

6. The Apostle who never loses heart

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[0 : 00] Well, good evening, friends. We come to our Bible reading now, and we're continuing in 2 Corinthians. And if you'd like to turn to 2 Corinthians chapter 4, you'll find this on page 965, if you have one of our hardback Bibles.

2 Corinthians 4, and I'm going to read from verse 1 to not quite to the end of the chapter.

The verses that we're studying this evening are verses 7 to 16. So 2 Corinthians chapter 4, beginning at verse 1. Therefore, writes the apostle, having this ministry, that's the ministry of the Spirit, the ministry of the New Covenant, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word. But by the open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. 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.

[1 : 32] 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.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed. Perplexed, but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken.

Struck down, but not destroyed. Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

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.

[2 : 44] So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what has been written, I believed, and so I spoke, we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

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.

So we do not lose heart. Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us this evening. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Well, do let's be turning up our 2 Corinthians 4 again, page 965. And as we continue to look at this letter, I've given it the title, The Pastor Who Never Gives Up, because the Apostle Paul is conscious that his beloved Christian friends at Corinth are in danger of being taken away from Christ by the influence of false teachers, false apostles.

[4 : 06] And so he's continuing to persuade the people to stay with him and to stay, therefore, with the true gospel. And I've given to tonight's talk the title, The Apostle Who Never Loses Heart.

Now, as we look at chapters 3, 4, and 5 of 2 Corinthians, one of the striking features of these chapters is the way that Paul keeps on telling his Christian friends that his courage is being sustained.

Look with me at chapter 3, verse 4. Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. And then 3, verse 12.

Since we have such a hope, we're very bold. So we have confidence and then boldness. Then chapter 4, verse 1. Therefore, having this ministry, the gospel ministry, by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

And then chapter 4, verse 16. Again, so we do not lose heart. Chapter 5, verse 6. So we are always of good courage.

[5 : 13] Chapter 5, verse 8. Yes, we are of good courage. That's very striking, isn't it? How he repeats this idea. Why should he want to keep on emphasizing to the Corinthians that he is in good heart and courageous?

I think for two reasons. First, he's wanting to reassure his Christian friends that he's okay. He knows that they are concerned for him. He knows that they know that he's been suffering all kinds of traumas and afflictions.

And he wants them to know that he's not about to pack his bags and send in his letter of resignation. But the second reason, I think, is the more important one. And that is that he is teaching the Corinthian Christians what the Christian life is really like.

He's opening a window into his own heart. And he's saying to them, look inside. My job as your apostle is not simply to teach you doctrine, but to help you to understand what the experience of following Christ really does feel like.

You know something of my sufferings, sufferings that come to me because I preach the gospel. And these are sufferings that you too may have to endure. So I want to show you how it's possible to keep going as Christians with a sense of joy and perseverance, even in the midst of trials and real sufferings.

[6 : 37] And surely, friends, as far as we're concerned, this is one of the main reasons why the Lord has caused this letter to be included in the canon of Scripture. For our sake, for the sake of all Christians, to teach us how it's possible to keep our courage and our confidence and not to lose heart, even in the face of opposition and difficulty.

Now, you don't need me to tell you that many churches these days are very shy of this aspect of the Christian life, shy of the whole idea that those who stick to the true gospel will suffer for it.

Some churches and Christian organizations can give the impression that if you come to our church, your life is going to be gloriously happy and you are going to be as carefree as a well-fed puppy.

Just have a look at some of the publicity or the websites that are put out by some Christian organizations and local churches and ask yourself what message is being conveyed. You may, for example, see the photo, if it's a local church, you may see a photograph of the pastor and his wife looking so very relaxed and so very, very H-A-P-P-Y.

A pastor, he's smiling and he looks so healthy. He's wearing a tracksuit top to show his physical fitness and he's carrying a tennis racket. And his wife, she is just radiant.

[8 : 02] She's got beautiful hair. She's got perfect skin. She's got rows and rows, well, two rows, I think, of white teeth. But the teeth are just beautiful. She looks 39, but actually she's 56.

And the message that is conveyed by this kind of thing is come to our church and trouble will be a thing of the past. You'll be far healthier in mind and body. You'll lose weight.

Your stresses and strains will fall away from you. You'll stop smoking. You'll stop worrying. And you'll begin to experience heaven on earth. Now, if Paul, the apostle, had looked at these brochures and websites and so on, I think he would have said, I don't know what this organization is all about, but it's not Christianity.

