

Be the Light in a Dark World

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Date: 16 October 2016

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[0 : 00] The white rabbit, you know, in Alice in Wonderland who kept saying, the hurrier I go, the behinder I get. You know, I think we're living in an interesting time in America, aren't we?

You know, it seems to me like we have those who are campaigning for president, and it just doesn't seem like there's any moral compass that's involved.

And the direction of our country seems to be going, you know, lower and lower as the Christian community seems to be becoming weaker and weaker.

And it seems to me like there's a case where Christians can really be alarmed because even recently, I mean, even this week we heard how there are people in political power who absolutely want to do something that is contrary to Christianity.

And we're facing kind of, in America, we're facing kind of the same kind of situation, although it maybe hasn't gotten to the point where Russia is, but we seem to be going down and down and down that same road.

[1 : 18] One of the things that just amazes me, however, is there's a passage in Scripture that I want to direct your attention to that's found in 2 Corinthians chapter 4.

And the reason why this is significant is because Paul was dealing with a situation that's not unlike, and it was not unlike what we're dealing with. I mean, the Corinthians were people that had a reputation for deviant living.

I mean, they were morally corrupt, and the Christians in this particular area were in the minority. And in the minority, they not only had very little power in relationship to their own communities, but they had absolutely no political power.

And Paul is talking to a group of people that, you know, they had family issues, they had strife in the church.

I mean, there was all kinds of things that were part of this particular group of believers that could have made Paul get extremely discouraged. And particularly, those believers who really wanted to live for Jesus Christ, they could have been downhearted.

[2 : 27] They could have been very, very disappointed. They could have absolutely been at the point of saying, is it worth it? Is it really worth it? And maybe some of you have come to a point where you say, man, you know, is this all, is this what we're doing?

Is this, is this, are we going to have any influence in what's going on in America today? Or in the world today? And in the midst of that, Paul writes these words to the Corinthians.

It's found in chapter 4, verse 1. It says, Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we don't lose heart.

I remember reading this about, oh, let's see, maybe 10, 15 years ago when I was going through a really, really difficult time. And it just struck a chord in my heart.

And when I started, when I read this, I said, this is a passage worth memorizing. And, you know, when there's something that really, really, you know, you know, you know, gets down deep in your heart, you know, it's easy to start, start memorizing these words.

[3 : 48] It goes on to say, we have, we've renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of truth, commending ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

For if the gospel is hid, it's hid to those who are lost. In whom the God of this world is blinded, the minds of those who believe not, lest the light of the glory of Christ should shine unto them.

And I just, it just seems to me like there are some really interesting things that we need to understand about this passage of Scripture. And because Paul doesn't say to these people, buck up.

You know, he doesn't say, you know, get with it. He doesn't, he basically says, you know what? We have a message of mercy. And this message of mercy is so amazing because it reached down into the very heart of Paul.

It reaches down into our hearts and it produces something that no human effort, no self-help lessons can do.

[4 : 55] I mean, it's an amazing thing that Paul describes later on in this, in his book. He says, we are new creations. The very next chapter says, we are new creations in Christ Jesus.

It's a transformation that takes place because of the wonderful mercy of God. And so, we have a wonderful ministry of mercy.

And so, and there's three things that are part of this great ministry of mercy that motivates us. First of all, he says, it's a ministry of truth.

It's a message of truth. He says, we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty. We're not walking in craftiness. We're not handling the word of deceitfully. It's a, the amazing thing is that God has given us an opportunity to understand that we are preaching, we are proclaiming the truth.

Everyone knows how exhausting it is to be involved in lying. I mean, all of a sudden you have to think, okay, how did I, who did I say this, what did I say this to? I mean, being involved in lying is so exhausting.

[6 : 08] And in this particular time, there were, there were preachers, there were people that were coming to Corinth and they were, they were telling a story. They were telling a gospel of lies saying that the only way that you can become, really become a believer is be kind, be gracious, you know.

So, do a, a religious ritual because that's what's required in order for you to, to know, to know God.

And Paul is proclaiming a gospel of mercy. Do you know, do you know that, you know that it's really amazing that in, in our day, in our day, Christianity is the only religion where God has mercy.

On sinners. Do you know that, you know that in, in, in Islam, God rejects sinners, God hates sinners. In, in Hinduism, if you do something wrong, there's karma.

