

Compassion and Conversions

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- [0 : 0 0] But I've been reading, I say, this week in my own readings. And after last Sunday night, sometimes it's strange being a minister, a strange phenomenon being a minister.
- And there are one or two ministers here who will know what I'm speaking about. But after last Sunday evening, flat as a pancake, nothing left to say. There's no point in carrying on.
- It's not making any difference. And nobody seems to be coming to faith in Christ. The word is just going through people and back outside, no one's interested.
- And there's no passion and fire and above all, no conversions. And it was really flat at the lack of people coming to faith, lack of people coming to Jesus Christ.
- And you wrestle with that. And you wrestle with yourself, you wrestle with your own heart, you wrestle with your techniques and your models of ministry and with your own life and with the congregation and lots of things.
- [1 : 1 6] And it can be very sobering spiritually, the experience to have that. Lack of conversions within the congregation, lack of conversions within the church, nationally.
- Lack of conversions to Christ within the city. Just as I kind of dipped into someone else's conversation when they were speaking, who was saying, do you know that there's only 2% of people in Edinburgh even go to church?
- 2% of people in this city. And so sometimes these things just hit you like a freight train and you end up crying to the Lord and asking Him to speak and asking for guidance.
- Is it time to move on? Is it time to try something else? Is it time for someone else to take over? What is it, Lord, that you want?
- And it came to this chapter when I believe God spoke personally in encouragement to me.
- [2 : 2 5] The reality of the situation here is the same as it is as we looked at in the passage with regard to compassion. The people had turned their backs, they were kind of desks, obstinate children as he says in verse 1 of chapter 30.
- They were rebellious, they were kind of hypocritical. We read that in these verses, you know, they were doing one thing in public and then one thing in the dark and who will see, who will know. And they were turning the whole of God, like what we were saying this morning, turning God in His head as the potter and those who were at the clay were kind of questioning God.
- And we can so often be exposed in the same way as questioning, what do you know God? What are you doing? Why are you doing what you're doing? As if he's accountable to us at that level.
- But then God gave me these words from verse 17 onwards, which I believe were His promise. Not only to me, but also to the people to whom this was written and we must always bed our understanding in that.
- Because from verse 17 forwards, Isaiah is prophesying great messianic days, days of blessing, days when people's eyes will be opened, where people will be taken out of the gloom and the darkness, where the death will hear the words of the scroll and they will be rejoicing in the Lord.

[3 : 53] And this messianic is looking forward to the New Testament, it's looking forward to the coming of the Christ. That's one of the great things about Isaiah, keeps on looking forward to the coming of the Saviour, the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Gospel prophecy, the Kingdom coming, the ultimate revelation of this compassionate God who will come in the person of Jesus Christ, speaking of the harvest of New Testament days. These are our days, these are the days in which we live.

And so I think there's better days that we need to grasp, not just better days that Isaiah looks forward to, but we need to grasp these days and see just beyond the kind of theological formulation of the text and remind ourselves that this is what God is looking for and wanting in his Kingdom today, of which we're apart.

And I believe that he encouraged me with these words, crying out about conversion, and he says, in a very short time, will not Lebanon be turned into a fertile field?

Speaking about times of blessing and times of empowerment and times of conversion, there will be a harvest. And that's really all I wanted to say. I think sometimes it's important to remember that our ears have to be open and sometimes we are crying and we're looking for God to answer us, not in kind of spooky voices, mystical words, but simply through his word as we come to it. And as we pray for conversions by his Spirit as we live humbly and as we live in his confidence and in his strength as we were reading earlier on, that as we lean on him and rest on him and live close to him, then in this congregation we will see conversions.

There's not many people here in our church on a week-to-week basis who have to be converted.

[6 : 30] Our church is mainly filled with Christians, not exclusively, but mainly. I think as we are praying for the people next to us, people that we know, people that we love, our neighbours, flatmates, our colleagues, our family members, and as Christ is precious to us, then may it be that we seek the preciousness of Christ for them.

And they will ask that they will hear his word, even though maybe at the moment they don't, that they will listen to his voice in a way that maybe they don't at the moment, that their eyes themselves will be opened and it will be a great blessing for them to know Christ Jesus and to know what it means to follow him.

I think when that is the case, there will be great rejoicing in our lives. It speaks about that in verse 19, and once more the humble will rejoice in the Lord as we live close to him. There will be great rejoicing.

I think, and I may be wrong, I think there's a great lack of rejoicing in our Christian lives. And I wonder if it's related to the fact that we're not at that place where we are able to share the gospel and are burdened for the gospel and are burdened for conversions. I certainly feel that in myself and I make no judgement on anyone else.

But Christ says in his New Testament words, the fields are ripe for harvest in John 4.35, or in the Aave as it used to be, are white to harvest.

[8 : 16] Not quite sure what that meant, but they are certainly ripe to harvest and we are to pray to the Lord of the harvest. And I hope that you will do that and you will remember that you are the evangelists, not me.

We are all the evangelists, but you have the contacts with people far more than I have, and you're the ones who are to be praying for your friends and colleagues and living in a way that will challenge them to consider the Christ that is precious to you.

And I hope and pray that we will see it in a very short time, the fertile field blossoming in a forest, spiritually speaking, as we think of our own situation and where people will hear the words and the gloom and the darkness will be lifted and the eyes of the blind will see.

May that be our hope and our prayer for ourselves as we go into this new semester, new term, whatever you want to call it, new part of our lives and that we will see many people coming to faith in Christ.

I guarantee there's nothing greater for us and see people that we love who care about coming to Christ. No better thing and it brings no more rejoicing for us and it will change what we are absolutely when we have and see and experience conversions among us.

[9 : 51] Entirely, I believe that. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we ask and pray that you would speak to us from your word, that you would challenge us with your truth and that we would be unafraid to wrestle with you and to bring before you our grief and our struggles and our doubts and our feelings of inadequacy and our lack of vision and our lack of sight and sometimes our deafness and our closed Bible and all these things that sometimes trouble us and the lack of fruitfulness that maybe we are aware of in our own lives and maybe even congregational and we pray and seek Heavenly Father, that we would be encouraged that you speak to us not just kind of exegetically from your word but also personally from your word as we cry out, as we open the book and as we listen for your voice that you would speak to us and that we would be encouraged in a short time these things will happen.

We do pray for conversions to Christ. This may become kind of unpopular to speak in these terms because of the challenge that it brings.

Lord as we were reminded this morning the centrality of the cross and the amazing work of Jesus Christ where He dealt with death, a death that each one of us are under unless and until we come to Him, that we would have a real burden for the people we know and love.

We pray for our friends and our colleagues, pray for the people that we really love and know, we pray for people that we care about and that we maybe always think about in terms of their lack of spirit, in fact they will never believe.

How could they ever believe? Lord give us faith to believe and give us a passionate concern to pray that you will open the hearts of the people that we are in contact with particularly and the people that we are around, our neighbors particularly in whatever form our neighbors are.

[12 : 26] We pray that we would be bold, gentle, courageous and strong in our witness that we would be real and spiritual and holy but respected because of the honesty and humility of our faith.

We pray for our friends and for them to have a loving concern to pray for our friends and to believe that God has a purpose for them. He said and promised and gave us a promise eight years ago here saying I have many people in this city and we do pray to see that brought to fruition.

We thank you for the amazing throughput of people we have had here over these eight and a half years and we ask for many many more but especially those who don't know you to come to faith in you and to give us joy and excitement and freshness in our worship and in our lives for Jesus' sake. Amen.