

2 Corinthians:

The Gospel's Glory and Power is seen in Human Weakness

La Crescent Evangelical Free Church
December 17, 2023

Reading of the Word

2 Corinthians 4:5-8

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

Prayer

Warm Up

Good morning, for those who don't know me my name is Eric Mattie. I'm a member here at LEFC I serve as an occasional preacher and teacher and serve with my wife on the prayer ministry I want to thank the elders for inviting me, to share God's Word this morning as they return from the Elders Retreat.

Introduction:

"This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine. Let it shine, Let it shine, Let it shine."

There is no other light for this dark world than Jesus Christ.

V 5,6

So when we read in today's verses and are reminded by Paul of the first recorded words that actually created our history "Let light shine in darkness" "Let there be light", let us remember the powerful way God shone his light into our dark hearts.

- ❖ Do you remember The way Jesus was presented to you? Whether through preaching, or reading, or in conversation, or when you were seeking alone, maybe it was a gradual shining. God's... surpassing... powerful light.... unveiled our hearts to clearly, comprehend Christ's Coming to earth,

Christ's Cross where he died

Christ's Canceling your debt of sin

Christ Coming back to life so that you'd be made new- that light!... that knowledge of the glory and majesty of God's divine being found in Jesus Christ... led you to become a Christ follower, a lover of Jesus.

You've put your hope for all eternity in the only person who can sufficiently hold you for that long. You simply have received the kindness that God has offered all of us, that is found only in Jesus Christ.

The reason why we as believers can see, is not because we are smart enough to figure it out. It's because God was merciful enough to us, through his Spirit to open our blind eyes and hearts.

John Newton wrote: “Neither education endeavors, nor arguments can open the eyes of the blind. It is God alone, who first caused light to shine out of darkness, who can shine into our hearts.”

That gift of His grace, is something we possess, but it is not our own.

This little light of mine doesn’t shine because of me. This light is gifted to me, but this light is not from me nor is it me.

Jesus is the light of the world. We are reminded of this metaphor, this symbol every Christmas season. And as His Church, we are to let His light shine through us.

There is no other light for this dark world than Jesus Christ.

Verse 5 says: For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord

When I read that verse I say to myself “self, Why does the apostle Paul remind the Corinthians of this?”

The simple answer is that

The light of the Gospel’s work in Corinth was at risk

We must remember where we are at when we read this second letter of Paul.

There is actually a year between these 2 letters

1 Corinthians and 2nd Corinthians are not sequential chapters like a book.

Now...

I’m not embarrassed to admit that when I took a class at Bible School in 1996 called Corinthian letters, to my shock I learned that Paul had physically written 4 letters to the Corinthians. That blew my mind! It blew my mind because I thought “well everything Paul wrote was the Word of God wasn’t it?” Obviously not. So I learned that there were letters A,B,C,D. and out of that sequence I learned that 1st and 2nd Corinthians were letters B and D. The only reason we know that there are other letters is that, they are mentioned in the 2 letters we have in God’s word. So with all these letters, there is a lot going on between Paul and the Corinth church.

- A. Letter A is called the “previous letter” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:9 (“I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people...”)
- B. Letter B is the Biblical Canon letter of 1 Corinthians itself,
- C. Letter C The “tearful, severe” letter referred to in 2 Corinthians 2:3–4 (“I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears...”), and
- D. Biblical Canon letter of 2 Corinthians itself.

So Pastor Dan left us last week with mentioning letter A and preaching on letter B- 1 Corinthians which had much instruction for the church at large and counsel in godly behavior and even godly discipline.

Today...Picking it up from there.

- Since the letter of 1 Corinthians, the Church in Corinth had worsen! Paul’s instructions fell on deaf ears.
- Immorality was still happening.
- Sin was still rampant.
- Factions were not disbanded.

False teachers came in and taught a different Jesus, a different gospel. Therefore they were actively opposing Paul and his associates and what they taught.

- The Corinthian church is one of the earliest examples of a people of God, who were poised to not endure sound doctrine. They welcomed, in Paul's absence, teachers who would tell them what their selfish passions and desires were longing for. And in a culture like Corinth, that's dangerous. These teacher masquerade Their message in Gospel and Jesus language. They would tell them whatever the people ears itched to hear.

