Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Looking at the Face of Jesus, Part 3
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:3
Code: 47-24

It has been a rich and spiritually rewarding time for me to be studying in 2 Corinthians chapters 3 and 4, as you perhaps can tell from the series. So I invite you to turn in your Bible back to 2 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 18 through chapter 4 verse 6, which is a passage we've been studying for several weeks and will yet study for some time ahead. This is one of those rich mines of treasure that you find in the Word of God, almost inexhaustible. I was thinking as I had finally pulled all my thoughts together and sort of summed up everything I wanted to say about this passage and I had it all in rough notes and then I reduced it to a first draft and then I reduced it to a sort of a second draft and then put it in to some final notes. When I was completed doing that whole process I sat back and thought to myself, "I haven't begun to even do justice to this text, it just keeps yielding so much that only the Lord at this point when we'll have all that He would want us to have."

It is a profound text with immense implications about themes related to the issue of salvation and its proclamation. And I'm never in a hurry, as you know, because I want to be sure that I am faithful to what God intends to say and that His Spirit is given the opportunity to relate it to our own lives in the time in which we live. And this is a passage the theological riches of which are beyond measure and the implications equally significant to us. So it's been a very rewarding time for me as I have studied hour upon hour in this text and God has used it in my own heart and I trust in yours as well.

We've titled this section of Scripture, "Looking into the Face of Jesus," because in chapter 3 verse 18 we see there new covenant believers with an unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord. And down in chapter 4 verse 6, again 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. So here we are looking at the glory of God in the mirror which is the face of Jesus Christ reflected to us on the pages of Scripture. "Looking at the Face of Jesus," is the series, a very, very important foundational concept to all of the Christian life.

Now as believers what the new covenant has done for us is to allow us to see God revealed in Jesus Christ. That's something the Old Testament saints did not experience. They saw God move in history. They didn't see Him face to face. God is a spirit. They might have seen fire and smoke in one of His representations of judgment, or perhaps they saw the Shekinah cloud or a pillar of fire. They may have seen God in some whirlwind. They may have seen God in some cataclysmic event. They may have heard the voice of God from heaven. But they never saw the glory of God shining as clearly as in the face of Jesus Christ, and that's reserved for new covenant Christians, those on this

side of the incarnation. As believers, then, we see things that Old Testament saints never really saw clearly. What a marvelous wonderful thing it is to be a new covenant believer. And that's what Paul is celebrating in this section of Scripture...the glory of the new covenant. There were always those teachers who dogged the footsteps of Paul who wanted to drag people back to the old covenant which was shadows and pictures and types. And Paul is saying the new covenant is reality and the glory of the new covenant is that God is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ and that is a complete enough vision, there's no need to retreat back into the shadows. The veil is off, there's no need to put the veil back on. The vision is unhindered. There's no need to go back to a hindered and shadowed vision.

And so it is that in the new covenant we see the revelation of God like it's never been seen. The Old Testament saint heard about God. He may have heard God speak. He may have seen some of the phenomena around the appearance of God but he never saw God as clearly as we see. Old Testament saints had faith in God. And Old Testament prophets had faith in God. But they never saw God as clearly as we do because we have seen the exact representation of God which Hebrews 1 says is in Jesus Christ. He is the exact representation of God. He is the image of God. He is God made visible. Jesus even said, "If you've seen Me you've seen the Father." What a tremendous truth to look at the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus.

And I might add as a footnote at this point that though we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ in an unhindered way, looking into the mirror of Scripture in which the glory of God is reflected through the person of Jesus Christ who is the theme of Scripture, we still with all of that vision do not see Him as perfectly as we will some day, right? We're still waiting the perfect vision of Christ, we're still waiting that day when we see Him as He is and become like Him. In fact, in writing the first letter to the Corinthians Paul made this clear that as wonderful as our vision is, it's still yet not the perfect vision. First Corinthians 13:9 he says, "We know in part and we prophesy in part but when the perfect comes," the perfect, I think, is the eternal state, "when we enter into eternity the partial will be done away." Verse 12, "For now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face. Now I know in part but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known."

The perfect vision, the perfect knowledge is yet to come, but the knowledge of Christ in the vision of God in the face of Christ that we have now is superior to anything that any Old Testament believer ever had. We see God in Christ in a way that Old Testament saints never saw Him. We see God in Christ in a way that even Old Testament prophets, the noblest of all those Old Testament people never saw Him. I'll go one better, we see God revealed in Jesus Christ in ways in which the holy angels never see Him. That is to say we look into the face of Jesus Christ and we see the glory of God in redemption in ways that angels can't comprehend because they are unredeemable. Holy angels don't need to be redeemed and fallen angels can't be. And so there is a sense in which the revelation of God as merciful and gracious, as kind and loving and compassionate toward sinners is revealed to us in the face of Jesus Christ to a degree that even angels can't comprehend.

So Paul here is celebrating new covenant privilege, the vision of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, seeing the glory of God. What is the glory of God? Just who God is. That's the manifestation of God. We see God in Christ. God becomes clear to us in Jesus Christ. We come to see Him and to know Him, what a tremendous truth that is.

