

1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-9
THE WHOLE STORY IS MISSION?

There is no such thing as the perfect Church. That might come as a bit of a shock to you, but I'm afraid it's true! It doesn't exist, this side of heaven! There are strong churches with lots of strengths and good points; there are Churches that succeed in doing great things and succeed in lots of big enterprises; but these same Churches also have their weaknesses, their failures, their unfinished business, things to which they never quite get round! The Church is always a mixture of two things (of lots of things really, but two will do for now!): on the one hand, the grace of God is at work making us the people of God in the first place, a people who belong to God and so to be a people blessed beyond anything we can really fully understand; on the other hand, our faults, failings, and weaknesses are there that spoil grace, that get in the way of grace. These two things are always at work pulling the Church in two different directions, grace to lift us up and delight us; sin to pull us down and disappoint us.

In 1 Corinthians 3, Paul says this: "we are..." (3:9) Someone has changed that slightly to say that "We are God's building-site!" The thing about a building-site is that it is messy: there are heaps of sand, pipes and bricks lying all over place; it tends to be a muddy place, dirty, never neat and tidy, but messy; there are machines parked all over place, one is left here, another left there; there are heaps of rubbish lying around until someone comes to take them away from time to time. Anyone who travels around the city at moment knows how messy a place Edinburgh is with road works. The whole city is like a building-site. But, out of this chaos comes a building, something is created, something new arises and when the building is finished, the place is neat and tidy, and something of beauty for people to enjoy or to enhance the life of community, like the new primary school, is made.

The Church is God's building-site, not yet finished, but a work in progress. God is about His mission to bless the world, to have the whole world know Him and know His blessing, to have people all over the world hear the gospel of Jesus and respond in faith. That is God's mission. He has called His Church, us, to be part of that, to be His co-workers; what a privilege that is. "The mission is God's. The marvel is that He invites us to join in." (Christopher Wright *The Mission of God* p.67) So we are sent into the world to be in the world, to serve the world, to make disciples, to share the message of Christ. We do this, not as a perfect people, not as a people who have all the answers, but as people in whom God is at work by His grace, people whom God has loved and blessed, people who are called to share something of what we have tasted with others.

God is writing a story: "This is The Story that tells us where we have come from, how we got to be here, who we are, why the world is in the mess it is, how it can be (and has been) changed, and where we are ultimately going.... He is the originator of the story, the teller of the story, the prime actor in the story, the planner and guide of the story's plot, the meaning of the story and its ultimate completion. He is its beginning, end and centre. It is the story of the mission of God, of this God and of no other." (Christopher Wright *The Mission of God* p.533) The whole Bible is the story of God's mission in the world; from the beginning of the world, God has been about this mission of making Himself known and calling people to faith; God is still about this mission, writing new pages in His story of the world. The whole Bible and the whole history of the Church since is the story of the mission of God in the world; the whole story is God at work in the world, changing things, changing lives, blessing people, calling people to faith.

We are part of that story. Paul says that “*We are...*” (3:9) We work alongside God, in partnership with God. We are called to be God’s fellow-workers! What a privilege that is! Paul then shows us something of what that means: in Corinth there had been a huge bust-up in the Church over loyalties to various leaders: some had thought Paul was best, others said Peter, other said Apollos, others thought they’d be the most spiritual and said Christ was the best. Here Paul shows another side of the coin: “*I planted...*” (3:6) these different leaders and preachers had come to Corinth at different times, yet through all of them God was at work to build His Church; so no matter which you liked best, God was at work in and through all of them and they were all God’s fellow-workers. As Christians we are fellow-workers with God in the world; as we go about our business of living out Christian faith, as we seek to follow Jesus, as we seek to put our faith into practice by being the right kind of people, God is at work in us and God is at work through us – we are the light of world; God shows the world what He is like through the witness of His people in world. So we are God’s fellow-workers and people are drawn to Christ by the witness of Christians.

The challenge for us is to see the whole of life as part of God’s mission. As the Church, we need to learn to see that everything we do is part of God’s mission in our community: every event we organise, every meeting we hold, every part of Church life is part of God’s mission in the community. By all that we do as Church, we can show God to our community, or give people the opportunity to find grace, find Christ. Social events, Bible study groups and prayer groups, Sunday services, *Church News*, Open Door Café, Guild of Friendship, pastoral care etc – everything we do needs to be seen as part of our mission in the community, an opportunity to show Christ to others, to tell His story to others.

There is a personal challenge in this as well. Every part of my life and your life as an individual Christian is to show something of Christ to others. We are God’s fellow-workers in the world. How do we do that? We do that by way we live, that we live in the way Jesus teaches and shows us; we do that when we love one another and care for people in need; we do that by the things we say when we have the opportunity to share something of our faith. As we live like this, God is at work in us and through us; as we do all of these things the light of Christ shines through us into our little part of world and people see Christ in us and are drawn to God. We don’t always get it right; we make mistakes and there are times when the things we do and say turn people away from God; that is to our shame. Church can be like that, a bad experience for people; Christians can be crusty people who turn others away from God – that also is to our shame!

God is at work; God is writing His story. It is a story of grace and blessing; the centre of the story is Jesus, His death and resurrection; the story is not yet finished. We are God’s fellow-workers in that story; through us God is at work in the world; as we live by faith, as we love others, as we tell people what we believe, God is at work to bless. The great challenge for us is to “Go and be a blessing!” How can we be a blessing to others this week? How can I be a blessing to someone each day this week? Ask yourself that question each morning, then go and be a blessing! God is at work.