

Christ Amid Chaos (1 Cor 1:1-9)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 February 2023

Preacher: William HC

[0 : 0 0] So if you'd like to open your Bibles and read along with me, we'll be reading from the book of Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 1, verse 1-9. So it is a new series.

We're starting the book of Corinthians. We're going to be going through that together as a church, which will be pretty exciting. There's a lot of really cool stuff in Corinthians.

So yeah, this is the Word of God. Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God and our brother Sothenes, to the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I always thank my God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus.

For in him you have been enriched in every way, with all kinds of speech and with all knowledge, God thus confirming our testimony about Christ among you. Therefore, you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed.

[1 : 1 5] He will also keep you firm to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

And yeah, we'll welcome William for the sermon today. Good afternoon everyone.

Good afternoon. So keep your Bibles open. Yeah, really appreciated just the prayers for our children. Thank you for being older brothers and sisters, aunties and uncles, depending on how you prefer to identify yourself.

So let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we hear from his word today. Amen. O Lord, help us to see wondrous things in your word.

We thank you for this letter written to a church, a gathered people struggling to remember that Christ is their greatest gift.

[2 : 2 6] And so help us, even when we struggle to remember, to know that you are faithful, that we are God's gathered people, that Jesus is God's greatest gift.

And nothing else is more important than that. So Father, help us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. So our kids have just heard of how people gather for all sorts of reasons.

But I want us to now cast our minds back into time to maybe a Sunday, right? Except this is Sunday in 55 AD.

And I want you to imagine a bunch of people gathering together. Church. Church. They're gathered together to read this precious letter. Perhaps someone, a brother or sister, has just brought it in.

And now they're gathered together. We can't wait to hear what our brother Paul is about to tell us. Our beloved former pastor. This is the scene in Corinth.

[3 : 3 3] Corinth, you'll remember, as we journeyed through Acts last year, Corinth was one of the big cities that the Apostle Paul spent time in during one of his missionary journeys.

You'll remember Acts 18, verse 1. We'll put that on the screen. There was a big debate with some philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens. And Paul goes from Athens and then he goes to Corinth.

He kind of hops to a huge city. And in that city, he meets a bunch of other Christians. And they start to work together to tell people in that city that Jesus is their promised king.

The true Lord that they can worship, that they need to give their lives to. And so these Christians, they begin to meet regularly to reach their city.

And now, years later, Paul writes this letter, 1 Corinthians. Back to them. And it's an incredible letter. Because this is a letter for them and for us.

[4 : 35] Did you notice it said, you know, to the church in Corinth and all who call upon the name Jesus. So we're listening in, but actually Paul is writing to us directly today as well.

Right? Because here we are. We're gathered together. And we need the wisdom of God. We need Christ amidst our chaos.

And so Lord willing, as Isaac shared, we're going to journey through this book together, section by section. We won't do it all in one week, right? Because there are 16 chapters. So you might think, wow, I've never written a letter that long to, you know, my boyfriend or girlfriend before.

16 chapters. But hey, we'll work through it together. Here as PCBC English, it's a usual practice. We want to work through books of the Bible. Whole books, right? So we get what's going on.

We don't skip the hard bits. And we don't skip the long bits. But we want to sit under the whole counsel of God's word. And yeah, and we'll be journeying through with the other congregations as well.

[5 : 34] So if you skip a week, if you're feeling like I need a hearing canto, yeah, you're most welcome as well to join in. We'll be journeying together. So 16 chapters. So it feels like a lot.

But let's just start with the first nine verses that we just heard. So for today, I just want to set the scene, right? I just want to explain the first nine verses for us.

So please have that in front of you. And I believe from Paul's opening words to the Corinthians, we see a very simple premise. What we see is this. Church is God's gathered people because Christ is God's greatest gift.

Let me say that again. Church is God's gathered people. Why? Because Christ is our greatest gift. Look again in verse 1. How does Paul introduce himself?

Have a look. Verse 1 says, Paul called, and then to be in the NIV, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. It's an interesting way to start a letter.

[6 : 36] There are actually 13 letters in the New Testament part of our Bibles that start with Paul. And then this is the only letter where he then immediately follows with the word called.

