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Jars of Clay

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5-10

Introduction

1. Today, I would like for you to take a moment and do something with me.
2. Step back from all that we have been doing for the last seven weeks and ask yourself a question — “Who are we?”
 - a. Some of you might answer, “we are members of the Waverly Church of Christ.”
 - b. Others of you might think, “we are members of this community.”
3. Step back a little further in your mind and consider this — We are servants of a gracious King, the Lord Jesus Christ.
4. It is true that over the last few weeks, we have . . .
 - a. Provided temporary shelter for those who lost their homes.
 - b. Cooked meals for our friends and neighbors and those who have come to help in our community.
 - c. Sought to provide tools and workers to help with the clean-up.
 - d. Been a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on for those devastated by the flood.
5. But in all of this we have been servants who, hopefully, are pointing others to the One whom we both love and serve.
6. In our text today, Paul has something to say about all of this:
 - a. Where we seek to place the focus.
 - b. What we hope to do in all of this.
 - c. The great trust God has put in us.
7. Though in the context Paul is speaking about himself and rest of the apostles,

the truths he presents apply to us as well.

8. Let's look at what he had to say as we seek to learn how we can fulfill what God calls us to do.

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I. The Focus Is Always Upon Christ

A. THIS WAS TRUE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

1. In his first letter to the Christians in Corinth, Paul told them that when he came to Corinth, he “determined to know nothing among [them] except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).
2. In chapter 9, verses 1 & 2 of that letter, Paul told them that they were his “work in the Lord” (v. 1) and “the seal of [his] apostleship in the Lord” (v. 2).
3. In the first verse of our text today (2 Corinthians 4:5), Paul wrote “for we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.”
4. In his ministry, Paul gave all glory to God and focused the attention of his hearers entirely upon Christ.

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B. THE SAME SHOULD ALWAYS BE TRUE OF US

1. You and I are servants and Christ is our Lord.
2. Like Paul, we are “servants through whom [others believe] . . . as the Lord gives opportunity to each one” (1 Corinthians 3:5).
3. When we imitate Paul, even as he imitated Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1), we bring glory to God.
4. It was Jesus, who, in His Sermon on the Mount, said “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

5. In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul wrote that “whether [you or I] eat or drink or whatever [we] do,” we are to “do all to the glory of God.”
6. As we serve our friends and neighbors here in our community, do we do so in a way that they will glorify our Father who is in heaven.
7. If we view ourselves as servants of Christ and operate from that humble mindset, we will.

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II. Our Hope Is For Light To Shine In The Darkness

A. GOD ALWAYS BRINGS LIGHT TO DARKNESS

1. The apostle John, in chapter 1 and verse 5 of his first letter, wrote “This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all.”
2. He was the One who in the beginning drove the darkness away with the simple words, “Let there be light” (Genesis 1:2).
3. In the beginning of the gospel which bears his name, John wrote that Jesus is “the true light, which gives light to everyone” (John 1:9, ESV).
4. It was Jesus who said, “I am the light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life” (John 8:12).
5. According to the apostle John, it was also Jesus who said, “I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness” (John 12:46).
6. Jesus came into this world to counteract the evil work of Satan, so that through Him, God might rescue us from Satan’s “domain of darkness” and transfer us “to the kingdom of His beloved Son” (Colossians 1:13).

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B. GOD CALLS US TO BRING LIGHT TO A DARK WORLD

1. Back in verse four of this chapter, Paul wrote that “the god of this world [Satan] has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel [good news] of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4).
 - a. Satan does not want people to know the good news of Jesus Christ.
 - b. So, he blinds their minds, as Paul wrote, “so that they might not see.”
2. In His parable of the Sower, Jesus compared such people to the seed sown beside the road.
3. He said that when they hear the word of God, Satan immediately “comes and takes away the word which has been sown in them” (Mark 4:15).
4. Here, in verse 6 of our text, Paul writes that God “is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ” (2 Corinthians 4:6).
5. What does Paul mean by this?
6. He is taking us back to the moment of our conversion — the point at which we were buried with Christ in baptism and then raised to “walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4).
7. It was at that point that God’s Spirit took up residence within our hearts as you and I became nothing less than new creatures (2 Corinthians 5:17).
8. Back in 2 Corinthians 3:15-18, Paul compared it to a veil being taken away, allowing us to behold “as in a mirror the glory of the Lord.”
9. Now, “as we are being transformed into the same image” (2 Corinthians 3:18b), we seek to share this “Light of the knowledge of God’s glory” [Christ] with others.
10. This is what we have been seeking to do over these past few weeks:

We will glorify the King of kings, we will glorify the Lamb,

We will glorify the Lord of lords, who is the great ‘I Am.’

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III. We Are Humbled By The Great Trust Placed Within Us

A. "WE HAVE THIS TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY"

“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, ESV).

1. Paul presents us with a stark contrast between a precious treasure and the fragile container in which it is housed.
2. The precious treasure is “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” (v. 6).
3. In Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, he prayed, “heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27).
4. Paul reiterated that thought as he spoke to the philosophers in Athens, “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24).
5. But God did choose to take up residence, through His Spirit, in those of us who are Christians:
 - a. “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).
 - b. “Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that your are not your own?” (1 Corinthians 6:19).
6. But, who are we? Paul says we are “earthen vessels”(NKJV, NASB95), “jars of clay” (ESV, NIV84).
7. Long ago, Job asked God, “Remember now, that You have made me as clay” (Job 10:9).

8. You and I carry about in our frail mortal bodies a light derived from the central source of light, Jesus Christ.
9. Paul said that it is in order “to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Corinthians 4:7b, ESV).
10. What are we to do?

Slide 7**B. LET US MANIFEST THE LIFE OF JESUS IN OUR BODY**

“For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (2 Corinthians 4:10).

1. In verses 8-9 Paul uses a number of metaphors to describe the demands of ministry which he and his fellow apostles are experiencing.
2. With each one, he contrasts their helplessness as human beings on one hand with God’s divine enablement on the other.
3. We are . . .
 - a. “Afflicted in every way, but not crushed” (8a)
 - b. “Perplexed, but not despairing” (8b)
 - c. “Persecuted, but not forsaken” (9a)
 - d. “Struck down, but not destroyed” (9b)
4. His point is that without God’s intervention these troubles would have broken them.
5. God’s power transforms every situation — “contrary to all human probability, God brings him safely through.”
6. Even though you and I may be at the end of our own resources, we are not at the end of God’s resources.
7. If anything, we are in the best position to experience the power of God breaking through and resolving our human dilemma.
8. It is in this process of trusting in God with all our heart, regardless of the situation that “the life of Jesus” is “manifested in our body.”

9. Right now, those around us need to see us manifesting the life of Jesus in our own lives each day.

Conclusion

1. Let me go back to the first question I asked you this morning — “Who are we?” or more specifically, “Who are you?”
2. Can others tell that you are a servant of Jesus Christ? Is He your Savior and Lord?
3. Are you a person through whom God shines His light in the darkness of sin and despair we currently see around us?
4. Is it evident that God’s surpassing power is at work in your life?
5. If you had to answer no to any of these questions, I encourage you to examine your life and your salvation.
6. Our God is mighty save, but He will not force your obedience.
7. He wants only those who will truly seek Him with all their heart.
8. If you seek a new life, one filled with hope and indescribable peace, let me encourage you to come to Christ today.