

2 Corinthians Ch4v1-6 - Don't Lose Heart

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Preacher: Sam Ross

[0 : 00] to preach this morning as we continue in our series from 2 Corinthians.! Thanks Sam. Good morning everybody.

If you could turn please, in God's word, to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. And we're going to read from verses 1 to 6.

That's 2 Corinthians chapter 4. If you're using a church Bible, that's on page 1161. As we come to read God's word, let's pray and ask for his help to really hear it.

Let's pray. Our Heavenly Father, as we come now to read your word, help us by your Spirit to really listen.

We don't want your word to just go in one ear and out the other. We want to hear what you have to say to us this morning.

[1 : 33] We pray this, Lord, so that we may not lose heart, but that we will be encouraged in the ministry that you have given to us all. Amen.

Mary's going to read our passage. Thank you, Mary. Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.

Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways. We do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it's veiled to those who are perishing. The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

[2 : 54] For God, who said, Let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

Amen. Well, I wonder, what do you see?

I don't know if you've ever seen this picture of Ruben's vase before. Half the room will look at this, and they will see a vase. The other half of the room will look and see two faces looking at each other.

I wonder which one did you see first. I saw the vase first, not the two faces looking at each other. Isn't it funny, though, how two people can be looking at exactly the same thing and yet see something completely different?

I have another example of this. When I was 16 years old, I became convinced that I had a future as a singer-songwriter. I got recording software for my Christmas present.

[4 : 11] I began writing and recording my own songs and sharing them out to the world. My older, wiser brother, he was coy about the whole idea. He didn't want to crush my spirits, but he was gently trying to help me see that singing wasn't my main gift that the Lord had given to me.

But when I told him that I had got my first gig, he nearly collapsed. And he did sit me down at that point and said, Sambo, you can't sing.

Of course, I completely ignored his advice. And I went and I played that gig anyway. It took me years to actually see the reality that he saw, which is that singing isn't my main gift.

And I should leave that to others more so in a solo capacity. We were looking at the same thing and saw something completely different. Have you ever had that experience?

Well, the text today tells us that the same thing happens when we look at Jesus. We could all be looking at Jesus and see totally different things.

[5 : 26] And we're going to learn today why that is. So that's our first theme in this text. It's seeing Jesus.

But here's the second thing. It's sharing Jesus. Now, all those who truly seen Jesus and received him as God, as Savior, they're given the ministry of sharing Jesus with others.

And it's really natural. We want to share the good news of the Savior who we have seen. We share the gospel of his life, his death, his resurrection.

Now, that's the ministry we've been given. Paul has already been talking about this ministry in chapter 3. And now in chapter 4, he tells us this. In verse 1, he says, Don't lose heart in your ministry.

Don't lose heart. Why did he feel it necessary to say that? Why is it so important to tell us not to lose heart when we share Jesus with others?

[6 : 37] Well, here's what I think. As believers, whenever we look at Jesus, we see God the Son from eternity who became a human being.

We see the second Adam who never failed. We see the humble servant who made himself nothing. We see the only substitute who could ever pay for our sin.

We see the unstoppable victor who crushed death when he rose from the dead. We see the reigning king who is interceding for us, a God's right hand in heaven right now.

We see the good shepherd, the sovereign ruler, the head of the church, the king of kings, the lord of lords, who one day will ride out with heaven's armies, eyes ablaze with fire.

To judge the living and the dead. That's who we see when we see Jesus. But they can't see him. They can't see Jesus for who he really is.

[7 : 47] That's why we get disheartened. All they see is a dead, distant, historical figure with no relevance to their lives. Or a religious joke whose name they thrash around.

Or a cold condemner who's just waiting for them to fail. It's heartbreaking. And when this happens, we so easily lose heart because we know they desperately need Jesus, but they can't see him.

But look at what Paul says in verse 1. He says, Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Now how so, Paul?

How are we not to lose heart when most people in Cargoline just can't see Jesus? And Paul's going to answer that question in our text today.

But first, he wants to talk about what happens when we get disheartened. In verse 2, he shows us two different ways that we can respond whenever we lose heart.

[9 : 04] Now here's the first response we can have. We can distort the gospel. We do this whenever the results aren't coming in. Paul talks about it in verse 2.

