

Caleb Evans (11)

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[0:00] 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.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Does anyone want to hear some amazing news this morning?

God is in the business of saving sinners, saving unbelievers, calling those who are lost to faith and repentance. And if that is not amazing enough, and it is, think about this.

God works through ordinary, flawed, weak, and imperfect people to do it. As far as I'm concerned, that is personally good news on two fronts.

[1:20] The first, that the only reason that I am saved at all, is that God saves sinners and gives faith to unbelievers. What about you? The second, is that if God works through imperfect, weak, flawed, ordinary people, even people who might be fools in the eyes of the world, that means, hey, God can work through me.

I don't have to ask what about you on this one, because I know that if God can do it through me, He can do it through anyone. Two points I want us to take away this morning.

I'm always a bit hesitant to give the core of my sermons away so quickly, because you might say, okay, I've got it, and go ahead and take an early Sunday nap. But I'm going to put it all out there this morning.

Point one. The gospel is the power of God unto salvation. It's the gospel that gives new life. And point two.

God intends for the gospel to be proclaimed through us, and it does not matter if we don't feel worthy for the task. Let's be real.

[2:36] Who is? No one, as I think we'll see. As we continue our 40 days of prayer for mission and evangelism, I want us to keep these things in mind.

God works through gospel proclamation in a miraculous way, a way that defies any natural explanation, to bring light to darkened minds and hearts.

And then, God works through imperfect people to do it. Now, Paul, in his context, in our 2 Corinthians passage, is talking about the work of New Testament-era apostles and missionaries.

So we might be tempted to think that it has limited application to us. In some ways, it doesn't apply. We're not writing inspired scripture, as Paul and others did, for example.

Most of us, unlike Paul, haven't come close to being stoned to death for proclaiming Jesus. Don't know about you, but I've never had anyone try to stone me.

[3:43] But we're wrong if we forget that we too are evangelists and missionaries. As Charles Spurgeon once put it, every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter.

That gets your attention, doesn't it? So let's look at what Paul has to say to us this morning and think about what it means for us as missionaries.

Let's look at 2 Corinthians chapter 4 together. Starting in verse 1, we read, Now I would simply say, by way of introduction to the passage, on one level, Paul would seem to have every reason to lose heart.

On top of his personal struggles and hardships, and they were many, he's writing to a church that has been, in many ways, a total train wreck. If you've read the letters to the Corinthians, you're well aware of the sin in that church.

When people say that we need to get back to the ideal purity of the New Testament church, they're apparently forgetting about the Corinthians. So this is a serious situation.

[5:06] Why doesn't Paul lose heart? I think it will become clear that Paul, through the mercy of God, does not lose heart because he knows that God works through weak and ordinary people like himself to save those who are broken.

It is easy to lose heart when you're engaged in gospel mission, isn't it? Maybe it's happened to you. You've tried to reach people with the gospel and they won't listen. Maybe you were ignored. Or worse, mocked or ridiculed when you shared Christ with someone. Maybe you felt like it wasn't doing any good. That you weren't fit for the task.

That it seemed hopeless. But follow Paul's example. Don't lose heart and give up. And also, don't change the message to make it seem more appealing or more sophisticated.

Don't have to do that. Any believer can present the basic message of the gospel because it's really not that complicated. As Paul puts it in verse 2, 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.

[6:26] And that is why I'm preaching an expository sermon this morning instead of launching a hip new sermon series on the newest Star Wars film. It can be tempting to want to water down the truth of God's word or to try to complicate gospel proclamation unnecessarily.

But do you want to know the truth? We don't have to do that. And we shouldn't. Because the gospel, even with all its simplicity, even with all its potential for causing offense, the gospel saves souls.

Do you want to follow the example of Paul's ministry? It was a fruitful one. It turned the world upside down. But when you get right down to it, what did Paul do?

He told the simple truth about Jesus, didn't he? By God's grace, can't you do that? Can't I do that? You can tell your co-worker or your sibling or your friend the simple truth about Jesus.

I know you can. That's what evangelism is. Telling the simple truth, whether we're talking about evangelistic preaching or personal evangelism.

[7:50] John Stott put it this way, to evangelize is to spread the good news that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the scriptures and that as the reigning Lord, he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gift of the Spirit to all who repent and believe.

Stott summarizes all of that in one sentence. Any one of us can share that, can't we? Not that it will be easy.

It will be difficult because when we evangelize, whether we realize it or not, we are facing supernatural opposition. Paul goes on to write, even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled 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.

Now here is where the really difficult and potentially frustrating thing comes in. Paul tells us that the unbeliever cannot believe the gospel.

[9:08] Doesn't that blow your mind? He tells us that those who are outside of Christ cannot see the glory of Christ, cannot see the truth about Christ.

Why? Because their minds are blinded by the evil one. On one level, that's quite a little bit terrifying, isn't it?

And a little daunting, because as we evangelize, we are sharing the truth with people who can't see the truth. No wonder it sometimes seems unsuccessful to us.

