

Light: knowledge of the Glory of God in Christ provides comfort and reassurance

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 December 2020

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 0 0] Corinthians 4. I was, as I always do, I tend to prepare sketches 18 months ahead of myself, and this doesn't rule out God because God is able to think about the future. You know, the argument that you should think about these things on the week that you're doing them because you don't know what God is going to address your conscience on or what God is addressing the consciences of his people on, and therefore you must prepare it weekly. Well, I believe in a God who can think of more things than once and can think what's going to happen in a week from now, a month from now, a year from now, and therefore planning ahead is not a difficulty for God, and neither is it to guide us as we listen to his word. Now, as I was doing this, I received a text message in the week, which was encouraging, but at the same time, it caused me a bit of a stumbling block. I'm not going to tell you who in the fellowship texted me or what they said, but the text message was encouraging, but at the same time, knowing this person and knowing some of the difficulties that, you know, the struggles, the emotional struggles and everything that are there, you begin to realize that not only is pain subjective, in other words, I don't know everything that's going on in your lives, you don't know anything that's going on in my life and the lives of people that are connected to me, but the pain that's associated with that, the trouble and the difficulty is largely subjective. You know, we often speak about pain thresholds, how one person's pain threshold is much higher than another person's, because it's largely subjective, that I feel pain in a different way than you do, and so the measurements are different and everything. And so the more I thought, not just about the text message, but about the person behind the text message, it caused me great difficulty, because I knew what I was bringing the message on this morning, and prayed it through. And in the end, just thinking through that whole situation, actually helped. It actually helps me perhaps understand things in a way where I had to consider things slightly differently. So with that in mind, when we think about the subjective reality of distress, the subjective reality of affliction, of emotional turmoil, that for all of us it is different.

Even though we can speak about emotional ups and downs, but all of those ups and downs for each of us are very, very different. And so with that in mind, I understand that we'll all come to this word differently. And what I'm seeking to do is to show you how the word sort of brings in a sort of a balance for us all, that brings us back to that place where that peace guards us rather than us trying to keep a peaceful being. So 2 Corinthians 4, we're going to read verses 1 to 6, and then 16 through to 18, but we are going to cover the whole chapter. But the focus is going to be on these first few parts.

Therefore, having the ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced disgraceful and underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of truth, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In this case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel and the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For this we proclaim, it 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. And then in verse 16 onwards, so we do not lose heart.

Though our outer self nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Well, on this first Sunday of Advent, it's appropriate to speak about light, especially when Christ is referred to as light in his coming, a light to the Gentiles, a light to the nations. And of course, that is a reflection on the nation of Israel, who were meant to be a light to the nations, but of course, they were not. At least not as God intended them to be. But God, in giving Jesus, would be the light to all people. And what we begin to realize in 2 Corinthians 4 is that light equals comfort.

[5 : 44] That light equals comfort. It equals a number of other things along the way, which we will see, but light equals comfort. And that comfort then has to be understood properly, because we're not here necessarily speaking about what I would call material comforts, as in the three basic comforts that all people need to remain sane. That is, somewhere to live, someone to love, something to eat.

Essentially, when you go throughout history and you read history books, and you can even pick up a psychology book, even an atheistic psychology book, and read it, and they will identify that these three basic things are necessary for a person's development. Somewhere to live, someone to love, something to eat. And we recognize that shelter is incredibly important. This is why houses within scripture are referred to as shelter. They're never referred to as assets. It's only in this world, this modern day world where we think of shelter in terms of assets. And because they are assets, they're looked upon as profit generators, rather than something which can seek to provide a roof over someone else's head.

That's a terrible shift, but that's the way things have happened. Food. Of course, there is enough food in the world, and there's enough food that can be developed to feed people. We understand the difficulties of movement and what have you, but there are great measures being made in the world now for people to be fed. Fellowship. And by fellowship, we're not talking about tribal fellowship. We're not really talking about cultural fellowship. We're talking about the kind of fellowship where love seeks the good of the other person. So love, by definition, is seeking the good of another person. God loves us. He gave his son. Well, how is that love expressed? Well, God is seeking the good of those he loves. He gives us Christ because he's seeking our good. Now, of course, these types of comfort, material comforts, are good comfort, that there's nothing wrong with them. But then you've got another kind of comfort that a person can, as it's been said, can have all those material wealth. In other words, can have people around them, can have plenty of food, and have perhaps not just one property, but let's say two properties, but then experience a kind of distress and affliction within the family that then just makes all of those other things which at first were good and nice to have suddenly fade in comparison because now some things are worth more than others. We place value things. You know how children place value numbers. You have one, then you have two, then you have three, and you understand the value and the order that they go in. Well, in the same way, the church and Christians and people in the world place value.

