

# Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?  
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.  
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.  
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same  
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.  
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

## **Understanding Delay**

**November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2015**

**2 Corinthians 1:15-2:4**

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### **Introduction:**

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 1:15. Last week we did a little bit of forest level orientation because we are inside a unit of text that has a single unifying theme. Paul is defending himself as a real Apostle over and against the accusations of some false Apostles who have infiltrated the church in Corinth. In 2:17 at the end of the this section Paul says:

For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but **as men of sincerity**, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ. (2 Corinthians 2:17 ESV)

We are the real deal and having the right Apostles is really important – that isn't just the theme of this section that's the theme of the whole letter. Paul is only defending himself because he understands that ultimately, this is a Gospel issue. If you lose the Apostles then you lose Jesus – its as simple as that. He says at the end of the letter:

<sup>3</sup> But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. <sup>4</sup> For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. (2 Corinthians 11:2-4 ESV)

There are people out there – in verse 13 of chapter 11 he calls them false apostles, deceitful workers – these people are trying to lead you astray. They are trying to steal you away from the

Jesus I betrothed you to and they are trying to lead you to another Jesus who is no Jesus, who cannot save you because he is THE DEVIL disguised as an angel of light. So I have to defend myself, Paul says, I don't want to, but I have to because at the end of the day IT'S A GOSPEL ISSUE.

Now, last week we looked at the outer frame of this section that runs from 1:12-2:17. We talked about the marks of a real Apostle. This week we begin to look at how Paul pushes back on one particular accusation that these false Apostles were making against him. They were saying that Paul's change of travel plans – the fact that he said he would visit them in person and then didn't, sending a letter instead of coming in the flesh – that proves that Paul is unreliable and untrustworthy. Paul pushes back on that. He says that just like these people don't know how to read suffering, they also don't know how to read delay.

At the end of this section Paul makes the case that God is telling a Gospel story through the lives and experiences of the Apostles. NT scholar Mark Seifrid puts it this way:

The apostle bears the form of Christ in relation to the church. This is so, not only in his outward afflictions, but also in his suffering with their failures. These failures are what have kept him from visiting Corinth. As a result of their unfaithfulness, he has appeared unfaithful. Like God's own promises in the face of human suffering, and especially in the cross of Christ, his promise seems to be unreliable. But as with God's work in Christ, Paul's No turns out to be a Yes, since all that he has done serves the salvation of the Corinthians.<sup>1</sup>

I read that to you so that you understand that we are not really talking about Paul's travel plans this morning. I know that some of you get fired up about that kind of historical detail but most people do not. Most people didn't get out of bed this morning to hear a lecture on the movements and motivations of a first century Christian missionary even if he is the Apostle Paul. But people are interested in God's reasons for delay. Jesus said that he would come back for us but its been 2000 years and he still hasn't come. God said that he would restore all things and yet things seem to be more broken than ever. God said that he would judge the wicked and break the arm of the evil doer and yet evil seems to go from STRENGTH TO STRENGTH and darkness spreads seemingly unchecked across the globe. So where is the PROMISE OF HIS COMING? How long O Lord? We need to understand the reasons for delay no less than the Corinthians. And Paul says that we can understand those reasons by understanding his reasons for delay with

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<sup>1</sup>Mark Seifrid in *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 55.

respect to his eventual visit to Corinth. So let's take that at face value, let's read the text and then reflect together upon the meaning and the message in delay. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

<sup>15</sup> Because I was sure of this, I wanted to come to you first, so that you might have a second experience of grace. <sup>16</sup> I wanted to visit you on my way to Macedonia, and to come back to you from Macedonia and have you send me on my way to Judea. <sup>17</sup> Was I vacillating when I wanted to do this? Do I make my plans according to the flesh, ready to say "Yes, yes" and "No, no" at the same time? <sup>18</sup> As surely as God is faithful, our word to you has not been Yes and No. <sup>19</sup> For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes. <sup>20</sup> For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. <sup>21</sup> And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, <sup>22</sup> and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. <sup>23</sup> But I call God to witness against me—it was to spare you that I refrained from coming again to Corinth. <sup>24</sup> Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith. <sup>1</sup> For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. <sup>2</sup> For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? <sup>3</sup> And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. <sup>4</sup> For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you. (2 Corinthians 1:15–2:4 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