Paul knew from long experience that where Christians hold true to the real gospel, inevitably they will attract opposition from the world and the devil.

And life will become difficult and at times very difficult. For Paul, it meant beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, imprisonments, hunger, and lots of other things.

[9 : 12] So Paul knows that if the Corinthians are going to stick with the true gospel, and there's a bit of an if there, but if they will stick to the true gospel, they too are going to suffer for it because the true gospel challenges the world and the devil.

It challenges the world's values deeply, and it also reminds the devil that his ultimate defeat is assured because of what Jesus Christ has done and because of who he is.

So let's turn to these verses 7 to 16 in chapter 4. Now, you'll see that verse 16 begins, So, on the basis of what's happened in the previous verses, so we do not lose heart.

And you'll see that verse 1 includes exactly the same expression. I think we can take it then that not losing heart is the thread that holds everything together in chapter 4.

Last week, we saw from verses 1 to 6 that the thing that keeps Paul going is the power of the gospel to bring people to see the glory of Christ.

[10 : 18] Yes, the gospel is veiled and incomprehensible to those who are perishing, as he says in verse 4. But for others, as verse 6 puts it, God shines into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face, the features of Jesus Christ.

We see Jesus and we see the glory of God. But, verse 7, and here's a significant but. Despite the glorious power of the gospel just described, there are various things that the Corinthian Christians and we today need to understand if we're to be people who don't lose heart on the long haul of life.

So let me suggest three things that Paul is teaching the Corinthians in these verses. First, they must learn self-knowledge. Second, they must learn to die.

Third, they must learn to speak. So first of all, something about learning self-knowledge. Here's verse 7 again. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

Now, this treasure must be the gospel which Paul has been describing in verses 4 and 5 and 6, the gospel that shines into human hearts and enables us to see the glory of God in the face of Christ.

[11 : 43] But, says Paul, this treasure is kept in jars of clay. Now, that's Paul's description of himself. I'm a jar of clay. And he's using the first person plural here.

So he's saying that not only I but my colleagues, Timothy and Silas as well, are jars of clay. Imagine, friends, putting that on your CV if you're applying for a job.

I want you to know that I'm a jar of clay. Now, when Paul says we're jars of clay, he's not saying I'm worthless. Not at all.

Jars of clay are not worthless. In fact, in first century society, they would be used for all kinds of things, for storing food and other types of goods. Every household would have a number of clay pots.

And we still use a few of them today, don't we? But we have other things. We have plastic baskets and trays for storing valuable things. So the clay pot is not worthless. On the contrary, it's very useful.

[12 : 43] But the point is, it is very ordinary and fragile. I think the main point is that it's so ordinary. It's not the kind of pot that you might find in king's palaces, made of gold or silver or studded with rubies and diamonds.

It's a workaday pot that you might find in anybody's kitchen or in anybody's understairs cupboard. It's useful, but it's unadorned and it's simple.

Now, why does Paul speak of himself and his fellow evangelists like this? Well, verse 7 again. We have this treasure in jars of clay. Here's the reason. To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

So he's contrasting the immense value of the treasure with the very ordinary vessels which contain it. He's saying to the Corinthians, don't confuse the treasure with the pot that it comes in.

The extraordinary thing he's saying is not the Christian teacher, but the gospel that he teaches. And Paul has to emphasize this because the Corinthians and we today can so easily start honoring the pot more than the treasure it contains.

[14 : 02] And we can start thinking in Paul's words in verse 7 that the surpassing power belongs not to God, but to the Christian teacher. And this will lead us to puff our teachers up in a way that they ought never to be puffed up.

Let me give you an example of this. I was given a book a few years ago, which was a collection of essays written by four or five fine Christian leaders from the United States of America.

I began to read the book, but I never got beyond the preface. Because in the preface to the book, the editor or the compiler of the book spent several pages eulogizing each of the authors, inflating him like a bullfrog.

And when he praised one of the book's contributors as being, I quote, a real evangelical rock star, I shut the book.

I thought, I cannot bear to read another line. The impression was being given, just look back to verse 7 here, the impression was being given there that the surpassing power belonged not to God, but to these high octane Christian leaders.

