

LOOKING AFTER YOUR GARDEN

OUR LIFE OUGHT TO PROVOKE QUESTIONS ; OUR LIPS OUGHT TO SUPPLY ANSWERS.

I pass by a garden on the way back from Brick Lane to my House. It is in a row of houses that are very unremarkable, but the garden is magnificent. It is a joy. Now the person who owns the house may (I thought at first perhaps unkindly) be going a bit over the top. After all the house is not remarkable, and no doubt in worldly terms he does not get back his investment.

Perhaps we could say others benefit as much as him as it is not enclosed but is open. Indeed he told me he has trouble enjoying it because the neighborhood is a bit over exciting and noisy at night.

Sometimes there is such a din that he cannot sit in it. But it is beautiful and always is in top condition.

Now how is my garden ? Well some of you may know that it is not that great but what if I says my life is a Garden and it is open to all to see.

How does it look to you and how does it look to God. Does it attract others? Do people see that I am excited about my garden or have I grown weary of it ? Does the fact that there is a din from time to time put me off going into it? Do I tinker or am I consistent ?

Is it for others or just me ? Does anyone know about my garden ? And have I been going onto the gardens of others and saying things instead of being the best I can in my own Garden ? What does God want me to do ? Is my Christian life important?

It is truly wonderful to be used of God. When we hear about used of God we perhaps think of great evangelists , doing amazing things. But each one of us can do amazing things and this morning is all about encouragement.

However when meditating on the great encouragement I also felt a tremendous sense of responsibility. How does my Garden look ?

How does it appear to others. If the master came back tonight would he be pleased with my garden ?

Not to be condemned but to put everything into context I am called to make my life a shining example by allowing the spirit of God to work in and through me.

TITUS 2:10. Not purloining, but showing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

We are to beautify the doctrine of God our Saviour by our life.

The believer's walk with God is of great importance – that is you and me and how we are with others and before Christ.

May God's truth be adorned and beautified through me.

PHILIPPIANS 2:15-16 That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

We win the world not by being LIKE the world (Rom. 12:2), but rather by being like Christ. Again no greater way to show than how this lives out through our lives.

EPHESIANS 6:19-20

And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

Are we timid ? Pray for BOLDNESS to speak and to make known the gospel

We are Ambassadors - we need to talk to God about men before we talk to men about God. The key to personal evangelism is found in one's personal prayer life. Have you been praying for boldness and for gospel sharing opportunities?

We can ask him for the boldness even if we are unremarkable “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Ph 2: 13”

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Consider our unsaved loved ones and our unsaved friends and neighbors. May they never be able to say, "No one ever urged me to

be saved. Those Christians that I knew never shared with me the urgency of being reconciled to God."

People are looking at the life we lead. What makes my life special ? Me ? No – the presence of Christ. Here we can shine in our own schools- offices, even if we do not leave our house, we can pray for opportunities to speak to those with whom we come into contact.

OUR LIPS OUGHT TO SUPPLY ANSWERS.

HOW ?

*How can we faithfully and compellingly present the gospel in a culture like ours? The Corinthians wanted **LIGHTS AND ACTION.***

Much like today – we need to be big on style and light on substance don't we ? Don't we need to get the point over some way or other by some incredible show to be put in with Celebrities.

Into this culture walked the Apostle Paul with the gospel. How did he package it? How did he sell it to them? The answer may surprise you. In fact, it may look very weak and foolish. We read about in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5:

“(1) And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. (2) For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. (3) I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, (4) and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.”

Paul was committed to the simple proclamation of a message that appeared foolish, and he did it in a rather unimpressive way, by Corinthian standards. He simply centered upon the cross and depended upon the Spirit, and that's what we can do as well. And my encouraging message this morning is we can all do this in our own lives, we all have a walk with God that I have likened to a Garden this morning- and people come to us and pass by our Garden.

A DECISION

We just need to decide that Christ is going to be the centre of our lives and we what this Christ centred life to do all the talking and doing.. and our role is Ambassador. Our lives are opportunities in 2008 to show Christ working out through us.

A DECISION

You notice that he says that he determined not to know anything among them save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. In other words, it was a decision. It was something he had determined. It was something quite deliberate.