## Understanding Delay:

The first thing Paul says about delay is that:

### 1. Delay is not dishonesty

In verse 17 it seems like they are quoting from Matthew 5:37<sup>2</sup> where Jesus said:

<sup>37</sup> Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil. (Matthew 5:36–37 ESV)

Aha! Paul is not a straight up "Yes" or "No" kind of guy, therefore Paul must be from the evil one – you can almost hear that accusation can't you? But Paul says that there are within Scripture reasons not to break your word, but to delay the timetable or to alter the manner of its fulfillment. After all, we are dependent creatures living in a world ruled over by Sovereign God who is very good at turning us this way and that according to his will and purpose. God occasionally over rules my sense of timing, Paul argues. This happened to Paul on multiple occasions, in Acts 16 for example we read:

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<sup>2</sup> I am not suggesting that these folks already possessed a copy of Matthew's Gospel but it does appear that they had access to Jesus' sayings. Whether this was from Apostolic sermons and recollections of from an early "sayings" document, I cannot say.

<sup>7</sup> And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. <sup>8</sup> So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. <sup>9</sup> And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup> And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them. (Acts 16:7–10 ESV)

Paul had a plan, Paul had a timetable and a schedule and then all of the sudden, at the last minute, God called an audible at the line of scrimmage. Get over it, Paul says, God can do that. He is large and in charge and he sees the whole field in a way that we don't. That's why all plans have to be made SUBJECT to the superintending will of God. The Bible says that; James the brother of the Lord said:

Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that." (James 4:15 ESV)

All human plans should be made and should be understood as subject to the Sovereign will of God. Make straight forward plans but understand that God is always Sovereign over your plans – and Paul did that. Paul did not promise to visit the Corinthians in an unqualified way. He said in 1 Corinthians 16:6-7:

<sup>6</sup> perhaps I will stay with you or even spend the winter, so that you may help me on my journey, wherever I go. <sup>7</sup> For I do not want to see you now just in passing. I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. (1 Corinthians 16:6–7 ESV)

That is not an unqualified promise. Perhaps. I hope. If the Lord permits. Paul is not out of bounds here and his delay should not be interpreted as dishonesty. God called an audible. God changed the plan. He can do that, because he can see the whole field and he knew that the timing wasn't right for Paul to visit at this time.

People often mistake delay for dishonesty. They did it to Paul and they do it with God. The Apostle Peter said that scoffers will come and:

They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." (2 Peter 3:4 ESV)

"It's been 2000 years! Where is this Jesus you keep talking about? He's not coming! Nothing has changed. The world keeps on spinning and you need to get on with your life. Nobody is

coming to save you. He was wrong. Its all a lie.”

Have you heard that whisper in your soul in the long, quiet watches of the night? Peter reminds us:

<sup>8</sup> But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. (2 Peter 3:8–10 ESV)

There is no human analogy for the Divine sense of time<sup>3</sup>. God delays! God is slow – not because he is untrustworthy or dishonest, but because he is working REALLY BIG PURPOSES that unfold across the ages. God delays because he sees the whole board and he loves all the players! God delays! But he does not lie. The day of the Lord will come and the heavens will pass away and the earth will be reborn in fire and all the works done upon it will be exposed. The arm of the wicked will be broken, the teeth of the blasphemer will be shattered and the devil and his servants will be cast into the lake of fire and the RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE LIKE THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father forever. Everything God promised WILL COME TO PASS. So just wait and believe and endure because the one who endures to the end will be saved.