That not only is the point of our salvation but that becomes the process of our sanctification...sanctification for us is looking into the face of Jesus and seeing God revealed. And all the issues of life and all the struggles of life and all the dilemmas and troubles and problems of life, we go to Christ and we look to Him to find the one in whom we can trust and put our confidence and our hope. Whenever life doesn't give us what we want, whenever we're embattled and whenever we're beaten and hurt and troubled and beset by temptation and trial and questions and dilemmas that we can't answer, the place we go is to Christ and we look at Jesus Christ and in Him is God revealed. And we find there a sovereign, holy, powerful God who transcends our trouble, a God there who is the God of all comfort, a God who has the beginning written and the end written from before ever they began or ended, a God who is absolutely in control of everything for our good and His glory. And we find in that vision of God in the face of Jesus Christ the comfort we need. We find in Christ the God who loves and cares, a God who forgives, a God who picks up the wounded, who becomes a friend to the lonely. God manifests Himself in Christ and that manifestation is a confident trusting...is the manifestation of a God who we can trust and put our confidence in.

You say, "Well what did an Old Testament saint do if he couldn't look at Christ and see God revealed and know that there was a God he could trust in the deepest part of life? What did an Old Testament saint do?" Well, he couldn't see God revealed in the face of Christ but he still believed in God. He believed in the God that had been revealed to him as far as he had been revealed.

Let me give you an illustration of how an Old Testament believer would react to distress. Go back to the little book of Habakkuk, it's just five books back into the Old Testament, fifth book from the end, a minor prophet, somewhat obscure. Habakkuk prophesied in the time of Judah, prior to the judgment of God by the Chaldeans. And Habakkuk had a dilemma. Habakkuk the prophet had a real burden, his burden was that God would bring a revival, that God would bring spiritual renewal and spiritual awakening, that God would come to Judah or the people of Israel and that He would convert them and regenerate them, that He would bring back righteousness, that He would turn them from their sin because they were the covenant people. They were the people of God, the people of promise, the people for whom the kingdom was to be given, the people who were to bring the Messiah, the Savior. And everything looked bad. They were in sin and wickedness and disobedience.

And so, Habakkuk is found as this oracle opens praying in verse 2. "How long, O Lord, will I call for help and Thou wilt not hear?" And he's pleading with God to come in and deliver this people from their sin. "I cry out to Thee violence, yet Thou dost not save." Lord, why do You allow this? Why do

You tolerate a defecting people? Why do You tolerate violence everywhere and You don't step in and You don't bring righteousness and repentance? He's really praying here for a spiritual renewal. Then in verse 3, "Why dost Thou make me see iniquity and cause me to look on wickedness?" Lord, the society is getting worse and worse and more wicked and more iniquitous every moment. "Yes destruction and violence are before me and strife exists and contention arises. Therefore the law is ignored and justice is never upheld for the wicked surround the righteous, therefore justice comes out perverted." Boy, does that stuff sound familiar, sounds like reading the L.A. Times.

He says everything is gone wrong in this society. And this isn't just any old group of folks, this is the covenant people. So here is a prophet of God in a deep dilemma. I mean, he is in the bottom of the pit right now. He doesn't understand why God doesn't come in and turn His people toward righteousness. He has a real dilemma. And because he carries the heart of this people so much in his own heart, it's a heavy, heavy burden.

And then the Lord answers, and if he thinks he had a dilemma while he was praying, wait till he hears the answer. "Look among the nations, observe, be astonished, wonder." In other words, I'm going to...I'm going to act and what you're going to see you're going to be shocked at because I am doing something in your days and you wouldn't believe if you were told. I'm doing something that is so strange you wouldn't believe it. So I'm telling it to you first hand. "Behold, I am raising up the Chaldeans." What? You're lifting up the Chaldeans? That bitter and hasty nation, that fierce and impetuous people?

The Chaldeans were the most wretched, they were the scum of the earth. They were a cancerous sore on the body of humanity. They were a vile, pagan, godless people of whom it is said they never built a building without bearing a baby alive in the wall of it. They were a wicked perverted kind of people. What do You mean You're lifting them up? I'm asking You to lift up Your own people? "No, I'm raising up the Chaldeans, that fierce and impetuous who marched throughout the earth." They were a murderous marauding people. "To seize dwelling places which are not theirs, they are dreaded and feared, their justice and authority originate with themselves. There's no higher law than theirs. Their horses are swifter than leopards and keener than wolves in the evening. Their horsemen come galloping. Their horsemen come from afar. They fly like an eagle, swooping down to devour. All of them come for violence, their horde of faces moves forward. They collect captives like sand. They mock at kings and rulers are a laughing matter to them. They laugh at every fortress and heap up rubble to capture it. Then they will sweep through like the wind and pass on. But they will be held guilty, they whose strength is their god."

You know what He's saying? I'm going to answer your prayer. What I'm going to do is bring the Chaldeans to judge Judah. Well that's not what he wanted. He wanted a revival, instead he got a judgment. Now he's got a compounded dilemma, here's his dilemma. How can God use a worse nation to judge the covenant people? What's going on here? Not only is God not bringing a revival to

the covenant people, but He's using a more despicable, wretched people to be the judge of His own people. This is a major problem. He does not understand this, this is incomprehensible to him and he is on the quicksand of his confusion and he's sinking and he's looking for a place to find footing.

