

Don't Lose Heart 2 Corinthians 4

Intro: It's been a difficult '20-'21. Discouragement has permeated the air. The apostle Paul feels our pain and addresses it in 2 Corinthians 4.

In chapter 3, Paul tells the Corinthians that God's grace is transforming, and he uses this illustration to prove his point.

- Moses went into the presence of God to get the Ten Commandments.
- When he saw only the backside of God, his face so reflected God's glory that he had to wear a veil over his face to talk to the Israelites.
- If, Paul contends, receiving the law was so glorious and the law was temporary, eventually replaced by grace, how much more glorious and transforming is grace?

This is why chapter 4 – *“Therefore, having this ministry [of grace] by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.”*

This is an appropriate chapter for our 2021 world -

First: Be Encouraged about the (World & the) Church. 1-6

We often look at the world – and what a fallen world it is – complaining and speaking ill of it. But Paul reminds us

3-4 - And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

We're asking dead people to act as though they are alive – (Eph 2:1), blind people to walk as though they could see, lame people to run, etc.

The world is sinning. They are doing what is natural to them and they are doing it very well.

What happens is one of two things:

- 1 – We adjust the gospel – 1-2
- 2 – We promote ourselves – 5

This is because we have forgotten or don't trust the power of the gospel

V 6 - 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.

Ask yourself, in the light of these truths, “Why have I lost heart?” The answer is that you have

- 1 – Forgotten the world’s true predicament
- 2 – Trusted in your own ability to change your world

But,

- 1 - Every marriage, family, church, academy, workplace is negatively affected by sin. 2 –
- 2 - Apply this to your family relationships, to your parenting, to your teaching, etc.

As you rest in God’s mercy (v 1), you will “...*not lose heart...*”

We have every reason to be encouraged about the church because the church is powered by God’s grace. We must trust in, rest in and work in that grace!

Second: Be Encouraged about Your Own Life 7-12

One of the reasons we want to step back into the shadow of the cross so that the Gospel – the good news of Jesus’s birth, life, death and resurrection – can be seen is that it alone can do what only God can do.

v 7 - But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

The realization that we are not God is helpful to us and others –

- 1 – We recognize that hardship/sorrow is natural to the world and our lives

We are

- V 8 - afflicted in every way and perplexed
- V 9 – persecuted and struck down

But because we know this is natural and God’s grace is sufficient, we are not

We are

- V 8 – not crushed or driven to despair
- V 9 – not forsaken or destroyed

Just that little change of mind, changes everything.

Instead of looking at the world, we look to what God is doing

V 11 - *For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.*
And come to this realization –

V 12 - *So death is at work in us, but life in you.*

ILL – Think of it like this. You are pouring your life into your children. You are giving your life away. You are exhausting your life to give them life. And you do it gladly because you love them. You also do this with your spouse. Who else? Your parents? Your friends? Do you see that, *“death is at work in you, but life in those you love.”*

Third: Knowing These Things Changes the way We Live. 13-15

“I believed and therefore I spoke” =

What is it that we believe?

V 14 – *knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.*

Faith in God’s resurrecting power, his ability to transform death to life, creates our conversation. If we truly believe, it changes what we talk about and the way we talk.

- a) If we don’t believe, we shouldn’t speak
- b) If we do believe, our conversation should center on Jesus

Whether it is Covid, Afghanistan, Haiti, our Gov’t, there is only one answer – Jesus - and we should point people to that answer. We must turn the conversation to Christ, knowing that

V 15 - *For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.*

Fourth: And This is the Bottom Line. 16-17

16a – Statement – *We do not lose heart (v 1 also)* – (This is how he begins and ends the chapter, making it the chapter’s theme)

“Really? You must have a problem-free life.”

“No, actually, we all have the same...”

16b – Problem – *Though our outer self is wasting away*

16c – But the reality is that – *Our inner self is being renewed day by day*

17 – Which Means – *...this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison*

Paul's "light momentary affliction" =

T - 2 Corinthians 11:24-28 & 32-33 - *Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.... At Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to seize me, ³³ but I was let down in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands.*

Paul's theology of 'heartiness' was forged on the anvil of suffering

I do not want to minimize anyone's suffering but the world we endure is, in Christian terms, "light" compared to:

- what we deserve.
- what others suffer.
- what Jesus suffered for us.
- the blessings we enjoy.
- the glory that is ours.

18a – *As we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen*

This is essential because suffering can lead to anger, bitterness, or misery

18b – *Because – ...the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal*

As Paul said in 1 Corinthians -

T - 1 Corinthians 15:53-57 - *For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:*

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

⁵⁵ *"O death, where is your victory?*

O death, where is your sting?"

⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

2 Corinthians 2:14 - *But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession*

Do you believe that? Then (v 13), “*speak*” it – preach it to yourself and others.

Conclusion:

Think about all that was wrong with the Corinthian church – every chapter (except 12-14) addresses at least one different problem. And only four years after the church was founded. How discouraging! And yet, Paul is encouraged about God’s work in them. And 1 & 2 Corinthians detail God’s transforming grace in the Corinthians. (I still wouldn’t name a church after them).

As you rest in the Gospel – the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus – you too can be encouraged – about the church, the world, and your life.

Community Groups:

- 1 – What is your greatest discouragement right now?
- 2 – What is Paul’s argument for the Gospel in 1 Cor 3?
- 3 – According to vs 3-4, why don’t unbelievers understand the gospel?
- 4 – Read verse 6. What power can open the mind of an unbeliever?
- 5 – Why do we have “this treasure in jars of clay?”
- 6 – Read vs 8-9. What does the gospel keep us from?
- 7 – Explain verses 11-12. How do you see this working in your life?
- 8 – What does “I believe and therefore I speak” mean?
- 9 – Read verse 14. What power is available to encourage us?
- 10 – Why do we rejoice in “light momentary afflictions?”
- 11 – How are our sufferings light? Momentary?
- 12 – Read v 18. What should be our focus now and particularly when we suffer?
- 13 – Read 2 Corinthians 2:14 and explain the verse.
- 14 – How has this chapter encouraged your heart?