It's like, if we change the message about Christ slightly, right, presenting a less offensive, more culturally acceptable Jesus, more people will believe in him.

Right? In verse 2, Paul calls it deception. Often we do this by overemphasizing one truth about Jesus at the expense of others.

Some examples. We might deceive people by presenting Jesus as life coach. Okay? Jesus will help you to make big decisions, guide you on your journey, support you in hard times, you know, footsteps in the sand, all of that.

And it's true. God is intimately interested in our lives, but it's not the main truth of the gospel, is it? If that's all we're telling people, it's a deception.

[10 : 16] Do we share how Jesus confronted us in our sin and commanded us to repent? How about his demand that we would take up our cross and follow him?

We could present Jesus just as a spiritual help along your journey, that he affirms your choices as such, but no, the gospel presents Jesus first and foremost as our rescuer from our hopeless, sinful state, not a life coach who affirms our choices.

But that's not popular today, is it? We're tempted to distort the message of Christ so people will listen.

Here's another example. Maybe we might distort the gospel by presenting Jesus as the ticket to heaven. Okay? Yes, you should repent. Say sorry for your sin, accept Jesus as your savior, and then you'll go to heaven.

With the emphasis all the way through being on you'll go to heaven. And really, Jesus is just the ticket machine, right?

[11 : 27] You insert a prayer, out pops the ticket to heaven. You know, off you go. Get back to your ordinary life that you were living. No change.

You just got the ticket in your back pocket now. And it's true, of course, that Christ does give us heaven. But that's only because heaven is to be with Christ.

Heaven is when Christ is truly and fully united to her bride, the church, betrothed to her forever. But my colleagues in work don't really want to know about that.

Or the classmates, or family, or neighbors. They want heaven without Christ. So we begin to subtly change the message.

You know, when I think about it, I presented both of those deceptions before, in sharing what I thought was Jesus with other people. I don't know what it is for you. How do you try and dress Jesus up or something to make him easier to believe in?

[12 : 36] People will probably be more keen to listen, yeah. I might be more acceptable. But it's shameful deception. And it's preaching a false Jesus.

Think about it. He can never save. It's not the real Jesus. Look at what Paul says in verse 2. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways.

We do not use deception. Nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

God, that's the second response. That's our only right response when we are disheartened in ministry. We keep declaring the gospel anyway.

The true message of Christ, the way the Bible presents it, we don't gloss over the awkward or offensive bits. We set it forth plainly, genuinely, whatever the response.

[13 : 50] Here's a quote from an author called Dean Ortlund. He says this, the gospel is a message of truth, an honest assessment of our sinful condition, and a clear and forthright declaration of how freely to be put right with God.

That's what it means to share the gospel. You know, so when we are disheartened that people don't listen to our message about Jesus, we don't distort the message to try and get them to listen.

No, we must keep sharing the truth regardless of the response. Paul now turns, though, in the next verse to address a really important question, and it's why do people reject the gospel truth?

Why do they reject the good news about Jesus? Why do so many not see Jesus as God and Savior whenever we tell them about him? Why can't they see what we see?

Well, let's read from verse three and find out the reason why. Verse three, and even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.

[15 : 07] Okay, so we hear that the good news of the gospel is veiled or hidden from those who don't see Jesus as God.

The true Christ is veiled. He's hidden from them. Why is Jesus hidden from them? Verse four tells us. Read with me.

The God of this age, that is Satan, has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

Well, there's our reason. This is why people don't see Christ as God and all his glory. It's Satan has blinded them. They can't see the light of the gospel.

The gospel shines light on Jesus, his glory. The gospel illuminates his glory as God.

[16 : 15] Satan blinds them from seeing that light. That's what's happening whenever your colleague or classmate or family member doesn't respond.

Whenever you tell them about Jesus or whenever they hear about him in some other place, they can't see the glory of Christ when they've been blinded.

Whenever I was 18 years old, I went to my sixth year, Deb's Ball, with a friend of mine from school. She was visually impaired. She could only see shadows of light.

At this point, she was almost 100% blind. when we arrived at the venue, I was amazed at the glory of the hotel. It was just wonderful.

There was a red carpet laid out, this Georgian architecture, the grand staircase, the ornately decorated tables.

[17 : 18] I was sad that my friend, she couldn't see the glory of that place for herself. She could never express her praise of it as I could.

