The Glorious Gospel
TM11-1

Truth Matters 2011

Divine truth is the most important thing there is. By it we are saved, sanctified, and given the hope of glory. By it we understand what God requires of us, and therefore we understand what we are to obey, what we are to be. That is the path of blessing in life and reward in eternity. So truth matters more than anything else. God is true. Scripture says, “Let every man be a liar, but God is true.” God cannot lie. Christ is The Truth. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. And Scripture, said Jesus, in John 17:17, is truth.

We are here to worship in truth, as Jesus instructed us, to believe the truth, to speak the truth, to meditate on the truth, to understand the truth, to walk in the truth, to love the truth, delight in the truth and obey the truth. It’s all about the truth. In fact, we might be better named Truth Community Church because that’s really at the very heart of it. Truth is the way things really are. That’s what truth is. It is reality, and God is the author of the truth. He has determined what is true and He is the revealer of what is true.

Now the Bible, of course, is true. It contains the truth about the true God, the true Christ, and the true Holy Spirit. It contains everything we need to know, and it is an inexhaustible resource for the truth.

I spent 43 years going through the New Testament verse by verse, finished up in the gospel of Mark. A couple of years in Mark. After ten years in Luke, eight years in Matthew, a few years in John, and the rest of the New Testament, and my only regret is that I went too fast. I missed too much. There’s so much more there. I could go back over it again and again and again and never exhaust the truth that is there.

But, since we only have four days together, a portion of today and the days that remain until the Lord’s Day, we had to sort of land on some aspect of the truth. Those of you who are at all familiar with me know that a number of years ago I wrote a book called *The Gospel According to Jesus*. This was a real revelation to me, and I don’t want to give you a lot of history, because you can read about that. But when I came out of seminary, I had been trained very well in seminary to handle the Word of God, Greek and Hebrew, and theology and church history and all of those things. I knew how to handle the Word of God, and I thought I knew what the issues were going to be. I was prepared to give an apologetic in a defense for the truth and in a number of battles that were waging at the time. But what I never understood, never had an inkling, would be that I would have to spend a great portion of my ministry trying to make the gospel clear to the church; not so much to the world, but to a very confused church.

And so I wrote *The Gospel According to Jesus*. Followed it up a few years later with *The Gospel According to The Apostles*, which answered a lot of the arguments that were thrown at me when I wrote *The Gospel According to Jesus*. And then I slipped in a few other books like *The Truth War*, things like that to go back to the truth of the gospel, and a few other books that addressed the issue

of the gospel. But there's one other book that I haven't yet written, but I'm going to do that. It will be the third in the trilogy and it's *The Gospel According to Paul*, *The Gospel According to Paul*. If you flipped open your program, you notice that's the theme for the week. That's what I've been assigned by the higher powers at Grace to You. And it's a worthy subject because *The Gospel According to Paul* is under attack. You probably have heard about something called "The New Perspective on Paul?" It is a rejection of what Paul wrote in the New Testament and what the church has understood that he wrote through all its life since the Gospel was clearly recovered in the time of the Reformation.

The Gospel According to Paul is under assault. I'm not going to deal with the error; there's no point in that. If I give you the truth, you can expose the error yourself. But we are going to look at The Gospel According to Paul, so we're going to stick with him. We've got plenty of material to work with. We've got a lot of him in the book of Acts, and then we've got 13 epistles that he wrote. So there's much more than we can ever get to with regard to Paul.

He refers to the gospel as the gospel of God. He calls it the gospel of the blessed God. He calls it the gospel of His Son, the gospel of Christ, the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. He calls it the gospel of Grace. He calls it the gospel of Peace. He calls it the gospel of our Salvation, but most wonderfully he calls it "my gospel." And then he extends that and calls it "our gospel." What was his gospel? What is our gospel? What is the gospel of grace, the gospel of peace, the gospel of salvation, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel of the blessed God? What is it? We need to know what it is because it is that gospel which we proclaim.

In familiar words to all of us, Romans chapter 1, Paul says in verse 15, "I am eager to preach the gospel. I'm not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes, the Jew first, and then the Greek." That's chronological. So what is it that he preached? What is it that he was eager to preach? What is it that he was obligated to preach? What is this gospel?

Looking at it negatively for a moment, you might open your Bible to Galatians chapter 1, and this is just by way of a brief introduction here. Galatians chapter 1 and verse 6 gives us a warning of the deadly danger of distorting the gospel. Galatians 1 verse 6, "I'm amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ for a different gospel, a different gospel."