Where does he turn? Where is he going to go? Like any faithful Old Testament saint he turns to God. His faith kicks in and he begins to remember his God. That's the only place he can find to stand firm. So in verse 12 he says this, "Art Thou not from everlasting?" What is he saying? He's saying, "God, You're bigger than this problem. This is a problem in history. This is a temporal problem. This is a moment in time and You are eternal. O God, You're transcendent, You're way beyond this problem. You were here before the problem came, You'll be here after the problem is done. You're way beyond this." And he affirms in his mind that his God is transcendent and he finds a measure of comfort and a measure of hope and a measure of security in the fact that his God is much bigger than this problem.

And then he says, "O Lord," and that indicates His sovereignty. Not only is God transcendent but God is sovereign and when he says "Lord" he is saying You're in charge, You are the absolute ruler, nothing is outside Your permission. This fits within Your sovereign purpose." And then he says, "My God, my holy one," and here he affirms God's righteousness. God would never do anything that was wrong. God is above and beyond this problem. God is sovereign over this problem. And whatever God is doing is right because He is a holy God. And then he says, "We will not die." Why does he say that? What does he mean by that? He means that God is a faithful God, God said He would never destroy His people. He would never abandon His people. He would bring them the promise and they won't die. And so he affirms God's faithfulness.

Here is a man in a serious dilemma, a dilemma that is racking his mind and racking his heart to a severe degree, as I'll point out in a moment, so much so that if you look over at chapter 3 he says in verse 16, "My inward parts trembled at the sound, my lips quivered, decay enters my bones, in my place I tremble because I must wait quietly for the day of distress." He says I'm shaking, I'm rattling, my knees are banging together, my bones are decaying. I am a wreck. This is severe distress. This is what somebody would call a breakdown, a severe emotional breakdown.

And where does he go in the midst of this tremendous dilemma? He begins to recite the things he knows are true about God. "God, You are beyond this problem. God, You are sovereign over this problem. God, You are absolutely righteous and whatever You're doing is the right thing to do. And, God, You are faithful and You will not destroy us. O Lord, I see it, You've appointed them to judge. O Thou, O rock, You've established them to correct. I see, Your eyes are too pure to approve the evil of our people. You can't look on wickedness with favor. I understand, You are a holy God, You are a faithful God, You are a sovereign God, You are a transcendent God."

And all he's doing, his faith is reaching out to grasp what he knows is true about God. Now what I'm pointing out is this. What does an Old Testament saint do when he hits the bottom, when he gets into the unsolvable problem and the dilemma that he can't really resolve? He turns to his God and he looks for a vision of God. That's what Isaiah did. God comes to Isaiah and says the same thing, "I'm going to destroy the people. I'm going to punish them, I'm going to wipe them out. I'm going to send an army in there." He describes in Isaiah chapter 5 the most fierce frightening army is going to come in and just destroy Judah. And Isaiah is in shock. And what does he do? Chapter 6, he makes a bee-line for the temple and he goes into the temple and why is he at the temple? Who lives there? Who is there? God is there. He goes to the temple because he desperately needs to check in with God. Are You still in charge? Are You still on the throne? What is going on? Your people have defected. They have fallen into iniquity after iniquity after iniquity after iniquity. They're in to grasping materialism, drunken pleasures, seeking moral perversion. And it's all listed in the fifth chapter. And You're going to come in and destroy them all. What is going on?

And he gets a vision of God. And he sees God high and lifted up. What does that mean? God is sovereign. He sees His glory everywhere. God is transcendent. He hears the angels,

"Holy, holy, holy," God is holy. And he gets a vision. Again he is reminded of the character of his God or the glory of his God which is simply the sum of His character.

So an Old Testament saint in the midst of a dilemma pursued a vision of God in which he would be assured by what he knew to be true about God. And, in fact, in chapter 2 of Habakkuk and verse 4, Habakkuk sums up a statement that becomes a byword for Paul in the New Testament when he says, "The righteous will live by his faith." You can't always live by sight, believe me. Paul said we walk by faith and not by sight, 2 Corinthians 5. And here Habakkuk says the just, the righteous will live by faith, I'm just going to trust God. My God is a faithful God. My God is a holy God. My God is a sovereign God. My God is a transcendent God. So go to chapter 3 verse 17, he says if the whole world goes nuts, if the whole world goes crazy, if the fig tree doesn't blossom and there's no fruit on the vines and the olive trees all fail and the fields produce no food and the flock is cut off from the fold and there's no cattle in the stalls...in other words, if everything, he's in an agricultural agrarian kind of society and this is life for them, if all that we know we can count on in life unravels, I will still rejoice in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation, I will trust my God. And then he says, "The Lord God is my strength. And He has made my feet like hinds' feet," a hinds is a kind of goat. "He made my feet like the feet of a mountain goat and I can walk on the precipices." He found his sure footing in a vision of his God. He simply recited what he knew to be true about God.

