

3. Paul Opens his Heart

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[0 : 00] Well, let us bow our heads together and we'll join in prayer. I'll lead in prayer, but do join in the Amen and join with me in thought as I try to lift up our concerns and our thanksgivings to the Lord now.

So let us pray. Jesus lives. Our dear Heavenly Father, how we thank you for this great assertion which we know lies right at the heart of the New Testament.

Right at the heart of the wonderful gospel that you have revealed to us. And how we thank you for his life. We remember that he has life in himself and he is able to give it to all those whom you have given to him.

All Christian people are able to share in that life. Not only in this life, but in the world to come too. And we thank you for it. And we think, dear Father, of the way in which our first forefather, Adam and Eve, his wife, were barred from the Garden of Eden because of their rebellion.

And more than that, they were barred from the weight of the tree of life because you said they must not eat it. And we think of the way in which many centuries later, you prepared the way to life through our Lord Jesus.

[1 : 26] How we thank you that Adam and Eve were not able to eat the tree of eternal life and live forever in an unforgiven state. But that with the coming of Christ, much later, our sin could be truly dealt with and paid for.

And thus the gateway to heaven could be opened for all believers as we repent and turn to Christ and turn indeed to you, our heavenly Father, and find in you and through the Lord Jesus forgiveness and new life and peace and reconciliation.

So we think of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, now seated upon the throne at the right hand of power in the heavenly places, in the place of great authority and honor.

We think of all those who even now bow down before him and recognize that he is the Lamb who was slain for our sins, the one whom death could not hold, whom death had to release.

And we thank you that our assurance and joy and hope for the future is based upon this. And we pray, therefore, dear Father, that you will keep us in this hope, that you will build up our trust and our confidence and help us to live the Christian life with joy and perseverance.

[2 : 49] And we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, let's turn to our Bible reading, which is from 2 Corinthians chapter 4.

And you'll find that in the Visitor's Bible on page 965, if you have that Bible, page 965. I'll read from verse 1.

Over the past two weeks, we've looked at the first 12 verses of the chapter and we're going to look a little further today. So I'll read from verse 1 to verse 16.

Verse 1 to verse 16. So 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 1. Therefore, having this ministry, this gospel 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.

[3 : 55] 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.

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. So, death is at work in us, but life in you.

[5 : 25] 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 through the Apostle and may it be a blessing to us. Well now, I want to take for our study this afternoon just three verses and those are the verses 13, 14 and 15 that I've just read.

I had been planning to take verses 13 to 18 today, but as I got to work in my preparation a few days ago, I realized that there is so much thought packed into these three verses, 13 to 15, and I didn't want to skim over it and miss things.

Now in this section of 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul is telling his Christian friends why it is that he doesn't lose heart in his gospel work. Just look back to chapter 4, verse 1.

[6 : 41] Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. And then 4, 16, so we do not lose heart.

That's where I finished the reading on purpose so that we should see that sentence. And look on to chapter 5, verse 6. So we are always of good courage. So I think his theme is quite clear.

We don't lose heart, he's saying, despite the persecutions and the sufferings that we're having to endure. And we are able to keep up good courage. But the reason why Paul was able not to lose heart is not that he had a naturally cheerful temperament, not because he was a born optimist.

His reasons lie in God and in the nature of the gospel. And Paul is writing these things to his Corinthian Christian friends so that they too will be able to keep going as Christians, so that they will develop perseverance and stickability in the Christian life.

And the reason why we people today can read these verses of Paul with such profit is so that we too in our generation should be able to persevere in Christian service without losing heart and throwing in the towel.

[7 : 54] Now last week in verses 7 to 12, Paul was telling the Corinthians about the principle of death first followed by life. You see how he sums it up in verse 12.

So death is at work in us, but what this means is life is at work in you. Now of course he'd learned this principle from the Lord Jesus himself who said whoever wants to save his life will lose it.

But whoever is prepared to lose his life for the sake of me and the gospel is the one who will save it. And this is one of the big reasons why Paul doesn't lose heart.

He knows that as he endures persecution and opposition and perhaps one day even has to endure death because of the gospel. It's going to mean eternal life and eternal salvation for many others.

So it's worth it he's saying. He's prepared to die so that many others might live. Now you wouldn't want you and I wouldn't want to endure persecution or affliction if there was no positive outcome would we?

[8 : 57] It would be rather like banging our heads against a brick wall. But to endure persecution if others as a result can hear the gospel and be saved that is worthwhile and that's the message of verses 7 to 12.