They have things at the top, and then they have things further down the list. And of course, when one of those things loses, gets damaged in some way, let's think in terms of relationship, it can just spoil the rest because we understand that I would give everything away just to have that back the way that it was or to have that the way that I wanted. So there is that kind of emotional peace that you have at times when you have the absence of distress. So it's not that emotional stability is not always caused by the presence of peace. It can often be caused by the absence of distress. And we convince ourselves that we're at peace when all that we are is we have the absence of distress. And then thirdly is real peace. And that peace of God that guards us, not that we don't have to guard it. Now any peace that you have to guard is a peace not worth having, because the amount of time and effort you need to spend on trying to keep it. And you work long hours, you worry about the future. You do a second job. And all to maintain some kind of peace in future direction.

And that is difficult. Now what we must understand is that these people here had a real affliction. And the peace of God, this light, this knowledge, which brings comfort, which then guards them, which then gives them reason not to lose heart, is that which afflicts them in their Christian life and walk. And therefore, as Christians, we recognize there are greater difficulties other than just the ones that we have just mentioned. So what God would have us see here is, if I can use a title of J.I.

[11 : 04] Packers, that weakness is the way. The way forward is the way of weakness. And we'll begin to see that as we go through. Notice how in verse 6, that Paul begins by Likens' error conversion to a creation event. By stating it in this way, you know, when God created the world, he spoke light and light came out of darkness. That when Paul here says, let light shine out of darkness, he is taking us back to Genesis. He is reminding us of how the creation began. He's now reminding us that our new life is like a new creation event.

That God always brings light out of darkness. Now I'm not going to get into why the darkness exists prior to the light. We can do that for another time. But the point here is that Paul is saying, God has created something new. He has brought light out of darkness. And so your conversion to Christ is explained in terms of receiving light. In the same way the world received light and brought the world out of darkness. The darkness that covered the face of the earth. And God said, let there be light.

And there was light. And now you see, now you see what God is about to do or has done so far. And God, it says, has shone this light in our hearts. And this light is a knowledge. And the knowledge is of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus, which then gives us that assurance so as not to lose heart. So light equals knowledge equals comfort. Light equals knowledge equals comfort. We don't lose heart because of the light that God has shone in our heart. Then as we look down to verse 16 through to the end, we don't lose heart. And we don't lose heart because now we see things differently.

That we can still see what everyone else sees. That is people getting older, our outer self wasting away. But we're able to see something we can't see with the eye. And that is their inner self is being renewed day by day. And in this momentary affliction, whatever this affliction may be, we recognize that we can see something because of the light that God has given us. The light that God has given us is a knowledge of the unseen things. So when Paul says, verse 18, as we look not to the things that are seen, okay, that's fairly easy, but to the things that are unseen. Well, how do you do that, Paul? How do you look to the things that are unseen?

If they're unseen, how do you look to them? And the answer is the light that God gives us is knowledge. And that knowledge allows us to see. And it allows us to see the things that are unseen by the world.

[14 : 20] And those things that are unseen by the world are not the transient things that everyone else sees, but actually the eternal things that no one else sees unless they have received this light from God.

And so the reason we're able to see unseen things is because the light that God gives us is a knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus that allows us to see the unseen things.

And it's these unseen things that the world cannot see, but which we can in the light that God gives us, which now causes us never to lose heart. Now, Paul has to say, in fairness, don't lose heart, because the temptation for Christians in the church is to lose heart. He wouldn't have to say it if there wasn't the temptation for you to give up, if there wasn't the temptation for you to think, I've had enough. There's always that temptation to put your hands on, I'm tired, and I'm fed up, and I don't want to do it anymore. I just want it to be over. And what Paul is saying is, I understand the temptation, but the things that you're looking at and the things that you have your heart attached to are perhaps the transient things, and that's why you're feeling this way.

Don't lose heart because God has given you the ability to see the unseen. It sounds strange, but now we understand that we see through understanding. So light equals knowledge, equals comfort, equals assurance, equals the ability to not lose heart. It gives us the ability to see the things that no one else can see. Light. That light is shone out of darkness, and now we see.