Fake Apostles had appeared and settled in the church. They were self appointed apostles and present themselves as superior in manner and speech. Paul even called them mockingly that they were super apostles. Ones who had visions and had been eloquent and bold in their preaching

With all this going on and Paul's authority as a true apostle continued to be questioned. Paul paid them a visit to look into resolving the matter in person. Paul briefly visited the church in what he characterized as a 'painful visit'.

Members of the church rejected him.

Others questioned his integrity because he had been away for so long when he said he would be visiting soon. The believers of Corinth accused him of being nothing like his bold letters and basically called him unimpressive in person and in speech.

They questioned his apostolic call, because well- he suffers too much for God to really be on his Side.

One leading figure in the church stood up to Paul and resisted his authority. No effective action was taken for Paul's defense by leaders or members alike. Paul stood alone. Paul left Corinth, yet we don't know precisely why

None the less the work of the gospel was at risk and he wasn't going to let the situation slide.

While the painful visit didn't accomplish the goal, Paul returned to Ephesus. He sat down and wrote the "C" letter what is called the "exceedingly severe" letter or letter of rebuke. Paul recalls this writing in 2 Corinthians:

And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.
2 Corinthians 2:3-4

So if you are anything like me. When I learned that there was this 3rd painful tear stained "severe" letter (which of course is lost in history) I do wonder, "what did Paul write? Whatever Paul said it was the catalyst that led to repentance to happen in the Corinthians.

Again Paul talks about it:

For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it—though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting.
2 Corinthians 7:8-9

God used this long lost letter to work repentance into the hearts of the Corinthians. I'd think that God would want to save that letter as well.

- Yet, in God's providence we don't have it. Obviously God used it and His Spirit was moving the hearts of the Corinthians and the apostle Paul.
- I think we can contend that it's not so much that we know the exact word's Paul said to achieve repentant results . But it's allowing the work of the Spirit to happen in the lives of those involved.
 - ♦ It's the Spirit and the Word.
 - ♦ It leaves us who love to "talk things out" humble.
 - ♦ Because no matter how well we reason or mediate conflict, God has to do a work. That takes time and at times, silence and prayer.
 - ♦ It also leaves us who love to stew, and of course we know better and want to hold the grudge, it leaves us to submit and forgive.
 - ♦ Its literally making the choice to get bitter or to get better.

So the light of the Gospel's work in Corinth was at risk.

Now as we open up this letter of 2 Corinthians, we understand that when we read this, its like reading someone's email with a person they were in a fight with and are now trying to restore the relationship

:10 second context

After a season of rebelling against Paul's ministry and teaching, repentance occurs among the Corinthians and this letter assures them of Paul's apostolic calling, care and character.

2 Corinthians Outline

Chapter 1-7 Paul is Emphasizing his Gospel Campaign and Ministry

Chapter 8-9 Paul is Encouraging a Generous Collection for the Jerusalem Church

Chapter 10-13 Paul is Explaining his Genuine Call and Authority as an Apostle

One Bible Study note characterizes 2nd Corinthians as a "personal letter filled with expressions of deep emotions"

- That in my opinion is an understatement! Paul is his most transparent, biographically honest and very emotional in this letter. It ranges from very affectionate remarks, to sarcasm. It is not as organized as many of his letters traditional are. Because of these characteristics, some scholars have questioned it unity and integrity. For the record, we have nothing to worry about. The integrity and unity stands up to critiques that are subjective and weak at best.

While 2 Corinthians is disorderly in arrangement it is profoundly theological and practical in talking about ministry of the gospel, suffering and glory, earthly and heavenly living, reconciliation and righteousness. And for our continued purposes in this series of messages called Route 66, looking at the one Big Redemption story in Scripture, 2nd Corinthians main redemptive truth is

2 Corinthians: The Gospel's Glory and Power are seen in Human Weakness.

Let me explain: Paul is stating "that we preach Christ and not ourselves" to help the Corinthians re-orientate their worldview from a Corinthian centered lifestyle to a Christ centered life style. The error of the false teachers and the example of the false super apostle undoubtedly skew how they thought the Christian life should look and sound like. Pastor Dan commented last week that the culture of Corinth, was bleeding into the church.

We understand that in our own American culture. We fight that same battle We are not to be duped by a counterfeit gospel that can bleed in from the ideals of the American Dream. We see this today in, the

prosperity gospel. Those who hold to this message believe that God can best be seen when people are healthy, wealthy, happy and successful. They are absolutely fine to point to their own careers as proof.