And when we get to verses 13 to 15 Paul is developing his thinking further still along the same lines but he's explaining still why he doesn't lose heart but he brings certain new elements into his thinking and it's these new elements that I want us to notice this afternoon.

So let's take this little section under three headings. First Paul's belief opens Paul's mouth. Look with me at verse 13.

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. Now he's quoting there from Psalm 116.

It's quite possible I guess that Paul had recently been reading that Psalm before he wrote the letter. Quite interesting isn't it to think of Paul at his daily devotions and reading his Bible and praying.

[10 : 05] Almost certainly Paul would have read his Bible every day but Paul could not sit down and read the Gospel of John or the Gospel of Mark or the Epistle to the Hebrews or the Epistle to the Romans.

There was no New Testament written in Paul's day so he would read from his Bible the Hebrew Scriptures the Old Testament from the Law the Prophets and the Psalms. So he'd been reading Psalm 116 and he'd noticed this phrase I believed and so I spoke and Paul thought that's me to a T.

This psalmist and I are peas out of the same pod. That's exactly my experience. It's because I believe the Gospel that I speak the Gospel. Now friends Paul is our teacher our trainer and our coach.

Paul shows us what the Christian life is like so that we should be able to imitate him as he imitates the Lord Jesus. And this is one of the elements in not losing heart. To believe means to speak.

The more truly we believe the Gospel the more naturally we will speak the Gospel and the more we're prepared to launch out and speak the Gospel the more we shall find that we actually believe the Gospel.

[11 : 18] Now this principle of believing leading to speaking is something which operates at all levels of life. For instance a top musician let's say a violinist is able to speak about the violin and the joy of playing in the orchestra because he or she has learnt how to do it and understands it and believes in it.

A computer expert will be able to speak volumes about computers. Even a little boy who is very fond of his chosen beloved football team will be able to speak enthusiastically about his football team.

Now Paul believes the Gospel. And when he says in verse 13 we also believe he doesn't just mean that he believes in God or that he believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

He means that he believes deeply and strongly in the whole biblical account of how the creator of the universe in the person of his Son Jesus has intervened in the lives of lost and wretched men and women so as to save us and rescue us for eternity.

And Paul is a man who's been studying and preaching this Gospel for something like a quarter of a century before coming to write this letter to the Corinthians. Possibly no man on earth understood the Gospel quite as well as Paul did in the years from 35 to 65 AD.

[12 : 37] So when he says we believe he's saying a great deal. He's saying in effect that only the Bible and the Bible Gospel gives a satisfying and true account of the meaning of human life on planet earth.

Paul spent half his life debating and arguing with Jews and Gentiles and his subject was the point that he sought to persuade people about was that Jesus of Nazareth truly is the Christ the long awaited King of Israel and not only the King of Israel but the rightful and true King of every human being.

Paul believed that Jesus was not only the son of David and therefore the royal heir of David's line but also that he was the son of man Adam's true son true successor and that human beings of all races can only find their true meaning and purpose as they bow their knee to him.

We also believe says Paul and it leads us also to speak. We must because what we believe is so overridingly important and is the only answer to the lostness and the plight of beleaguered men and women.

Of course Paul must speak even if it's costly to him even if it stirs up men's anger against him of course he must speak because the gospel is the only way by which we can be reconciled to the God from whom we have been estranged.

[14 : 03] Now the call to us is to be like Paul to be ready and willing to speak to explain to people as well as we can who Jesus is and what he has come to do.

Friends, let's get to know our gospel so well that when somebody says to us and this does happen when somebody says to us tell me why you're a Christian we've got something to say.

People speak so readily about their enthusiasms. If you're enthusiastic about vintage cars you'll be able to speak about them. If you are the greatest expert on growing parsnips in the whole of Motherwell you will have an audience from time to time won't you?

All Christians can speak up for Jesus. It's not only a job for trained preachers and teachers. Remember how Simon Peter preaching on the day of Pentecost made the point that on that day God's spirit was poured out upon everyone who belongs to Christ.

Men and women young and old high and low all can speak for Jesus. So there's the first thing. Paul's belief opens Paul's mouth. Friends we have tongues in our heads and we have breath in our windpipes and the Lord has put them there so that we should use them to honor him.

[15 : 18] Now second Paul's conviction is that believers will be raised. Let's look together at verse 14. Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

Now notice that verb at the beginning there knowing. There is something that Paul knows. He's not hazarding a guess. He's not expressing a vague wish. He's telling us with all his authority as an apostle that he knows that the one who raised Jesus is in the business of raising the dead still and that he will raise Paul and the Corinthian Christians and bring all of them into his presence in the end.