And so light, if we focus on this idea of Christ being a light to the Gentiles, if we focus on this idea of light being our conversion experience, of light giving us something, knowledge that we did not have before and now we see, not with our eyes, but with understanding, we can understand how this light is an incredible blessing. So think about Simeon, which I've referred to in part, but not in totally, that Simeon, you remember, he was very old, and as he's getting older, he hasn't yet passed away.

[16 : 56] And God keeps the promise to him that, you know, he will see Jesus. And of course, he recognizes that this is what has happened, and he has Jesus in front of him, and he says, now you're letting your servant depart in peace. And then he refers to Jesus as the light to the Gentiles. In other words, being able to see Jesus is the light of the world, Jesus is the light to the Gentiles, he is the light to us in our conversion. And Simeon understands that his departure in peace, that is, dying in peace, in the comfort, in the assurance that God has kept his promise, comes with the coming of light. But as the light comes, so does the assurance and comfort come. So does his life being able to be depart in peace. So light brings comfort. Or think about it in terms of Thomas, who needed to see Jesus before his doubt could be dismissed. Just being able to see Jesus.

Now, light, of course, gives us sight. And I'm using it in a slightly different way here, but light gives us sight, the ability to be able to see Jesus. And that seeing Jesus is what gives Thomas' then his assurance. All right, this is true. Now I'm no longer or no longer need to doubt.

Now, sometimes some people have divided what God has put together, and they have sought to divide comfort from knowledge, as if comfort must come to us sort of pastorally, and knowledge comes to us via being teaching. I've heard this division plenty of times. I'm not convinced of it at all, as if to say that they're, for instance, some ministers are more pastoral than others. But it's probably true.

God makes us all different. And some pastors are more teaching rather than preaching, or more teaching rather than pastoral. I think it's a false division. I think it's a false division for the very obvious reason here that knowledge brings comfort. Nothing else seems to bring comfort.

It's not as if knowledge simply brings belief and understanding, and comfort comes from somewhere else. That comfort comes from me putting my arm around someone or someone putting their arm around me. I mean, you may be that type of person, but I'm not the type of person who needs a hug.

[19 : 41] Yeah, even on my worst days, I don't need you to hug me. I just need you to tell me how to put it right. I just need you to tell me what needs to be done. Some people don't want to be told that. They just want to be hugged. And I understand the difference. I really do. But what we're being taught, and really being taught to understand, is that light equals knowledge equals comfort. That the way God brings us to that sense of assurance and not losing heart and that sense of peace is by giving the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. And just in case you're wondering, well, that sounds very much just like a belief conviction. No, because Paul is speaking to this to people who have real affliction.

These are people who are really suffering in their Christian faith. And that suffering is subjective on one level, but it's real. They feel it emotionally, spiritually, that they feel it physically. And Paul's saying that this is what makes the difference. This is what will cause you not to lose heart in all that difficulty. It's the light that God gives us. Why? Because it is a reminder, Paul says, that the surpassing power for you not to give up doesn't belong to you. But it belongs to you as long as Christ is in you. In other words, it doesn't come from you. It comes from Christ in you.

And the moment you forget that, the moment you don't have that knowledge or you don't ponder on that knowledge, you don't trust in what God has taught you, then guess what you try and do?

You try and seek your own means of peace. And then you get worn out. Because you've not settled yourself in the knowledge that weakness is the way. That the way to experience the surpassing power of God is to not do it yourself. And then Paul goes on to say, this is in jars of clay.

That God has decided to put this enormous amount of power in fragile, weak people. To emphasize the point that this is God at work in you, not your ability to do it.

[22 : 16] Now, if you're not convinced, let me try and come at it from another way. And I ask you the question, what does the God of this world do? In other words, if you were to attack an enemy line, if you were to attack the enemy, and from this point of view, God is Satan's enemy. And the people of God are Satan's enemy. So if you're going to attack, what are you going to attack first? Well, you're going to attack that, you know, the age old story, if you cut the head off the serpent, the whole body dies. You know, when you, when I forget, I think Jason, his first name's Jason, I forget his last name, who wrote the book on Al-Qaeda. And he pointed out very clearly, you know, if you cut the head off, the, the, the, the sub heads will die. And of course that soon changed because you then had multiple heads coming up afterwards. It's a fantastic book. Um, but it explains how evil grows and, and it doesn't matter. The, the point here is to recognize that the, the, you go after that, which will cause the most damage. And so what does the devil do? Verse four, he has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel in the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. Notice what, notice what the God of this age goes after.