In many smaller forms, the legalistic and perfectionist in the body of Christ can fall into the same deceptive tentacles. It's can be building our righteousness on the things we do well. Like staying in shape That's physical fitness righteousness. Like parenting-righteousness, or balanced life righteousness. How about financial stability-righteousness. What about doing things perfectly right. Being the perfect worker- to the glory of God. Or the perfect husband or the perfect wife or super mom. We at times feel our witness has to have this masked smile and certain perfect conduct in order to represent God well.

My point is we can all slip into that belief that God can be seen best if we shine our light of conduct and character and strength and reputation perfectly and self-righteously.

But Paul is telling the Corinthians and he is telling us:

"For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."
2 Corinthians 4:5

But then 2 verses later:

"But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."
2 Corinthians 4:7

The light of God's glory shines brightest in weak vessels

V 7

Paul, using word pictures here, says that God's glorious gospel power is a treasure- a priceless gift. This precious, valuable treasure of the Glorious power of God in our lives, Paul says, are in jars of clay. That is thin earthen worn vessels. He's talking about us and our bodies and our human nature.

We need to remember the culture of Paul's day- Jars of clay were not know for there beauty, had little value, and was insufficient to keep things safe. In fact these jars easily cracked and broke. Just like our bodies

So in verse 7 Paul is saying that the insufficiency of man reveals the total sufficiency of God and this glorifies his character, his power, his greatness, his beauty his plans.

AND NOT OURS.

There are times we get this wrong in our reading and recounting of Scripture and its heroes. Jesus is the hero of this Book! God's mighty working is what we are to see when we read. The Bible

For example: The call of Israel's prophet have a similar pattern where we see:

1. The Lord has a divine encounter with someone.
2. God invited them into his work, by commissioning them
3. The person objects due to some insufficiency or obstacle
- 4 God reassures them with gracious and abundant promises of his presence or even a sign to overcome the obstacle.

Consider The call of Moses: Exodus 3

Divine Encounter

Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. ... When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." Then he said, "Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

Verses 1,2,4,5

Inviting Commission

Then the Lord said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings... Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt

Verses 7,10

The Obstacle

But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

Verse 11

The Promise of God's Presence, Confirmed with a Sign

He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."

Verse 12

This pattern is reduplicated in the remaining verses for the three obstacles that Moses continues to object with. Yet the emphasis of the narrative is how God overcomes Moses insufficiency by the promise of his sufficient presence, the giving of a sign, the provision of a miracle-working rod and even Aaron to be his spokesperson.

This is what is called sufficiency in spite of insufficiency as a result of the grace of God. This points to God's glory shining in a weak vessel.

It's incredible that Moses in certain circles and portrayal gets all the credit. Moses with all his objections and weakness and insecurity is a thin jar of clay -a weakened human being.

Yet God's light shines brightest in human weakness as the deliverance of God's people is accomplished by God himself through Moses.

Consider The Call of Gideon Judges 6

Divine Encounter

Now the angel of the Lord came and sat under the terebinth at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite, while his son Gideon was beating out wheat in the winepress to hide it from the Midianites. And the angel of the Lord appeared to him and said to him, "The Lord is with you, O mighty man of valor."

Verses 9,10

Inviting Commission /mandate

And the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?"

Verse 14

The Obstacle

15 And he(Gideon) said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."

Verse 15

The Promise of God's Presence and a Sign of Favor from the Lord

16 And the Lord said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man." 17 And he (Gideon) said to him, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, then show me a sign that it is you who speak with me. 18 Please do not depart from here until I come to you and bring out my present and set it before you." And he said, "I will stay till you return."

Verses 16-18

- Gideon proceeds to make a meal, present it to the angel of God and the angel of God makes fire spring up from a rock and consume Gideon meal, and then the angel of the Lord disappears

I hope you noticed the stark contrast. In God's eyes Gideon is a mighty man of valor and strength who will strike the Midianites as one man. All this is said even though Gideon's family is the weakest in Manasseh and he is the youngest in his family.

God's light shines brightest in human weakness as God said he would give Gideon strength due to God's promise to be with him in his weakness.

You get the idea

This same pattern happens in the The Call of Isaiah, The Call of Jeremiah, and the call of Ezekiel.

Point is: Each of these men were aware of their weakness and frailty and insufficiency to carry out the Lord's task. Yet God's strength in their weakness highlights God's goodness, power, provision and purposes.