Now I want to ask you a question which is going to send your eyes into the text, into the Bible. Put your thinking caps on for the next five minutes because this is important. My question is what is the connection between verse 13 and verse 14?

Now verse 13 as we've seen is about believing leading to speaking and verse 14 is obviously about the resurrection of Jesus and of Christians to be with the Lord after we die.

But why is it that Paul moves from the one to the other? How can we follow his thinking? Well let me read the two verses together and I think you'll see what the connection is just as I read the two verses.

[16 : 46] 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.

Now doesn't he mean this? Here is Paul, he's often spoken the gospel around the Mediterranean world, particularly if we can just think in terms of modern geography in Syria, in Turkey and in Greece.

He's spoken the gospel at thousands of different gatherings and meetings. At synagogues, in town halls, in the market places, even from house to house.

He's been a tireless evangelist in the Jewish world and the Greek world and the Roman world. But so often his gospel preaching has brought great trouble upon his own head.

Now if you or I were to go out there into Buchanan Street and preach the gospel or in Socky Hall Street, the worst thing that would happen to us is a bit of heckling or possibly a few angry words.

[17 : 55] You're unlikely in Glasgow even to get a rotten tomato thrown at you. But think of what happened to Paul. He was stoned, he was whipped, beaten, put in the stocks, imprisoned several times for long periods.

He was taken by Jewish courts and forced to endure the 39 lashes punishment. That happened to him five times, he tells us later in 2 Corinthians. 39 lashes five times.

Multiply 39 by 5 and you get 195 lashes. Paul knew that wherever he went as a gospel preacher he would meet opposition, often violence and quite often intense physical pain as a result of his work.

And he knew that almost certainly in the end he would not die peacefully in his bed in old age. He knew that he would face a death penalty sooner or later, just as Jesus had done.

And that is exactly what happened. Paul was beheaded by Roman justice in 65 AD when Nero was the emperor. Now look again at verses 13 and 14.

[19 : 04] We believe and we also speak and we are prepared to go on speaking even though we know what it's going to cost us. We know it's likely to lead to beheading or crucifixion in the end, but we are prepared to go on speaking because we know that the one who raised from the dead the Lord Jesus will raise us too.

So if we should lose our lives prematurely in this world, we shall be taken straight to the glorious kingdom to be with the king and all his people. Now isn't that those two verses, isn't it a great encouragement to us to go on speaking the gospel?

In this country today, we're not running the sort of risks that Paul ran. We still have great freedoms to preach the Bible and the Bible gospel. I know that our freedoms are being somewhat curtailed today.

I know there's a growing opposition to the teaching of the full message of the Bible. But if Paul was willing to risk his life every day, will we not be prepared to risk far less?

The temptation that will come to us, to Christians who preach and teach the Bible today, the temptation will be to trim the message of the elements which the modern world particularly dislikes.

- [20 : 23] And that temptation will come not just to preachers and teachers, but to all Christians. The pressure upon us today is to be fearful, to be afraid. There are many things that press us in this way, but I want to mention two particular things which the modern world in the West hates about the Bible's message.

The first is its insistence on the uniqueness of Christianity, that salvation and eternal life can only be found in Christ and not in other religions.

That so much goes against the spirit of the age. The second thing is the Bible's clear teaching that homosexual practice has no place in the Christian church. And as we all know, homosexuality has become the darling idol of the modern world.

Now these things were just as big issues in Paul's day as they are for us today. Paul insists in all his teaching that only in Christ can salvation be found.

And equally Paul insists on the purity and the sanctity of marriage as the only godly way for men and women to express their sexuality. But Paul was prepared to go on speaking the truth whatever it would cost him.

- [21 : 40] Because he knew that when a court of law or perhaps even an angry mob would eventually bring his life to an end, he would be gloriously raised.

So are we willing to be like Paul? To be prepared to stick fully to the Bible and not to trim it? Or will we give way to fear? Fear that our names might be blackened?

Fear that we might be taken to court or even sent to prison? I guess that some of our number may be serving prison sentences before too long for the crime of believing and teaching the Bible.

Paul throws down a certain gauntlet to us here, doesn't he? We believe and so we speak and we're going to go on speaking whatever it costs us. That's what he's saying. Because we know that God who raised Jesus will raise us as well.

And then third, Paul's ambition is the glory of God. Look at verse 15.

