

Gloriously Uncomfortable

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[0 : 00] Hey, good morning, everybody. It is morning still. Yes, it is. Coming from South Africa, I don't know what the time is. I just know it's Sunday.

Amen. It is such a privilege to be here with you today and to be part of this gospel partnership, to know that we are part of something bigger around the world, and seeing this incredible good news of the gospel go out to so many folk who don't know the beauty of what Jesus has done for us, to be part of his church, to be part of what God is doing in the world.

He's building this church, man, and the gates of hell shall not prevail. As Jesse said, we have the privilege of leading this church in Westville, Durban.

I know you all know where Durban is. Yeah? No? You all know where Cape Town is. Shame on you for not knowing where Durban is.

But no, seriously, if you look at the bottom of Africa, the tip of Africa, you'll see Cape Town. If you go up the east coast, about 1,800 kilometers, we deal in kilometers, not miles.

[1 : 13] I don't know how many miles that is. But you'll eventually see a city called Durban, and that's where we're from. And I'm a white African. And that's not cultural appropriation, by the way.

I, my parents, born in Africa, my great-grandparents, great-great-grandparents, African, same with Bronwyn. So we, you know, we're not visiting South Africa from some part of Europe.

You know, that's our home. And, but we love America as well. We love to come to America. We've been here a number of times on holiday. Yeah, we come here on holiday.

And, and there's at least three things that we love every time we come to America. One, I believe the name has changed, but it's, it's still to us, it's Aunt Jemima syrup.

Like that is, that is like liquid gold. The second is peanut butter M&Ms.; Yeah. Yeah, boy.

[2 : 13] We get peanut M&Ms.;, but we don't get peanut butter M&Ms.; Americans love peanut butter. And I love peanut butter. So we always, our bags, we had to like navigate the weight of our luggage already as to who was carrying the amount of M&Ms.;

And then Twizzlers. We're suckers for Twizzlers. Just a quick history. We've been married now 25 years. Bron and I met, I was in a band.

And we're traveling around. And, and as a young kid, I always knew that I wanted to serve God in a vocational way. I believe we're all in full-time ministry. We were all, we're all called to live our lives wholly for God.

And I'm going to be preaching on that this morning. But as a young 13 year old, I received a prophetic word on a camp where, you know, I thought that I was going to be like a preacher. I know I'm preaching now and that's just God's kindness.

But as a young person, I thought, you know, I don't want to do the, I don't want to do the second job or the third job. I want to be the important guy, you know. And so I thought, yeah, Lord, I want to, I want to, I want to be the man of God, you know, with all the power for the hour.

[3 : 27] That sort of guy. And we were on this camp and, and the guest speaker called my whole family up, not because my parents were young. They were cooking and got them all out and he began to just pray over us and got to me.

And I, I remember standing there thinking, okay, this is my time. He's going to say, God's going to use you. You're going to preach the gospel. And he got to me and he said, I really think God's going to use you.

Well, not, I think. He said, I believe God's going to use you in music. You're going to be in a band and travel the world and preach the gospel. And I was bitterly disappointed. Because my only example back then was not, not, not your worship leader here today, but like our worship leader back then.

This is the day, this is the day that the Lord. I don't want to do that. That's not the important job. Nevertheless, a year later, I started a, started a band.

Would you believe it? It was a hip hop band. Yeah. I used to, I used to rap. I'm not going to rap for you now. That'll just be embarrassing. But, but we then spent 18 years traveling the world, preaching the gospel through music.

[4 : 34] God was faithful. But in that time, met Bronwyn. We got married and really felt God was calling us into pastoral ministry. And there came a time when I was no longer cool for kids.

Our daughter was three. And it was time for us to transition. We went on to eldership at our church. And our daughter is now 19 years old. I know you cannot believe that I have a 19 year old daughter. I look far too young for that. You can laugh. That was supposed to be a joke. But we've been, we've been pastoring this church now for 15 years.

And it is a joy. It is a joy to see God build his church. And it is a privilege to be used by him. That God would be mindful of us.

How amazing is that? So let me dive in this morning. I want to open up to 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 11 to 12. It's just a short passage. And I'm just going to, I'm going to pull out some implications from it for us today.

[5 : 32] Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you, Lord, here on the east coast of North America and North Carolina, New Bern. You're speaking to us still today through your word.

What a privilege. Lord, speak to us today. Not a single one of us here want to leave unchanged. By the power of your Holy Spirit, would you do what only you can do in our hearts today.

In Jesus' mighty name. Amen. Amen. When you and I put our faith and our trust in Jesus, we become sons and daughters of God.