[15 : 12] You see how Paul has a proper estimate of himself. He's a jar of clay and he knows it. This is not false modesty. This is a sober piece of self-knowledge.

So let's remember that the Pauls and Silases and Timothys of the 21st century are in just the same way clay pots. Now this is not to say that we shouldn't thank each other or appreciate each other or encourage each other in our Christian service.

It is good to give quiet words of thanks and appreciation to other Christians when they're faithfully serving the Lord and doing something useful. But Paul's point is that the surpassing power, the irresistible forcefulness that lies behind the gospel work is not to be located in Christian workers.

It's the power of God that opens our eyes to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. So let's get a true estimate of ourselves and learn self-knowledge with jars of clay.

So there's the first thing. Now second, and we'll look here at verses 8 to 12. Paul is showing the Corinthians that they must learn to die. Now friends, buckle on your seatbelts.

[16 : 26] This is quite a tough one, but we do have to learn it if we're ever going to be useful in gospel service. It's in these verses particularly that Paul opens up a wide window onto his heart so that the Corinthians can see what it feels like to live the Christian life.

Now I say this is a tough one because it so cuts against the grain of what the world today is telling us day after day. The world tells us to pamper ourselves and to preserve ourselves and to fulfill our potential and to protect ourselves and gratify ourselves and so on.

Self is very much in the center of the modern world's view of human life. Paul's teaching is radically different and really to feel the force of what he is saying here is like jumping into a cold bath.

Let's look at the four great phrases that he uses in verses 8 and 9. You'll see they all have the same construction. He says we are something, but we are not something else.

You see that four times. So we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed. Perplexed, but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken.

[17 : 43] Struck down, but not destroyed. Now in each of those four phrases, the first element is something gruesome, but the second element is something wonderful and surprising.

So he says afflicted in every way, every way you can think of, afflictions are going to come to us, he's saying. Beatings, stonings, whippings, shipwrecks, prison, hunger, exhaustion.

But amazingly, we're not crushed by these sufferings. The afflictions threaten to kill Paul, and yet to his amazement and joy, he survives.

Secondly, perplexed. Paul must have often been perplexed. Lord, he would have said, why is all this happening to me? How can I trace your good hand and your kind provision for me through this maelstrom of difficulty that I'm experiencing every day?

Now you would think that that level of perplexity would drive anybody to an early grave. But Paul finds to his amazement that despite this perplexity, he is not driven to despair.

[18 : 49] Somehow he's still standing. He remains deep down sane and sober. Thirdly, persecuted. Well, that was often his experience.

Hounded, hunted. The Acts of the Apostles records a number of moments when people made determined efforts to kill Paul. And yet amazingly, he says, I'm not forsaken.

I'm not on my own. Not forsaken either by God or by other Christians. And then fourthly, struck down. Rather like a boxer who finds himself rather suddenly on the floor.

Struck down, but amazingly, he says, not destroyed. J.B. Phillips' translation renders that phrase, using boxing language, knocked down but not knocked out.

Now this is the life of the Christian who presses on with the agenda of the Gospel and the Bible. Survival, afflictions and persecutions, body blows and distresses. And yet, survival.

[19 : 51] Living to fight another day. Not reduced to a despairing weeping blob of jelly. Dying, in a way, and yet living.

Just glance across to chapter 6, verse 9. And you'll see there's a similar group of phrases. Partway through verse 9 there. Dying, and behold, we live.

Punished, and yet not killed. Sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. Et cetera. So this is the authentic Christian life.

It's authentic Gospel service. And Paul is telling the Corinthians about his experience because he wants them to be willing to live in the same way. And they perhaps haven't grasped these things yet.

Of course, it is possible for a Christian to opt for self-preservation and a quiet life. But it's a dangerous option to pick. And Paul never encourages us to take that course.

[20 : 53] Let me have a word just for a moment to the younger ones here. When I say younger ones, I mean those who are under the age of about 25. Those who've still got life and energy stretching out before you.

Follow Paul because he follows Jesus. This is the pattern for you to live over these next 50 years or so.

This is genuine Christianity. And anything else that pretends to be Christianity but doesn't look like this is sham Christianity. Let's look on to verse 10 and we'll see more what Paul means as he develops his theme.

