

# Conrad Mbewe

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     come to an end except heaven and my visit among you is slowly entering into that category of things that must come to an end. I've enjoyed every moment of being with you. I actually came in on Tuesday and so it's by the time I will be leaving tomorrow it will be about six solid days of wonderful fellowship among the people of God. One of the wonders of what God has done through the gospel as we shall be seeing even in the message I'm about to share is simply that fact that through Christ he has made us one. What I've been doing during this missions conference has really comprised two strands of thought. On the one hand I have been dealing more directly with the theme of church planting and that's been around the passage of the book of Acts. Those of you who were there when I dealt with the mandate of church planting or for church planting dealing with not so much Jesus sending us out to do it but the Holy

Spirit sending us out to do it. And that was fairly deliberate because I wanted a rather fresh approach which would ultimately lead us to the same conclusion because God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are one. The other aspect of that was what we dealt with this morning which was an example of that in the context of Zambia and in the context of our own church. And that's just a sample. It is not the only thing that is happening whether it's in Zambia or around Africa. But I trust that in seeing a church in today's world working in reproducing churches after the New Testament pattern that you would have had some level of encouragement as well.

So that's been one strand. The other has been primarily around the context of the book of Romans. Romans. And this is to do with proclaiming God's glory. And basically the idea there has been that we tend to easily fall into the context of the man-centered evangelistic and missions enterprise.

We tend to thrive more on the thought that let's rescue men and women who are perishing. And that is true.

There is a reality of that because when God sent his son into the world, it was in order to rescue rather than in order to condemn. However, what we've done is to take two steps backwards and say, what's the bigger agenda behind all that? And we have seen, I trust those of you who are around, that it's greater than saving individuals from perishing. Rather, it is the proclamation of the glory of God.

[ 4 : 0 1 ]     It is God being honored and God being glorified. And the way I opted to handle this was by a journey through the book of Romans.

And I said that the book of Romans is easily divided into two sections. The first section, which covers chapter 1 up to chapter 11, deals with the indicatives of the Christian faith. That which is true, that which God has done, that which is simply facts that we therefore later on speak about responding to.

And so up to the end of chapter 11, the apostle Paul hardly asks anybody to do anything. But from chapter 12 to the end of this book, the apostle gives the imperatives of the Christian faith.

And you can't miss it. It's literally one verse after the other saying, therefore, this is the way we ought to live. So what I've done then is to take us through the journey of the first 11 chapters that happened yesterday, where we were noticing that the gospel that Paul preached was a gospel that was proclaiming the glory of God.

That's what we saw. That's what we saw. All the way from chapter 1, where he dealt with people in sin, being in sin because of godlessness.

[ 5 : 54 ] And then only in the second place is it unrighteousness. And that's something we need to come back to and appreciate.

That's the primary nature of human sin. All the way from the Garden of Eden. It is that of dragging God's name in the mud, that of stealing his glory and placing that which belongs to him alone upon ourselves.

Finding fulfillment in our own pleasures rather than in God himself. I won't take you through that.

We've already done it. We went through chapter 1, chapter 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.

And I said to you yesterday as we're winding up that we will begin at the end of chapter 11. So let's go there. Although our text really that I've chosen is the very last verse.

[ 7 : 09 ] So let me begin from there. And that is the doxology. I have put it there as the place we will finally end.

But it's important that we commence from there. The apostle Paul puts it this way. Now to him, that is Romans 16 and verse 25.

Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ.

According to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages. But has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations.

According to the command of the eternal God to bring about the obedience of faith. And then verse 27.

[ 8 : 11 ] To the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ.

Amen. What we're looking at in this session is really the results and rewards of proclaiming God's glory. And basically what I want to say is this.

I'm letting the cat out of the bag immediately. It's the fact that when we proclaim the glory of God, the reward and the result is that we have a people that live for the glory of God rather than for themselves.

The richness of that is what I will want us to see as we make our way from chapter 12 onwards. It is that we, what you bring people into the church with is what you use to keep them.