Now you'll find that same pattern of behavior all through the Psalms. The psalmist gets himself in a dilemma and what does he do? He starts to recite what he knows to be true about God. One's understanding of God is the foundation of all living and God is never better understood than when He

reveals Himself in the face of Jesus Christ, right? Never do you see God more clearly than you see Him in Jesus Christ. What a privilege for us to go beyond Habakkuk, to go beyond the psalmist, to go beyond the prophets and have a vision of God in the face of Jesus Christ that transcends every other vision. When Jesus said, "If you've seen Me you've seen the Father," He summed up the essence of new covenant privilege. As the writer of Hebrews says, "We see Jesus. And when we see Him He is the radiance of God's glory in the exact representation of His person." And we saw Him first at salvation, we saw the glory of God in the face of Jesus at salvation and we continue to look into His face as we are sanctified.

The Christian life for us then becomes what it was for Paul as we ended last week, "For to me to live is Christ." We live our lives then according to Hebrews 12:2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. So our whole life is looking at the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. You just continue to look to Christ, see His glory revealed on the pages of Scripture, study the New Testament and see Jesus revealed. In the gospels is the story of His life and His works. In all the rest of the epistles is the meaning of His life and His works expounded. And in the book of Revelation, His glorious return. It's all about Christ. We who are new covenant Christians, new covenant believers look into the face of Jesus revealed in the mirror of Scripture and see clearly the glory of God there. What a privilege.

Paul needed that vision. As you remember, and I don't want to say too much about it cause we've done that, but Paul needed that vision because he was struggling at this time with some painful things. You can go back to 2 Corinthians 4. And the Apostle Paul was going through these terrible trying times. He was being assassinated as to his character. He was on the edge of death every day from persecutors. Jews wanted him dead. Gentiles wanted him dead. He had a terrible disappointment as the churches which he loved defected away from him and from the truth. The man's heart was grieved and broken as he writes this letter. In fact, down in chapter 4 verse 8 he says, "We are afflicted every way but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down and not destroyed. We always carry about in the body the dying of Jesus." I mean, life is really pretty...pretty miserable. Relationships are a disappointment to him. The response of people to his preaching is a disappointment. Physical treatment is brutal. We've gone through the catalog of that, the litany of that before so I won't do it again. It's a very, very trying time.

And it's at this time of all times in his life when he needs a clear vision of the New Testament glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. And so, what he says here is right out of his own heart and right out of his own experience. Here was a man who never took his eyes off Jesus Christ. He could say, "Be ye followers of me as I am of Christ," he never stopped following Christ. "That I may know Him," was his prayer, "and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death that I might attain unto the resurrection from the dead." He never took his eyes off Christ. "This one thing I do, forget the things that are behind, I press toward that goal and that goal is Christ." He lived his life that way.

Now when you do that, when you live your life beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus, first of all, we saw it's a clarifying look, didn't we, in verse 18? We have an unveiled face and we see the glory of God clearly revealed in Jesus Christ. His attributes are displayed in Christ and they give us confidence and hope and courage. Secondly, it's a transforming look. We saw that in verse 18. As we look into the face of Christ unveiled we are being transformed into His very likeness, we become like Him. And thirdly, we saw it's a strengthening look. The end of verse 1, "We do not lose heart." In other words, as you look into the face of Jesus it is such an encouraging thing, it is such a glorious privilege that nothing could cause you to become discouraged. Paul says it's impossible for me to surrender to all the pressure, to all of the difficulties of life when I have such a privilege. And then we said fourthly it is a purifying look. Verse 2, Paul says, "We have renounced the things hidden because of shame," that's the secret sins of one's life that are in the hiding place because of shame. We've renounced that sort of undercurrent of wickedness, that hidden shame that is characteristic of unregenerate people. And he says we have renounced walking in craftiness, being hypocritical, being a deceiver. And Paul says when you look at the face of Jesus it's a purifying look cause you're seeing the holiness of God revealed. And when you see the holiness of God you become very aware of your sin.

Remember Isaiah, he saw the holiness of God...Holy, holy, holy...the angels said and he knew he was in the presence of a holy God. And immediately what was he conscious of? He said, "I am a man of unclean lips." What do you mean by that? I'm a sinner. Why would he express it that way? Because it's out of the mouth that the heart speaks, right? His sin was manifested in what he said and he could see his sinfulness there. And he was aware of his sin. Whenever you're in the presence of a holy God you're aware of your sin. Whenever you gaze at the face of Jesus, sin is revealed under the searchlight of His look.

Peter walks on to the shore, Jesus has just revealed Himself as God by controlling all the fish, Jesus looks into the face of Peter and Peter's immediate response is, "Depart from me, O Lord," Luke 5:8, "for I am a sinful man." Get out of my presence, I can't stand the intimidation. Any look at the face of Jesus is a convicting, purging, purifying look. And that's what he's saying here. When I looked in the face of Jesus on the Damascus road, from that point on I renounced the secret life of sin and the crafty deceitful ways of my wicked heart. One who gazes into the face of Jesus hates sin. And that would be true in the sanctifying process as well. If a person can tolerate sin in their life, they're not really cultivating that look in the face of Jesus. When we look at His face all the time, sin is ugly to us.