I'm going to read verse 10 again and I'm going to change just one word because I think this is a better translation and gives a better sense of what Paul is trying to say. So verse 10, always carrying in the body the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

Now here, Paul is opening the window onto his heart just a little bit wider. Notice the always at the beginning of verse 10, always carrying in the body the dying of Jesus and he repeats the idea in verse 11.

[22 : 08] We are always, we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake. Now what does he mean then in verse 10 when he speaks of always carrying in the body the dying of Jesus?

Well the body he speaks of here is his own body, his own physical body. He regards his body just as you and I regard our bodies. Our bodies are the house we live in for the time being.

So what in verse 10 is Paul conscious of? What is taking place in his body? He sees his physical life as carrying a reproduction of the experience of Jesus and the experience of Jesus on earth was a process of dying.

Now there's no need to turn this up but let me illustrate this from Luke's gospel. In the early chapters of Luke's gospel, Luke tells us first of all about John the Baptist and his birth, then about the birth of Jesus, then we have the earlier events of Jesus' public life, we have teaching and healings and confrontations with the Pharisees, we have the choosing of the twelve apostles, a mini version of the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 6, we have the stilling of the storm, the exorcising of legion, the sending out of the twelve to preach and heal, the transfiguration and then various other things as well.

And then we reach in Luke's gospel a decisive moment. Luke chapter 9 verse 51. And Luke says this, When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, and taken up means taken up to the cross and then on to heaven.

[23 : 50] When the days drew near for Jesus to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. Now that is in Luke's gospel a climactic and tremendous moment.

It is as though Jesus says, I am setting my face now towards Jerusalem, because I must do this thing. I cannot avoid it. It is the reason for which I came.

The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. His whole life was a dying. He knew that it was his destiny and his purpose.

But he also knew that beyond his dying would come his resurrection. There was only one way to the glorious resurrection, and that was via death on the cross.

Now Jesus is the prototype of restored humanity. Therefore those who belong to him learn this pattern of life from him and follow it.

[24 : 51] And his pattern of life is not merely death and then resurrection. It is dying. It is a process of continually laying down one's life.

If the pattern was simply death and then resurrection, we might think, well I haven't got to think seriously about this till I'm 80. Eat, drink, live for myself till I'm old, and then I'll think about death and resurrection.

No. The time to start looking at this with a clear eye is the age of 8, not the age of 80. This is a lifelong pattern. Jesus said, if anyone would come after me, in other words, if anyone would look at my footsteps and plant his own in them, if anyone would recognize that I set the pattern for human life which is to be followed, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily, every day, as a lifelong pattern, and then follow me.

It's the only way in which we can follow him. If we take any other road in life, it won't be the road that Jesus has taken.

It's the only authentic Christianity. And Paul here, in our verses 10 and 11, is teaching the Corinthians precisely this lesson. In my body, he's saying, in my bodily existence, I'm carrying, I'm bearing, I am embodying the dying of Jesus.

[26 : 20] I'm walking in his footsteps. I have, so to speak, set my face towards Jerusalem. I have, in principle and in practice, laid down my life for the sake of Jesus.

And I'm continuing to lay it down. As he puts it in verse 11, for we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake.

This is an always and everyday experience. Now just think of how different this way of life is from the way of secular man.

Contrast secular man and Christian man. Secular man leaps out of bed in the morning, flings back the curtains, looks at the sunrise and says, another day for me to boost myself and enhance myself and develop my power.

Christian man leaps out of bed in the morning, flings back the curtain, looks at the sunrise and says, another day in which I have the privilege of being given over to death for Jesus' sake.

[27 : 29] And the final end of those two very different views of life is expressed by Jesus when he says, whoever would save his life will lose it.

But whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will find it. And this again is just what Paul is teaching here. We've only looked at the first halves of both verse 10 and verse 11.

It's the second half of both of those verses that opens up the glory of the Christian life. So verse 10, yes, we carry in our body the dying of Jesus. But why?

So that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. And you'll see verse 11 is almost a word-for-word repeat of verse 10. We are being given over to death for Jesus' sake so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in in what?

Now here's the slight difference from verse 10. In our mortal flesh. Our mortal flesh. That means not just in the world to come where we shall have immortal flesh but here in this world before our mortality is swallowed up by immortality.

[28 : 39] Now this is the strange wonderful paradox of the Christian life. The great apparent contradiction at the heart of the gospel. The one who lives is the one who's willing to die for Christ.

but the one who is determined to live for himself is the one who will lose everything in the end. So Paul is teaching us and this is a great encouragement.