[6 : 32] We are now part of God's kingdom. And when you're part of God's kingdom, it starts to look like something. You start to look countercultural to the world around you.

The kingdom of God comes into conflict with the kingdoms of this world. In our culture, back where we live in South Africa, if you have means, then the sort of cultural template for life is that you've got to have an SUV.

Is it an SUV here as well? Yeah? Or a Ute? No? What? SUV. Okay. So, no. So, you've got to have an SUV.

You've got to send your kids to private school. You've got to have your Mozambique holidays. And you've got to secure your kids' education at a good university. There's certain—and you've got to live in a really nice housing estate.

Like, that's the cultural template. And it's not that those things are bad in and of themselves, but there's something that is now birthed within us as children of God that cause us to live in a different way where those things are not of ultimate value.

[7 : 46] Right? The kingdom of God undoubtedly is in conflict with the kingdoms of this world. Peter says that we are to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which war against your soul.

We are called to be salt and light. Now, if your culture is like anything like ours, we've got many folk in our country where—Christian folk—where their preference is not to be the salt.

They want to be the meat. They want to be the meat. And that's not what God's called us to be. He's not called us to be the meat. We are sojourners and exiles. We're so—so we're called to be the salt that brings out the flavors.

We're a redemptive people. We're a people that actually look at what's good in the world, objectively good, and we redeem it for the kingdom of God. We don't capitulate to the way things are done badly.

So in our church, we would say—we say to people, we don't stop preaching marriage because the divorce rate is high. No, we keep preaching the beauty of marriage. We want to redeem marriage.

[8 : 50] Just because something has been applied badly doesn't mean we now just say, well, okay, we're just going to capitulate to it and just forget the good. No, we're called to draw out the best.

There ought to be something different about you, One Harbor, New Bern. There ought to be something different about you when you walk into your supermarket, into your schools, into your

workplace.

And that is going to make life for you uncomfortable. But I want to propose to you today that it is gloriously uncomfortable. I know it's Mother's Day, and maybe you were hoping for a nice message just to warm your heart.

This is going to warm your heart, but we're going to go deep first, and maybe to some dodgy or hard territory, but it's going to pick up at the end. So hang with me.

The author, Adam McHugh, says that we must put away our convenient notions of God, the one who always agrees with us, the one who always favors our nation or political agenda, the one who feeds us candy and never vegetables.

[9 : 55] Again, in our church, we say, you know, many of us in our followership of Jesus, we love to receive different inspiration and teaching from time to time.

And at any moment today, you can go online and you can get the message from your favorite preacher around the world, right? You can go to your local Christian bookstore and get really good books and so on.

And that's really good to a degree, but it's kind of like eating fast food. There's nothing wrong with going to get a bit of fast food, some Bojangles every now and then, right?

But if all you ever do is eat Bojangles, you will get sick. You have to come to the family table. You have to open up the Word, and sometimes you have to follow where the Word goes, and sometimes it goes to hard places.

It goes to places that are more akin to spinach and vegetables, which is good for your soul. It's good for your heart.

[10 : 56] Don't be hard on Jesse. Sometimes he has to follow Nehemiah into hard places. But that's good for you. If you only ever go to where things are tickling your ears, you'll get sick.

It won't be good for you. I love what C.S. Lewis says. He says that, I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I knew a bottle of port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity.

So where am I going with this? Well, 100% I want to say that following Jesus brings immeasurable rewards. I've been a Christian most of my life.

I can't remember when I gave my heart to the Lord. I grew up in a Christian home, and God has been so kind and so good and so gracious.

It brings immeasurable rewards. Has it always been easy? No, it's been a bit like a bed of roses. It's beautiful. It's wonderful. But there are thorns. Jesus came, though, that we might have life and life abundant.

[12 : 00] That's life in large amounts. But Christianity is not about seeking discomfort. It's not about seeking suffering. It's about seeking first the kingdom of God. It's not about celebrating pain or celebrating brokenness.

It's about celebrating the redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ. But this is the point. For you and I to sincerely follow Jesus. It costs you something.

It costs you everything. Jesus says, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it.

But whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. I mean, if you've been around church long enough, you'll know that many folk come to church because their first priority is to try and find their life.

They want moral therapeutic deism. They want stuff to make them feel better. Jesus says, Don't come looking for your life. Come ready to lose your life.

[13 : 04] And then you'll find it. Now, of course, you and I, we face some hostility towards Christianity in the world today. We are in South Africa. We get to catch a bit of a view of your country from a distance.

