

Andrew Cook:

To mark the 500th anniversary of the Reformation we began a series on church history and last time, Philip Parsons and Derek French highlighted a few reasons why, nowadays, there seems to be little knowledge of church history amongst Christian believers.

Well, Philip and Derek join us again to continue the discussion from a different perspective.

Derek French:

What about the reasons why we should consider Church History - the positive reasons, if you like?

Philip Parsons:

Well I think there are five main reasons. The first of these is because all history, and particularly church history, is God's activity. We perhaps think of history as being what men have done and that is true, but it is also primarily what God has done.

The Bible teaches us that Christ is the sovereign Lord of all history, the only one who has the right to open the seals of the scroll of history, as Revelation 5 puts it. There are some other references which underline this point; there's one in Daniel, chapter 4 and verses 34 and 35, if you would read that for us please, Derek?

Derek:

It describes, well, the very humiliating experience God brought Nebuchadnezzar through (the king) and humbled him before him. And the result of that was his conversion and really this is [...] his words here, isn't it, that refer to that.

And we read in verse 34.

'At the end of that time, (that's the time of his illness. He was so humble; he was like an animal wasn't he. We read he even ate grass. He says,) at the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes towards heaven, and my sanity was restored.

Then I praised the Most High; I honoured and glorified him who lives for ever. His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endured from generation to generation.

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?"'

Remarkable change in that man, wasn't it? He didn't believe God at all and was opposed to Daniel.

Philip:

Remarkable! When you think that this is a powerful pagan ruler who was a despot. You know he had people thrown into the fire at a whim and he could have them executed just as he wished.

Derek:

It's interesting, Philip. I know we've both done some studies in Daniel and when I was doing that a year or two ago, I came across a quote from a secular historian about the life in Babylon when Nebuchadnezzar was king. And they said it was a very cruel regime, really, but the latter years of his reign, there was a change, there was a leniency. And unbelieving historians can't understand that, but this man was changed.

Philip:

Yes. I think one writer says he was struck with divinity, which is an interesting comment. I mean, they obviously couldn't understand what happened but it's very significant, and that fact that he should be able to say that and make this sort of statement about the peoples of the world and the rulers of the world. And the kingdoms of the world are all under the sovereign control of God. He's the one who does as he pleases.

Derek:

Because prior to that, Nebuchadnezzar thought it was his day, wasn't it? He thought he was number one and he has to realise: no it isn't, it is the Lord! Yes it is a remarkable change.

Philip:

There's another reference in the New Testament in Ephesians chapter 1 and verses 9 to 11. This is Paul speaking of God's work and of Christ,

‘And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”

So really it’s saying that the whole of history is God working these things out according to his will and particularly for the benefit of the church, the body of Christ.

Derek:

Yes. And I think that ‘all things’ there is vital because it’s not just the truth of history that we find in the Bible itself. That which is outside the Bible and since the Bible was written, his rule and his control and therefore every reason why we should study the works of the Lord, isn’t it?

Philip:

Yes, that’s right. There another reference in John 5, and verse 17 if you’d read that for us please, Derek?

Derek:

Yes. And this is from the lips of Jesus. He was being persecuted by the Jews at the time, according to them for breaking the Sabbath. He wasn’t of course but he said this,

‘Jesus said to them, “My Father is always at work to this very day and I too am working.”’

Philip:

There’s another verse that comes to mind in Proverbs 21, verse 1 where it says *‘The heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord.’* That’s again a very important thing to remember.

Derek:

Yes and I think really this is the most important reason, isn’t it, because the Lord is at work all the time.

Philip:

Yes.