He's teaching us that the power of the resurrection is something that we begin to experience even in this life. That even as we go through the business of laying down our lives day after day for Jesus' sake we find a foretaste of the glorious new world.

The world to come already at work here and now in our mortal flesh. But we shan't know the new life unless we're prepared to submit to the dying.

Let me speak again to the younger ones here for a moment. If the Lord doesn't return soon what are you going to do with your next 50 years? Will you live for self and lose everything in the end?

[29 : 49] Or will you die to self and live for Jesus and know the power of the resurrection? Let me read you a short quotation from a book by John Piper. I will tell you what John Piper writes John Piper what a tragedy is.

I will show you how to waste your life. Consider this story from the Reader's Digest of February 1998. A couple took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51.

Now they live on the coast of Florida where they cruise in their 30-foot trawler, play softball, and collect shells. Picture them before Christ at the great day of judgment.

Look, Lord, see my shells. That, says Piper, is a tragedy. Paul is teaching us to welcome the principle of carrying in our bodies the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus will also be manifested in our mortal flesh.

It seems tremendously risky. It is risky. Some of you younger ones will be sorely tempted to give your 50 years to self and money.

[31 : 21] So there's the second thing. Paul is showing us that we must learn to die. Now third, Paul is showing us that we must learn to speak. When I say speak, I'm not talking about public speaking or teaching or that kind of thing, but simply about opening our mouths and saying something which is true and interesting and challenging about Jesus Christ.

And this is something that all Christians are called upon to do. Have a look at verse 13 and you'll see that Paul is quoting there. It's a quotation from Psalm 116.

It may be that he'd been reading that particular Psalm in his daily Bible study and he came across this verse, I believed and so I spoke. And he's saying to the Corinthians here, that we, that's Timothy and Silas and I, we also believe and so we speak.

We understand the intimate connection between believing in the heart and speaking with the lips. Now we all understand that connection, don't we, between something you believe and something you speak, whether we're thinking of the gospel or thinking just in terms of the life of this world.

For example, I've heard people on the radio in recent days who strongly believe in the goodness and nutritional value of horse meat. Have you heard one or two people talking about that?

[32 : 41] And they've been very willing to speak in order to defend their belief in horse meat. Or think of a young boy in primary school. He's aged about 10 years old. He loves his football team and because he loves the football team and he knows the manager and all the players and so on, he's very willing to speak enthusiastically about his team.

If we really believe in something, of course, we will be willing to open our mouths and speak about it. So Paul is saying we believe the gospel and that's why we speak the gospel. Now here's a question.

What is the connection between verse 13 and verses 14 and 15? Let me read the three verses together again. Since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what has been written, I believed and so I spoke, we also believe and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

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. Now it's clear here that verses 14 and 15 are giving the reason why Paul and his fellow evangelists go on speaking.

After all, there were great pressures on them simply to stop speaking. If they had stopped speaking the gospel, they would immediately have been relieved of all the pressures on them.

[34 : 12] No more stonings, no more beatings, no more spells in prison. If Paul had just dropped out of the work of mission, he could have gone back to his Aunt Jessie's at Tarsus and lived a quiet life, just the two of them together.

Give me a quarter of an acre behind the cottage, Aunt Jessie, and I'll grow the potatoes and cabbages and we'll live quietly ever after together. Now he must have been tempted to drop out of the work at times, particularly when his back was sore from whipping and his belly was empty.

But he kept on speaking. Why? Because there was something he knew. Verse 14, knowing. So what was this knowledge that kept him speaking the gospel?

It was the knowledge that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, would undoubtedly raise him with Jesus because he was bound to Jesus with an unbreakable union and that God would also bring him and Silas and Timothy with the Corinthian Christians into his very presence at the end.

And that is why Paul kept on preaching the gospel despite the persecution and the opposition because he knew that his gospel preaching was bringing the Corinthians in the end into the very presence of God.

[35 : 28] And it's that same knowledge, the knowledge of the resurrection, that will keep Christians today preaching and speaking the gospel. We do it because of the glorious future that awaits all who hear the gospel and believe it.

Our speaking brings others into the resurrection, into the very presence of God. You know how we sometimes hear Christian people saying, don't preach, don't speak.

