

G O D ' S B I G P I C T U R E

Aim:

Using Vaughan Robert's 'God's Big Picture' (GBP) as our guide, we are aiming to get an overview of the whole Bible story. It can be summarised by the unifying theme:

The Kingdom of God: God's people in God's place under God's rule and blessing

(read GBP pp 20-25 for a fuller explanation)

STUDY 8: The Proclaimed Kingdom 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

Key things to teach:

- In these last days God has given his church the wonderful message of the gospel to proclaim.
- Gospel proclamation is so hard that we are likely to want to give up

Study Outline:

(see GBP pp 135-137)

Launching Question:

We're thinking today about 'the last days', the time between the first and second comings of Christ. It is the age of the church, and therefore of gospel proclamation (which is our theme in this study).

Pool together all the things that make our enthusiasm about gospel proclamation fluctuate (!): what makes it hard?

OPTIONAL EXTRA:

First let's think about the three elements of our summary of 'God's kingdom': what is the current position now of ...

- God's people *the new Israel is the church, believers in Jesus, rather than any racial grouping*
- God's place *God's dwelling place on earth is his people, individually and as a Christian community*
- God's rule and blessing *cf the three tenses of salvation (see GBP p130)*

(There is much more explanation about this in GBP pp 131-132)

So much already, and yet there is frustration in our present experience (... read excerpts from GBP pp 132-134 ?)

We're going to read **2 Corinthians 4** where Paul is describing the wonderful ministry of proclaiming the gospel.

READ 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

What makes the task of evangelism hard, according to these verses? (*lots of answers*)

(the god of this world' could be 'Satan', but is more likely to be something like 'the spirit of the age' ...

everything about our world that attracts people's attention away from considering Christ and the gospel)

What are the temptations for Christian evangelists who are finding the job hard?

What encouragements are we given to keep going? why should we 'not lose heart' (1)?

What can we learn from Paul's example in evangelism about how we share the message?

READ 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

What is 'this treasure' (7)?

In what ways does this passage say that we are like 'jars of clay'?

Why has God allowed us/all gospel messengers to be weak?

In what ways might a successful-seeming church be dangerous in gospel proclamation?

How do verses 8-9 reflect your experience in evangelism?

What encouragements does Paul give to us in our weakness?

READ 2 Corinthians 4:13-18

What is our hope?

v16 repeats 'we do not lose heart' from v1. How does our hope help us not to lose heart, but to 'speak' instead?

In what ways might we be tempted to lose heart in the task of proclaiming the gospel?

If I find the task hard, does this passage lead me to think my experience is normal or abnormal?

How does this passage help us to keep going?

So what can you do to put into practise what God has said to us through this passage?