Notice in verse 2 how actually the word pops up again, right? To the church of God in Corinth, those sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be his holy people.

Notice again, right? Keep going. Keep scanning. With all those everywhere who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus. Can you see what is on Paul's mind immediately in this letter?

Actually, what have I told you that the word church, right, in the original language, which is Greek, in the original language, the word church comes from two words, called and out.

Ekklesia. The called out people. That's what we are. Can you guess what word is important here? Call. Calling. Who am I?

[7 : 37] Who are you? Who are we? This is not a 21st century issue, right? Our identity. Struggling with it. This is a 55 AD church in Corinth issue as well.

And I think a church like ours, we've got lots of people from different backgrounds, we think about identity a lot, right? You might think, well, I'm a Kiwi. Or I'm an Asian.

I'm an Aucklander. Or, no, I'm not an Aucklander. I'm not from here. I'm a gamer. I'm a baller. I'm an architect. I'm an engineer. I'm a Lakers fan.

I like rugby and not soccer. Look. And if it's not who we are that we think about and introduce to others, maybe it's who we hope to be, right?

I'd love to be a dentist one day. Maybe a lawyer. I am an aspiring politician. Now, what really gets me out of bed is hoping to be the next influencer.

[8 : 42] Look, whatever description goes on your social media profile or on your application form for something, often that's what we define ourselves, right? Or what we hope to be defined as.

To become our calling. But what's the first calling that comes to mind for the Apostle Paul, our brother? Called an Apostle of Christ. Literally, a sent one.

A messenger. By the will of God. And we get this vibe sometimes in the scriptures that it's all Paul, but actually, look, Paul and his good mate Sosthenes is mentioned here.

Sosthenes, we heard in Acts chapter 18, he was a guy that moved from Corinth to Ephesus to join him in his ministry. Someone who had struggled with him for the gospel. And it seems like, for both of them, even after leaving Corinth years later, their love for the church there remains.

I mean, after all, when you live with someone for a year and a half, you don't leave strangers, do you? So you can see a bit of a timeline there, right? He plants a church at Corinth, and then he's writing back to them now in this letter, 1 Corinthians.

[9 : 55] We're going to see that Paul loves this church heaps. But we'll also discover in this letter that this is a church that looks impressive on the outside, and yet is struggling with a lot of issues under the surface.

We're going to hear next week, there's division over who their favorite preacher is. We'll hear later, there's disunity over unrepentant sexual sin.

There are Christians taking each other to court. And even the Corinthians themselves have issues they want to ask Paul about. Paul, Paul, Paul, tell us about marriage.

Tell us about singleness. Can you explain clearly about sex or foods that we can eat? Tell us about freedom. And what are the differences between guys and girls?

Some spicy issues right through this letter. And there's three whole chapters on Paul, Paul, tell us about spiritual gifts. But as important as all these topics are, and we will get through them, none of them, Paul is emphasizing here, none of them define the Corinthians.

[11 : 08] None of them are what the Corinthians are called as, right? Because what does it say here in verse 1 to 3? He calls them the church of God.

He says you are God's gathered people. That is your first identity over all the issues that are in your church. Isn't that encouraging?

Church is not a building. It's not a place. It's those who call on Jesus' name. Everywhere.

Notice everywhere is emphasized there. So church are those who call on Jesus' name in Auckland, New Zealand. Church is those who call on his name in Antioch in Turkey, or even here in the story of Corinth.

I find that really encouraging. We're not defined by our issues here. We're defined by the fact that we are God's people, called as God's people.

[12 : 15] Paul writes to them, we'll see, with love and affection, because they are not first and foremost those divisive people, or are that problem congregation. They are most importantly, verse 2, called to be his holy people.

And so friends, our legal name, it could read, it does read, Pakaranga Chinese Baptist Church, registration number CC 21721.

But, the most important thing about us is not that we're Baptists, not that we're Chinese, not that we're Pakarangans, it's that we're a church.

We're God's gathered people. We're called as his holy people, to be his set-apart people. Paul needs to unpack what holiness looks like in the flesh.