He goes after the light. He goes after blinding people to keep them from the light. Why? Because the light is the knowledge and the glory of God in Christ Jesus, in the face of Christ Jesus. In other words, it's not just a natural issue here. It's a spiritual issue. That Satan has gone after that very thing, which can give people that hope, that strength, that, um, everything that they receive in Christ Jesus. And so the God of this age knows what to attack. And he attacks the light. He blinds.

Why? Because light equals knowledge, equals comfort, equals assurance. Light is conversion. In this case, the knowledge that God gives us allows us to see, not only allows us to see what the God of this age does, but allows us to see how God comforts us. So Paul says, don't lose heart.

And the reason that you ought not to lose heart is because even though your outer self is wasting away, which you see with your eye, your inner self is being renewed day by day, which you cannot see with your eye. So how do you see it? Why are you told to look at the things that you cannot see if you cannot see them with your eyes? And it is because he spent this whole chapter setting it up so that you would appreciate that the light that God gives you to see is knowledge.

And that knowledge gives you the assurance. And that assurance then gives you comfort so that you don't lose heart, so that you don't give up and walk away. It's very easy to walk away because all the pressure goes away.

[25 : 39] All the pressure goes away. Responsibility is heavy. I mean, incredibly heavy. And of course, how do you walk away from responsibility? You walk away from weight.

And who doesn't want to walk away from weight? One of the things that we teach when we teach the program on wealth and money and future, one of the lessons is if you want to be rich, then what you're asking for is more responsibility, not less. But most people tend to think that riches in this world means that I'll have less to be responsible for because everything will be taken care of with money, not from God's point of view.

No, you want to be rich, then you're asking God for huge amounts of responsibility. Responsibility. And that's the way we appreciate what God is trying to teach us, that responsibility is heavy, and so it's easy to walk away. It's easy to just say, I've had enough of it.

And that's exactly what, go live in the dark somewhere. And that's exactly what the devil does, and he seeks to do.

So here's the exhortation as we come to a close. Paul tells us to do something which on the surface looks strange. That is not to look to the things that are seen, that's fairly easy to understand, but to look to the things that are unseen, which begs the question, how do I see unseen things?

[27 : 19] And the answer that he gives is with the light that God gives you. Okay, well, what is the light? The light is the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.

And how do I appreciate that light? How do I appreciate that knowledge? How do I not lose heart? Well, by remembering that weakness is the way. If you don't remember that weakness is the way, then what this ends up sounding like is someone just simply standing in front of you this morning saying, it will all be all right in the end.

And that's not what I'm saying. I am expressly not saying that it will all be right in the end. It will all be right in the end. And put up with what you've got to put up with now until that time.

That is exactly what I'm not saying, or what 2 Corinthians 4 is not saying. Paul is not saying, put up with it until the end, because it will all be right then. What he's saying is, it will all be right then.

Focus on the end. Focus on what God has shown you. But in the meantime, the frustration that you live with, that inability to bring about change, that inability to change the life of another individual, or to change your own life, is weakness.

[28 : 38] And embrace that weakness so that you would understand that the surpassing power belongs to God, not to you. So it's not a case that God has sort of left you alone and just given you a sort of a little word that says, don't worry, it will all be right in the end.

God is not telling you to sit still, tough it out, suck it up, come on. He's not telling you that. He's telling you to look beyond your immediate, whilst you remind yourselves that God has put this surpassing power to keep you going in a world where you don't necessarily want to keep going, in you.

And if you feel weak, then weakness is at the very moment where you experience the surpassing power of God to keep you going.

Without understanding that, this message will just sound like a message that says, keep going, it'll all be right in the end. Well, it will be. But until you get to that end, notice how God comforts us.

God has told us here that this surpassing power is put in us, our weak and feeble people who cannot create the change that they need to happen.

[30 : 00] And so this treasure that God has given us, this treasure is placed in jars of clay as a reminder that the power belongs to God and not to you.

That all the weakness you feel is a weakness that you ought to feel so that you ought and can feel the power of God. So light equals knowledge, equals comfort, equals assurance, which gives us the confidence not to lose heart.

Amen. Amen. Before we come to our close, we'll come to the final hymn, please, Stuart.

the final hymn that we do could. Thank you very much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.