And then fifthly we said it's a truth-loving look. When you look into the face of Jesus, you become enamored with the truth. Paul says here that he renounced certain things and one of them was adulterating the Word of God. He would not do what the false apostles and false teachers did and that is manipulate people by the misuse of Scripture as 2:17 says, huckstering the Word of God, peddling it in insincerity to achieve your own ends. But he turned from that and turned to the

manifestation of truth. One thing about a person who really looks into the face of Jesus, we could say it another way, one thing about a person who is really close to Christ, they have a passion for truth...they have a passion for truth. I don't understand people who don't have a passion for truth. I can't comprehend that. The only answer, the only explanation I have for it is that they're not obviously very close to Christ because if you look into the face of Jesus who is the truth you're going to have a love for the truth.

I look back in my life to when I was a freshman in college and I had been sent to a certain college by my father and really not the place I wanted to go. I was wanting into professional athletic career, collegiate athletics were important to me on the path to that. I thought I was going to be a football player or a baseball player. And I wound up in a school and it wasn't a very happy experience and I had a terrible car accident on the way home. I was thrown out of the car, as some of you know, and slid 125 yards on my back down the middle of the highway. Wound up three months in bed.

And that was all in the providence of God because in those three months in bed I for really the first time in my life I began to look at the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. I remember I had a little New Testament and I had nothing to do, I had to lay on my stomach all the time until all those wounds were exposed to the air and could heal that were all over my back. Everyplace, my elbows were all scraped off and my knees and my ankles and my feet and my hands and everything that could have touched that highway as I was going down there. And I was lying there in a very strange position and I was just reading the Scripture. And it was at that point that I began really for the first time to look into the face of Jesus Christ. And I became literally passionately committed to the truth.

I can remember to this day saying, "I must understand what this means, I don't understand this." And I began to reach for books and ask people to bring me books so that I could come to an understanding of what the Word of God meant. There I was, an 18-year-old kid and God let me look into the face of Jesus because I couldn't look anywhere else. I couldn't get over on my back. I couldn't even lie on my side. And I was sort of...that was the only way God could get me fixed on anything. And there I was looking into the face of Jesus and that's what began to cultivate in my heart the love of the truth.

And when I changed schools and participated in collegiate athletics and had the opportunity to sign a baseball contract and a football contract, I had no more interest in doing that than some job I had never thought of. That was completely remote. I said, "Absolutely not, I have to go to seminary." And if somebody said to me, "Why? Do you want to be a preacher?" I would have said no, I need to go to seminary because I need to understand the Scripture. I was never driven by a desire to preach. I was driven by a desire to understand. And to this day the preaching part of this deal is work. You don't think this is work, this is work. The fun is before I ever get here. The passion is the discovery. And in all honesty, sometimes I have to look at Sunday as, "Boy, you know, this is going to be a

strenuous day and I've got to go to work," but I never look at the process of discovery like that. It's how fast can I get there. That's the passion for the truth. I think it's somehow linked, and I don't think everybody needs to be as sort of fanatical about it as I am, that all ties in to my giftedness and what God wants me to do and how He motivates me, but I cannot comprehend a believer who is not interested in learning the truth, other than to assume that they're not looking into the face of Jesus Christ because that's a truth-loving look. When you look into that face you're going to find in there a passion for truth in the one who is the truth. Truth takes on tremendous proportions.

When I even...when I see ministers who spend little time in study, I don't conclude that they don't have an interest in the Bible, I conclude they don't have an interest in God. When I see somebody who is content with a minimal understanding of the Word of God, that's a spiritual betrayal. That's a spiritual issue. There are people who come here, and you're some of them, you'll come here and then you don't come here...I'm always amazed. I talked to somebody this week who said, "Well, I've been going to your church," told me a number of years they had been going. That's interesting. "Well I just...I don't always come." My response to that is, "Well, we're just here to teach the truth, how important is it to you?" That's kind of a spiritual thermometer on someone. If you can take the truth or leave it, then that's a commentary on the diligence with which you pursue the face of Christ. Because when you look into His face you'll have a passion for the truth. I don't understand people who aren't devoted to the truth.

Well let's come to the point for today. Can you believe it? We haven't even gotten there. Number six, this is where we left off and we'll at least look at one verse. Verse 3, "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing." Now I have a lot to say about that.

Listen, the sixth point is this, it is a limiting look...it is a limiting look. It is true, not everybody has the veil taken off. Is that not true? Not everybody. All the more reason you ought to be privileged, right? Not everybody has the privilege of looking into the face of Jesus. Most of the whole-wide world doesn't. And that's how it is. It's a narrow way and few there be that find it.

You say, "Why does Paul bring this up?" I'll tell you why. Now listen carefully to what I'm going to say. It is important to remember that Paul was being criticized by false apostles in Corinth. And one of the things they were criticizing Paul for was that he offended everybody. Their criticism of Paul was, "You really turn people off, you're too plain, you're too straightforward, you're message is too open, your emphasis on the cross..." And he says, "I preach Christ and Him crucified and I'm determined to know nothing among you except Christ and Him crucified," 1 Corinthians he says in chapter 2. "Look," he says, "I don't have any other message. I don't come to you with words of human wisdom. I don't come to you with cute and clever sayings. I'm not coming to you in some oratorical ingenuity. I just preach the simple straightforward message of Jesus Christ on the cross which is a message of sin and judgment and repentance and salvation. It's a straightforward message."