And, and, and you don't even know what's next. I mean, you could come back as a bug. But, but in, but in, in Christianity, God has, I mean, in all the religions in all the world, God is a God of mercy.

[7 : 21] And, and, and it's so, it's so amazing that we have the opportunity to experience the, the mercy and wonder of God. The other thing that, that's interesting here is, it says, it says, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

Um, mercy leads to a life of devotion. I, um, think about this. Think about the fact that, that we, that, uh, in, in, uh, Romans chapter 12, verse one and two, it says, it says, um, I beseech you therefore brothers by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice.

I mean, those who really come to a point of understanding the mercy of God. I mean, the, the results of that in your, in a person's life is you devote yourself, you give yourself to God because, because it's so amazing.

The first 11 chapters of the book of Romans talks about what God did for us. And then in chapter 12, it says, this is the response. This is the natural response of understanding what God has done for you and for me.

It's an amazing thing. I, uh, in the first, in the chapter right before this, in chapter three of, of second Corinthians, Paul, Paul talks about how amazing the old covenant was.

[8 : 45] But you know what? At the very end of this chapter, he says, it doesn't hold a candle to what God has done in the, in the new covenant for us. It's kind of like, it's kind of like, um, when I, when, when, when we were, when our kids were young, we, we got them a present for Christmas.

Okay. And, and so we, they opened this present. They were, oh man, this is a fantastic thing. Wow. Wow. And, and as they opened the present and, and they looked at it, it said, batteries not included.

Okay. We didn't know the batteries weren't included. How disappointing. You had to wait for a couple of days to use this thing that was so exciting. Cause, okay, that's, that was, that's the difference between the old Testament and the new Testament.

You know, we just bought us a Swiffer or, you know, one of those things, you know, and, and I opened it up and, and, and it's, I didn't realize you had to have batteries.

Okay. But you know what? They've gotten smart. Now batteries are included. It's amazing. And, uh, and so, so we were able to use it immediately. That the, the Lord, when that, when the disciples were talking to the Lord, they said to him, will you at this time establish your kingdom?

[10 : 03] And you know what he said to them? It's not for you to know, but like Ben said, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you'll be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the uttermost part of the earth.

The, the amazing thing is, you know, is that Jerusalem was a scary place for the disciples. It was way out of their comfort zone. Okay. They spent a lot of, most of their time in Galilee, but here, here, uh, Paul is, or excuse me, uh, Jesus is saying to the disciples, you're going to be in this very scary place.

You're going to be in a place where you feel way, it's way over your head. And then the very next place he sends them is to the place where people were absolutely rejected. They were called dogs.

Okay. So he sent them to rejected people and then he sent them to people way beyond their comfort zone. And, uh, and so if you ever feel like you're, you know, way over your comfort zone, that's where the Lord, you know, likes to have us sometimes.

The third thing that I, about the mercy of God that's amazing in this passage is that it says, if our gospel is hid, it's hid to the lost in whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, whose image of God should shine to them.

[11 : 23] For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus, the Lord, and ourselves, your servants, for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

You know what mercy does? Because mercy exalts the wonder of God. And yet, and the marvelous thing about this is that, is that the, that, the, the evil one wants to hinder, uh, uh, people from really seeing.

He, he's blinding the minds of those that believe not. Paul experienced this in his own life. He was so, he was so intent on believing that everything that he had going for him, all his, his birthright, the way he was living, you know, it was all, it was all fantastic stuff.

Until he came to the road to Damascus and all of a sudden this amazing light shone down upon him. And, um, and I mean, it just, it, I'm basically, it, it, it blinded him.

This amazing light. And, um, and what is, what do you say? You know, uh, he, uh, he was in, in chapter, in Acts chapter nine, uh, verse, three, it tells the story.

[12 : 39] And, um, and it says, um, and he fell on this, he, and he fell to the earth and he heard a voice saying, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

And, and he said, and he said, who are you, Lord? And he says, I'm Jesus whom you persecuted. It's hard for you to kick against the goads. And, and basically he, it was, Paul was, Paul was basically saying, he's at verse six, exactly, exactly what he was experiencing in this place, in, in, in this, um, in this passage in Acts.

He was, he was experiencing the face of God and it was convicting. Um, but you know what? The mercy of God doesn't just, doesn't leave us there.

