

New Wine Cymru Leaders Conference – Paul Williams: ‘The Church on mission in Wales’

Speaker – Paul Williams [00:01:35] I've been asked to talk about the Church and mission in Wales. It's great to be in Wales. My great grandparents, John and Blodwyn, they were converted in the Welsh, the 1904, revival on the steps of their terraced house in Mountain Ash. And I'm incredibly grateful for the blessing

quitting – during COVID. So this is the thing, this level of burnout. And, you know, and what that, what that speaks to.

[00:07:17] So how does it feel? But what about members of the congregation? How does it feel to be a Christian in contemporary society? Now, this is a question that I have been asking of lots of groups for over a decade and capturing the answers and turning them into a word cloud. Here it is. This is largely millennials and Gen Z. Zoomers if you want. Most Christians out there in the world, the people in your congregation, in their workplaces and neighbourhoods, they've got a positive approach, but they actually feel very isolated in wider society. Often it can seem like I'm the only one in my workplace, right? Now, that

the time. But how does Scripture speak into that? We don't like the description because we think it sounds like judgement on us. Or maybe it feels a bit too world rejecting. But both Old and New Testaments use this framing, this theology – very important word exile – to turn around into something very hopeful and missional. Just like the way that, you know, it's one of these paradoxes of the kingdom.

[00:14:23] So let's have a look at a few examples of what I mean. The Jews from the southern kingdom were sent into exile in Babylon in a series of waves of deportation. It wasn't one. Over and over they went around 600 BC, and those remaining in the land were ruled over by kind of Babylonian overlords. And Psalm 37, which you may know quite well, gives us a sense of how they felt. They're down by the river, they're refusing to play their harps, bemoaning their fate, wishing that God would smash the Babylonian babies against the rocks. Mayb.8 (o)4.1 (4) (e)6 (t)49 (i)1.-2.2 (h)9 p et et r.5 (o)9k B-3.4 (A)1.3 (ki)1.5 (i)6.1 (i)0.6 (o)4.1 (i)2 (B)

I'm not needing to feel alienated. I haven't been forced into it. God's mission, according to Ephesians 1.10, is nothing less than the reconciliation of all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

[00:20:19] And the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians, that the message of reconciliation, of all of that reconciling, has been entrusted to us. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors. Like captive aliens and visitors and tourists, ambassadors are strangers – they're still strangers in a foreign land. They're away from their true home. We're citizens of heaven, friends, are we not? But they're not living as strangers unwillingly or unintentionally, they're not sleepwalking into things. They're living as a stranger in a foreign land on purpose. Can you see how the Scripture reframes the experience of exile? Yes, you are not of this world because I've called you out of this world. You are no more of this world than I am, said Jesus. That's a remarkable statement when you think about it. Ambassadors live in a strange land because they've been sent there for a reason.

[00:21:20] Now, that's how the Prophet Jeremiah challenged the exiles, isn't it? Don't listen to the false prophets. Rather, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I've carried you. And, you know, we've heard several times from John 17, Jesus' prayer, his heart prayer, my disciples are not of the world any more than I am of the world. As you, Father, have sent me into the world, I have sent them. That word 'sent' is where we get the Latin 'missio'. 'Missio' means to be sent. We are called to Jesus, but we're then sent into the world. So each and every one of us is an ambassador, a missionary. What we've made a special niche job title is a bit like the word saint in the New Testament. There aren't just a few. We're all saints. Because of the holiness and the setting apart that happens by the Holy Spirit. And we're all sent, we're all missionaries, into some part of God's world that he wants us to represent him in, to witness for him in and to be his emissary.

[00:22:42] So have a quick think where you might be tempted – to withdraw, to assimilate. And what kind of stranger are you? You

[00:26:06] All of that mindset was reflected in the way we trained church leaders, right? We developed a model in which we assumed a pastor teacher with lots of theological training – any of you who've struggled through seminary – it's not really who you are, you know what I'm talking about. Oh, the only practical bit might be how do you do a wedding, a funeral and a baptism? Really, right? But Ephesians 4, in my Bible at least, has apostles, prophets and evangelists as well as pastor teachers. Those are all needed for the building up of the church. But you look in vain for many seminary curricula that would actually seek to develop those gifts.

[00:26:48] We also developed at the same time (W)-y1-0.6 (e a)-8.d.7 (a)-2.b 7.5 (p)-M-4.8 (h) aimeh ostlaeek cu1.5 (n)-6

[00:32:25] There's more to learn from the New Testament record because these local congregations were planted and nurtured by a different kind of structure – a community that one scholar described as the missionary bands. Think of the Apostle Paul with Barnabas, Timothy, Titus, Priscilla, Aquila, Epaphroditus – all these names. Whereas the congregations were planted very firmly in a place, he wrote to the letter of the church in Corinth, for example, right? The missionary bands are trans local. They're travelling constantly. They're planting, they are establishing new churches. They come back, they appoint local leaders, they mentor them. They build up to strengthen the health of the local congregations. And both of these two structures are working together. The local in this powerful organic demonstration of what the future could be like as heaven invades earth, and the trans local – nurturing and growing these like a gardener, if you like. And discipleship took place at both levels. Paul's missionary bands nurtured and mentored leaders. Local leadership amplified that teaching with the kind of discipleship, friends, that formed thousands of believers who were willing to give their lives for Jesus in the Roman arenas, rather than compromise their witness.

[00:33:53] So these two separate, but reinforcing local and trans local structures return again and again through church history. We see them in the monastic renewals, the vow of stability in the Benedictine. The mendicant orders who travel and preach, like the roving Dominicans. Think about Wesley and the circuit preachers and the powerful model of the local class meeting. Over and over again, we see these structures reappearing in some form. And we have versions of them today, but often we've unhelpfully narrowed them. Mission agencies, trans local groups, focus too much on a definition of mission activity, which is not nurturing the local church. My organisation has been guilty of that. But, you know, the local church is absolutely at the centre of God's purposes. That's his mission strategy. We are his mission strategy. But local churches too often have ignored the flourishing of the town and city. It's got too much about personal familial care of the flock. Now, that is so vital, isn't it? It's where we, that's where we experience the core, the heart of the Father (r)-1.7 (t)0.6 [(a)-B(b)-0.6-1.7 (t)0.6 (o) (h)-0.]1.1 (a)-6 (e c)1.2 (en)-6 ()-5.5 (w)-0.99 (tilia)-1.9 l1 (p

of the different generations, Tik Tok, Instagram, they all have their little cultural dialects. We've got to learn these languages. And do you know what? These audiences are not just out there, they're in your congregation. So this is our data. This is a massive dataset. You would think the church is full of the hot, top right of that diagram. And that's true, but only 70 per cent on average. That means on average, 30 per cent of your congregation, they want to be there but they probably are very Bible ignorant. They might not read the Bible. They might think the Bible in fact is, you know, we'd be better off if we didn't have the Bible. They're undisciplined, they feel there's something important to be in here, in this room that's drawn them in, but they're still searching because they're actually lost. They just happened to have crashed into something that feels safe for now. But, you know, are they going to go deeper into dis ve cmpodtoy b(d)-0.6 eBt de eBt-mio.o.o in (