And the critics were saying, "You see, Paul, you just turn off people. Sure there's a group of people who come and believe, but look, most of the city of Corinth rejected you. And look at you, Paul, every town you go to, the first thing you have to find out is what the jail is like, not the hotel, because you're never going to be in the hotel, you're going to be in the jail. You know that. As soon as you go to the synagogue they're going to despise you and hate you. When you leave the synagogue and preach to the Gentiles, they're going to despise you and they're going to hate you. Paul, there's something wrong with your methodology. You're not effective." They're saying his gospel preaching was offensive and ineffective. He didn't have a good strategy. He just made people angry and hostile and surfaced all their animosity. In fact, they would sometimes try to kill him and stone him and whip him and beat him with rods and throw him in jail and put him in stocks. Sometimes he was, by God's grace, delivered from all of that. When he would go into town, riots would start, whole riots, the whole town would riot. I mean, you talk about a straightforward message, that was Paul. He went right at it...sin, repentance, or judgment and the cross and forgiveness and heaven. And these guys were saying, "See, it's just not effective to just use that, look at the animosity. You're getting a bad name for Christianity. People are thinking Christians are just really sort of unkind, offensive people, you know, we've got to soften that deal down, Paul."

And we've got that same kind of thing here today. And Paul's answer to that is, "Look, if our gospel is veiled, the reason it's veiled is because the people are perishing. There's nothing wrong with the preacher and there's nothing with the message but there's something very wrong with the people."

We have contemporary critics today who say, "You know, we can't be offensive now, we've got to...we've got to be more subtle and more clever and we can't just be going around preaching hell and damnation and judgment and sin and repentance and the cross." These contemporary critics, by the way, have been very successful and they have replaced preaching the Word with all kinds of things, haven't they, in the church? Very successful.

Roy Clements(?) who pastors a church in Cambridge, England writes this, "A preacher is a herald and a herald is precisely a one-way communicator. He does not dialogue. He announces a message he has received. But if our communication experts are correct, announcements do not change anybody." Then Clements asks, "Where is the flaw in their reasoning? It lies...he says...in their theology. For people who argue like this are assuming...listen to this...that Christian preaching is analogous to a marketing exercise. You have your product, the gospel. You have your consumers, the people. And the preacher is the salesman. It is his job to overcome consumer resistance and persuade people to buy."

Well, Clements goes on, "According to Paul there's only one very simple but overwhelming reason why that analogy is not a good one. And it is this. The preacher doesn't overcome consumer resistance. He can't. He can't. Consumer resistance is far too large for any preacher to overcome."

And then he writes, "All the preacher does is to expose that resistance."

Hum...."The preacher...he writes...doesn't save anybody. Evangelism has to be proclamation not because it's a marketing concept but because preaching is a sacrament of divine sovereignty." It's a great statement.

Now what is all that saying? It's saying this, the gospel is not a product, I'm not a salesman and you're not a consumer. I am a preacher because that's what the Bible tells me to do. I preach the Bible because that's the message I'm given to preach. And there's nothing that I can do in my own power, persuasive power, whatever that power might be, my oratorical ability, the force with which I preach that is in any way, shape or form going to release you from the bonds of sin. I can't persuade you. I cannot overcome consumer resistance. You know what? You are dead in trespasses and sins and you are blind. And I can't change any of that. And the natural man understandeth not the things of God, they are foolishness to him. In fact, the preaching of the cross is to them that perish...what?...foolishness. I can't do anything about that. I'm just a human being. I can't do anything about that. But you know what I can do? I can surface your consumer resistance.

You know, you might not even know you've got it until you get here. And that's how we work it, see. The first part of the service is Clayton, everybody likes Clayton. Everybody loves the music, everybody likes it. Then I get up. And what is my job? To overcome consumer resistance? No, to surface it. I want that sinner out there to say to himself, "I don't like that," and come to reality about his resistance. Because that's the path of conviction, isn't it? And then the second thing I can do, after surfacing the resistance, is to present the facts of the gospel. And if the Spirit of God chooses to take the conviction of sin and the truth of the gospel and regenerate as a sovereign work, then sacrament...then the sacrament of preaching has fit its purpose. That's what he's saying and that's exactly right.

So, you say, "What you're telling me is that you want to make a sinner resistant." That's exactly right. Even if you're a Christian, I want you to come here and I want to say things that are going to make you say, "I don't like that. Why did I come here? I don't like what he just said." And the reason you're saying that is because you don't like the intimidation of the truth against your sin. That's a service that I have to render to you and to me. You think you've got it bad, I had to prepare all this. I've got to go through all of this a lot more than you do and then I have to listen to every word I say while you're tuning out and in. Don't kid me, I know that. Why do you think I have long reviews?

The idea that cleverness or the idea that methodology or the idea that technique can break the bonds of sin and bring the sinner to salvation would do nothing but exalt the preacher and make a hero out of the preacher. You can't save yourself and I can't save you. And I'm not selling you a...the gospel like some salesman who is clever enough at what I sell to get you to buy. I can only do two things. I can surface your resistance by bringing truth that the Spirit uses to convict you. And then I can give

you the truth by which God can change your heart. But He alone has to do the changing.