She was physically blinded from seeing that glory. And this is a picture of what is happening spiritually.

When people we know cannot see the surpassing glory of Christ. Satan has blinded them from seeing Christ as God and the only savior from sin.

At best, what they see is this blurry or false picture of who he is, like a life coach or like a ticket to heaven. They can't see. Now, if that was where Paul left us, this would be a really hopeless text and sermon, wouldn't it?

We might ask, how then, Paul, can anyone believe if Satan has blinded everyone? We might completely lose heart and just give up sharing Jesus with anyone.

[18:29] I mean, do you guys, do you feel the blindness here in Caracol and around? Does it weigh on you? Do you feel disheartened because so many people just can't see Jesus as you can? do you feel that? Where is the hope in this situation? Paul begins to give us the answer in verse five.

He says this, for what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

So he's basically saying here, look, all I'm ever going to share with you is Jesus. Jesus as Lord, no other message matters. Why? Here's the glorious hope.

Here it is in verse six. For God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

[19:42] light. Yes, thank God there is hope for those who cannot yet see, because God gives spiritual sight to see Christ.

And here's how he does it. As we speak his word, he calls forth light. Okay, just as in creation, God commanded light to come out of darkness and it came flooding out, so also God calls new spiritual light out of spiritual darkness in people's lives and they can see.

How does he do that? Well, he does it as we speak God's word into their lives. God makes the light to shine on Christ.

That's why it's so important to keep sharing God's word faithfully. Isn't that amazing? God's word creates new spiritual light in people's hearts.

You know what? Where people could never before see Jesus as God and Savior, now with new spiritual eyes, they can see him. It's a miraculous transformation.

[21:04] It's not something anybody can do for themselves. There's no spiritual formula to manufacture it. No, only God can remove the blindness Satan has cast on them.

Now, turn with me, if you could, please, to Matthew chapter 16. Matthew chapter 16. And verse 13. And here's another example in scripture of how God removes spiritual blindness. It's Matthew chapter 16 verse 13.

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, who do people say the Son of Man is? They replied, some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

But what about you? He asked. Who do you say I am? Simon Peter answered, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

[22:15] Peter saw, right? He saw who Jesus really was. Now what does Jesus do in response? Does Jesus give him a pat on the back and say, hey, Peter, you're the man.

Knew you'd be the first one to see who he truly was. Top class disciple right here. Everyone give this man a round of applause. Is that what Jesus says? No.

No. The answer might surprise us. Verse 17, he says this. Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.

Our sight is a gift. Peter isn't given an ounce of credit for seeing who Jesus really is. God removed your blindness, Peter.

It was a gift. You had nothing to do with it, Jesus says. Now think about your story for a second. If you're a believer in Christ today, there was a time in your life when you couldn't see your need of Jesus, right?

[23:33] Just think back to that time now. God. And maybe like me, you had heard the message of Jesus spoken to you many, many times before, maybe over years.

But you still couldn't see Jesus as God and Savior. You didn't see your need of him. You didn't want him. But then, over the course of time, something changed.

You found yourself deeply convicted of your sin. And you saw Jesus as dying on the cross for your sin personally. And you repented of your sin and you turned to him in wholehearted trust.

You believed that he rose from the dead crushing your death. Is it to your credit or to mine that we saw him? No.

We never wanted Jesus until God removed our blindness. And then we saw his glory and believed. [24 : 43] Isn't that amazing? Reminds me of those famous words. Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now am found, was blind. But now I see.

That's true. People who are physically blind cannot do anything to give themselves sight.

So also, people who are spiritually blind can never make themselves see Christ. There really is all a gift of amazing grace. How does this help us not lose heart in our ministry?

Of sharing Jesus with others? How does this help us not lose heart? Well, here so, we now have hope. Satan may blind people from seeing Christ, but God can remove the blindness.

[25 : 56] God can shine his light in their hearts just as he shone it in ours. Just as he removed our blindness making us see Christ, he's going to do the same for other people as well.

That is our hope. There are neighbors, colleagues, classmates, family members who will see him as glorious God and Savior.

It just hasn't happened yet. God. Now, if it were up to us to change people's hearts, we would have every reason to lose heart in ministry. But no, because God is in the business of removing blindness, we don't lose heart.