His statement is that, having looked at the whole situation, he came to this conclusion, this decision, that he was not going to know anything among them, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. Have we made this decision ?

WHY THIS DECISION?

Why did the Apostle come to this decision? Why should we today come to this decision? Because the Church – and our testimony- will be powerless today and ignored by the people unless we come to this same decision

Surely we must talk about things in which people are interested?

Not the conclusion the Apostle came to – why not ?

Well, the people consisted partly of Jews and mainly, probably, of Greeks. What were they interested in? What did they want Paul to talk about? The answer, of course, is quite simple.

The Jews were always interested in the Law - the Law given by God through Moses to the children of Israel. And they were always arguing and debating about this.

The Greeks were primarily interested in what is called philosophy : the attempt to understand life.

Yet, knowing that these were the things that the people were interested in, having the ability and the understanding to deal with them, this man deliberately decided and determined not to

deal with any of those subjects. 'I determined not to know any thing among you save Jesus Christ and him crucified.'

He gives us the answer in the sixth verse of this second chapter of First Corinthians.

Wisdom comes to nothing

'Howbeit', he says, 'we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought.'

Nothing!

But you know I think the world is more accepting than ever that it's wisdom comes to nothing.

The danger is there is the counterfeit ready to step in.

'I delivered unto you first of all' - What? What I thought and what I had worked out philosophically? Oh no! 'that which I also received. But that is not the only reason by any means

Why did not Paul preach politics and art and culture and philosophy? It is because he has a message about the deep things of God, the testimony of God.

He says, 'You know, what I have preached to you was not man's ideas about the world and about life, but *God's* ideas!'

Your greatest need and mine - the greatest need of the whole world - is to be reconciled to God.

We know , the only way of being reconciled to God is to know that Christ has died for your sins, borne your punishment, borne your guilt. In Him you are reconciled to God. *And that is why Paul preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified.*

2. Be Dependent Upon The Spirit

But we must also stay dependent upon the Spirit. That's verses 3-5: "(3) I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling, (4) and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."

The point is that the power in preaching, in evangelism, in the simple sharing of the gospel is not in the man or the method.

The power is not in the method. Verse 4: “and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom...” This does not mean that Paul couldn’t speak clearly or cogently, but that he wasn’t going to trust in his own ability.

When it comes to the proclamation of the gospel, be it in our churches or at your workplace, if all of our focus and discussion and hope is being centered on ourselves, our own cleverness and ingenuity, and how powerful and persuasive our methods of communicating are, as though that is where the power lies, we lose the most important thing.

It is the gospel that saves. And where it is faithfully proclaimed God can do incredible things, even if we’re a bit unimpressive and not relevant in the eyes of the popular culture. .

**OUR LIFE OUGHT TO PROVOKE QUESTIONS; OUR LIPS
OUGHT TO SUPPLY ANSWERS.**

How do you and I feel about our Gardens now ?

The Garden that is our lives.

If we have been thinking it is small what of those who pass by every day
?

Have we been thinking “I wish I was not in this place – I deserve a
Garden elsewhere ; may be a tropical Garden ? Ask God to bless the
place where you are.

***Have we been thinking I am not knowledgeable about the current
matters and therefore might not engage people ?***

Remember Paul's message was simply Christ to all . All of Christ and he came with fear and trembling. Recognising that knowledge and philosophy have no answers – what we have however is the Pearl of the greatest price. The deepest mystery that all our troubles are because we are not reconciled to Christ.

It is all about him - his beauty, His perfections, His righteousness, His glories—His life and death and resurrection and ascension. We must faithfully declare the gospel “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). We are all Ambassadors for Christ and it's our own life that is ultimately what people see.

If you have been neglecting your Garden – perhaps thinking that there is not much you can do – do you feel enthused to go out into it – and in the strength of the Lord – tenderly look after it and nurture your relationship with the hi, in order to be the stars that Paul talked of shining ...and others will be also blessed and see Christ shining through us.

May OUR Lives in 2008 PROVOKE QUESTIONS; OUR LIPS OUGHT TO SUPPLY ANSWERS. May God's truth be adorned and beautified through you and me.