

Hi, at its best Church is all about living life to the full.

At its best what we talk here about is
how we can discover what life is all about;
how to overcome life's hurts; and
where we find the power to live it well.

Learning how to do this is more important than maths and physics and chemistry
it is deeper than biology, its more relevant than history

I think it is the most important stuff in the world
*In fact, the reason why I chucked in my job in the city to do what I'm doing now
is because
life is more important than fast cars; and
people are more important than swimming pools.*
This stuff, is **way more important** than anything else I can think of...

At its best what we do here is to discover
the one who made us,
the source of our being,
the one who can live alongside us forever!
and knowing this is way better than foreign holidays, big houses and fancy careers...

*Later on this evening we're going to hear from Lisa Meadows,
a young woman whose personal story is deeply moving (its' reality in the raw) and
she simply wants to testify to the truth that the power of God in life is totally transforming –
where the world failed – God worked.*

So tonight I want to take the passage that was read in 1 Corinthians chapter 2, p1145 and draw out 3 three things:

- How the world goes about answering the questions of life
- How God calls us to answer these questions; and
- how to live life in full.

the way of the world goes about answering these questions, how God answers them, and how to live life well.

So here's

1. The Way the World goes about answering life's questions.

*We already know that Paul dedicated his life to talk about the big questions of life with people
He gave up his home, the respect of his friends, his job, his life-style – to share with people what life is all about.*

And because he had sacrificed so much...

*You'd expect him to present the most sophisticated arguments,
to use every oratory trick in the book,
to be bold and persuasive and clever.*

yet He said in v1, **“When I came to you, brothers, I DID NOT come with eloquence or superior wisdom”, v4
“My message and my preaching WERE NOT with wise and persuasive words”.**

And this is odd!!

Because surely if something is really important to you, if you've given up everything to pursue it – then you're gonna try to be as persuasive as you possibly can!

After all, this is way the world would do it...

The world likes “eloquence”, it likes “clever”, it likes “bright and shiny”.

It would say the answer to life is found in being “great” and “impressive” and “succeeding”.

The world says

“If you want to be liked, if you want to be valued, if you want “to be important” then present your best image!”,

The world says

“look good, be clever, earn lots, be funny, be confident, be successful, don't admit your mistakes...”

This is the way to earn worth and value, to be happy and accepted.

This is how the world answers the big questions of “who we are”; and “how to live”; and “how to measure our worth”

But Paul doesn't do this, and

he doesn't do it because it doesn't work and it'll screw you up!

It'll screw you up because

1.1 For many of us, these things are unobtainable

If we make these things our measure of worth... then

What happens if we're not particularly good looking?

What happens if we're dyslexic and we can't do exams well?

What happens if we don't get a really high-flying job?

What happens if we're shy or not good with words?

What happens if we never get the breaks we deserve?

What happens if something terrible happens to us and something (or someone) stamps on our dreams, our self-respect, and any chance of getting these things?

I'll tell you what happens... we feel rubbish about ourselves

If we use these things to value ourselves, then not having them, will make us feel inadequate and “worth less”.

And how many young women get screwed up because they don't have the body shape that they want?

Because they don't have the looks that they feel they need?

How many marriages get wrecked because the husband makes his career success more important than his wife and kids?

How many people feel inadequate because they can't make the exam grades, or get the job, or afford the house, or find the husband, or have a family?

Making this stuff the way we value our life will screw us up – firstly because for many it is unobtainable.

But secondly, for many it IS obtainable – and that is even worse!, because

1.2 These things are simply superficial.

The biggest problem for many is not that they DON'T obtain this stuff – it is that they DO get this stuff and they then think this is what life is all about!

Listen, our value is not defined by our jobs, or our looks, or our wealth - we are more than that. *And we ALL know this!*

Our value isn't about our IQ, or our competence or even the image we project - we are deeper than that.

We know these things are not what life is all about,

But **if we live as if they are**, then we will never discover the depths of why we were made.

If we live, AS IF this stuff is how we value ourselves – then it'll kill our appetite to search deeper.