Secondly, Paul says:

## **2. Delay is mercy**

Paul didn't come when he had originally planned because he did not want to cause them further pain. He says in 2:1-2:

<sup>1</sup> For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. <sup>2</sup> For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? (2 Corinthians 2:1–2 ESV)

The Corinthians didn't realize how out of bounds they were. They wrongly assumed that a visit from Paul would be a prestigious event – a visit from the Apostle would honour and encourage them. They didn't realize that in the state they were in there is no way his visit could have been anything other than painful. Paul was being merciful in his delay.

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<sup>3</sup> A quote generally associated with St. Augustine.

God says the same thing about his own delay many times in Scripture. Earlier this week in our RMM readings we read the prophet Amos saying:

<sup>18</sup>Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light, <sup>19</sup>as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. <sup>20</sup>Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it? (Amos 5:18–20 ESV)

Why would you be eager for the Day of the Lord? Do you think it will be a day of light? Do you think it will be a day of deliverance? How could it be? How could it be that way for YOU, God says. Your worship is a mockery and a deceit, your behavior is like the nations and there is NO JUSTICE and NO RIGHTEOUSNESS among you. How could my coming at this time be anything other than DARKNESS, GLOOM and JUDGMENT? You are not ready for me, you are not prepared for my coming.

Jesus told a similar story about the horror of being visited by God in a state of unpreparedness. Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who gave a wedding feast for his son. Great preparations were made! Invitations were sent out, servants went to gather and prepare the guests. The king did everything necessary to ensure a blessed celebration for the honour and glory of his beloved son. Finally, when everything was ready, the king came to visit his people. Jesus tells it this way, he says:

<sup>11</sup>“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. <sup>12</sup>And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. <sup>13</sup>Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ (Matthew 22:11–13 ESV)

There is no scarier prospect in all the Bible than being caught unprepared at the coming of the King! Everyone will stand one day face to face with the King of the Universe and the God of all things. It may happen on the day of your death, it may happen on the day of Christ’s Return, but one thing is absolutely certain, ONE DAY YOU WILL MEET HIM and YOU NEED TO BE PREPARED FOR THAT DAY. You need to be IN CHRIST. That’s what Paul says in verse 20:

all the promises of God find their Yes in him. (2 Corinthians 1:20 ESV)

The Gospel is so simple – it is absolutely clear and unambiguous. Everyone will stand before

God in Christ or IN their own sins. Therefore if you know yourself to be a sinner friend, then there is only one thing that you must do. You must lay down your sins and cling to Christ. Take off your filthy rags, lay down your wicked works take LAY OF CHRIST! Ask and ye shall receive his Robe of Righteousness – what we call the Great Exchange! His death for your death. His life for your life. That’s what it means to be found in Christ! That’s how you prepare to receive ALL THE BLESSINGS OF GOD IN CHRIST.

If you are not prepared on that day then you will not be admitted. Instead you will experience the wrath and justice of God. There will be no bargaining and no defense. The man in the story was SPEECHLESS and so will you be on that day if you are not prepared to meet the Lord IN CHRIST.

Delay is mercy but it is not forever. Get dressed. Cast off your sins and put on Christ for the day of the Lord is at hand. It will come, and the Bible says, it will come like a thief in the night.

Thirdly, Paul says:

### **3. Delay is hope**

In chapter 2:3 he says:

And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. (2 Corinthians 2:3 ESV)

Paul suspected that given enough time, under the operation of the Word and the Holy Spirit these folks would end up eventually in the right place. He had sown good seed. The Spirit was stirring in their hearts and therefore he had hope.

God too, is patient in hope. God too delays because he knows where we stand, he knows what we need and he knows how to finish his work. God is not an easy bake oven. God is more like a crock pot. He knows how to stew. He knows how to wait. He didn’t snap his fingers to create the cosmos – no his Spirit hovered over the waters. He worked a slow plan. There was Day 1 and Day 2 and Day 3 and Day 4 and Day 5 and Day 6 and Day 7 when it was finally done and

ready to be enjoyed.

