is happy with ordinary.

[3 : 27] We're told that in the chapter that we read and we recognize that in what they say in verse 13. Now, when they saw the boldness of Peter and John after this great miracle that they performed, they were astonished and they recognized, sorry, and perceived that they were uneducated common men.

Ordinary is another translation of that word, they were astonished, they recognized that they had been with Jesus. The disciples, Peter and John here particularly, they weren't special people. They weren't extraordinarily gifted in their lives. They hadn't even been educated in any formal sense. They were fishermen.

That's what they did. They were fishermen. They were manual laborers. They were ordinary people. They didn't have spectacular gifts.

And at many levels, the Bible is a most ordinary book. Now, don't quote me on that, because it's also the Word of God and therefore it's extraordinary.

[4 : 37] But what I mean by that is that it is full of ordinary people, people who are failed and fallen and paradoxically used by God, confusingly dull people, ordinary people.

You know, it's at that level of ordinary books about everyday life. There are some amazingly plain and ordinary things in the Bible. The pages of the Bible are full of details that would never make the history books of this world.

They would never make the biographies of important, significant, famous people. Peter and John exemplifies believers in their ordinariness in many ways.

The problem so often in the times of the New Testament and also in our own times is both comparison and expectation.

So that we spend a lot of our times comparing ourselves to what's around us and what we see in the church and maybe what we think is in the Word.

[5 : 42] And that verse 13, it talks about them being uneducated or common men. The word that we are given there is idiots, the word that we unfortunately get idiots from.

But they weren't idiots, but that is the corruption of the English that has come to us. Common is what it means really, ordinary, unlearned. And it would be, it's a word that would have been used particularly in comparison with other people.

Oh, compared with these people who are educated, compared with these people who are professionals, or who are gifted, I'm ordinary, I am un-gifted, I am amateur, I'm a layperson.

And so it was a comparative word, and very often we use that also in our Christian lives. We compare ourselves with others, and we come to the conclusion we are just very ordinary.

God has not stopped at our door when we were born and poured out lots of gifts on us. He bypassed us at that stage.

[6 : 45] And also I think it is to do with expectation, extraordinary expectation. Un... What's the word I'm looking for there?

Expectation that is not biblical, I can't think of the unword. It's been in holiday, brain stops working. But an expectation that doesn't come from the word, but that we have laid on ourselves the kind of people we should be.

We should be people who are Christians, who are God's power, who have got the Holy Spirit. We should change the world. We should be able to do like these apostles, miracles. We...

Destiny's a big word today, isn't it? I actually hate that word. And I was gonna... I was hoping to say that it's not a word that's in the Bible. It's not biblical word. Well, it's not a theological word, I don't think.

But it is in the Bible, but in a different way. It usually refers to your end, the destiny, the end you have.

[7 : 50] I think today it's used a lot of, you know, fulfill your life. You can never be complete unless you meet your destiny, as if it's some kind of thing that you can miss by taking a wrong turning.

I've missed my destiny and I can't... there's nothing left to live for. But drama and excitement and moving mountains, I think we can often misapply God's promises and what God means for us to be.

I'm not decrying these things that have come on to say, but we're looking at being ordinary. And I think... I know I am ordinary, and I suspect most of you think you're ordinary people as well.

What matters? What is it that matters in our very ordinariness today, in your life and in mine? Well, it's exactly the same as here.

It's exactly the same. And it may be that you are extraordinary as a person. I'm not sure you may be extraordinary, but I'm not really speaking to you if you are.

[8 : 54] Well, I am. I'm sure God will use you if you're extraordinary or if you're ordinary. But it doesn't really matter because what does matter is the same for both. If you're exceptionally gifted, if you're one in a million in terms of your position in this world or if you just feel you're very ordinary, what matters is just the same.

Verse 13, it was noted, it was recognized that they had been with Jesus. That's what's incredibly important here in the lives of Peter and John.

They were people, ordinary people, and it was noted that they had been with Jesus. That is what set them apart. It wasn't anything else. It wasn't anything grand that was this, that they had been with Jesus.

These were disciples who were living, I believe, one day at a time. There's no evidence that they had some great plan of destiny for themselves, that they had a master plan that they were on page one of and that they knew right to the end of the book.

I doubt very much they felt that they were world changers at that point, even though they became world changers. I think it's much more likely that they faced death every day.

[10:03] It was much more likely that they had no idea of what lay ahead. They recognized that they were outsiders. In many ways, they were exiles.

They were nobodies. They lived a day at a time, but they lived a day at a time in the company of the Lord Jesus Christ. They had been with Jesus.

