

## 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

“The Light Of The Gospel”

I don't want to get ahead of myself here because I would imagine we'll come back to this next week and I mentioned it *last* week but the waters of life that Paul the apostle sailed on weren't always the smoothest. They were quite frequently tumultuous; they were turbulent, if there was anyone who had justifiable reasons to cease the work of the ministry from a human point of view it was certainly him. He often times found himself discouraged, dejected, downtrodden, and disheartened. But one thing he didn't do was quit, he never gave up, he continued to press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God that's in Christ Jesus. Why? What kept him going? How is it that such discouragement or despair at times though it may've brought him down never took him out? It was the fact that he realized the treasure he had and the glory that had gripped his life in the person of Jesus Christ So that rather than focusing on what wasn't happening, or complaining about what he *didn't* have, he focused on the greatness of what had already happened, and he rejoiced in what he *did have*, what he *did* possess in the person of Christ.

and When we realize what it is that we have in Christ, the fact that we even know Him and then that He has commissioned us to make Him known; that is a powerfully persuasive force in motivating us in ministry. You can't quit, you can't give up. Not only do you owe it to the Lord after all He's done for you, laying down His life for you, taking my sin, your sin upon Himself receiving in Himself the penalty that's due me and you, becoming sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. But we owe it to the world around us to offer them the same message of hope, the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ that was offered to us. Paul told the Romans, *“I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes,”* Rom 1:14-16 and What that means is that he realized that the debt of sin and transgression that had been forgiven him was so great, so vast, so immeasurable that he literally *owed* it to any and everyone around him to extend to them that same offer of forgiveness and salvation in Christ that he himself had received. He said, “I am a debtor to both Greeks/barbarians/wise/unwise.” Or another way to understand that, “I owe it to you to give you the gospel message, if I don't I'm ripping you off, after what Christ has done for me I owe you the same opportunity, how can I hold out on you when such an offer of love and grace was extended to me?” and Paul understood that, so it drove him on, it compelled him, constrained him, he couldn't not press on. We'll read in the next Ch where he said, “The love of Christ compels us.” In 1<sup>st</sup> Cor we read where he wrote, *“For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!”* 1 Cor 9:16 Paul knew what he had in Christ, or should I say he knew who he had in Christ. So though you might beat him down, you could never take him out, what he had was too great, he couldn't not share, he wanted people to be saved, and the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes is found in the gospel of Christ.

But here's the deal "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!'" Rom 10:14-15 The problems that came into his life personally simply didn't warrant his setting aside of the ministry, the stakes were too high, who he had in Christ was too great, so he kept going, and kept going, and kept going, he refused to stop, notice.

### Vs1-6

Look at Vs 1 (read). Paul says, "Therefore," or because of the fact that, "we have this ministry," what ministry? The ministry that he was referring to throughout Ch 3, the ministry of the Spirit and not of the law, the ministry of righteousness and salvation, not death and condemnation, the ministry that focuses not on what I need to do but on what Christ has done, the ministry that exceeds immeasurably in glory compared to the old covenant of the law. "Since we have *this* ministry, as we have *received* mercy, we do not lose heart." I want you to notice 2 things about this ministry that we have here. #1 It's something we have *received*, and #2 It's by the *mercy* of God that we've received it.

#1 It's something that we receive, it's not something that's been contrived of man, it's not an idea, or a philosophy or plan of man, it's something that we receive from God. There is something distinctly different about the plan of salvation as declared in the Word of God from virtually every other religion in the world. **Something that sets apart this ministry from any other philosophy out there that shows/shares with man the way one is made righteous or is saved from the error of his ways and given entrance into heaven.** and We could go through and give various examples but the bottom line is that every other "religion" of the world somehow and in some way says, "do" its legalism, ritualism, methods and mechanics, its man reaching out to God, pulling himself up from the ashes of debauchery and depravity and earning a way in and of himself to be accepted before God. **The religions of the world say, "Do" Christianity says, "Done."** It's a message that man could have never thought of on his own because as mankind we're too prideful. We want to have some part in God's acceptance of us, we want to be recognized and realized as somehow deserving of a righteous standing before God. But Christianity doesn't allow for that, the message and ministry that we've received says, "Mankind is completely and totally corrupt, we live in depravity and immorality of the heart. and Not only is this man's condition but he has no power nor ability to (in and of himself) do anything about it. Man isn't *seeking* God, he wants nothing to *do* with God, he's not reaching *out* to God, and he's turned his back *on* God. **But God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that He reached out to man in the person of Jesus Christ That He demonstrated His own love toward us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us, and that by His grace through faith if we'll simply believe in Him, trust in Him for His work on our behalf upon the cross, that God will impute, or accredit to us His righteousness.**" But man innately rebels against a message like that, we don't naturally glory in a message like that or come up with an idea like that, because we can't stand the fact that we don't deserve it and can't do *anything* to earn it, all we can do is *receive* it in humility. It's a ministry we receive.

