

Urban Regeneration

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[0 : 00] Okay, well, everybody loves to see urban regeneration happening, especially in a city like Glasgow.! And how it happens is that cities where there are areas of decay and deprivation are reversed and there is good that comes from the bad.

! Cities can be transformed physically and economically. In fact, every way through this process of urban regeneration. Of course, it happens when local authorities start it. They pump prime money into an area and then that encourages further private investment.

And so the developers come in and the regeneration happens. And the result of urban regeneration is it is the flourishing of the city and also the dwellers of the city are helped by the good that is done.

And if you know anything about Glasgow, you know that Glasgow is a prime example of urban regeneration, where years and years ago Glasgow had to address its decline, the decline in its industries and in its poverty and in its poor housing.

Parts of Glasgow since then have been completely transformed and are far better places. And of course, there are more plans for further and greater and wider urban regeneration in Glasgow and areas like Govan, the south side of the city and also in the city centre.

[1 : 27] So Glasgow is a great place to be. And the merchant city in the city centre is a prime location to start a church.

So it's good news that there is a church that is starting there. But there is another kind of regeneration and it is far more significant and far more life transforming.

And it is the regeneration of people through the gospel, through the good news of Jesus Christ. In fact, Christianity is one great big global regeneration project.

And it is rolled out across the course of history as the gospel of Jesus Christ restores individual lives like ours.

It renews communities, forms new communities, churches and rebuilds our broken world. And that is really what we see in the book of Acts, where God's plans spread out from Jerusalem as the message of Jesus takes shape and changes people's lives.

[2 : 36] And it grows and expands towards the ends of the earth. And so that's what we see in Acts. But of course, we still see this happening today as the good news of Jesus continues to transform people's hearts and lives.

Churches are started. Communities are changed. And the world is a different and better place because of the power of this message, the message of Jesus. And that's what we see happening in Acts chapter 18, where the gospel of Jesus impacts the city that is called Corinth.

And so we need to understand what God is like and how God does his regenerating work so that we trust him. So we're going to look at three things this afternoon.

Three points. First, understand God's pattern. First, one to eight. Second, believe God's promises. First, trust God's promises, verse nine to 17. And then third, trust God's plans, verse 18 to 28.

First, first of all, understand God's pattern. Now, Paul went to Corinth on his second missionary journey and his strategy is to move from one city to the next city to the next city.

[3 : 47] Cities had synagogues, cities had people, cities had influence. influence and so his pattern was to go there to the city first so what kind of city was Corinth well it was the largest city in Greece with a population approaching three quarters of a million people at the time it was the center of the north south trade route as well as the east west trade route and so it had easy access by both land and by sea and so last week we saw Athens was really the intellectual capital Corinth would be considered the commercial capital and so it was a strategic city and Paul went there to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ because if trade could radiate from Corinth out into the wider world then so could the message of Jesus but Corinth was also famed for its immorality and its idolatry it was the

home of the temple of Epaphrodite the goddess of love it had all kinds of temple prostitution happening in fact the sexual promiscuity of Corinth had become proverbial and so they'd even coined a term where the verb to live like a Corinthian basically meant to live a sexually immoral life and that is the kind of city that Corinth was in many ways first century Corinth is really no different from 21st century Glasgow a place where Jesus is largely unknown let alone believed in and also a place where anything and everything goes but what happened was that Corinth underwent this kind of urban regeneration as the gospel of Jesus

Christ transformed individual people's lives and a new church was planted and established in this pagan city and it seemed unlikely but it all began in a small way with a few people because God's hand was behind it now so at the beginning of our reading when Paul arrives in Corinth he's met by a married couple or he meets a married couple called Aquila and Priscilla now Luke tells us that they were immigrants they were expelled from their homeland of Italy so they were exiles the emperor Claudius commanded all the Jews to leave Rome as they leave Rome and they end up in Corinth and God connects them with Paul and so they work together as tent makers verse 3 and they become the core team of the church plant that would begin in Corinth but I've got here in my notes applications for David and Ashton and big bold type and so I hope the applications are pretty clear David and Ashton along with Neil and Jill Longway are heading off very soon the next couple of months to begin work on a new church in the Merchant City here in Glasgow and they're starting small there are just a few of and they're depending on God, but God has brought them together and we trust that God will work.

So things start small, David. They do. But we never know what God will do from these very small beginnings. So Paul begins in the synagogue as usual. Every Sabbath we read that he tried to persuade his listeners that Jesus was the Messiah that the scriptures spoke of. So Paul funded this through his tent making job. And he did this until Silas and Timothy came with support. And that's the thing about church plants. All the money is not there up front and neither is all of the vision up there up front. And yet you're committing or you're wanting people to commit to a church plant, even though the full picture is not yet complete. And that's certainly the case here in Corinth.