There's a lot of confusion going on in Corinth. And so you want to tune in each week as we tackle topic after topic. But remember, friends, we heard it from Haggai chapter 2, holiness is not contagious.

[13 : 25] It's not something that can be earned by what we do. Here it says, by the will of God, Paul was called an apostle. God did it. And here it says, by the will of God, the Lord calls us saints, holy ones.

No matter who you are, no matter how badly you have stuffed up, in Christ, you and I are called his holy people.

Church is not meant to be a bunch of perfect people. It's not an org chart that's complicated, full of trees and branches and twigs, and we just fit in somewhere. Church is God's people gathered together.

And I think an important lesson for us is that if church is God's gathered people, then we should gather together. We should be called out together, whatever it takes, no matter how hard, or inconvenient, or, wow, that was really nice weather this afternoon.

Can I just sit at home and live stream it, or maybe just stay at the beach, and I'll just catch up. I don't know. Church is God's people gathered together.

[14 : 47] Recently, we had a good friend stay with us for a week, visiting from overseas. She was from Sydney, so we took her to try and show what Auckland life was truly like. And so actually last Sunday, I visited another church.

It was actually the local yacht club. They had an open day, and so I brought our kids along. There was face painting, free gifts, and a free sailing experience. We just signed our names up.

We weren't sure what would happen. And then they said, all right, get your life jackets on. You're going out on the boat. And, oh, by the way, could you just climb up there and hoist a sail up for me? Okay. So you have never seen your pastor that stressed out.

Literally thrown into the deep end, right? Look, now, if after that experience on Sunday, I came up to you and said, hey, you know, what's your name? I'm William. I'm a sailor.

You'd be like, nah. Yeah, nah. Surely not, right? Because, I mean, I've never been back to that yacht club. I probably won't, unless my kids twist my arm and say, you need to join the yacht club and get sailing lessons.

[15 : 51] We'll keep chatting, kids. But how would you respond if someone who's never been to the yacht club calls himself a sailor? You wouldn't believe them, right?

How much more when it's not just a sports club, but our calling as God's people? If the church is God's gathered people in Christ, we show it when we gather in his name, when we commit to this local expression of church, as we gather and take part in the weekly rhythms, right?

And there's more than just Sunday service. There's your groups. There's other opportunities to encourage each other, many of them in English, right? So language is no barrier.

Look, if church is God's called out people, then we should be called out together. That's pretty simple, right? But if church is God's called out people, I think it also means if you are here and you've not yet called on Jesus' name, like it says here, if you've not yet called on Jesus as your Lord and personal Saviour, then you are in great danger, can I tell you that?

You may live for a calling right now. I don't know what it is. It could be your work, your studies, it could be your gamer ranking, or it could be your wardrobe.

[17 : 17] But think about your calling and ask yourself this question. Will my calling crumble after a breakup? Is my calling just, does it fall to pieces if I fail my test?

Or if I get a rejection letter? If it does, then you need a better calling, my friend. You need a call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He invites you to turn to Him amidst the chaos of this world. Come to Christ amidst the chaos. Let that be your calling.

You can do it today through the Gospel. Jesus is no ordinary name. His name is power. We remind ourselves that through our praises.

Just as believers under the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, you can read about their stories, they regularly called upon the name of the Lord. Here, this is what defines God's people today.

[18 : 19] Every man and woman must call upon the name of Jesus Christ to be saved, to be delivered from God's wrath against our sins. There is no other way.

The Apostle Peter puts it this way. Acts 4, verse 12. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to humankind by which we must be saved.

And so, friend, if you've not done so, if you're listening and you've not done so on live stream or if you're here in person, can I invite you to cling to Christ?

Call upon His name. He can save you. He can rescue you. He can give you a better name. It's only in Jesus' name there is truly grace and peace, as Paul writes there.

Right? Grace and peace. Two things that only God can truly give us forever through Jesus. And so we thank God for that as a church. And so does Paul.

[19 : 22] He thanks God in the very next verse. So let's skip to verse 4 now. And from verse 4 to 9, I think we see the next part of the argument. Look, the only reason we can celebrate church as God's gathered people is because Christ is God's greatest gift to us.

