

God's Proclamation: Jesus is Lord--Shining the Light of the Glorious Gospel (2 Cor. 4:1-6)

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God's Positive: Living in God's Yes (2 Cor. 1)

God's Perfume: Spreading the Sweet Spices of the Knowledge of Christ (2 Cor. 2)

God's Presence: Removing the Veil to See Christ Clearly (2 Cor. 3)

God's Proclamation: Jesus is Lord--Shining the Light of the Glorious Gospel (2 Cor. 4)

God's Promises: Seeing the Unseen (2 Cor. 4-5)

God's Power: Revealing His Glory (2 Cor. 4)

God's Point of View: Seeking the Lost (2 Cor. 5)

God's Purpose: Sharing the Hope of Reconciliation (2 Cor. 5)

God's People: Relationships Restored--Hearts Shared (2 Cor. 6-7)

Sermons are a unique form of communication. Many professional communicators have observed that PowerPoint and sermons don't go together. Sermons have shape and form; they are often shaped by the text. When that occurs, sermons are memorable, easy to remember. PowerPoint works best for classes. In this series I am doing what I am trained to do. Perhaps, I can convince you anew of the power of Open Bible sermons vs. visual slides.

I encourage you to open your Bible, check your Bible, read your Bible. Make notes. There is a difference between using the Bible in a sermon and preaching the Bible. We have used the Bible too long—we need to preach the Bible, preach the Bible text.

Introductory textual observations

>Paul is writing about his ministry, the nature of ministry, defending his way of doing ministry. This is his topic, but his applications are broader.

>We have an inclusion (parentheses that frame the text) in chapter 4.

4:1, we do not lose heart because we have a ministry

4:16, we do not lose heart because outward hardships do not compare to the ultimate goal

>4:1 continues the previous paragraph. The controlling theme has to do with seeing the face of Christ. The old covenant kept people from seeing the glory of God (Christ). This happened because of the veil over their faces. In Christ, the veil is removed, see face to face.

With unveiled faces, we reflect/contemplate the Lord's glory

With unveiled faces, we are transformed into his likeness

With unveiled faces, the glory increases more and more

>Controlling phrase #1: (v. 4):

*the light

**of the gospel

***of the glory

****of Christ--who is the image of God

>Controlling phrase #2: (v. 6):

*the light

**of the knowledge

***of the glory

****of God--in the face of Christ (as displayed in Christ)

>#1: Does the gospel focus on Christ as the image of God, for those out of Christ?

Christ is glorious, the glory of Christ. God is seen in the glory of Christ—his divine side.

#2: Does the knowledge of Christ focus on seeing Christ (his face), for Christians?

God is glorious and his glory is seen in Christ. The glory of God seen in Christ—his human side. Alternate reading: in the presence of Christ, in Christ's presence could easily communicate the same truth, i.e., in Christ's physical presence, he provided the knowledge of God's glory.

Our text is 3:12-4:6, seeing the face of Christ
[Let's read the text together so we have it in mind. Prayer.]

We have so much to learn about ministry and the spiritual life, and we can learn it here because this is from Paul's heart. Here is Paul's "for me to live in Christ." Here is what it means to look to Jesus, Heb. 12:1-2, AUTHOR AND FINISHER OF FAITH. See his glory, splendor, exact representation of God in the person of Christ.

The Christian life is ultimately blown away, and what remains – a life related to Jesus Christ in a personal and intimate way. This is the distinguishing mark of the New Covenant – that God may be personally and intimately known because he is revealed in the person of Christ. Looking into the face of Jesus is both saving and sanctifying.

In our new life in Christ, we see the glory of God in the face of Christ.

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus...."

"Open our eyes, Lord...."

"Open the eyes of our heart, Lord..."

Our spiritual condition is measured by our gaze at the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus.

That's how it started, how you were saved. I hope that vision is still unhindered, unobstructed, and the constant focus of your life. At one time, seeing Jesus lifted the veil and you saw, you knew truth. You were grateful, you were baptized. Seeing Jesus dispelled the fog of confusion caused by sin, you saw God's work in salvation and reached out to receive the blessing.

We who are Christians at some time saw Jesus, beheld his glory, saw his magnificence.

Now I am not suggesting you saw, as in a vision. You saw, as Paul writes in 5:16, by faith. This means he knew the historical story of Jesus. He knew the data. To look at the face of Jesus is objective, not subjective. It is historical, not mystical. It is revealed.

Of course, Paul also knew from his Damascus road experience, and he became a follower, and never took his eyes off the goal, Phil. 3:13-14.

It is this glorious vision of God, revealed in Christ that is the essence of the New Covenant. We see Christ, we see the glory of God.

Now look at the text with me, here is our Bible study

3:18, First, to see the face of Jesus is a contemplative look. It is perhaps reflective. To look at one's self in a mirror, that which is seen in the mirror. What happens when you look in a mirror but don't see yourself? That is the problem with this translation. With unveiled faces we see the Lord's glory even in ourselves.

3:18, Second, it is a look that changes us, it is a transforming look. We are being changed, conformed to the likeness of the Son, into the same image/his likeness, from glory to glory, growing, increasing, becoming like him, and this is of the Holy Spirit. The HS let us keep our eyes on Jesus. To gaze at him makes me like him. "The Great Stone Mountain." Moving from one level of glory to the next, higher and higher.

4:1, Third, it is an encouraging look, perhaps fortifying. We have a ministry, we are often overwhelmed by the task before us, we are as Paul faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Lose heart here means to become discouraged, give up, become tired (Gal. 6:9). Paul would not give up. Those he loved most were breaking his heart, but his ego was not tied up in all of this. His courage came from seeing Jesus, a vision of mercy, caring, rescue, even of chief of sinners.