So much modern evangelism is built on the heretical idea that anyone...listen to this...that anyone can and will respond to the gospel if it's presented in a clever enough way. And that is not true, that is heresy. The word of the cross is to those who are perishing...what?...foolishness and it always will be foolishness unless they are the ones being saved by God to whom it is the power of God. And so, there's a massive theological biblical error at the foundation of contemporary evangelism that misunderstands the whole issue of what is going on. I can't save anybody. The greatest orator in the world couldn't save anybody. The most persuasive speaker couldn't save anybody. Only God saves. Go back to Titus 3:4 to 7, "God saved us," it says. Only He can save. All I can do is bring the truth against the sinner so that it surfaces his resistance and he has to deal with that and then bring the truth of the message of righteousness and healing and restoration and all of that so that the Spirit of God can enact that into his life. That's it.

All then, listen carefully, that is required of the preacher is clarity. We're not called to persuade people that the clever innovative speech we give should be followed. We simply persuade them of truth. We just clarify truth. Then we stand by and let a sovereign God open blind eyes as He sees fit. And even as a believer, my job is to bring you the truth about any given issue of life so that the Spirit of God can quicken that truth and accomplish in your heart what He will.

Now once I deviate from the truth, I have really convoluted this process, right? If people are being awakened, if they are being saved, then the truth will be the power of God. If they are perishing, it's going to be foolishness to them and it's going to be veiled and they're not going to see it. You know what this says? And this is a very important truth. What it says is that it's not the skill of the preacher or the skill of the witness, it's the condition of the hearer. Isn't it? People say, "Well I don't know if I should witness, I don't know very much." That doesn't matter. Any simple presentation of the gospel that makes the gospel clear, God can use, right? The humblest preacher preaching the humblest message a one on a one-to-ten scale, if it is the truth, God will use. And the humblest Christian with the most simple clear knowledge of the gospel, presenting it to a friend or a relative or someone he or she meets can be used by God mightily as an instrument by which that person is revealed, because all God requires is the truth. It's not the cleverness of the one who presents it.

Now let's go to verse 3, follow this, a couple of more thoughts. "Even if our gospel is veiled." See, they were saying, "O Paul, don't you realize nobody accepts this, nobody listens to this." And he says, "If it is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing." It's their problem. And they were saying, "Well, Paul, you're irrelevant, you're antiquated. The gospel is being scorned by people." Just read the book of Acts, they were right. I mean, there's no question it was being scorned. But Paul is saying, it's not due to a defect in the preacher or the message, don't change the message, don't stop the preaching. That's what God ordained that by the preaching of the cross, that foolish preaching He would save. And by simple witnessing to the gospel, He would save. It isn't the problem of the

message. It isn't the problem of the messenger. It's the problem of the hearer.

Let me give you the best illustration of this in all the New Testament. It's the parable of the soils in Matthew 13...it's the parable of the soils. Do you remember that there were four kinds of...well, actually, we'll just work with four, there was the hard ground, the weedy ground and the stony ground and then the good ground, right? Matthew 13? And a sower went out to sow and he throws his seed. Some of it lands on hard ground, can't penetrate, so the birds take it and it's gone, nothing grows. Some lands on weedy ground and the weeds are in there and they choke out the good seed and nothing grows. Some lands on rocky soil and it can't grow because of the rocks stop the roots and it dies, nothing grows. Some gets in to good ground and it grows. What do you have there? People throwing the gospel seed and the issue there is that when it hits good ground you get a conversion. It doesn't say anything about the skill of the sower, does it? It doesn't say anything about the seed. It just talks about the soil.

Roy Clements has a comment on this that I think is really insightful. Listen to what he writes. "It is such an important point. Jesus made it too in the parable of the sower. A man went out and sowed the seed, said Jesus. Some fell in the path, some fell on the stones, some fell among the weeds and some fell on good ground. Notice the way He structures His story. One sower, four soils...now listen to this...notice this, the sowing of the seed reveals differences of receptivity in the soil." You see that? The soil is the issue. "But if our modern-day experts were to tell the parable, they would tell it differently." Here's what Clements, "There would be one homogeneous soil and four different sowers. Sower one would have a particular evangelistic technique but it would be no good. Sower two would use his method but that wouldn't work either. Sower three would next use his particular evangelistic style and unfortunately it would have very little effect. And finally there would be sower four who had his technique right and he alone would obtain a harvest."

Now that is the modern church growth movement parable of the sower, but it's not the biblical one. It is not the technique of the sower that is the issue, it is the condition of the...what?...of the soil. And only God deals with soil. Only God can plow and clean the heart. You understand that? So all I can do is preach truth which surfaces consumer resistance, show the consumer the level of his resistance and let the Spirit of God use that to convict his heart and then clearly present the truth so that he can move to the path of righteousness under the power of God. That at conversion and that in the sanctification process in the Christian's life is the same process. Nothing wrong...nothing wrong with the message, nothing wrong with the means.