It doesn't matter how eloquent we are. It doesn't matter how charismatic or persuasive we are. Unbelievers are blind to the truth. And when I say that, don't think that I'm slamming on unbelievers. I used to be one myself. If that were all, this whole evangelism thing that we're talking so much about would be utterly pointless.

[10:09] Wouldn't it? But, it doesn't depend on our eloquence, our persuasive capabilities, our natural charisma.

Thank the Lord it doesn't. We proclaim Jesus Christ and not ourselves. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord.

Now, in my best moments, I like to think I'm a fairly likable person who can make a decent intellectual argument. But even if that's true, and I'm not really sure that it is, that is not enough to pierce the veil that keeps unbelievers in darkness.

But the Spirit working through the proclamation of Jesus Christ and Him crucified is where the power is. Not in us.

We are called to proclaim, to evangelize, because God chooses to work through that to open the eyes of the blind. But, it is His power and not ours that removes the veil that keeps people in darkness.

[11:18] Now, if we're believers, isn't that what happened to us? The Holy Spirit removed the veil that kept us in darkness and did so through gospel proclamation. As Amazing Grace says, I was blind, but now what?

I see. How did that happen? God removed the veil. As Paul says in verse 6, For God, who said, 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.

My brothers and my sisters, that's what happened. That's what happened to us. God shone in my heart to give the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Isn't that what happened to you?

Amen. If He did it in us, why would we be surprised that He can do it in others?

Is there any nut that is too hard for the gospel to crack? I was just as blind as anyone else when God opened my eyes through the gospel.

[12:41] Weren't you as well? the task before us then isn't to charm people into believing or to manipulate their emotions or to come up with some knockdown argument.

Those things can't remove the veil. Our task is a very simple one. To tell the truth about Jesus because the truth about Jesus saves.

Knowing that it's God that removes the veil, knowing that it's the gospel, takes the pressure off of us when we proclaim the gospel, doesn't it? It's God working through the truth about Jesus.

All we're called to do is to tell the truth respectfully and lovingly and as often said, leave the results to God. You might be thinking, man, he's making this sound easier than it actually is.

I'm not eloquent. I'm not an intellectual. I'm shy. I'm sinful. How am I supposed to do this evangelism thing? God has heard objections to being sent on mission like that before.

[13:59] And he is not in the habit of letting people off the hook. Moses said, Oh my Lord, I'm not eloquent either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I'm slow of speech and of tongue.

What does God say? I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall speak. Jeremiah says, Lord God, behold, I do not know how to speak for I'm only a youth.

God says, don't say I'm only a youth. For all to whom I send you, you shall go and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord.

We also get the sense from his letters that Paul himself was not a conventionally eloquent and persuasive speaker. So, God has encountered that objection before, hasn't he?

God called Moses. God called Jeremiah. And these are just a couple of examples that I could pull from. Now, in a game of kickball in the schoolyard, they might have been the sword who would have been picked last.

[15:12] But God called them anyway. And God called Paul and his companions. Now, they probably wouldn't have seemed to us to be the clear choice.

But the power and the presence of God was with them and that was more than enough. Here's what Paul has to say about that in verse 7.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. God has chosen ordinary, weak, flawed people to spread the gospel because it shows so clearly that the surpassing power to save belongs to God.

Praise the Lord. Do you know yourself to be weak? Do you know yourself to be flawed? Do you know yourself to be insufficient for the task?

Good! That means that you are precisely the kind of person that God uses to proclaim the gospel. That's what that means. The power to save belongs to God and not to us.

[16:38] The power to lift the veil that causes spiritual blindness belongs to God and not to us. the power to convert the hearts of sinners belongs to God and not to us.

The power to reveal the glory of Jesus Christ to those who are in darkness belongs to God and not to us. When it comes to evangelism, that takes the pressure off a little bit, doesn't it?

But we are called to evangelize. Every Christian is called to be a missionary. God works through jars of clay like us.

God works through the message of the gospel, the simple truth about Christ and Him crucified. You're called to bear witness to that. So am I and so is our church.

I will say the church of the Holy Trinity must always be a body of believers that proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord not only from the pulpit but everywhere we go.

[17:50] Can we pray about that this morning? That God would give us the grace to grow more and more faithful in evangelism and mission. To quote John Stott again, he's a favorite of mine, forgive me, on evangelism.

Stott says, Jesus' authority on earth allows us to dare to go to all the nations. His authority in heaven gives us our only hope of success and His presence with us leaves no other choice.

Please pray with me. Lord, help us to dare to go into our community, into our city with the gospel. Help us to remember Your authority in heaven, Your power to save.

Help us to realize that we have no choice but to reach out to others with the life-giving message of salvation. Remind us always of Your presence with us.

Help us to remember that You are with us wherever we are sent. We offer ourselves to Your service this day, crying out to You, asking that You would use us for the salvation of many, and asking most of all that You would be glorified.

[19:17] Amen. Amen.