#2 It's by the mercy of God what we *have* received it. The ministry of righteousness and salvation by grace through faith is given to us as a *mercy* of God. We all know where we've been, what we've done, the things that we've entertained in our heart and in our mind, and what it is that we truly deserve. The only thing we've earned or merited before a holy and righteous God is judgment; we deserve to pay for our sins. "*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),*" Eph 2:4-5 and Keep in mind who it is that's writing this, it wasn't some amoral, depraved, culturally corrupt individual who was at rock bottom and had nowhere to look but up when he was in the world. Sadly that's many of our stories. But Saul of Tarsus (Paul the apostle) was a Pharisee of Pharisees, the most self-righteous of the self-righteous, a Hebrew of Hebrews, of the stock of Israel from the tribe of Benjamin from which came the 1<sup>st</sup> king of Israel.

Circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day, concerning the righteousness that was found in the law (according to the outward man) blameless. If there was anyone who could count on his merits to gain him acceptance in the eyes of God it was this man. Yet one day he was confronted by Christ, and you *cannot* come into a conscious awareness of the holiness of God with out being profoundly impacted by the sobering reality of your own sinfulness and inward depravity. Suddenly he became the chief of sinners; he counted all those former things as loss for Christ, as rubbish that he might gain Christ. That he might (as he said), "...*be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith;*" Phil 3:9 Paul knew that this ministry that he had received was nothing that he'd somehow earned or deserved, it was through the mercy of God. and The same goes for me, and the same goes for you, we have received mercy.

and You should see there that he says regarding the ministry and the mercy that it's something *we* have received, this isn't something aimed at the man in the proverbial pulpit, but the people in the proverbial pews. It's something that God has entrusted to us all in Christ.

But because of these things, because of the reality of the radiance and the glory of this ministry of the Spirit, of righteousness and salvation, because of this hope (Vs 12 Ch 3) that we've been given, it's non-negotiable certainty and it's concrete reality, we do not lose hope. We don't lose heart; we don't give up, or give in. In Luke Ch 18 Vs 1 you'll find where Jesus taught the people a parable and the point of it was that men always ought to pray and not lose heart. In this glorious ministry of righteousness and salvation we stand sure, secure and settled; there's to be a boldness and a straightforwardness about us in love. It doesn't mean that we never get discouraged, or never feel beat down, but that with Christ as our focus we persevere and press on. We do not lose heart. If you feel as though you've lost heart, ask the Lord to help you to refocus on Him, on the greatness of who He is and what He's done, to get your eyes off your personal problems and on the greater need of people slipping off the planet with out Him. That you might regain your footing, finding yourself shining forth the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ into the hearts and lives of those around you who are still in need of Him. You may be having a horrible time personally right now, but let me encourage you with this, you know Jesus, your eternity is set in Him, this life is but a vapor and then all your problems will be over. But what about that guy, that gal that *doesn't* know Him, isn't found in Him?

We owe it to Christ, and we owe it to them to get our eyes off ourselves and share the hope, the healing, the forgiveness and grace that's found in Christ. Don't lose heart, let the Lord reset your footing today.

## Vs2

To put this in brief God's Word is living and powerful, and once you're saved God's Word is alive in you, the result being that it permeates and infiltrates and changes your life. You renounce the hidden things of shame. *You can not turn to something with out turning away from something else. and When you turn to Christ, you turn away from sin, it's called repentance. Paul says, "What we don't do is lose heart, what we've done is renounce the hidden things of shame."* Coming to Christ isn't an intellectual assent whereby we acquiesce to a certain set of ideals, it's not subscribing to a certain philosophy for life, it's surrendering my heart, my will *not to a principle, but to a person.* The person of Jesus Christ and those hidden things of shame no longer define me, I've turned from those things, I don't walk in craftiness; meaning I'm not a conniver, I don't adopt cunning ways, or various deceptive devices that will enable me to achieve whatever desired end I'm looking for. (Satan handled the word of God deceitfully in seeking to manipulate Jesus to fall prey to his desired end).