Have you heard folks saying this? We don't need to speak or to preach. Just let your life speak. Let your character and your conduct speak of the grace of Christ. Your life is a better sermon than your sermon could ever be.

I've heard people say that. Paul would never have accepted that approach as authentic. The problem is that if you and I live a wordless Christian life, others will look at us and if they do see something attractive and good about us, they will praise us.

They won't connect us with God. People are naturally godless and man-centered. They haven't got the capacity to look at a godly life and link it with Christ. They'll link it to what they call human goodness or some other will-o'-the-wisp.

[36 : 44] Paul knows that the gospel has to be spoken as well as lived out if people are to come to Christ and salvation. We believe, he says, and so we speak. And in verse 15, Paul further extends his view of what believing and speaking lead to.

He says, don't you love those first words in verse 15, it is all for your sake. It's an astonishing statement for Paul to make. It would be an astonishing statement for any human being to make.

He's saying, I'm doing all this for your sake. I'm prepared to endure all this difficulty for your sake. Really, Paul is saying to them, I love you. I'm prepared to carry the dying of Jesus in my body day after day for your sake.

And to what purpose? Well, Paul tells us there in verse 15, so that, as grace, that is the undeserved saving love of God, as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving.

Now, thanksgiving has always been the reaction of Christians when they hear of other people becoming Christians. Just think of somebody that you know whose conversion to Christ you never expected.

[38 : 00] Somebody who for years was apathetic to the gospel, bored, contemptuous, or even hostile. And then suddenly they're converted. We've all known people like that, haven't we? Here they are in the Lord's church, born again, their lives turned upside down.

What do we naturally say? We say, thank you, Lord. If you're a Christian, the moment you became a Christian, a lot of other Christians said, thank you, Lord.

Lord, just think about the person sitting next to you for a moment or the person sitting in front of you. Don't need to look at them. It's too embarrassing. But just think about them for a moment.

Now, if that person you're sitting next to or looking at is a Christian, you are sitting very close to somebody to whom, in the words of verse 15, grace has been extended.

Why don't you, just in the silence, this very moment, under your breath, thank the Lord for extending his grace to that particular individual. Paul is teaching us here how to think of each other in the Lord's church and that is with very thankful hearts.

[39 : 05] Thank you, Lord, for extending your grace to Fred. He hasn't deserved an ounce of it any more than I have, but you've had mercy on him as you have had mercy on me. Isn't this a great vision here in verse 15 of the growing of the worldwide church as grace is extended to more and more people?

And this is really the truth of what is going on in the world day after day. You know how we listen to the news on the radio or the television and it is so depressing, isn't it? And we can be kidded into thinking that that's all that's really happening, but it's not.

Grace is being extended day by day. We listen to the news and all we hear is death, disaster, decline, division, and disruption. But what Paul is writing about here is also going on in the world every day and it's much more important.

Grace is being extended to more and more undeserving people and the consequence is that God is being thanked by countless tongues. So where are Paul's eyes?

At the beginning of verse 15, his eyes are on the Corinthians. It is for your sake that we carry on speaking the gospel. But by the end of verse 15, his eyes are on the glory of God.

[40 : 22] He sees grace extending to more and more people. He sees the increase of thanksgiving and he sees how the honor and glory of God shines because of it all.

And that is why he goes on immediately to say in verse 16, so we do not lose heart. Now it's only this clear view of the power of the gospel that will sustain our hearts and our courage lifelong.

If we don't grasp what Paul is teaching us here, we will in the end lose heart and the contents of the BBC news may indeed bring us to despair.

But if we can grasp what Paul is teaching us here, a sober self-knowledge, a willing acceptance of the principle of dying day after day, and a view of how gospel preaching brings many into the presence of God after the day of judgment, then we will be sustained in our Christian faith lifelong.

And like Paul and Silas and Timothy, we will not lose heart. Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. we do thank you, dear God, our Father, for opening this window to us into the heart of the Apostle Paul and his actual experience of the Christian life.

[41 : 49] How we thank you for sustaining him and how we thank you that the power that sustained him is available to sustain us as well.

and we pray that however long we live, we will be able to experience this great joy of seeing the power of the gospel at work in our world so that even though the price of it is our dying day after day, you will write upon our hearts the great conviction of the resurrection to sustain us to the end.

And we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.