4:2, Fourth, it is a decisive look, helps us make a decision, rejecting and opposing, denouncing and renouncing. Following Jesus always requires such a decisive point. Just turn your back on all of that stuff. Want no part of it. Changed, turn away from. Consider all of that *skubalon* – filth or rubbish, dung, manure. We are committed to something better. Turn back on power, prestige, possessions, position.... Count cost. This is a vision of holiness, vision of righteousness, vision of virtue, vision of purity. Devote life to pursuit of godliness.

That is what happens at salvation, a real renouncing. Baptism gives such a renouncing, identifiable point, did I or didn't I? I did! When a person really sees the vision of the glory of God revealed in face of Christ, understand who God is, what he requires, what he has done in Christ, the provision of salvation, this is a turning point. Interesting, of all of the possible responses to God's saving grace that we might know salvation – make a list, there are many. Only one is continually doubted. Why? I do not know. But it is interesting. I am not to judge the motives of others, but it is interesting. Romans 6: baptism, death. Maybe it is because we don't want to die, think we can just reform, don't see that God's grace has such power.

Turn your back on that old life, even the good citizen life that you possibly maintained as a non-Christian. This is not about who is good, who is better. This is about who has decided to follow Jesus.

- The Bible word is disciples – followers, learning to be like the Master.
- This renouncing and deciding is the foundation of purity/holiness, Isa. 6.
- To do anything else with the word of God is shameful (ugly, disgraceful).
- The deceptive/crafty ways are gone, *panourgia* = someone who will do anything to achieve his goals. No scruples, no standards, shred, unscrupulous, even mean. This is Satan, 11:3.

Paul will not be such once he decides to follow Jesus. 1 Cor. 2:2, not with superior speech or wisdom. Not kowtowing to the Gentiles, or to the Jews. No deep mystical, magical wisdom. It appeals to human pride to be with the in group, some still approach Christianity in that way. But you can't see the face of Jesus and come away a deceiver.

4:2, Fifth, it is to look at truth. Truth-loving, truth-facing, truth-receiving. Christians are those who have fallen in love with truth (John 14:6). Compare 2 Thess. 2:10 (not receive love of the truth). Being saved means loving the truth.

Some don't care about truth, cf. 2:17, hucksters, kapelos = those in a retail business, often with negative connotations.

What is our job? Speak simple, clear, plain, untampered, uncluttered truth, so it can activate your conscience. Hodge: He knew that the truth had such a self-evidencing power that even where it was rejected and hated it commended itself to the conscience as true. And those ministers who are humble and sincere, who are not wise in their own conceit but simply declare the truth as God revealed it commend themselves to the consciences of men."

Look at the face of Jesus, know his story, and you are going to love truth. We are committed to proclaiming truth. You can check progress of Christian by whether they love the truth. Some are content with human ideas, sit under those who preach human wisdom, contemporary insights, cunning, plotting, planning to solve human problems.

Who loves the truth? People coming, crowding (Las Casitas), jamming into places to hear the truth. Even when people reject it, truth can grip us. Even with hostile reactions, because people don't like their consciences assaulted. Who loves truth? Who supports the preaching of truth? Who prays, attends, anticipates....

The most powerful force for Christianity throughout history has been those who have been most clear in articulating the truth.

I want to know: unique story, unique motivation (Evan Pearce).

Preachers are heralds, heralding is one-way communication. Heralds do not seek dialogue, heralds announce a message received. Communication experts say that announcements don't change

anyone. But here is the fact. People who argue against “preaching that announces” think that preaching is a marketing exercise, with gospel as product, consumers in the people, preacher as salesman, who must overcome consumer resistance and persuade people to buy. Not true, cannot be. We preach because that’s the message we have been given, we can’t persuade, we don’t overcome resistance, we just tell the facts. “The facts, Ma’am, just the facts.”

Too much modern evangelism is built on the idea that anyone will respond to the gospel if it’s presented in a clever enough way. Their version of Matt 13 would be one soil and four sowers, throwing techniques, style. But the parable says the difference is the soils.

There is a veiling of the gospel, veiling and blinding, 4:3. It is a matter of the heart, the soils into which the gospel seed is sown. The problem is the people. It is not the preaching, not a need for better methodology, nor better oratory, not clever enough, not innovative enough, creative enough, manipulative enough. Problem is not that gospel is too plain, simple, nor that it is too high and exalted. Don’t need marketing skills. Problem is one hearing: 1 Cor. 2:14.

Keeping your eyes on Jesus is to know him deeply.

What unbelievers cannot see, but need to see:

Jesus is glorious, Jesus is divine, Jesus Christ is the Image of God

4:3 It is true that our gospel is veiled to some (cf. ch. 3), it is veiled to the perishing (cf. ch. 2).

That the gospel is veiled is not the fault of Paul and his companions, but is the result of the work of the god of this age.

He has blinded the minds of unbelievers

So that they cannot see....

What can they not see: God, the gospel, the divine Christ who reveals God?

Knowledge of the glorious Christ who is divine.

What Paul and his companions preached: Jesus is Lord

4:5 We preach Jesus Christ as Lord, not ourselves

If we preach anything about ourselves, is it that we are your servants for Jesus’ sake. See how he mixes the reference: Jesus Christ as Lord, servants for Jesus’ sake.

Preaching Jesus is Lord is only possible with a life that validates that statement.

We act for his sake, on his behalf.

Jesus is Lord is the bridge between the two affirmations

What God provided: Jesus Christ as the revelation of God’s glory, Phil. 2:5-11

4:6 God, the originator and giver of light, make his light shine in our hearts to give us....

Illumination (the light) of the glorious God in the face of Christ. See the human Christ, see the Shekinah glory of God.

Never before in history – the unique claim of Christianity.