And Africa in itself has some persecution towards Christianity. Some horrific persecution. There are people in the world today who are dying. Not so long ago, 26 people beheaded in Syria. Christians in Nigeria perpetually under persecution from Boko Haram and worst kind of persecutions around the world.

I don't think that that's the kind of deaths that you're going to face here in New Bern. It's certainly not the kind of death that I face or that Bron and I face in Durban, South Africa.

But that doesn't mean that every single day there are daily deaths that Bron, mainly Bron, not so much me, has to die. There are daily deaths that we have to die in our following of Jesus.

[14:06] I'll give you a little bit of a hint, though. In Christianity and following Jesus, there's always resurrection after death. So hang in there with me as I tell you of a couple of things that you have to lose or that you have to kill every single day.

The first is that you are not large and in charge. You are not the boss of your life. If you're following Jesus, you're not large and in charge.

And that goes against what the world says to you today. The world says that you can do it. You can do it. Be what you want to be. Go find yourself. You're the bee's knees.

Is that a saying here? Yeah, you're the bee's knees, man. That's the current narrative of the world. It's a celebration of individualism. Freedom without constraints.

That's not real freedom. Freedom, true freedom is the right constraints. I love this example. I don't know who came up with it, but I'll steal it.

[15:05] I'll just say it was me. But think of the fish. A fish decides one day, I'm tired of feeling the constraints of this aquatic environment.

I want to be free from it. So it takes a swim up and launches out of the water onto the beach and goes, I'm free, I'm free. Oh, I'm dead. See, freedom is not the absence of constraints.

It's the application of the right constraints. God knows what's best for you. And the reality is this individualism, this freedom without constraints is anti-gospel.

The idea that you're supposed to be in control of your life as much as you and I want to have control of our lives. The idea of discipleship, the idea of following Jesus requires that we surrender our will. Not your will, but your will be done. Not my will, but your will be done. We sing that song.

[16:03] I surrender all. I surrender all. My voice is gone. I get convicted sometimes because sometimes I sing songs that I don't know if I really live out.

In Christ alone, I place my trust. And then I check my bank account. You know? I surrender all. But Lord, no, I'm going to do this rather.

There's a fault line within us that we've got to fight against the passions of the flesh. There's this desire, this selfish desire within mankind to want to be outside of God's rule, to be our own God. But following Jesus means we put away that desire. And we allow Him to reign in our lives. John Stott famously said that the essence of sin is man substituting himself for God, whilst the essence of salvation is God substituting Himself for men.

How amazing is that? When we put our faith in Jesus, we let go of our autonomy. We accept union with Christ. When I say those words, we accept union with Christ, I want you to feel the gravitas of that.

[17:18] That when you put your faith and your trust in Jesus, it's a miracle of salvation. It's not a ticking of the box. It's not an adherence to a set of moral behavior that makes you a Christian.

It's this miraculous cosmic miracle that takes place in the depths of your heart. And our hope is not in ourselves.

It's in God. Not in our self-reliance. The second thing that we lose is consumer religion. Consumer religion. And I cannot tell you how many times I have bumped into people in our community who have maybe come through to our church or to a church in the area.

And they decided one day, okay, enough's enough. I'm going to sort my life out and I'm going to be a Christian. And I'm going to do everything that I believe a Christian should do. I'm going to go to church.

I'm going to give to the poor. And I'm going to be good. I'm going to be good. And after a while, they just can't do it anymore. They can't white-knuckle it anymore.

[18:28] And they give up. And they'll say things like that to me. They'll say, oh, I tried that Christianity thing. It didn't do it for me. They didn't understand grace. They didn't understand it's not what you do.

It's who you become in Christ. And that what you do now flows from that. And people approach their faith like a consumer.

They approach it not realizing that actually to follow Jesus is about this miracle of salvation, about being changed from the inside out.

And when you approach your faith like that, you start to approach how, you know, what church you go to, how you look for a spouse. It's all about you.

It's all about me, myself, and I. I mean, think about James and John. They even revealed a little bit of that to Jesus when they said, you know, can we sit next to you at your right hand?

[19 : 30] They revealed their ambition, and they were shocked when they realized that actually following Jesus was not about their glory or prestige. It was about washing each other's feet.

We need to recognize just how countercultural this is. Again, I think our culture is actually, there are some similarities. We're taught that the customer is always right.

Is that what you're taught here? Customer's always right. And we approach our faith like that. And so even when we go to church, we think, well, yeah, that worship experience didn't really do it for me.

It didn't do it for you? Yeah, you know, they didn't sing the latest Elevation song, you know. And that's what I've been listening to all week, you know.