and Of course as it pertains to the context he speaks of handling the Word of God deceitfully (as do his critics or opponents there in Corinth who are in reality accusing him of that, what they're accusing him of is like a diversionary tactic to get their focus away from the fact that that's the very thing *they're* doing). *But what he's saying is that he won't water down the message, or somehow corrupt the Word of God to attract people to the message, thereby seeking to trick them into somehow believing. and For me it's difficult to not think of a seeker friendly type of approach as falling into this category.* Using various gimmicks and things that appeal to the world to get people through the doors, diluting the message, telling them what they want to hear to keep them coming back, sliding the gospel in, in bits and pieces here and there in order to somehow hopefully see them saved in the end. *But in reality you've sought to get them to buy into something that was a show to hopefully get them where you want them in the end. It's walking in craftiness, trying to trick people into believing, handling the Word of God deceitfully. Paul says, "I refuse to do that." I'm not going to play the part of the hypocrite.*

"But by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." "We're not going handle the Word of God deceitfully, but rather we're going to manifest the truth." "Here it is, here are the facts," he would confront people with the message of Jesus Christ and Him crucified, make people accountable, and now you're left with a decision to accept it or reject it. *God is able to have His way with His Word; He doesn't need our cunning craftiness to help it along. He's called us to sow the seed, He's responsible for the causing of it to accomplish the purpose for which He's sent it forth, and He'll do it. It's our responsibility to manifest the truth, speaking the truth in love. But not just speaking it, not just sharing it, showing it, manifesting it practically before the people around us.* Commending ourselves to every man's conscience, we're to be a people of integrity, of open honesty, of transparency with no hidden agenda and nothing to hide. It's important that our motives be pure, and our message be pure, both before man, and more importantly, "in the sight of God."

Again this isn't just an exhortation to pastors/preachers; this is aimed at believers in general. We're to be a people of integrity, we're to handle God's Word truthfully, our motives and message is to be marked by purity. These are the things that make for key ingredients in your witness. If people are to come to Christ through God's work in your life then these things should earmark your witness before people. As much as we want to see people coming to Christ with in these 4 walls the largest impact we'll have upon the community is when you're out there in the midst of them (at work or school or wherever) sharing and showing the person of Jesus Christ to them. **It's not shepherds that beget sheep, it's sheep that beget sheep, the shepherd is to watch over the sheep, feed them, tend to them, do his best to maintain their health and well being, but it's the sheep who will beget other sheep.** Let the word of God, the witness of God in your life spill out into the lives of those around you and God will touch and transform lives through you, through your witness.

#### Vs3-4

Following the flow from Ch 3 where Paul talked about the veil that was laying over the hearts of the nation of Israel in general in the reading of the law not realizing that the law was there to point them to Christ and that, that veil comes off in Christ; here he says the same thing can be true of the gospel. **People can be veiled from it's truth, it's life transforming power; the people to whom the gospel is veiled are those whom are perishing.** In 1 Cor 1:18 he put it like this, *"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,"*

#### Vs4

Now there are a few things we need to see here. #1 I don't want you to think that those who are perishing are the innocent victims of Satan's blinding power, the scripture is clear here that those whom Satan has blinded are those "who do not believe." **They don't want to believe therefore Satan has blinded their minds lest the glorious light of the gospel of Christ should shine on them. Or to understand that another way, if they don't want to see, if they don't want to believe, they're given over to blindness. In the gospel of John we read it like this.** *"For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."* John 3:17-19 **You see there's no "innocent victim" involved. Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil, so in refusing to come to the light there's only one alternative, you're left in the dark. and Satan works hard to keep that individual in that place.**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> thing I want you to see is that it doesn't say that their eyes have been blinded, but that their *minds* have been blinded. The major battle of belief takes place 1<sup>st</sup> and foremost in the mind, we're transformed by the renewing of our...mind, we're to the love the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul and all our...mind. **We're not to set our minds on high things but to associate with the humble. The bible says that we were once alienated from God and enemies in our mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled us. We haven't been given a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. The bible says we have the mind of Christ, on and on we could go. The battle begins in the mind, sure he works on the heart, he plays with the emotions, but the primary battleground lies in the mind.**

Satan wants you to toy with the thought of evolution, something completely unsubstantiated, with no valid scientific back bone, but he wants to use it blind your mind from the truth. Or perhaps he'd have your mind preoccupied by your favorite sin, or perhaps you don't have time to think about eternity at all you're too busy living life right now, maybe later. Maybe all you can think about is that if you came to Christ all your friends would forsake you, and rather than realizing they're not really your friends in that case, and friends that would rather see you in hell aren't worth having, you can't imagine having your "buddies" abandon you. Some people are blinded by a false sense of security, they're religious, they're caught up in legalism, ritualism, do's and don'ts and they think that because of that they're ok. You see the battleground is in the mind, and as we mentioned earlier it's not that they can't believe if they wanted to, it's that they love darkness rather than light. They don't want to give up some particular sin, or set of sins in their life. If they're prepared to turn from their sin and come to Christ, they'll have no problem believing, that's the bottom line.