He says, "I am amazed." The Greek verb there is *thaumazō*. It is used very often in the gospels of people marveling over the inexplicable miracles of Jesus. Paul literally finds it incredible that someone would abandon the gospel, or be drawn to a different gospel. Paul uses that word *thaumazō* for two realities. One of them is here, and the other one is in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, where he describes the return of Jesus Christ, and what a marvel and a wonder that's going to be when He comes in flaming fire and wreaks vengeance on those who obey not the gospel.

So he holds this word pretty close to the vest, just letting it out twice. I'm amazed that you're so quickly deserting, defecting from Him who called you. Here we're talking about an effectual call, an internal call, a real call, a call to salvation. So what we're talking about here is people who are called effectually, that is, converted people who are being pulled away and seduced by another gospel. They're being enamored. They're being sort of mentally titillated by another gospel. And then he says in verse 7, which is really not another because there is no other gospel; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. And then this warning, "Even if we, we – " that

plural pronoun that he likes to use when he refers to himself because it's a more humble way to refer to yourself, " - we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be anathema." Damned, devoted to destruction. Used also in 1 Corinthians 16:22, "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be damned."

So the most important truth of all truth and all truth is important, all truth matters, but the most important truth is the gospel, the gospel matters most. So we're to look at Paul's gospel, which is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel of the blessed God. It is the gospel of peace. It is the gospel of grace. It is the gospel of salvation.

Now I'm going to try to break this down over the days that we have together. Tonight I'm going to talk to you about the glory of the gospel, the glorious gospel. Tomorrow morning I'm going to do two sessions on the same theme, on the satisfying gospel. In the first hour, we'll talk about how the gospel satisfies the sinner. In the second hour, we'll talk about how the gospel satisfies God, and then tomorrow night we're going to talk about the reconciling gospel. And then Saturday morning, going to do a double session, and then on Sunday morning, we're going to talk about the humbling gospel, the humbling gospel. And then Sunday night, I think we're going to do a Q&A on Sunday night together, and try to get all the loose ends tied up. We'll have a great time.

All right, for this session then, we're going to look at the glory of the gospel, and I just want you to know that I'm not trying to lay this out in some kind of chronological order. These are sort of impulses that come into my heart as I think about the gospel, and I can't get away from one particular passage which lives in my soul all the time. I confess to you that I wouldn't really care what the theme was, I'd preach on this chapter anyway. Okay? I'd figure out a way to get there from wherever you put me. All roads lead to 2 Corinthians 4. So open your Bible to 2 Corinthians chapter 4.

I went through 2 Corinthians pretty late in my teaching ministry, and I'm so glad I did. If I had to try to preach the book of 2 Corinthians when I was a young pastor, I would never have been able to understand it. You have to have decades of being beaten up to even understand what Paul is going through in this. You have to have years and years of experience in ministry to understand his heart in this amazing epistle. And if you want to get the heart and soul of the apostle Paul, let me just suggest you do this, go buy the commentary on 2 Corinthians, and just read a chapter every day and you will know that man from the inside out because he tells you his heart in this incredible letter, 2 Corinthians 4.

And, you know, when you think about the gospel, I know you think about Galatians, you think about Romans, you think about Colossians and the passage we read. You might be thinking about other sermons that Paul preached in the book of Acts where the gospel is made clear. But you're going to find out that in the sessions that we have, we're going to be looking into the Corinthian letters on a number of occasions to find our understanding of the gospel. These are often overlooked in that regard.

Second Corinthians chapter 4 will give us insight into the glory of the gospel. Now the theme of 2 Corinthians is suffering, suffering. And this is a perfect entry point because it explains so much about the glory of the gospel. If you drop down to verse 4, you will see a phrase at the end of verse 4, "The gospel of the glory of Christ, the gospel of the glory of Christ." That's kind of our theme here for this opening session, the gospel of the glory of Christ. We're looking at the glory of the gospel. The glory of the gospel is a critical understanding. That is to say it's all surpassing importance. It's all

surpassing nature. It's compelling reality. It's unparalleled importance. The glory of the gospel is that which makes the gospel transcend everything else, all other truth, all other messages. And you have to understand that when I say 2 Corinthians is about suffering, the immediate question comes then as Paul chronicles his pain through this entire letter. Why do you expose yourself to all that suffering? And his answer is, the glory of the gospel because there is nothing like it, nothing that approaches it, nothing that touches it, nothing that ascends to its priority, its prominence, its importance. It is a transcendent message. It is an all-glorious message that has no equal. I think the reality of this is certainly missing in the evangelical church that I'm looking at today where the gospel is dragged down and cheapened.