You know, when we really come to understand the wonderful mercy of God, we, we come to a point of saying how marvelous God is. What a great God we serve.

What a glorious Lord we have. And, and, and, and Paul in, in first, uh, Timothy chapter, chapter, um, uh, one talks about his life before the, before Timothy says, he says, I was a persecutor and a blasphemer and I was all this stuff, but God in his mercy saved me.

[14 : 02] And, um, and you know, I think, I think, I think we can all identify with, with who Paul is. I mean, we're there, you know, um, we, we had our own intentions.

We, we weren't just strangers of God. We were all enemies of God. And in the midst of that particular situation, in the midst of that condition, Christ, God sent his son to die for us.

It's amazing thing. Absolutely amazing. And so, and so, uh, Paul in, in, uh, that first, first Timothy passage, he just glorifies God for his great mercy.

In, in Romans chapter one, verse 33, it says, oh, the depths. When he's talking about, he's talking all about the mercy of God. And he ends by saying this, oh, the depths of the riches, both of wisdom and power of God.

How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways, way past finding out. God's mercy is so amazing. God's mercy. But then he goes on.

[15 : 08] And like I said, he doesn't say to the, he doesn't say to the, to these Corinthians, buck up. He doesn't say, get with it. He, he basically, in, in, in, in second Corinthians chapter four, he says something really amazing.

He, he, he, um, he tells the Corinthians, yes, you are weak. Here's what he says in verse seven. That we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.

When we were, when we were in, in Russia, it was, uh, it was an amazing thing that, that happened when we were in Russia because, uh, we looked in the cabinets in our kitchen and we were expecting to find some stuff, you know, and there were plates there and there were some, there were some frying pan, there was a frying pan, there was something, some other utensils.

But you know what we didn't have? We didn't have any glasses. You know, you're, it was, it was very strange. And so we went to, we went to the store to find glasses and, and at that particular time it was hard to find glasses.

I don't know why. Maybe we were, maybe we were looking at the wrong place. But, um, but, uh, I mean, we, and then, and then when we did find them, they were expensive. I mean, they're really expensive. And so, you know what we did?

[16 : 29] We decided because we were, because we, there were six of us and, and we went to buy, we went and we bought some jelly and all of a sudden we discovered, we discovered, hey, you know what?

Jelly jars make great glasses. And, and it's really, it's really interesting because, because, um, even now, you know, in In our own home, we have, oh, this is my wife's tea.

She makes the best tea in the world. So what we did is we decided we were going to have, we're going to use glasses, use jelly jars for glasses.

We had six, we had lots of jelly eaten, and pretty soon we had tons of jelly jars in our house. And it was really strange because when we invited Russians to come over to our table, and they're looking at these things sitting in front of them, it was very strange.

Okay, so probably, you know, it wasn't long before we had maybe a dozen jelly jars. And there was only six of us, so we thought, you know, what can we do?

[17 : 53] So we decided that, you know, jelly jars make an amazing pen holder, right? So, you know, I had one on my desk, you know, and instead of stuff all over the place, I put the pens and the stuff in the jelly jar, and it was cool.

So, jelly jars make great button holders, okay? I mean, we didn't have a whole lot of buttons back then, but because, but when the button fell off, and when we tried to find, you know, had to find new buttons, we could use jelly jars.

Because we discovered that, my daughter discovered that jelly jars make great containers for crayons. I'm giving you all, like, really good ideas, right? I saw you shaking your head, yes.

Jelly jars make amazing candy dishes, right? Yeah, that's what I thought. That's, you know, these, this, you know what this is?

What are these? M&M;'s. You know why these, you know why there's M&M;'s in here? That's my, yes, you're right, that's my favorite, but what other reason? Because we're Tri-M, okay?

[19 : 13] There's, you know, there's tons of threes in there. So, I just want to remind you, Tri-M. Jelly jars make great ruble containers.

Now, I didn't have enough rubles, so this is full of coins. How much, how much money do you think's in here? \$20.

\$20. I think you're wrong. Try, try \$75. Okay, how many would like this?

That's what I thought. Okay, just, just to make sure you, just to make sure you understand. Okay, what do you see here? What's that?

I know, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh. Okay? Okay? What do you see here? That's what I thought you saw here. Isn't that interesting?

