

The courage and confidence of God's people comes from the Spirit of Jesus who has been given to us. The Holy Spirit comes to us from the future: he is the down-payment and guarantee of the future of righteousness and love that awaits us in Christ. And so he gives us deep confidence in the middle of difficulties and troubles—and courage! Through the Spirit's ministry to us, we know the reality that Jesus Christ actually rules this world. All that is happening is ruled over by him, and none of the suffering of his people is indispensable to the triumph of the gospel in the world, just as his suffering was indispensable to that triumph. When we see that, we don't lose heart.

Confidence and courage don't always feel heroic; they don't always feel triumphant. "But," as James Buchan says in his novel, *The 39 Steps*, "the big courage is the cold-blooded kind, the kind that never lets go even when you're feeling empty inside, and your blood's thin, and there's no kind of fun or profit to be had, and the trouble's not over in an hour or two but lasts for months and years." That's the kind of courage the Holy Spirit gives, the courage and confidence that looks not for immediate relief but for the unveiling and consummation of the triumph of Jesus Christ in the gospel.

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ACC-SA State Conference: Courage and Confidence in Christ

August 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016

### **Jesus Christ Rules This World**

#### Prayer

*Father God, we acknowledge now with joy and certainty and holy awe that you have made your Son, the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords to your own eternal glory. In him you have reassured your claim over the whole of creation. He has overcome the world, and by his victory he calls us to courage and confidence in witness and confession of the truth of the gospel. Father, we pray that you will fill us afresh with your Holy Spirit and grant to us the courage and confidence we need to be your faithful people in this world. Amen.*

Imagine you find yourself being led out into a huge arena, right into the middle of the field. The stadium is filled with a roaring crowd, around you you hear voices speaking a language you don't really understand, and you feel very much you are the unwanted competitor in some event. As you wait, a voice announces to the crowd that the mathematics competition is about to begin. A maths test! Okay...this should be alright; you're quite good at maths... And here comes the first question: "What is 2 plus 2?" Confidently you answer with a loud voice, "It's 4!" The crowd bellows out angrily "No!" The umpires look at you severely. Apparently you have three attempts at this—and the question is asked again. And again, a little less confidently and little less timidly you reply, "I think its 4..." The roar in the stadium is deafening—"no, no, no!" You look nervously around, and see that some of the officials have taken out truncheons and have moved closer to you. One very close to you tries to give you some help—he passes a note to you on which is written, "The answer is whatever you want it to be." And then, as the crowd roars its disapproval, and as the truncheon bearing official lean in, the question comes to you a third time... and you realise that this is not actually a maths test; it's not your knowledge of arithmetic that's being tested. This is a test of courage.

Welcome to this conference, being organised by ACC-SA and co-sponsored by the Hope Mission Network. We're really glad you have been able to make it. Especially we want to welcome our keynote speaker, Max Champion, who has flown in today from Melbourne. We look forward to your contribution and encouragement, Max. Our hope in holding this event is to bring encouragement to those who belong to Jesus Christ.

It is certainly true that we live in testing times! Both in society generally and in the church more specifically, we find ourselves in an arena where there is a test going on. And the test is not really about the facts or truth. The test is about courage. All around in society, and even in the church, there are pressures to not say what is true. People can lose their livelihoods, their careers and their reputations if they hold "the wrong opinion." Whether it's in discussion of sexuality or gender or religion or...well anything...there is constant pressure to not name the name of Jesus as Lord.

As God's people we need to rediscover the source of confidence and courage, so that we may make a faithful confession of Christ Jesus. Leon Morris once wrote a little booklet entitled, "What is nice church like that doing in a world like this?" The answer is very simple—we are here as heralds and witness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But we are heralds and witnesses in a world that "knew him not" and "received him not"—and so we, being servants who are not greater than the master, will face what he faced, will undergo what we underwent.

The earliest confession of the church was a wonderful three-word-slogan: "Jesus is Lord!" We as God's people today continue to confess Jesus as Lord to glory of God the Father. This confession flows from the impact of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Knowing Jesus risen from the dead gives a deep conviction that God had made him both Lord and Christ. That is, in the words of the Basis of Union of the Uniting Church, God the Father, in raising Jesus from the dead to reign, "confirmed and completed the witness that [he] bore to God on earth, reasserted [his] claim over the whole of creation, pardoned sinners and made in him a representative beginning of a new order of righteousness and love."

When you read the pages of Acts and the letters in the New Testament it is unavoidably obvious that the early church was extremely courageous and confident in its announcement of the gospel. Courageous enough to resist the edicts and judgments of the powers that be to stop preaching in the name of Jesus; confident enough to stand before kings and rulers; courageous and confident enough to bear all manner of mistreatment without shrinking away from bearing the name of Jesus, and counting it honour to suffer for his sake.

This courage and confidence was *entirely* grounded in its faith-certainty that Jesus had been raised from the dead. His resurrection was the sign that all the powers of sin, death and evil had been defeated, and that creation was now firmly held in his hands. He was going to take things to the end his Father intended. At the end of all things, a final judgment would sort out once and for all those who were for and those who were against the rule of Jesus Christ. None of his despisers and haters would be left with a leg to stand on. (A regular and indispensable part of the gospel proclamation was that of final judgment.)

The word "gospel" is a word borrowed from the political world of Jesus' time. It does have the meaning of "good news"—but who it's good news for is often misunderstood. In the ancient world, a king might send out a messenger with "gospel" for the subjects. It might be a proclamation that the king had had a son, or that the king had won a great victory in battle. Essentially it was *good news for the king*. I guess the people hearing the announcement may have heard it as good or bad news if they loved or hated the king, if they wanted his rule or wanted to dethrone him. The gospel is firstly *God's* good news. Certainly the first hearers of the gospel on the day of Pentecost *initially* heard it as bad news for themselves. They had been those who had participated in and celebrated at the crucifixion of Jesus. But God had made this Jesus, whom they had crucified both Lord and Christ. This put them in a tricky spot! It became good news for them when they heard and obeyed the command of Peter, "Repent and be baptised every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."