Listen to verse 4 again. All right? I thank my God always for you with every grace because of His grace given to you in Christ Jesus.

I don't know if you've noticed in your life what you give thanks for will give great insight into what you've been thinking about, what's on your heart. When I listen in to my kids praying at mealtimes if they're bold enough, when I chat with people before they go on an exciting adventure and they want to pray about it, I learn a lot about what's on their hearts.

I'm sure you do too. And so in the same way, I want to suggest we can learn a lot from Paul's thank you prayers, right, in this letter and others, what he's passionate about, what he wants for the people he's thinking about.

So to the church in Philippi, for example, in Philippians 1.5, he thanked God for their partnership in the gospel. To the Romans, he wrote a letter to them too, he thanks God for their world-famous faith.

[20 : 46] Even though he never met them, he was so thankful for their faith. To the foolish Galatians, well, when he writes to them, Paul doesn't even thank God for them. He just skips straight to like scolding them.

So, poor guys. What about the church in Corinth? What can you see there? What does God thank God for? Sorry, what does Paul thank God for in these verses?

We see it. I thank my God because of his grace given to you in Christ Jesus. Thank God that in Jesus, the church in Corinth are enriched, verse 5, enriched in every way with all kinds of speech and knowledge.

As the gospel takes root in their lives and is confirmed in them, Paul can say they lack no spiritual gift. Even this early on, Paul was bringing up an important lesson for them.

In Christ, you lack nothing, not even any spiritual gift, right? You notice that word repeated in this section, grace, given, gift.

[21 : 59] Actually, in Greek, all these words are very closely related. They have the same kind of spelling at the start. That's a window into what Paul's concerned about with the Corinthians, isn't it?

We hear of divisions over which preacher is more gifted and worth following. There's going to be disunity over which calling is more gifted, right? Singleness or marriage.

We're going to hear about disdain towards those. They've got those lesser spiritual gifts. We've got the better ones. Paul wants to tackle all that.

And so his first move here is so telling. He wants to tell us, thank you. Thank God for gracing you and me with the greatest gift.

It's not all that stuff that you think is gift. because the greatest gift, he says, is Christ among you. Christ, our Lord.

[22 : 58] You want to imagine because this was a church that lived in a society, right? Corinth was an ancient city that valued high achievers. After all, when your city sits between two important harbors, when ships need to pass through you to get anywhere, when you're going to take a cut over anyone who comes through town, you're going to be a city that's rolling in ancient dollars.

You start to have strategic value. Oh, I'm from Corinth. What about you? You start to have the best and brightest wanting to move to your city to make a living in your town.

Corinth was a place where people would start to seek you out if you had a wealthy home or a beautiful body or you had a noble rank. Right?

This was the kind of world that the Corinthians lived in, but hang on, that's the kind of world that we live in too, isn't it? Auckland, between two harbors, the rich and wealthy, all the beautiful ones are here.

Look, we struggle with this. This is the kind of gifts that people still value today, right? Okay? Being successful and made it. Paul wants to remind us, as he reminded them, once you experience the grace of God, once you gather as God's people, right?

[24 : 19] No matter what your background, you are literally saying to the world, Jesus is our greatest gift. Not our bank balance, not our Sunday lie-in, not my family commitments, not my GPA.

No, I'm here, I'm gathered, I'm encouraging each other because Jesus is my greatest gift. He's why I live, he's why I move and breathe. Paul wants the Corinthians to look past all their problems, to push hard against the society's messages, and to see Christ as God's greatest gift for them, and for you too, friends.

A theologian, John Calvin, once famously said in the opening of one of his books, the whole sum of wisdom, wisdom that deserves to be called true and assured, broadly consists of two parts, the knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves.

Right? Wisdom is two parts, knowing God and knowing us. And this is so true because behind every problem that the church in Corinth is going to face, it's a wrong view either of themselves or a wrong view of the God they should be worshipping.

And so can I suggest that as we go through the book of Corinth, we're going to ask this question, what's wrong with how we view ourselves? What's wrong with how we view God? Okay? If in doubt, ask that question and we're going to get somewhere as we journey through this book.