[20 : 21] Isn't it interesting you ignored the container and saw what was inside? You know, and that's exactly what God wants us to do. He wants us to be so transparent that when people look at us, when they see us, they don't, they don't, we, we, as missionaries, I came to the point of understanding that, you know, we're weak vessels.

I mean, we are, we really have feet of clay. And, however, we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power is not of us.

It's of God. And the wonder, the wonder of all this is that, is that if we're living the right kind of life, people, people see Christ in us.

And that's, and that is magnetic. That has some, that has a, people, people can see the difference.

I mean, they see the difference in a person living a life that's, it's given over to Christ. I want to, I want to ask you, I want to ask you something. Is jar full or empty?

[21 : 42] Who said that? Okay. Kara said it's full of air. It is full of air, you know. It's, okay, so, so every jar, every jar that I have up here is full.

It's full of something. And the interesting thing about this is that, is that it reminds me, what, what are we, what are we filling our life with? Because it's the very thing that we're filling our life with that spills out on people.

When people bump into us, it's what we, it's what we're filling our life with that spills out. And so, so, you know, we can, we can, we really do exhibit, we exhibit what, what we're thinking about, what, what's important to us.

We, we are, we are people who absolutely are demonstrating what's important to us. Because when people bump into us, we spill it out.

I bought these jars a couple days ago. You know, buying jelly jars at this time of year is a great idea.

[22 : 47] I mean, they are, they are very, they're really not very, very expensive. And you know what's really amazing about this? There's not one crack in them. They are, and that's what, and that's really what the Lord is looking for.

Ken was talking a couple days ago about, was that the staff? Was it, was it staff? Stay, that's it, sure. He was talking about a barrel and the, and how, and how, you know, if, if, if a barrel has a hole down here, or you can't fill it above there because, and, and if this has a crack in it, you know, it's just gonna, it's gonna constantly leak.

The Lord, the Lord's looking for, for vessels that are faithful. So I guess I'm saying to you this morning, you know, the mercy of God is amazing, amazing message.

And in the, in the, in the, and we're living in a, in a very, very dark world. But, but the wonderful thing is that our vessels contain light.

It's a, it's the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And we have the amazing opportunity to share this light, not because we are so wonderful ourselves, but because God has been so marvelous and wonderful to us in pulling us out of a corrupt, a corrupt world and, and bring us to a point of relationship with Jesus Christ that's amazing, absolutely amazing.

[24 : 24] And so I want to challenge you. As a matter of fact, here's what I've done. I've, I have several, I have several empty jelly jars up here. And I would, I'd like to encourage you folks to sit, to do this.

If, um, um, you know, maybe, you know, when we're done here, I'd like, I'd like you to use these empty jelly jars as a, as a motivation for you during this week, during this year to say, Jesus Christ is going to be, is going to be number one in my life.

I'm going to be a faithful container and I'm going to share his word with those people that are around me. And Paul says he does it in, in the way he walks and in the way he thinks and the way, and what he says.

That's what I want us to do. And, um, so, so if you, if you'd like to grab an empty jar and real, and remember it's all in what we feel it with. It's a, it's really important.

God bless you. Let's pray. Father in heaven, thanks for the opportunity to spend some time over these last few minutes, thinking about your word, the wonder of your word and the greatness, the absolute greatness of your, of your mercy.

[25 : 41] We know that you've transformed our lives if we're believers. And you, we know that if there's, if there's somebody here, it is a believer that you have this transforming work that, that you do in, in life.

And so, and so I pray that we will be the correct conveyors of this. We know that, that, that, that we are really insignificant, but in your wonderful plan, you have used insignificant people, lowly people, people without any position all over the world to change things.

And so we want to submit to that, submit to your power, submit to your grace, and, and, and devote ourselves to, to the message of salvation for Jesus sake.

Amen. Amen. John's going to lead us in our closing song, but as we're standing, I'm going to ask that we let our missionary guests go first, and they're going to meet us over in the gymnasium where we are going to eat a wonderful meal that has been prepared.

And as we are singing together, I want your heart to be challenged by what Byron just put in front. I've got to tell you, I'm going to have an empty candy jar, filled with candy, because it's not about the jars, but what's inside.

[27 : 02] Isn't that right? I appreciate that reminder. I appreciate that reminder. John. John. John. John.