That is our hope. Now, as we finish, how does knowing all this change the way that we live as Christians? I've got three brief things for you to consider.

Here's the first one. Keep sharing the true gospel. Remember how in creation God spoke his word into darkness and the light shone? So when people are saved, it's actually we get to speak God's word into people's lives and God makes the light shine on Christ.

[27 : 12] Isn't that incredible? And it means very simply that we have to keep on declaring the gospel. We don't distort it.

We don't change it. To try and make people believe him? No. To do so is shameful and damaging because it only leads people to a Jesus of our imagining, not the true Jesus of the gospel.

So that's our first thing. We share the true message of Christ. And I've been challenged quite recently to think about this. I mean, how am I actually sharing the gospel? I find it's very easy to, you know, when I'm chatting to someone here in town or wherever, it's very easy to chat about my church and I can tell them lots of great things.

Oh, yeah, we meet in the community center, we sing songs, we've got tea and coffee after. It's great. A kids program, all of that. That's good, but if that's all I share, they're not hearing about Jesus at all.

How can they know about Jesus if we don't actually tell them the gospel, what he's done? I think we need to challenge ourselves to just go for it.

[28 : 32] Be open with the gospel, not in a loud, in-your-face way that clearly does not work in contexts like Carragiline, but if we do open up our lives to people, no one can contest that.

Everyone is willing to listen to your life story, your experience, and through our story, we tell of our sinfulness and we tell of the Savior who rescued us and who can rescue them too.

We open up God's word, we show them just what it says. We keep sharing the true message of the gospel. Here's a second thing I was thinking about.

We should pray more than we share. If God is the only one who is able to remove blindness from hearts, as Paul has just told us, prayer should be on the top of our priority list.

Because when we don't pray, it implies that we think we're the ones who can make people believe in Jesus. You know? How good I am at sharing the gospel or something. It's like it's up to us.

[29 : 42] Prayer changes things because in prayer, we call upon the only one who is able to remove blindness and give spiritual sight. Now, you might say, well, God can remove blindness without anyone praying for it.

And it's true. I mean, it's not beyond him at all. God can remove blindness of anyone that he chooses anywhere in this world, and he has done. But here's the mystery of it all.

He wants us to pray for people. He actually asks us to. He says in Luke 13, ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find.

Knock, and the door will be opened to you. He wants us to ask him to save other people from their blindness. There are things that God is not going to do in this world until people have called on him

in prayer to do it.

Isn't that crazy? I don't understand that fully. It's a mystery why God does it in this way, but it's amazing, isn't it? He involves us in his work of saving people.

[30 : 58] He sure doesn't need our prayers, but how amazing that he chooses to use our prayers to involve us in his saving of people. So here's what we do. here's the model.

We pray for people who are on our hearts. We share the gospel with them and then we pray and pray and pray and we don't give up because we know that God opens eyes.

If you aren't doing so already, write some names down on the list. Just get praying for God to open their eyes and see what he does. Ask him for those opportunities to share the gospel and pray and pray for them and just watch what he does in their lives.

One last thing. Maybe you've been sitting listening and you just don't see your need of Jesus. You don't see him as God, as the king of your life.

your heart is not warmed when you hear of him. The songs that we were singing earlier don't really mean anything to you. We've just read that you are still blind to the glory of Jesus.

[32 : 25] But here's the good news. You can see. You can see today. Here's how God's word about Christ.

As you read it, hear it, ask God to remove the blindness from your eyes. Just try him. Ask him that you would see who Jesus really is, both God and Savior.

And God says in his word that if you seek him with all your heart, you will find him. today is the day that you can see Christ for the first time and be changed forever.

Let's take all that we have heard from God's word and turn to prayer now. Let's pray. thank you, Lord, that because we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.

We believe your word. You will save people in this town as we speak your word. the message of Christ. We call on you now for a fresh move of your Holy Spirit, removing blindness and causing light to shine in people's hearts.

[34 : 09] Save us from distorting that message to try and garner some fake results. Help us to speak the true message of Christ clearly, plainly.

Burgeon us to pray for our friends, family members, colleagues, classmates, that they too will be granted sight to see Jesus just as you did for us.

And Lord, we are amazed at your amazing grace, how you made us see. Let your glory be seen and savored by more and more people in Caracaline.

we pray this for your great namesake. Amen.