And so Paul, when he is able, exclusively spends his time proclaiming Jesus. And as he does this, what we see is the normal pattern for the growth of the church in Acts. That is that whenever the gospel of Jesus Christ goes out and is proclaimed, there is gospel growth. The church grows, but also opposition and persecution come. And they always come. So verse 6 we read, but when they opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, your blood be on your own heads. So they opposed Paul and they abused him, became abusive. And that is often what happens when people hear about Jesus Christ. They are so opposed to the message of Jesus Christ. They don't just oppose the message, but they also abuse the messengers. Verbally, of course, it's easy, but sometimes also physically as well. And yet this rejection and opposition didn't stop Paul from the work that God had him to do. So verse 7 and 8 we read,

Then Paul left the synagogue and went next door to the house of Titius Justice, a worshiper of God. Crispus, the synagogue leader, and his entire household believed in the Lord. And many of the Corinthians who heard Paul believed and were baptized. And so with opposition comes advancement. So there's this shift here from the public synagogue to private homes. And what happens? Well, the gospel continues to spread.

[9 : 39] And the church grows. And so don't miss the pattern of God's work here because God's people may be few. The circumstances may not be ideal for planting a church. The opposition may be fierce, but none of it thwarts God's purposes. Because God can use human problems to rebound in such a way that his message spreads and his church grows. And so that's why we should never be surprised if things are small, if the work is hard, and if people are resistant. Because David and Ashton, you find all three when you plant a church. And yet despite this, people do come to believe in Jesus. And so both, all of this happens all the time. So it happens today because, well, we see it happening in Acts. So it shouldn't be a surprise. In fact, I even saw it happening this week where people oppose the good news of Jesus.

Others oppose the planting of churches, other Christians. And yet, and it was so sad to see, and yet at the same time, somebody became a Christian after hearing the good news of Jesus, persuaded, being persuaded by it, and entrusting in Jesus as their savior. It's fantastic. It's brilliant.

But that tends to be God's pattern. It's his pattern in Acts, and it's still his pattern today. And so this passage helps us understand that God is in charge. Because we don't always see what God is doing, but God will be doing something. One of my favorite poems is the tapestry poem. I'm sure you've heard it. It goes, not till the loom is silent and the shuttle cease to fly, will God unroll the canvas and reveal the reason why. The dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skillful hands, as the threads of gold and silver, and the pattern he has planned. And so we don't always see God's pattern right now, today. We might not even see God's pattern in our lifetimes. A missionary like David Livingstone, who went to Africa, or Hudson Taylor, who went to China, had no idea how much the gospel of Jesus Christ would spread and grow after their death. And so we can't see or know what

God is doing. And yet God has the whole tapestry of world history before him in his view. And so if that is the case, then we should never doubt that he has got an individual eye on you and me and our lives and our circumstances too. Because we see this clearly in Paul's life and work. And so that takes us to a second point. Understand God's pattern, first of all, and second, believe God's promises. Now in verse 9 to 17, what's going on here is that Paul's promised from the Lord his protection and his presence. So let me read verse 9 and 10. One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision, do not be afraid, keep on speaking, do not be silent, for I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city. Now as you read those words, we've got to read them in context, because the Lord there is speaking specifically to the apostle Paul, speaking to him and about his time in Corinth, where the Lord's promises apply directly to Paul and to his situation. And so we must remember this in case we think that God will always intervene and stop me from being attacked or harmed. That's not always the case. But that said, there are promises in these words which do ring true for all God's people at all times. Promises that we have got to believe about not being afraid and believe that the Lord is always with us. And so we'll get to this, but let's see these words in their original context first.

So why does the Lord say to Paul, do not be afraid? It's because he was afraid. And why does the Lord say, keep on speaking and do not be silent? Presumably because he was tempted to stop speaking and was going to be silent. And I'm not speculating here, I'm going by what Paul himself said when he showed up in Corinth. And he tells us how that was in the first letter to the Corinthians, where he says, chapter 2, verse 3, I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling.

[14:49] So how did he go to Corinth with weakness and great fear and trembling? Well, we know from 1st and 2nd Corinthians that Corinth was a city full of proud and confident and sophisticated people. It was a city full of immorality and idolatry. And Paul arrived and what did he have? He says he had the message of the crucified Christ, which seemed so weak and so foolish in such a sophisticated place like Corinth.