That was their reputation. That was what set them apart. That's what stuck, and that was what was thought provoking to those who saw what they were doing. And the result of that in their lives was a Christ-centered confidence.

See, I want us to move beyond just ordinaryness and recognize where being in Jesus' company takes us. There was a boldness and a courage, a freedom of speech and a conviction that we see in them.

We cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. They are being in Christ's company. This resurrected Savior made a huge difference to their ordinary lives because they couldn't stop living with conviction of knowing this living God.

[11:11] And that's what matters in our lives. It's a very simple message, and it's a very glorious message, is that we too, I think, it's absolutely right for us, in many ways, to live one day at a time.

You may feel your life is dull because you have no master plan, no vision to share, no longing for greatness. We're not apostles. We're not founders of the church. Yet we share this ordinariness with them, and I think it's okay for us to be ordinary, to have a dull job, not always to be smiling on Instagram, not to be influential by our own estimation.

It's okay not to have any letters after our name, to fail, to not invent something incredible. It's okay not to stem the tide of secularism within Scotland or in Edinburgh, to stand up and change the world with regard to injustice and immorality.

Change that world on our own, yet by God's grace, we can be those who have been in Jesus company, and that changes everything.

To be in Jesus' company, I'm going to hammer two things this year. I'm sorry for those who are visiting with us, that I'm hammering gently and with grace and love, our own people, because I'm hammering myself.

[12:32] There'll be two things that I'm going to say quite a lot, I think, this year, from the semester onwards. One is the spiritual disciplines, the importance of the spiritual disciplines in our lives, encouraging all of us to spend more time in the company of Jesus as individuals, as people.

We try and do lots as a church and lots in community, and we can do this together, of course, and that's hugely important. But to be people who recognize the importance and the significance of praying and being in the Word, and of knowing and understanding His company, living, that takes us to the place where we're living out grace.

So the spiritual disciplines, it sounds quite formal and it sounds quite dictatorial, but a better way of putting it might be your walk with Jesus.

Your walk, you know, that walk with you, the way of life that you have, it's more about, more than just about Bible reading and prayer. It's having this being with Jesus and knowing Jesus in our life and in our lifestyle and in our decisions and in all that we are, so that you're not simply dependent on church company or church formal activities or anything other than that relationship that you have as an ordinary believer and as I have with the living God, it's the key to everything.

That quiet, unassumed relationship with God. Think about it in this world as a principle, you know, with amazingly gifted people even, say like Andy Murray as a tennis player, a Scotsman, a hip supporter, and think of great athletes or great musicians or great people.

[14:17] We see them up front and we see their gifts, we can never be like that, but we forget the huge amount of time and practice that they consistently, relentlessly put in in the background into the developing their gift, the graft behind the grace that they've been given.

And we're not saying that the graft is what earns us favor with God, or is a justification by works, but rather it's the graft that develops and grows the grace of salvation in our lives.

A relationship that needs to be nurtured, developed and protected, like every relationship, isn't it? It needs that development and protection.

Jesus company, they'd been with Jesus one day at a time. We see that routine, routine is very important, I think, in our spiritual, ordinary spiritual lives, even in our extraordinary ones.

You see it with Daniel, you see it with Jesus himself, you see it with the disciples, with the drawing to pray, finding a place, going to worship. You say, I'm not good at routine, I'm a kind of, I'm a free spirit, I'm not so good with routine.

[15:25] And I'm saying, well, you can do it. You may be a free spirit, but I guarantee you brush your teeth every day. I guarantee you eat every day and I guarantee we sleep every day and we probably check social media every day, because we get into routines of the things that are important and significant to us.

And I'm saying that in our ordinariness, may it be that we take Jesus Christ into that routine every single day of our lives and get to know Him, because He accepts us in our ordinariness.

He loves us and He loves to hear about us and He embraces us. And He isn't phased by our plainness or by our lack of gifts. He never tires of hearing our complaints and our doubts and our fears and our rejoicing and our worship, because He is beautiful and He is God.

I guarantee in our lives that we're either in one way or in another, and maybe spiritually we're either in a routine or in a rut. I think there's a difference. Only one of them is good.

We can be in a rut of bad ordinariness, where we leave God out and we have no time for God in our routine. It's a sinful rut. Can we change that rut to a routine that includes relationship with God and speaks to Him and plugs into that relationship with Him?

[16:50] Because both routine and a rut have consequences in our lives as to our reputation as believers.

So being Jesus' company in the spiritual disciplines, and that brings me to saying that I think I'm going to say a lot today, or in the next while, is just the impossibility of grace.

The disciples were very ordinary. They lived, they did lots of impossible things, literally, even in this chapter that we've read or the chapter before.