And we all, to some extent, are infected by this...

Do you see?

Thinking this way

screws us up

it is simply superficial; and

1.3 It prevents us from ever being real with God

if this is the way we value ourselves... then

because we are so used to *earning* our acceptance,

because we are so used to passing a test to qualify,

because we are so used to putting on a mask to impress others

then we'll try to do the same with God.

If everything within us says “in order to be accepted we must perform”

then we'll try to perform for God,

we'll try to earn his acceptance and (as a result) we will never be real with Him.

Listen, if our sense of acceptance is based upon our performance – then all we'll do is bury (ignore, deny) our failures.

We'll never be honest with God.

We'll say “*hang on, if I am real before you God, if I admit what I am really like before you, if I face the person that I really am, then*

you'll think 'well they're not very loveable'

you'll see how selfish I am,

*you'll see all the stuff then **even I** dislike about me*

and I don't want that

I want to be accepted

I want you to see my good stuff

*I want to **earn your** approval”*

So I'll just sweep this stuff under the carpet and not really look at it!

And I'll never be open with you or myself...

Listen, everything in this world has taught us to think this way

“to succeed I must perform”

“to be accepted I must be good enough” - and

IF THAT IS TRUE

then we cannot possibly be real before God - or before ourselves - or before anyone else for that matter!
because then we'll have to admit how far short we fall from God's standards and that
is the VERY last thing we want if we want to impress God.

So, if this is the way we value ourselves, and for all of us, to some extent it is –
then we cannot be real with God.

And if we cannot be real with God –
we will never find him.

We'll never have a real relationship with him

It'll only ever be make-believe, a pretence, anaemic...

Do you see? Thinking this way

screws us up

is shallow; and

robs us of any chance of having a living relationship with God.

This is why Paul didn't approach it this way.

2. This is how He approached life

And if you want to discover what life is all about;

to know how to overcome life's hurts; and

to find the power to live it well

then no matter who you are, and no matter how old or young you are, and no matter whether you are a
Christian or not,

we need to do 3 things.

2.1 Firstly, we need to stand before the cross.

Paul says in v2 [“For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”](#).

Paul says, when I came to you, to talk about to live life, to talk about how to live an extraordinary life, to talk
about finding the one who made us,

I spoke to you only and always about the cross.

It was always about the cross.

The cross is the only thing, I really, really wanted you to get!

For from it everything follows and our life changes.

What Lisa will say later on tonight – all flows from the cross...

So the first step is simply to stand before the cross and see Jesus Crucified.

The second step...

2.2 Is to be real.

to be real, to be honest, to take off the mask.

Paul said v3 [“I came to you in weakness and fear and with much trembling”](#).

He didn't come as 'Mr Super Apostle',
He didn't boasting about the miracles he had performed
He didn't come saying "have you read my letter to the Romans – now that's what you call theology!"

He came in weakness and fear and with much trembling.
He was real about who he was and what he was like.

You know I have never met anyone who is not in some way broken and flawed.
When I was in the city, it was filled with high-flying, confident, clever, successful people who simply wore masks.
Scratch the surface and you'd find just as many broken marriages, just as much selfishness, just as much heartache, anxiety and depression as anywhere else.

We are all broken to some extent.
We all have struggles, we all have histories, we all have failings.
You are no different to me, and I am no different to you.
We've all been stuffed up - and we all stuff up – some of us a just better at hiding it than others ☺

So try this – perhaps for the first time in your life, before the cross, be real.
Tell Jesus what you are **really** like.
(It will go against every fibre of your being, It will be the most unnatural thing you have ever done...)
(The world will say "NO if you want to be accepted: cover up, look good, put on your best")...
DON'T...

Be real. If you want to find life, be real in front of Jesus.
Say it as you really are.
No excuses, no justification, no explanations as to why its never your fault...
Just say it.