So if you bring people into the church through entertainment and recreation and fill them up with themselves, then you can be sure that to keep them, that's what you have to be doing all the time.

[ 9 : 33 ] Entertaining them until entertainment comes out through their nostrils and ears. But on the other hand, if it is a sight of the glory of God, then that becomes their main menu.

And that becomes the combustion chamber that drives them out in order for them to bring other people and other nations to worship the great triune God.

And hence this doxology is so important. What you may not have noticed is that these last words of the Apostle Paul in Romans 16 are actually just a repeat of his words in Romans 1.

So if you can just quickly turn with me there. What I'll do is I'll read Romans 1, the first few verses. And I want you to notice that what Paul is saying in verse 1 down to about verse 5 and 6 is exactly what he is saying in the doxology.

Except finally he tells us where it is all going. The glory of God. Chapter 1 and verse 1.

[ 11 : 03 ] Paul, Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, and we are told there, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures.

If we just quickly peep at chapter 16, verse 25, he speaks about my gospel, the preaching of Jesus Christ, which we will come back to again.

But notice, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been disclosed, and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all the nations.

So the prophetic writings there in the scriptures. Let's go on. Notice verse 25 again in chapter 16.

So it's the same one being talked about there.

[ 12 : 32 ] Let's go on. Verse 5 in chapter 1. Halfway through verse 26.

So as you can see, really, the way Paul ended is exactly the way he began.

He had the same idea. He kept it in his mind as he went right through this great epistle, 16 chapters in all.

Well, later on, those were added. And then he says, that's exactly what I've been speaking about. But as this, to the only wise God, be glory forever through Jesus Christ.

And if you remember in chapter 1, that's what was missing. What is it that was missing? The glory of God. You had godlessness being the way of life.

[ 14 : 01 ] And God being angry with humanity because of that. Paul makes his way showing what God has done in Christ in order to bring about salvation, points forward the hope that we have.

And then we are about to enter how all that is finally realized. And Paul says as he ends there, to his glory.

I'll come back to that text as we draw towards the end. Let's go then to the beginning of chapter 12. There are three fruits that the Apostle Paul brings out as he goes into the imperatives.

Three fruits. And those fruits all point to a people that are now consecrated above all that God might be glorified.

The first is individual consecration. Individual consecration. We find that in chapter 12, verse 1, downwards.

[ 15 : 19 ] But before we read that, it's important that we realize what I've already acknowledged, that these chapters were added later on. And so, chapter 12, verse 1, follows this wonderful statement of doxology, if we can put it that way, in verse 33 to verse 36, which is where we ended yesterday.

I want us to begin from there because if we lose a sense of this acme, this final sort of major ascent to the top of the mountain, we don't really appreciate what chapter 12, verse 1, is saying.

So, the Apostle Paul ends chapter 11 with these words, verse 33, All the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments, and how inscrutable his ways.

For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor, or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?

Remember what we said yesterday, that there are two grand thoughts in the mind of Paul at this moment. One is the depth of understanding, this magnificent way of salvation.

[ 16 : 52 ] Nobody would have ever dreamt of it. And then the other is the height of grace that he gives to us as sinners. Those two blow the mind of the Apostle Paul, and ought to blow our minds as well from the context of the glory of God.

And then he says the reason why. Verse 36, For from him and through him and to him are all things, to him be glory forever.

With the words, amen. It's out of that, that he then goes on to say, I appeal to you therefore, brothers.

I'm appealing to you to respond in this way. By the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

[ 18 : 20 ] Now obviously, I don't have the time to completely open up that section of scripture. There's a lot more that lies ahead. But at least allow me to say this, that what Paul is saying is that this is the only way you can reasonably respond to what has just been displayed before you.

Any other response does not make sense. In view of what this great God has done.

In giving to us such a magnificent way of salvation that causes us to see something of his glory, even in the way of salvation itself.

The only reasonable response is a heart devotion to him. And he uses the phrase there, a living sacrifice.