I years ago use to illustrate this by saying if you took somebody to a Bach music concert by a great chamber orchestra, playing the greatest of Bach and you took this person and they sat through this whole deal. And on the way out you said, "What do you think of that?" And they said, "Ah, it's pretty crummy stuff, doesn't show much music ability either in the writing of it or the performing of it. I wasn't impressed at all. Personally, I prefer Metalica...or the Rolling Stones, actually, or whatever."

You would say, "What?" Listen that would not be a commentary on Bach, that would be a commentary on the Bozo that made a statement like that, right? What kind of a guy would say that? Somebody who has no appreciation of what should be appreciated. The problem is not with the music...if you take the guy to the, you know, the Hermitage in St. Petersburg, Russia and you take him through these incredible paintings that just are staggering or to the Louvre, or like Patricia and I have walked through this beautiful little gallery in London where you can see Rembrandt, and somebody says, "Ah, I'm not into that, really I prefer the Snoopy cartoons," you know, or whatever, I don't know. Or you say, "Well, look, you really don't like this art, let me take a spray can and I'll fix it so you like it," you know. You wouldn't put spray can on a Rembrandt, hopefully. You would say, "Well this guy has no sense, this guy is a fool," right?

Well the same thing is true with regard to the gospel. You don't say we've got a world of fools so let's all act like fools. The problem is not with the message and the problem is not with the messenger, the problem is with the hearer. And unless, as verse 6 says, unless God who said light shall shine out of darkness when He created the world, unless that same God shines in the heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ, that person is never going to see, right? It's all a work of God.

The gospel is not on trial...anymore than the music or the art was. Neither is preaching. Paul says it is veiled to them because it is veiled in them. And it is veiled because they are perishing. They're perishing. They're headed for inevitable doom, which is another way to define their fallenness, their deadness, their spiritual blindness. They understand not the things of God, they're foolishness to them, 1 Corinthians 2:14. The sun, however, is no less bright because blind people can't see it. The music is no less beautiful because deaf people can't hear it. Sinners are veiled and they are on the road to damnation and you can't educate the into Christianity and you can't reason them into Christianity and you can't ceremonially induct them into Christianity by sprinkling water on them or any other kind of ceremony. The issue of blindness is so deep and so profound that only God can dispel it and He chooses to dispel it at the preaching of truth. Faith comes by hearing a message about Christ, Romans 10 says. and if they don't respond to the gospel, don't change the gospel, realize there's a reason for their blindness. The cheap peddlers adulterating the Word of God with their supposed secret knowledge and clever manipulation, mocking the clear simplicity of Paul's preaching couldn't halt the perishing. Only God can halt the perishing.

And when you look at the face of Jesus then, just to summarize this point, will you realize it's a limiting look? The only way you or anybody else will ever be able to look into the face of Jesus Christ is when they respond to the pure gospel. So from that you need to conclude that, that if I'm genuinely looking into the face of Christ then my life is going to be limiting...is going to be limited to the proclamation of the very truth that gave me that privilege, right? It's a very confining thing. I suppose I could do a lot of things. I remember having lunch one time with Otis Chandler who owns the L.A. Times and he said, "You know, John," he said, "you have a lot of influence and you have radio and

you have all this..." he says, "why don't you ever address yourself and give your opinion on the issues of our time, the social issues and the cultural issues and the political issues, why don't you...why don't you ever give your opinion on those things?" And my first response was, "Well, Otis, do you need another opinion? You want another opinion? Are you kidding? Do you really want another person's opinion?" And he said, "Well, come to think of it..." and he kind of smiled. And I said, "I'm not here to give an opinion." I said, "I have a very limited life...I have a very, very narrow band that I try to fulfill in this world and it's very limited. I am responsible simply to speak the truth of God in order that God might accomplish His purpose through His truth, that's all."

And when you look into the face of Jesus Christ, it's a very limiting look. You realize that that look is all about knowing Christ which is all about understanding the simplicity of the gospel. And from a standpoint of...you say, "Well, I'm a Christian, how does it relate to me?" Simply this, if you come here as a Christian, what you're going to hear is that same limited perspective all the time, just God's Word, God's Word, God's Word, God's Word addressing the issues of your life, hoping to surface consumer resistance and bring you to the place of conviction, repentance and then further down the path of sanctification, right? That's what it's about. It's a very limiting look. Once you see it, once you look into the face of Jesus Christ, your life becomes very circumscribed and everything else fades away and you're committed completely to that one thing...the proclamation of divine truth.

Well, there's a lot more to say but we'll have to wait for that. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for our time this morning and what a joy and a privilege it is to find in the Word of God that our life is exposed. We thank You that You do convict us of sin. O Lord, it's been convicting this morning just to talk about the fact that if we look into Your face we'll love the truth. If we look into Your face we'll hate sin. If we look into Your face we'll limit our lives, to constantly speaking Your truth before non-Christians and Christians alike in order to lead them to righteousness. I just pray, Father, that You'll purify us as we look at the face of Christ, that You'll give us greater love for the truth and that You'll confine and limit our lives to that which alone can be the instrument by which You spiritually transform. Father, thank You for the privilege of being a new covenant believer, seeing things that angels never saw and never will see and looking into the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and we look with thankfulness until that day when we will see Him face to face and know as we are known. Father, be with us now to energize us to the degree that we can serve You in a manner which will bring You praise. And we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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