Well, what can we do when someone is in that place, we love them, are concerned for them, but they're blinded by the god of this age. Jesus referred to Satan as the ruler, or prince of this world, the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. God is ultimately in control but as for this world, Satan is the elected ruler by popular demand. What can we do for people in that place? I think 1<sup>st</sup> of all, and the most important thing we can do is *pray*. Pray for them with the understanding of what we see here, they're minds have been blinded. Paul had a physical experience that taught him of his blindness after Christ met him on the road to Damascus, after Jesus encountered him he found himself blind. No doubt he reflected on his spiritual position during those 3 days, realizing how blind he'd been spiritually as well.

But when Ananias laid hands on him, ministered to him, he received his sight. We do well to pray that God might cause the scales to fall from the eyes, that the minds of those who've been blinded might be open to the light of Jesus Christ That they would see their sin and this world for the rip off that it is and who Jesus Christ is in truth, that they might see clearly to make the decision to accept or reject Him based upon the reality and understanding of who He is and what He's done for them. So 1<sup>st</sup> of all pray, 2<sup>ndly</sup> preach, check it out.

**Vs5**

Pray *for* them, and share *with* them Christ Jesus the Lord. and It's not that it's wrong to share a story about your life, or give an illustration here and there from your experience. But sometimes people want to know why I don't speak more illustratively from my life from the pulpit, because I'm not here to preach myself, but Christ Jesus our Lord. I want to point you to Him, help you grow in your knowledge of *Him*. As for me I'm just here to serve you for His sake, that's what Paul is saying. He belongs to Christ, and he serves them for *His* sake. and That's key you guys, if you're serving for any other reason, you'll be bummed, you'll get burned out, and ticked off when people don't recognize you, or appreciate you or give you a pat on the back. "Well, I'll never do that for *them* again." Good, you shouldn't have done it for them in the 1<sup>st</sup> place; you do it for Jesus' sake. When you do what you do to please man it can get fleshy real quick, but when we're doing what we're doing to serve Jesus, then it doesn't matter if men appreciate it, recognize it or not.

So pray for that person, and when the door opens to share, preach Jesus, keep it centered on Jesus. The one who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of the One who sent him is true, that's what Jesus said (John 7:18).

### Vs6

Now we're going to have to pick up from this point next time but for now realize that Paul is referencing the new creation. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. and The Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. It's the revelation of creation, God spoke and caused light to shine out of darkness, and He's also shone His light into the darkness of our hearts, the revelation of the new creation. The Psalmist said, "*The entrance of Your words gives light;*" In Vs 17 of Ch 5 Paul will say, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*" 2 Cor 5:17 But here's the deal God doesn't shine His light into us so that we can just sorta kick back in the rays of the "Son" and soak them up. We're not a reservoir intended to only hold the light, He's shone *in* us that He might shine *through* us, we're to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ *You see as you look into the word of God, and are transformed more and more into the image of the Son of God as by the Spirit of God, people will see the glory of God through your life. God's glory is seen in the face of Jesus Christ Vs 4 tells us that Jesus is the very image of God. Do you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus Christ Was He mad at the world? No, didn't come to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. Ready to smite the sinner? No, desired to save the sinner, He was moved with compassion seeing people as sheep without a shepherd, a harvest that needed reaping, as the sick in need of a physician. God isn't up there looking for the 1<sup>st</sup> opportunity to swat you with the giant flyswatter from heaven. He loves you, longs to walk with you, wants you to know Him and make Him known. He wants His light to shine full force in your heart, that it might shine forth full force from your life that you might give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ to a hurt and dying world that's so desperately in need of Him.*

Prayer Points:

Lord God may we decrease that You might increase in our lives. We thank You for the ministry that You've entrusted to us in Your mercy, a ministry of righteousness and salvation, that brings light and transformation to all who believe, strengthen us that we not lose heart. and May we not fall prey to the tricks and techniques of the world, but rather may our lives, our words and our witness manifest the truth to your glory. and God we pray for an opening of the minds of those we know and love who are blinded to who You are. That they might come to know and understand who You are and the reality of Your heart toward them in truth that they might come to know You and Your forgiveness that awaits all who believe.

and Be there anyone here today who needs that same touch, Father we just pray for them right now, that they might understand the destructive nature of their sin, and the desire of Your heart to forgive and reconcile them to Yourself.

Listen, if you've never given your heart to Christ. We're going to take a moment right now and give you that opportunity. It could be that your mind is in a million different places even now but I pray that God would give you singleness of mind to know His love for you, and His desire to forgive you, and reconcile you to Himself through His only begotten Son Jesus Christ If you would be forgiven of your sin, reconciled to God; if you desire to be made brand new, slate wiped clean and given a fresh start, then take this time to ask God for His forgiveness and as Jesus into Your heart.