And so here's the great Christian missionary, the apostle Paul. And he arrives in Corinth, not feeling confident that he's going to take the city by storm, but feeling weak and afraid. And that's why the Lord spoke to him in a vision, because he needed the Lord's reassurance. Do not be afraid, I am with you. And if you know your Bible, you know that these promises are actually echoed all the way through the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Do not be afraid, do not be afraid, and I am with you are words that God speaks to his people again and again and again. And in the New Testament, Jesus says exactly the same words all through the Gospels.

And so the Lord wasn't telling Paul anything he didn't already know in his head. But these promises needed to sink deep into his heart. Paul needed to believe them when the going got tough.

Because the going was going to get tough. Because despite all of this external opposition and the internal fear that Paul felt, the Lord promises that he will protect Paul.

[16:42] And his presence will be with Paul. So that Paul can keep on speaking about Jesus. Because the Lord said to Paul, in that verse, verse 10, from the Lord to Paul, that there would be much fruit from his ministry and his work in Corinth.

That Paul's preaching would result in many people believing in Jesus. So God had his chosen people dotted all over Corinth who needed to hear about Jesus.

That's why God sent Paul to them, so that they would believe in Jesus and then be added to this church that was beginning. And this must have been a massive boost and encouragement for Paul.

Knowing that as he proclaimed the message of Jesus, the message of the crucified Christ, in a culture where people were so proud and arrogant and sophisticated that they thought they didn't need it, it must have been such an encouragement to know from the Lord, telling him that, I've got many people in this city.

And they're coming to me. And they'll come to me when you share the good news about Jesus with them. And so from this, Paul actually stayed in Corinth a year and a half, we're told, in verse 11.

[18:01] Teaching the word of God to the people. And that's the longest stay that Paul has had anywhere in the book of Acts so far. And so the Lord's promise prepared Paul for the opposition and encouraged him to keep going.

So verse 12 and 13, we read, While Galileo was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews of Corinth made a united attack on Paul and brought him to the place of judgment. This man, they charged, is persuading the people to worship God in ways contrary to the law.

So here are the Jews trying to make the Christian faith illegal. But then Galileo, this local magistrate, throws it out of court. So Paul didn't even need to defend himself here.

Galileo decided this wasn't a criminal matter. In fact, this was a religious matter. And so he washed his hands of it. Which was a significant ruling because it meant that Christianity was legal.

It wasn't illegal. And so Paul had the protection of the state to preach about Jesus. Which meant in verse 18 that Paul stayed on in Corinth for some time.

[19:14] So the Lord had promised to protect him. And now he was also protected under Roman law. So God even uses this pagan judge to do his bidding and to pave the way for the message of Jesus to advance and spread in Corinth.

And so all of this should be an encouragement to you if you profess to be a Christian and a follower of Jesus today. Because like Paul, we too need to hold on to and believe the Lord's promises.

To know that the Lord says to you and to me, if we are a believer, he says, do not be afraid. I am with you.

Now do you need to believe these promises? Perhaps because of what you are going through right now, at this very time in your life.

Do you need to believe in your heart of hearts that there is no need to be afraid and that the Lord is with you? Because the reality is if you don't feel you need to believe this right now, the day will come when you do.

[20:32] So we need to store up these promises in our hearts for what we'll face in the future. Because there will be a time when we will need them. Because it is not always easy being a follower of Jesus Christ.

Living for Jesus and speaking for Jesus in a culture like ours today is really tough. So there will be times when we feel weak, when we feel afraid, when we feel like keeping our mouth shut and not speaking about Jesus.

And maybe it is because of the people who are around about us in our workplace. That they are just so intimidating. And there are so many of them. And as the one lone Christian, it is just so hard.

It might be that we are one of the only, if not the only, believer in our class or in our school. It might be that we feel weak and afraid because the future is just so full of uncertainty.

We have no idea what will happen. And yet we need to know that the Lord promises to be with us. And he promises to be with us not just as we go out and plant churches like Paul was doing.

[21:53] But as we follow Jesus day by day by day. In a world that doesn't know him or care about him. And if you are a young person, you know that all of your peers, virtually all of them, think you are crazy.

Not just because of what you do. You go to church. You read your Bible. You pray. But because of all the stuff that you don't do. And they are looking on at you thinking that you are weird.

So following Jesus is tough. But remember that Jesus says to you, do not be afraid. I am with you. So let's believe these promises and trust him. He is always with us. So we don't need to be afraid.

Okay, that's our second point. First, understand God's pattern.

Second, believe God's promises. And third, trust God's plans. Verse 18 to 28. So God's plans always progress. They always advance.

[22:55] So we see it happening in Corinth as God uses Paul, Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos to advance his work. And in these verses, verse 18 to 23, we get this summary of Paul's missionary journey.