Whoever you are... will you do that?
Stand in front of the cross;
Be real
and then thirdly

2.3 Discover the Power of God's love.

Because here's the deal.
[v 5 our faith does not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.](#)

As we stand before Jesus acknowledging
all the places where we have screwed up in our life, and
all those times when we have failed to be the person we should have been.
You would expect Jesus to reject us...
You'd expect him to say – you're rubbish, go away.
You'd expect him to say – call yourself a Christian?, do you really think you are worthy of me?

But don't listen to those voices
Look at the cross, with Jesus on it and realise
He doesn't condemn you – he is forgiving you!
He isn't judging you – he is saving you!
He isn't turning his back on you – he is holding his arms open for you!

Stand before Jesus crucified

and realise that Jesus knew all of this stuff about you anyway,

He knew it all and still he thinks you are valuable enough, and precious enough and loved enough to die for.

You see human wisdom says that 'acceptance', 'belonging', 'status', depends upon our performance

The world's wisdom says "try harder, be good, be perfect"

v7 But **there is a secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden, that God destined to be your glory before time began**".

Do you get it??

Your glory is not about how good you are,

Your glory is not about how lovable you are.

Your glory IS ABOUT how LOVED YOU ARE

how PRECIOUS YOU ARE

And how God has proved that by hanging on a cross for you.

Do you see?

Are you looking?

Is the penny dropping? This is how precious you are!

This is how God answers the biggest questions in life – on a cross!

And its taking what you see here and applying it to our life that gives us

(finally, third point)

3. The Power to live life to the Full

Tim Keller tells the story of the Vending Machine in the lobby of his apartment where you'd put your money in, turn the handle and nothing would happen. So what you'd have to do is to just keep banging and banging the side until the pennies dropped – and then it worked!

I think the cross is like this.

We hear it, but at first we just don't get it.

We just need to keep banging on about it until the penny drops.

But when the penny DOES drop,

when we 'get' that the God of the Universe is being crucified for us because he thinks we are that valuable, that precious

The implications change our life.

3.1 Firstly he gives us the power to put our burdens down

You see all the things that trouble us, all our fears, our insecurities, our paranoia – they are buried deep within us.

When we receive God's forgiveness at the cross

His Spirit penetrates these layers, these deep wounds and he shows us that we.. are.. forgiven..

And if we are forgiven, then we can forgive EVEN those who have hurt us.

If we have been utterly honest before Jesus on the cross,

If we have seen ourselves as we truly are –

If we have seen how much Jesus paid to forgive us

then

- 1) we can receive that forgiveness for to do anything else would be an insult (we can receive it, put it down and need never return to it again); and
- 2) we can give forgiveness because whatever it costs us to forgive (and it may be huge!) it will never be as much as it cost Jesus to forgive us.

God gives us the power to put our burdens down and move on and break free.

3.2 He gives us the Power to make the right choices.

It is our choices that destroy us.

It is our choice to believe lies about ourselves – our choice!

It is our choice to go our own way – that will destroy us!

Jesus walks alongside us in our life

and because we understand that we are unconditionally loved

our love for him becomes **the motivation** to ask him, to give us the power to make **right** choices.

We can't do it in our own strength

Lisa will tell you more about this...

We can't do it in our own strength

We can do it when God shows us how precious and noble we are...

So we don't screw ourselves up by telling lies, or by watching wrong things, or by feeding any of our desires that would hurt us

Jesus shows us we are better than that!

We are worth more than that!!

He gives us the power to put our burdens down

He gives us the Power to make the right choices.

and finally

3.3 He gives us the Power to live an Extraordinary life.

When we are worried about life

when things happen to us that are out of our control

when disaster overtakes us – as it will

You need to know that nothing will ever be able to separate you from God's love

You are eternally secure in him.

Therefore even if the world rejects you God applauds you

Even if people say 'you are rubbish' God says you are precious

Even if you alone he is always with you.

Because nothing can separate you from him.

Therefore what you and God can do together is beyond imagining.

What God can do in your life will transform you

What you and God can do for others will make an eternal difference.

Don't you see, you with God, can lead an extraordinary life!

So walk with him, discover his friendship, know his approval, see his love and lead the eternal life you were designed for.

This is how to live!