The context of sacrifice is something they would have been very familiar with in those days because they constantly took animal sacrifices, whether it is Jews or the Gentiles, to temples for them to be slaughtered.

[ 19 : 46 ] But he's saying it's not an animal being taken to be sacrificed now. It's you. Your body specifically being given over to God as a sacrifice.

The phrase holy has to do with separation unto God. Separation unto the Lord. 100%.

Being handed over that God alone may do with me as he pleases. And then that of acceptable makes a lot of sense for those familiar with the Old Testament because God always said, don't bring a blind animal or a lame animal to me.

You don't bring that which you are about to throw away. And then you bring over to the Lord. You bring your best, your first fruits to him. That is what is acceptable to God.

That's the reasonable response. And brethren, one of the reasons why our churches lack firebrand believers is primarily because of the me-centeredness of the kind of gospel that they have been living on.

[ 21 : 14 ] It's always what is in it for me. And when you have that kind of environment, you know where the problem is.

The foundational teaching has been all wrong. That the thinking of those who are in the church is that church is about me and my enjoyment.

And therefore, whoever is in front there is supposed to be giving me a time of my life. When really, that's not the case.

It's about God and worshiping him. And that when I am in that place of worship, I am being reminded of who he is in his world, what I owe to him, so that when I go back again there, I can go and live for him with renewed energy.

And hence it says, which is your spiritual worship, or to put it another way, which is your reasonable worship. In other words, the glory of God.

[ 22 : 41 ] That it's about living for him. And you notice it in the rest of chapter 12, going into chapter 13, that there are these major seismic changes that are being demanded of God's people, now that they are God's people.

We won't go into them, but when you have time, you can quickly open that up. He deals with the issue of using our gifts for God's glory.

He's given them to us, so we don't just sit there in the church expecting to be entertained. We ourselves see what gifts we have, and we use those gifts to glorify him who has given them to us.

He deals with the whole issue of love and how we are to relate even to those who hate us. He deals with the subject of submission to authorities in chapter 11, and then comes again back to love, sorry, chapter 13, and back to love towards the end of this chapter.

What I'm interested in, in my second point, point is chapter 14 and 15, because it's a very practical point, and it's to do not so much now with my personal commitment to God, but with my jealousy for God's glory within the context of the church, within the context of the church, and it's to do with the church's unity.

[ 24 : 31 ] I will read towards the end of his argument, which we have in chapter 15, and then I will open up the argument of the Apostle Paul for us.

So let me quickly read verse, I'll begin from verse 5. Just verse 5 and 6, in fact, and 7, should suffice, and then I'll open up the rest.

May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Jesus Christ, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God. You'll agree with me that as human beings, because of the nature of sin, we are very divided, and we tend to deliberately head in that direction.

In our context, in Africa, it's a lot to do with tribes, and so that's where the cleavage tends to happen. And so, that tribe is bad, this tribe is good, that tribe, they are thieves, our tribe is honest, and so on and so forth.

[ 26 : 12 ] In a country like America, you obviously have this whole issue with races, and often it's black on white and white on black. But the divisions are not just there, it's in terms of elderly people and young people.

There's, again, the friction, and people want a young church, and others want a church of elderly people, and so on.

It can be divisions to do with the bank accounts, or another phrase is the pocket. You have the church for the rich, and then you also have the church for the poor.

But sometimes, it's to do with qualms and scruples, which is what the problem was with the early church.

you were bringing Jews and Gentiles to the same gospel. And for centuries, they had been segregated religiously.

[ 27 : 20 ] The Jews, on the one hand, had developed their cult, the outworking of their religion. The Gentiles, in all their vast array, had also developed their own cults of worship.

And now, through the gospel, the same gospel, they were coming together into the same church. Now, trust me, that's water and oil being poured into the same bowl.

That's explosive immediately. And that's what the apostles had to deal with. Chapter 14 begins with these words. So, where we read earlier on was the end of the story, but let's go to the beginning.

As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions. One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables.

Let no one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him.

[ 28 : 43 ] Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls, and he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

And then I'll just read the next verse. One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike.

Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. There's no doubt that this was one of the most difficult issues in the first century, keeping Jews and Gentiles together in the same church.

The question that would have been put before the apostles a number of times would be who is right between us. Who is right?

In 1st Corinthians, for instance, it's one thing that the apostle Paul handles, at least in two passages. And you can't miss the fact that it was a very sensitive issue, even there.

[ 29 : 54 ] You read, for instance, in chapter 8, 1st Corinthians, and verse 1, now, concerning food offered to idols, we know that all of us possess knowledge.

This knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. And then verse 4, therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, again, we know that an idol has no real existence, and so on.

the issue there was who is right over the issue of eating food sacrificed to idols. Paul's ultimate answer was not those guys are right, you join them, or these guys are right, you join them.

Rather, it is what ought to be done for the glory of God. That was the primary point. How does God get glory out of this situation?

Now, once you put aside the issue of God's glory, the answer is quite simple. He would have said, look, instead of you guys quarreling, Jews cross over that road there, and start first Jewish Gentiles reformed Baptist church, and then Gentiles over there, and start first Gentiles reformed Baptist church.

[ 31 : 31 ] That sorts out the problem. But Paul was saying, no, you've entered into one body, the body of Christ.

Therefore, you cannot make being a Jew and being a Gentile to become a cause for dividing the body. Learn to borrow the phrase that he has in chapter 14 and 15.

Learn to accept one another the way God in Christ accepted you.

There's a lot he teaches here, but let's go back to those words where I read. May the God of endurance and encouragement, the God who gives you the ability to have patience with one another, the ability to be encouraged in the midst of all these genuine difficulties.

And he does so through the scriptures. Through the scriptures. In other words, as you're being taught his word, may he grant you to live in such harmony with one another in accord or that fits into that which is the template of Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 33 : 24 ] Now, where you have a church that recognizes from the beginning that this is not our church, it's Christ's church.

This is not for me and my family. No, it's for the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for his son and for his spirit, that I have as much right in this body as anyone else who has come to repentance and faith in Christ.

That immediately says, to some, I need to hold back some of my liberties. for the sake of others. And then to others it will be, I need to learn to be patient with my friends.

Because this is about us showing the world that there is one church, that there is one faith, that there is one body, that there is one spirit.

that there world may be amazed at how in a fragmented society and community you have this place where that fragmentation doesn't seem to be exploding this place into splinters.

[ 35 : 01 ] How? And there's only one answer, Christ. The way in which God has saved us is that he has brought us into this one body and therefore putting to death our hostility.

All that is from Ephesians 2. But notice the way he therefore puts it there in verse 7. And then I must hurry on back to chapter 16. He puts it this way.

Therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you for the glory of God.

The phrase is using there for welcome is move towards and take hold of one another.

Move towards and take hold of one another. I'm fairly deliberate in emphasizing that because often in churches people will say that we are not being divisive.

[ 36 : 17 ] I haven't done anything wrong that should cause us to be going our separate ways when it's fairly evident to everybody that this welcoming is not there.

That there is no effort at crossing the space in order to embrace or hug. So that it's fairly clear within the context of the church that those people sit over there, we sit over on the opposite end.

Yes, we're in the same church. But there is no extra effort to say for the glory of God.

I'm going to put aside all that which makes this such a hard boundary. I'm going to put it aside. I'm going to cross over and embrace for the glory of God.

I want to repeat. This is only going to happen when people are themselves convinced from the inside out that this is about God, his honor, and his glory.

[ 37 : 46 ] And that's what we ought to be living for. The world will always have diversity. there's no doubt about that. From every kind of angle, it will always be there.

But it is for us to say that we want our God to be worshipped and part of the way in which he is visibly worshipped is through this unity that completely goes over that same diversity which is very, very real.

Let's quickly hurry on to my last point. We are going to where we began. And that is Romans 16. When the Apostle Paul was dealing with this subject of unity within the church, that went into the rest of chapter 15 that is dealing with his own plans to continue expanding the Christian church, his missions enterprises.