And from day one, it must have seemed like an absolute impossibility to them. But we are fishermen. How could we do this? How can we live our lives as believers?

Nobody believes what we're saying. How can we fulfill the Great Commission? And I think that's a great place for us to be. From day one of our Christian lives to recognize it as an impossibility, we're nobody's.

[17:53] We may not have any particular gifts or abilities. And we see the secular waves coming in on us, and we feel, how can God be honored, and how can people be saved?

And we find great impossibilities. That's good. I think that's a great place to be, because it drives us back to the God for whom nothing is impossible. If your Christian life is manageable, if you've got it all sussed, and if you don't really need God on a day-to-day basis, well, I know the truth and I understand the gospel, and I remember my catechisms and whatever it might be, then we've misunderstood.

We should be coming to Jesus Christ on a daily basis saying, I can't do this. I can't be a Christian. I can be a Christian among people.

I can look like a Christian. I can even act like a Christian, but I can't be one. You're maybe not asked to raise people from the dead or do the great miracle that the disciple did, but today, as Christians, we're faced with impossibilities.

You're asked today, and I'm asked today to love God, to love my neighbor and my fellow Christian, to love my enemy. I'm called to be transformed from the inside out.

[19:11] I'm called to holiness and patience and kindness. I'm called to believe. It's all impossible. We can't do it unless we're dependent on the living God without that daily reliance on Christ so we become people who know Him and know who He is and know what He promises and know His great love and know that in our absolute ordinariness, He accepts and empowers us to live our lives.

The more we're in His company, I think the more beautiful He becomes and He becomes the object of our faith rather than living our lives in a certain way.

Mary had it right, didn't she, when she was at the feet of Jesus? He didn't rebuke her for that in His wisdom. It matters more than anything.

That's not a call to spiritual laziness, or is it a call to say we don't need to do anything, but just be in that secret place. But rather, it's the paradox.

It's the foundation place for being great Christians, part of a great church. And it's where we will see great things flow from our ordinariness because we're relying on the extraordinary one who is the living God.

[20 : 35] So it's being in Christ's company, and that then briefly, that gives us Christ's confidence. These were men who had become bold and who had become courageous, and it was astonishing.

They couldn't stop talking about this Savior and doing good works in His name. Therefore the call is just to live your ordinary Christian life and let the confidence of that transform who you are and who I am.

It changes our priorities. The disciples in their ordinariness chose to obey God, not men. It could have meant their death, but they chose to obey God.

And it was just plain obedience. And it gave them that Christ confidence, a willingness to share that relational reality of knowing this Christ who was risen and who had transformed their lives.

They just needed to pass that on. And if people, other people can't see it, there was an infectiousness about what they were doing.

[21 : 47] And who knows, therefore I will say where that leads to in our ordinary lives. What good we will do for Him. And it might not be recognized by anyone.

It might not be recognized by the world. We might not get plaques with our name on them. We might not get a statue on Princess Street or whatever else where they used to put statues of great Christian men.

Probably not be too long before they haul them down. But we might not get any of that. We might not get any recognition. Nobody might notice what we do, but God will, and it will change.

It will be what changes people's lives undoubtedly. I sincerely believe, in God's word, that if we are an army of ordinary Christians living ordinary lives in the company of Jesus as it's modelled here by Peter and John, then that we will know a revolution of grace in our own lives and in the life of the church and in the life of the city, because the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Because that is what we are called to do. There is a cost. There's a cost for you, and there's a cost for me in my life. You willing to have the reputation of belonging to Jesus and not use your ordinariness as an excuse for being in a rut rather than in a routine.

[23 : 25] May it be that we find ourselves in the routine of being in Christ's company which transforms us rather than being in a rut of unbelief and of separation from Him, because that from day one has been what Satan wants to do, to keep us from Jesus Christ, to make us turn the other way, whether it be religiously or irreligiously, turning away from the only one who can redeem us.

And the sacrament is a reminder to us of our need daily for the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Let's bow our heads briefly in prayer.

Another God we ask and pray that you would take your word and bless it to us. We do feel cursed sometimes by ordinariness. And we know even with sometimes the best of motives, we do use it as an excuse to hide behind, to leave the work of the gospel to those we regard as extraordinary and that we can't be used, but yet help us to look through the Bible characters today, maybe at some point in this afternoon and see how plain, how fallen and how failed so often they were, but they were chosen.

And they were redeemed and they were dependent. Help us to be people who have the reputation of being with Jesus. And that Lord of course means that we are those who will share Him in just from our own experience in our lives.

Help us to do that. Help us to know how to do that. Help us to learn how to do that more and more. And bless us as we come to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. May it be a means of grace to our spiritual lives.

[25 : 24] Amen.