And in a few words, Luke condenses a massive amount of miles, the travel that Paul does. So he travels around planting new churches and strengthening believers in different places.

So God's plans are moving forward because they always do move forward. They progress as God's word goes out by the power of his spirit through his people.

That's how the gospel advances in this world and how the church grows. God uses ordinary people, followers of Jesus like you and like me, to do his extraordinary work of restoring individual lives, of renewing communities, and of regenerating this broken world.

Because Christianity is not just about restoring our broken relationship with God. And that's got to happen. That must happen. But Christianity is also about restoring our broken world.

[24 : 13] Because God has a great salvation plan, which means God's brilliant and beautiful regeneration project cannot and will not ever fail.

Like other big projects, it never stalls. It is never underfunded. It's never under threat. And one day it will be complete. And so while we may not see how it's all playing out in specific detail or why some phases of construction happen in unusual ways, we can be sure that it's all happening according to God's will.

Because God knows what he is doing. And that's Paul's perspective on it. Verse 21, he says, And that is the key to it all, isn't it?

If it is God's will. Because God orchestrates everything according to his will to accomplish his plans. Which should be as much of a comfort for you and me as it was for Paul. Because we don't always understand what is happening. And we don't always know why God does what he does.

[25 : 32] Whether in the world or in the church or in our lives. And yet we can trust that nothing is outside of God's sovereign plans.

He is always advancing his purposes. And so as the gospel of Jesus Christ is let loose in this world, God does his regenerating work and lives like yours and mine.

And God does establish churches, communities of people whose lives are being transformed by Jesus to expand and advance his work.

Because wherever we are, wherever the Lord sends us, he sends us out with his good news. Which means wherever we go, we go with the gospel and we go into places where the Lord has people.

People who are his. They're his but they still need to hear and respond to the good news of Jesus.

And we don't know who they are. And yet as God's people speak about Jesus, the gospel will do its work.

[26 : 46] We'll reach out to them and find them. And so if you belong to the church and you know Jesus, let's keep speaking about Jesus.

Trusting that God will use our words to draw people to himself by his spirit. Because the results are the Lord's department.

They're not ours. And that's why we've planted Christ Church Glasgow in the northwest part of our city. And why we're sending David and Ashton to church plant in the merchant city.

Because we believe that in Glasgow, this great city, the Lord has many people here. And we don't know how many people God has in Glasgow or who they are.

They might be in our families. They might be in our workplaces. They might be in our school. They might be on our street. They might be amongst our friends. We don't know, but we are sent to them and amongst them to speak of Jesus.

[27 : 55] And the Lord will bring them to himself. Or you might even be here today. And you wouldn't call yourself a Christian. You're here because, well, you found your way here for one reason or another.

And God may be calling you to himself. And he intends to do his work of regeneration with you. By raising you from death and granting you spiritual life. By causing you to repent of your sin, trust in Jesus, and become a new creation.

Because that is what God does. As I look around me, I see what God has done in the lives of many people here today. And with the most unlikely of people.

God gives new life through the gospel of his son. And we need this new life more than we need anything else in this life.

[28 : 58] Because we are dead in our transgressions and sins and under God's judgment. We need regeneration. We're not what we should be.

And we know it. If we're honest enough, we know we are not the person we could be or should be. Because there's something wrong. And it's wrong inside of us. It's wrong in our hearts. And the sin on the inside of our hearts ruins everything on the outside. And actually, when we think about it, it is the cause of everything that spoils our world. And yet the great news is that because of God's great love and because of God's amazing grace, he regenerates people like us. And he makes us alive in Christ. And that's why Paul went around proclaiming the good news of Jesus and his death and resurrection.

[29 : 54] Because God is in the business of taking what is dead and giving it life. And it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

Because it's only as we repent of our sin and believe in Jesus that our broken relationship with God is restored. And that's why we must understand God's pattern, believe God's promises, trust in God's plans.

Because when we trust in Jesus, there's no need to be afraid of anything, even death. Because Jesus is with us now and forever.

And so when the day comes and God winds up this world as we know it, and he brings in his new creation, the new heaven and new earth, the holy city, the new Jerusalem, the ultimate and urban regeneration, then we will dwell in God's presence forever.

And that's what we were made for. For a grand purpose. Made by the creator as his people to dwell with him. Made by the creator as his people to dwell with him.

[31 : 02] Made by the creator as his people to dwell with him. Made by the creator as his people to dwell with him. And so let that future hope of what God promises is coming.

Let that be what motivates us to go on with the work that God has called us to do now. Knowing that there is no need to be afraid because the Lord himself is with us.

Let's pray.