God will come back when God's work is done. We want God to come back when things get tough. We're scared right now – we have seen horrible things on TV and so we want God to come back NOW before those things on TV start happening here. Come NOW Lord Jesus. Its ok to want Jesus to come now, but as I read the Bible God is not quite finished with us yet. He has BIG PLANS. He has hope and when a Sovereign God hopes then you know that good things are going to happen.

Let me show you two things that I see in the Scriptures that God is still working on. First of all I am expecting to see a mass conversion of the Jewish people. Paul spoke about that. He said that in the Sovereign will of God a partial hardness was ordained by God for the Jewish people – God ordained for MOST of the Jews to reject and resist the Gospel. They are still responsible for so doing, but in some way, this was also God's Sovereign plan from the beginning. Paul says:

<sup>11</sup> So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. <sup>12</sup> Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!... <sup>15</sup> For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead? (Romans 11:11–15 ESV)

If their temporary rejection of Christ has served to speed the Gospel to the utter ends of the earth, then what will their acceptance mean **BUT LIFE FROM THE DEAD!** What will the world say when all of the sudden there is a converted Christian nation in the centre of the perpetually boiling cauldron of the Middle East? What will they do when they see that miracle of modern history? That will mean **REVIVAL**, Paul says, **THAT** will mean **LIFE FROM THE DEAD!**

God's still working that plan, that plan has been simmering away on the back-burner now for 2000 years but one day soon God will turn up the heat and things will bubble over into **REVIVAL** on a global scale.

That's the other thing I'm watching for before the coming of the Lord. Jesus said:

this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14 ESV)



Before the end – BEFORE the coming of the Lord, the Gospel of the kingdom WILL BE PROCLAIMED throughout the WHOLE WORLD and then the end will come. Maybe those two things are related – many of our great grandparents thought that they were. Maybe the miracle of modern Israel’s conversion will WAKE UP THE CHURCH and ASTONISH the world and get us off our ivory couches and make us put down our bowls of wine so as to RE-ENGAGE the mission with fresh urgency and alarm. The KING IS COMING! GREAT EVENTS ARE UPON US! MULTITUDES, MULTITUDES IN THE VALLEY OF DECISION!!

God delays in hope and the purpose of God is already on the move.

Lastly, Paul says:

#### **4. Delay is love**

He ends this little subsection by saying in 2:5:

For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you. (2 Corinthians 2:4 ESV)

Everything Paul has been doing – even this painful delay – has been done out of love. So it is with God. God knows his children – he knows them by NAME and he will lose NONE OF THEM. The Corinthians must have known this. When Paul was first in Corinth planting the church he ran into some terrible opposition. Paul thought about leaving and moving to another city but JESUS SPOKE TO HIM AND TOLD HIM TO STAY. Acts 18:9 records Jesus saying:

“Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent,<sup>10</sup> for I am with you, and no one will attack you to harm you, for **I have many in this city who are my people.**”<sup>11</sup> And he stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. (Acts 18:9–11 ESV)

The work isn’t done yet Paul! You cannot leave now FOR I HAVE MANY PEOPLE IN THIS CITY! There are still people that need to hear the Word washing over them and the Spirit stirring in them so that they can SEE JESUS, believe and be saved. We won’t leave without them Paul – NO ONE GETS LEFT BEHIND!

It is because of God’s love that he delays. His anger at sin will never be stronger than his love

for his children. He will do his work. His word will not return void. Every child of God known from before the foundation of the world will hear and will **ARISE AS FROM THE DEAD**, they will hear, see, believe **AND BE SAVED** before the return of the Lord. This is the meaning of delay. This is mercy, hope and love and this is the Word of the Lord. Let's pray together.