And he's saying to the brethren in Rome that I'm on my way to Spain and on my way I will stop over in Rome, have fellowship with you guys, you have the opportunity to invest in my ministry as I then make my way to Rome.

So all that I have skipped. you find it there in chapter 15, the beginning of chapter 16 is all about Paul's greetings to the brethren in the church in Rome.

[ 39 : 29 ] But when he gets to the end, it goes into this agenda of missions, which is what this missions conference is all about.

And that's why I thought it was a good way for us to end this message. That number one, there will be individual commitment.

Number two, there will be a preservation of the church's unity because of God's glory. And number three, there will be a robust energy for world missions.

A robust energy for world missions. And that's captured in the prayer of the apostle Paul there. He deals first of all with the means that God has ordained for this propagation of the truth, the means.

And he says there, it is according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages, but has now been disclosed, and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations.

[ 40 : 50 ] That's the first. It is that God has revealed himself and his way of salvation through this book.

This is what needs to be expounded across the world to all the nations of the world so that through that, as we shall see later, God might be glorified.

Now, brethren, if truly you have been reading this book with the right lenses on, you will be amazed that the God of the Bible is a God, first of all, who is jealous for his glory, but secondly, he's a God on a mission.

He's a God on a mission. Even when he was dealing with the people of Israel, every so often, you can see light coming through the cracks on the wall, and that light is basically saying, I'm not ending with you.

My glory must be known in all the world as the waters cover the sea. Those two aspects begin to manifest themselves fairly clear in the scriptures, but more than that, this is what happens.

[ 42 : 30 ] You begin to say to yourself, how can I participate participate? How can I participate? I may not be one who will go, I may play a different role, but we need to see the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ spread across the kingdoms of this world.

Which leads me to my second point. So the first is what is in here, but the second is that it's actually the command of this same God to us as his church.

There it is in our text, very quickly, the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations according to the command of the eternal God.

The great God of the universe, this vast, vast universe, has an eye on but one of the planets among the many galaxies, and that's planet Earth.

And in this one planet, he has this grand agenda to be known through the vehicle that we have just seen.

[ 44 : 07 ] And he has given it as his command to his church. We know that. I avoided it at the beginning.

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go. Go. go and make disciples of all nations.

Gather them together into localized entities, little colonies of faith, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them what I'll come to in a moment, to obey, to observe, everything that I have commanded.

It's a command by which God is glorified. That's what the church is about.

We are a people that have been given marching orders. to lift the flag of Christ and place it in every nation, among every people, and every tribe, and every language.

[ 45 : 40 ] It's his command. The Apostle Paul knew this. I've already betrayed my final point, and it is this, to bring about the obedience of faith.

The last part of verse 26, to bring about the obedience of faith. That's his goal, so that individuals who were godless, that's what we started from, remember, godless, living for themselves, yes, with the form of religion.

But the religion being utterly false because it was not squarely based on his revelation. But now we have it, and consequently we are being urged to ensure that we are seeing more and more and more and more people coming to be obedient to the Lord, which is exactly what we saw in chapter 1 when the apostle Paul put it in exactly the same words, that we have received grace and apostleship to bring about, this is verse 5, the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

But this time he ends with the words to the praise of his glory. to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ.

What am I saying then as I close? It is simply this, that the major result and reward of proclaiming the glory of God is number one, believers who are passionate for that same glory.

[ 47 : 35 ] Number two, churches that are so passionate for God's glory, that they will experience a unity that blows the minds of our community.

And then thirdly, it will be a church that is committed on fire for the work of nations.

that that which God has done among us here, he may do to the ends of the earth. May God help us to be thus God centered.

Amen. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, thank you for your word this morning. Thank you for the opportunity to see the outworking of a God centered gospel.

And we pray that this might be realized among us here and in Africa, that you, oh God, might be truly glorified.

[ 48 : 50 ] We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Then let's stand and sing passionately hymn 55, To God Be the Glory.

Amen.