Or the preacher doesn't look like he belongs on men's health, you know. And he's not, his preaching is not, doesn't, like, he's not giving enough quotes that I can tweet.

[20 : 36] And we approach our faith like that. We try and accumulate and gather to us what we feel is about us. It makes us feel good. We treat it like a product.

When we surrender our lives, when we say we're going to lose our lives to find it, we say, God, it's about you. It's about how can I serve? I want to tell you something today. You may not know this. I'm sure Jesse won't mind me saying this to you. So we do everything that we can in our church to make people feel as hospitable as possible. So we try and have great coffee.

But there's always a church that does better coffee than us. There's always a church that has a better kids ministry than us. But we try and do all of those things because we want to be as hospitable as possible.

But ultimately, we believe wholeheartedly that when a person eventually commits into partnership, like you guys are going to do at Moorhead, God has given them to our church.

[21 : 37] And God has put a living stone upon a living stone upon a living stone. And so you might even be here because you thought, you know, the kids man's really good here.

And I think God is gracious and kind to us. He uses those things wonderfully. But there must come a time when you realize, actually, God has grafted us into this place.

God is building this church. And He's given you to this church. When you're not here, something's missing. Something's missing.

The other thing that we lose is we lose pride. And I'm not talking about the kind of motherly or fatherly pride. I'm proud of my son. I'm not talking about that kind. We lose the fact that actually it's the most offensive thing about the gospel is that everybody can come to the cross.

Anybody can come to the cross. Not just good people. Everybody can come to the cross. It's an amazing story.

[22 : 44] A woman, her son was murdered. And she decides, years later, she's come to faith and she decides to go and forgive her son's murderer.

So she goes to prison. And she's rather surprised to find the prisoner a bit upbeat and pleasant. And she says to him, you look better than what I expected.

And she proceeds to tell him how she's found God and she's been prompted to forgive him. And she has a new life. She has peace and love now. And she wants to spread that love. And one of the first things she wants to do is to come and forgive her son's murderer and offer forgiveness.

To her shock, the prisoner, the killer of her son, has also come to faith in Christ. And he says to her, he says, since I came here, I've accepted God into my heart.

The Lord has reached out to me, a sinner. Is that so, she says? She's a bit shaken by this news. She says, it's good that you found God.

[23 : 42] And the murderer says to her, yes, I'm so grateful. God has reached out to me, a sinner. I've knelt and repented and God's absolved me of them. And it's at this point where this woman completely begins to wilt.

God has forgiven you your sins. She mutters in disbelief. And he says, yes, I found peace. And my repentance and absolution have brought me peace. And now I start every day in prayer.

And I pray for you. And I'll pray for you till I die. The story continues that she leaves the prison completely crushed. But she's overcome by the horror of an idea that she had not considered.

That God had beaten her to the punch for giving her son's killer. And she ends up walking away from God. We lose our pride because this amazing grace is for everybody.

For everybody. We also lose power, coolness, and cultural respectability. And you might say, how is that possible? Because look at Jesse.

[24 : 54] He's as cool as they come. But what I simply mean by that is that when you live the way of Jesus, and when I say the way of Jesus, Jesus has something to say about what you do with your money.

Jesus has something to say about how you serve in the church. Jesus has something to say about your sexuality. Jesus has something to say about your marriage. And when you obey Jesus and you live in his way, that sticks into the jaw, the jaw, of what is deemed cool and respectable in the world.

It goes against political correctness. Remember, we're sojourners and exiles. We're not of this world.

We don't capitulate to what the world sees. We live our lives the way God would want us to live our lives. And the thing that makes you so strange, New Bern, is the gospel itself.

The gospel is never supposed to be popular. However, John starts in his book, The Cross of Christ, says either we preach that human beings are rebels against God under his judgment, and if left to themselves, lost.

[26 : 10] And that Christ crucified, who bore their sin and curse, is the only available savior. So either we preach that, or we emphasize human potential. You can do it, New Bern.

And your human ability, and God's gonna help you do, God's gonna help you get your dreams and boost you. And there's no necessity for the cross except to be an example of God's love and inspire you to greater endeavor.

The former, the first way, is the way to be faithful. The last way is the way to be popular. It is not possible to be faithful and popular simultaneously. It's what I love about our partnership in the gospel.

And I think if you were to just sit with Jesse or any pastor for that matter who's wanting to be faithful to the scriptures, you'll hear them speak about how there is an affront against the church to panel beat the scriptures, to soften some of the hard truths that we're called to proclaim.