[25 : 54] Because PCBC, look, we are such a gifted church. I've been here among you for nearly three years and I cannot believe how many of you have passed great aid piano or something else.

I can't believe how many languages some of you can speak. Not just, yes, I expect some of you know Cantonese because your parents do, but Korean, Japanese, Tareo, what else?

I don't know. Some German as well in there. I've seen Donald's playlist. Man, you are so gifted. Most of you have studied at university or you've got great jobs.

But we need to put our achievements into perspective. We need not to have such a wrong view of ourselves because otherwise our giftedness becomes pridefulness, becomes selfishness, becomes sinfulness.

Friends, the Bible says you are not the center of the universe. That's a wrong view of yourself because the clothes on your back, the air that you breathe, the achievements that you've accomplished, all that is God's gracious gift to you.

[27 : 07] In Christ, you lack nothing because everything is a gift. Friends, you cannot rely on yourself. We need the gift of a Savior. So don't have a wrong view of yourself.

That's how Paul starts. Everything is a gift. Even Christ is a gift, the greatest gift. And remember, God is not a mean master either. Don't get that wrong view of God. Surely not.

He's a gracious giver. That's what the passage says. A giver that doesn't even spare his own son. So you want to keep trusting this God.

Even when he seems silent. Even when it hurts. You'll see how God carries you to the end. Guiltless in Christ is what it says in verse 8.

Yes. One day. Guiltless in Christ. And I think this is why verse 9, if we put that up, Paul is able to say what he says. God is faithful who has called you into fellowship with his son, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

[28 : 15] God is faithful. As Christians, we think too little about what God is really like. I had a great conversation actually with someone earlier this week and just reflecting. We just think of God as love.

It's true. He is love. The Bible says that, 1 John 4. But that's so one-dimensional. God is far more than just love. He is just. He is holy.

He is angry at sin. He is tender and compassionate. He is the Lord, the Lord, gracious and compassionate, abounding in steadfast love. He is kind.

He is here with us. There's so much about God that we need to relearn or learn for the first time. And here, to begin with, Paul reminds the gifted but worldly Corinthians, God is faithful.

So hang on to that. That's an attribute of our Almighty that is worth remembering. God is faithful. Remember it when you've fought with a brother or sister here in church or at home.

[29 : 23] God is faithful. Hold on to that if you hate your gift of not being married. God is faithful. Hold on to that if you are so struggling with pornography or some other addiction in life.

Even if you're the only employee at work who will not celebrate Pride Month, God is faithful. Hold on to that. Even when your unsaved mum is shouting you again this week, saying stop going to church or whatever, God is faithful.

Take it. Even if you one day have to stand by someone you love at their coffin, God is faithful. How do you and I know this?

How can we be guaranteed that God is faithful? God is faithful. Verse 9 tells us, because He has called you into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ.

It's because of the Gospel. The Gospel, the good news of what Jesus Christ did, that is the most faithful thing God did. That is the most faithful demonstration ever.

[30 : 34] to unite sinners like us with His beloved Son, Jesus, to call us into His fellowship, to welcome sinners like us into a family through the cross.

That is faithfulness. Remember what the Lord Jesus said, His last words on the cross. He hung there. And one of the Gospels says, Jesus said, into your hands I commit my spirit.

He's quoting Psalm 31. Our Lord Jesus, as He dies on the cross, remembers that God is faithful. So because our faithful friend Jesus stayed on the cross, took our sins, bore our curse, died our death, we know God is faithful.

How much we need that good news in the chaos of our world. So friends, I look forward to jumping into this book together with you. If you want wisdom that will transform you, maybe start with these verses.

Church is God's gathered people because Christ is God's greatest gift. Let's pray. Father, we press on weak and trembling and yet we are reminded that it is not us but Christ in us.

[32 : 07] And thank you for reminding us today that our true identity is not in what we've achieved or accomplished. It's not even in what we look like. It's not in what family we're a part of.

We are citizens of heaven because of Christ, God's greatest gift, your greatest gift for us. So we thank you and we praise you in Jesus' name.

Amen.