This truth that God's light shines brightest in human weakness also plays out throughout Biblical History

- The Father and Mother of God's Chosen People- Abraham and Sarah- from them God would bring forth a nation that he would favor-the Jewish nation, Israel. They were not only infertile, but they were senior citizens well into their 90's before they had their first baby
- Israel's greatest king- David- a man after God's own heart. The youngest in the line of Jesse- a shepherd boy. When he faced Goliath, he wasn't even able to wear a standard man's armor, yet recognizes that God will deliver the giant into his hands and sufficiently defeat him.
- Lead apostle and first preacher of the church-Peter –no formal religious education, let's his passion get the better of him at times, fishermen by trade. Yet Jesus called him to be a fisher of men and lead the fledging church.

PREACH:

When we sing all blessing and power and glory and honor in the highest to the Lord, our heart should burn to proclaim in our singing not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord. Our hearts should have an affection for God that sings of God being our only hope, -----savior light and joy that we are to look to, trust in and make celebrating songs about.

So If God puts this valuable priceless gospel in weak jars of easily broken clay why is he doing this?

Verse 7 again:

“to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” 2 Cor 4:7b

Pastor Trent Casto says it like this:

“God displays his glorious gospel through broken and cracked jars like us because in doing so it is abundantly clear that the power at work within us is not ours but his.”

This is humbling. You know why? Because we struggle with weakness. Sometimes we can despise it. But God doesn't. Remember he chose you. In that choosing, he choose to manifest his power in us and through us. In you and through you

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

You might be wrestling in your heart with this thought: Wouldn't it be better if God magnified his greatness through our greatness? If that may be, Whose light are you shining? The fact is, there are some that are strong of mind and body. There are those who God grants wild success to and have talents that attract attention in every circle they walk in. By the worlds standard they are not the weak things- they are the attractive things this world looks for and God has chosen to save them as well. They are Christian brothers and sisters

But even the most renowned and celebrated Christian cannot compare to with the gospel treasure of Jesus Christ. Compared to the glory of the gospel, the best of us are still jars of clay.

WELL

How do I take such a message home with us.

I'd say the first application point is for us to adopt the Biblical reality that we must see our identity as defined by Christ, not culture.

The second application point is for us realize that if we are to Shine the light of Jesus we best do it in a manner that is honest about our need and His strength Brag on him as a Big God you need and love. Not yourself as a Big wig.

You don't have to be ashamed of your weakness. No pretention. No masks No self righteousness. No one is perfect and it is best to embrace that about yourself- no matter how wonderful you are.

There are times at work that my co-workers see my mistakes. Even in moments, my sin. But on more than 1 occasion, perhaps with a co worker who gives me the benefit of the doubt and extends grace, I've been able to be honest and say. “Well I screwed up. I'm not perfect. I know my need for Jesus and trust him to

help me next time and forgive me" You Honor God when you behave in humble ways that acknowledge Him

The Third application is that when we are weak do not lose heart. Christ is our strength. we can have confidence that Jesus will be working his power and strength in us.

How do we know this?

Look at this verse in 2 Corinthians

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. 2 Corinthians 4:8,9

How do we know we will not be crushed or driven to despair or forsaken. How do we know we will not be destroyed.

Paul's---and ours--- confidence is not in the ability to suffer well. But Paul's confidence---and ours--- is in the Savior who suffered for us.

In accomplishing our salvation, Jesus did it primarily through his weakness. In fact he took it to the extreme

Jesus was afflicted AND crushed

Jesus was perplexed AND driven to despair in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus was persecuted AND forsaken on the Cross when he cried out My God my God why have you forsaken me

Jesus was struck down AND destroyed in Death.

These are the things we deserved before Christ came along. When Christ came along and by God's grace he took what we deserved and placed it on Jesus at the Cross.. Jesus became sin in our place and took what our sins deserved.

In the midst of the greatest weakness- death. God displayed his strength and Raised Jesus from the dead.

Today we share in Christ death and in his life. Those who have trusted Jesus share in his suffering and share in the comforts that flow from his suffering for us.

It is this comfort and power that sustains us to not lose heart and have confidence when God says 2 Corinthians:

"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." 2 Corinthians 12:9

Let's pray

Mighty Savior, God with us, Christ here and now-be our all in all. Come Spirit and rest the hearts of your people. Comfort the minds of the anxious. Strength the weary for your mercy is new for today. And its new again tomorrow. Help us drop the perspective that our strength is sufficient. And may we find the true strength while we are weak and you are strong for us and shine your glory through that avenue any way. In Jesus Name Amen.