The last thing that we lose is the guarantee of health, wealth, and comfort. Now, there's nothing necessarily wrong with health, wealth, and comfort, and many of us enjoy health, wealth, and comfort.

[27 : 30] But it's not uncommon for Jesus to pull us into material discomfort from time to time to remind us that those ought not to be your God with a small g.

If we're gonna follow Jesus, we have to have an open hand when it comes to money and earthly possessions. And this is blatant in the scriptures, but also blatantly obvious. There's two plus billion of us Christ followers in the world, many of them in the southern hemisphere who are living below the poverty line, and many of them who are following Jesus more sincerely than any of us.

Right? And so if following Jesus sincerely and following Him earnestly is a guarantee of health, wealth, and comfort, well, then something's wrong.

It's not, friends. God has many uncomfortable things to say about this. But this is where I wanna land on this point, and just to say that, of course, we trust the Lord for healing, for health.

We trust the Lord for financial provision. We don't run towards discomfort. But the Christian perspective on hardships is not framed by fear.

[28 : 54] It's framed by flourishing. The moments in our life and in our ministry where I can see that God has done the most amount of work in our hearts has been when we've gone through some valleys, and God has deposited deep, deep truth, and we've been able to mine things that were forged in us that wouldn't have got there any other way.

I wish sometimes, you know sometimes you can smell rain. Right? Oh, rain's coming. I felt like at one time, I could smell a hardship coming. Right?

I would like, and then I'd be like, Lord, is there any way you could just like USB drive to me, you know, what lesson you wanna teach me? Could you just download it, Lord? Just tell me what you want.

Do I have to go through it? And very kindly, very gently, I would feel in my spirit, God would say, I've gotta show you. I can't just tell you. I gotta show you.

Remember, the Bible says that we will share in the sufferings of Christ, and it's in those times of suffering where we directly experience the gospel, because the gospel is about suffering, giving way to death, and beyond death, the victory of resurrection.

[30 : 13] resurrection. The victory of resurrection, friends. And of course, that's uncomfortable. Nobody wants it. Nobody runs towards that. But when we do, there's a strengthening that comes to us.

There's a flourishing that comes to us that doesn't come in any other way. What does a person look like when they pay that cost of following Jesus? Well, firstly, their lives are fruitful because they're living in obedience to the real boss of their lives, the one who is large and in charge, the one who actually knows how life should be lived, the one who has infinite wisdom, a person who dies these deaths, who loses their pride, looks incredibly attractive to the world.

Because you know what the gospel says? The gospel says that you are more sinful than you ever thought. Now, if you only ever hear that, well, then you're going to be crushed. You'll be, oh, what is me?

That doesn't look very attractive to the world. But then if you only hear the other part of the gospel, which is that you're more loved than you ever dreamed, and you don't hear that part, well, then you're going to be an arrogant punk. Look at me, I'm God's favorite.

But when you hold the truths of the gospel together, it produces a humble confidence in you. That's beautiful to the world. It's not one that goes around arrogantly.

[31 : 35] Yeah. I think it says it for itself. Produces a humble confidence. In terms of political correctness and coolness, there's something about standing up and having a backbone of truth.

I know that's uncomfortable. I know some of you, even some of you young folk at school, public school, like sometimes you're up against it because the coolness and the respectability of what's out there doesn't sit with what we believe as Christians.

Can I say that actually it's hugely respectable to see somebody standing up for truth? It's hugely respectable. When we choose to die to ourselves and pick up our cross and follow Jesus, we're no longer defined by what we want.

Our lives are not defined by us being the customer who's always right. Our lives are defined by what God wants. Our happiness is now not the primary goal because we have a deep-seated joy. We don't flit around by any happy moment. We have joy even in our sorrow. And it doesn't, it's not connected to how wealthy, how healthy, or how comfortable you are.

[32 : 51] There's a generosity that comes to you. As I close, in a world that says, you're your own boss, you deserve to get what you want, you can be accepted and respectable and politically correct, you live your life your way, your joy and your fulfillment and your happiness must be connected to how healthy you are, how wealthy you are, and how comfortable you are.

In that world, Jesus comes into the picture and he says, pick up your cross and follow me. And of course, it may be uncomfortable, but it is gloriously uncomfortable because it is beautiful.

Of course, it may feel like a death, but in God's kingdom, there is resurrection, my friends. There is life, there is joy, there is peace, and there is hope.

Father, I thank you for our time this morning so we get ready to come to your table, Lord God. Lord, would you give us the strength by the power of your Holy Spirit to lose our lives and to find our lives in you.

We thank you for that in Jesus' name.