- [22 : 45] 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.

I think this verse 15 is remarkable for its complete lack of self-centeredness. In this verse, Paul tells us whom he is serving in his gospel work.

And he's not serving himself, either his reputation or his bank account. He is serving in the shorter term, the Corinthians, and in the longer term, the glory of God.

Just imagine for a moment Paul the apostle being interviewed on one of those rather searching interview programs that you hear on Radio 4. Do you ever listen to John Humphreys or Michael Burke conducting an on-the-ropes interview on a Tuesday morning?

I listen to that kind of thing when I can. It's often very interesting. You know the kind of set-up, a penetrating interview from a very experienced interviewer. Just imagine John Humphreys interviewing the apostle Paul.

- [23 : 47] Now tell me, apostle, says the interviewer, I've heard that you've had not only a lot of adventure in your life but a lot of suffering as well. Is that right? Yes, it is right, Mr.

Humphreys. There's been pain. There have been scars. And am I right in thinking that you have five times received the 39 lashes from a Jewish court of law? Yes, yes, that is right.

And tell me, how do you feel about that? It's a typical modern question, isn't it? How do you feel about that? Well, it was an honor for me to suffer for Christ. An honor indeed.

Looks a bit more like a dishonor to me. And you have a prison record as well, I believe. Yes, I do. How long have you been locked up at the empire's pleasure? Well, it must be four or five years in total.

What else has happened to you? Well, I've been shipwrecked three times. I've been stoned several times. Beaten up by mobs. I've been driven out of various cities. But come, come.

[24 : 45] Why do you do this, apostle? Why do you do it? I suppose you must be very well paid and housed in a beautiful mansion for all this pain. Well, actually, I don't draw a salary at all, nor do I own a house.

But my Christian friends make sure that I have clothes to wear and bread on the table. But, Paul, what motivates you? What's in it for you? Well, there's nothing in it for me in terms of money or comfort, but there is a wonderful and great joy.

Joy? What do you mean, man? How can there be joy in prison sentences and whippings and stonings? Are you out of your mind? Let me explain, Mr.

Humphreys. This work I do is for the sake of other people. As my missionary friends and I preach this good news of Jesus to more and more people, the consequence is that more and more people receive the gospel and believe it.

And God's grace extends to more and more people. It's wonderful because we see the lives of so many people being turned around and transformed. Their thinking is reconstructed.

[25 : 51] They turn from the worthless idols that they've been serving and worshipping and they come to know the true God. And it makes them wonderfully thankful. Do you mean, Apostle, that they thank you?

Well, yes, they do sometimes, but that's not what I meant. Not at all. What I meant is that they thank God for having mercy on them and rescuing them. And it all means that God himself is lifted up in glory.

It makes me realize, Mr. Humphreys, as we preach the gospel, that in God's eternal kingdom in heaven, there will be countless multitudes of people who have been saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I can already picture them, rank upon glorious rank, of those who owe everything to the God who made them and to the Son of God who rescued them. God's name and purpose and kingdom will be radiantly, wonderfully glorious because of this missionary work that we're doing here.

I don't mind a little suffering on earth if it's going to increase the glory of God in the world to come. And Mr. Humphreys, while we're talking, will you repent and turn to Christ?

[26 : 58] This message is for all, including you. Well, it's kind of your apostle to wish to include me in the glory, as you put it, but truth is the BBC pays me rather well and I'd really rather not leave my shoes and step into yours.

Thank you. Don't you think verse 15 is a wonderful verse? It's all for your sake. All this work that we do and the suffering, it's for the sake of others, so that as more and more people become Christians, more and more will be thankful to God.

And what is the final end? The name of God, the purpose of God, the Lord Jesus, will be covered in glory, a glory which will be known and seen throughout the universe. And that is why, verse 16, we do not lose heart.

So, friends, let's keep going. And if we ever feel that we're losing heart in the Christian life, let's turn back to this passage and I think we'll find it will sustain us.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray together. Dear God, our Father, we thank you so much that you called Paul the Apostle to be an example of the Christian life to us.

[28 : 24] So that as he follows in the steps of Christ, so we can learn from him. And we pray, dear Father, that you will help us so to fix our eyes upon the great goal of heaven and the glory and all those who are gathered around your throne there.

That when life becomes tough and difficult here on this earth, you give us the strength and joy and courage to keep going and to keep going gladly because we follow in the steps of our wonderful Savior and his servants.

Please bless and help and sustain all of us who are here this afternoon, we pray. And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.