When you look at the life of the apostle Paul, you see a life of suffering, right? There are lots of people today who have managed to have come up with a different gospel, which is not really a different gospel because there isn't a different gospel; but they've come up with a variation of the gospel which is no gospel so that they can eliminate the suffering to make the gospel acceptable, to take the offense out of it. Not Paul. His entire gospel ministry made people furious, angry, hostile, brutal, and he never tampered with the message.

When he came to the end of his life, as we hear his parting words, familiar words to us in his second letter to Timothy, he says this, chapter 4, "I'm ready. I'm already being poured out as a drink offering. The time of my departure has come." And you remember these words? "I have fought – " what? " - the good fight. I've fought the good fight." It was a battle from the beginning to the end, and you know how it ended for him? He placed his head on a block, an axe head flashed in the sun and severed his head from his body and he was with his Lord. Prior to that, he had been in prison repeatedly. When he went into a town, he didn't ask what the hotel was like. He asked what the jail was like because they knew that's where he'd be staying. "What kind of a jail do they have in this town?"

And somebody probably came along to him, time and time again, and said, "Paul, look, why don't you ease up? You really don't have to end up in the jail in every town, or being run out of town. Do you have to live your whole life with people plotting to kill you? The plots of the Jews, the plots of the Gentiles, plots of the populous, and plots of the leadership? It really doesn't have to be that way. You can make some adjustments."

How did he endure all this? The answer is that he understood the glory of the gospel. Now, I want you to look at chapter 4, and I know I go really slowly normally and cover a few verses. I remember when I started the book of Romans. Our people were excited. They all came, and Romans begins this way, "Paul," so my first sermon was Paul. Then they thought, "Oh my goodness. He's going to go one word at a time. Sheesh!" So I know that I very often kind of poke along and digging down, but we're going to cover some broader chapters together.

I want you to see how this chapter is bracketed. In verse 1 he says at the end of verse 1, "We do not lose heart. We do not lose heart." Go down to verse 16. Now you're coming to the end of the chapter, he says it again, "Therefore we do not lose heart." That's really important. Unfortunately that's not the best translation. It's a verb in the Greek, *egkakeō* and *kakeō* is the root of the word *kakos* which is evil. It's to act badly. It's to do evil. Paul says, "Look, I have had plenty of temptation to do evil, to act badly by deviating from the truth of the gospel to make my life easier. I don't do that. I don't do that."

Follow the litany, chapter 1 verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the

Father of mercies, the God of all comfort who comforts us in all our affliction." He's just a few verses into the letter, and he's already talking about all his affliction. He uses the word affliction again in verse 4. In verse 5 he talks about his sufferings, the sufferings of Christ that are his in abundance. Verse 6 he says, "We're afflicted." He says also in verse 6, "We patiently endure suffering." Verse 8 he says, "We don't want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction." How severe was it? "We were burdened excessively beyond our strength so that we despaired even of life." He's literally taken on a regular basis to the brink of death.

Verse 9 he says, "We have the sentence of death within ourselves." In other words, as far as I could see, looking at my own mind, evaluating the situation, it was over. The enemies had all the power and all the opportunity, and we had no trust in ourselves. We put our trust in God, and our trust was put in God not because we thought God was going to rescue us; but because we knew God would raise us from the dead when they killed us. And God delivered us from so great a peril of death, and will deliver us. He will yet deliver us. It was just one horrendous situation after another.

In chapter 2, he talks about another kind of sorrow. He said, "You give me sorrow, you Corinthians," that's a church to make any pastor sad. "If I cause you sorrow, who then makes me glad but the one whom I made sorrowful? This is the very thing I wrote you so that when I came I would not have sorrow from those who ought to make me rejoice, having confidence in you all that my joy would be the joy of you all, for out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you with many tears." In other words, you are a pain to me, and I am then a pain to you, and the whole thing is a sad experience. I don't like the way you treat me, and you don't like the way I treat you, and this is a deep anguish of heart.

He actually went there, to Corinth, after leaving and somebody in that congregation, according to this letter, stood up and withstood him to the face, accused him to the face, condemned him to the face publicly, and no one came to his defense, and he slid out of town heart broken. Churches can do that.

Let's go back to chapter 4 verse 8, "We're afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not despairing; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down but not destroyed; always carrying about on the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifest in our body." In other words, the reality is we carry around the concept, the notion that any day we could die for the cause of Christ.

Verse 11, "We're constantly begin delivered over to death. Verse 12, "Death works in us," and we'll see a little more about that later. That's how he lived his life. Chapter 6, verse 4, "As a servant of God and much endurance, affliction, hardship, distress, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, sleeplessness, hunger." That's the way it was. Verse 8, some contrast, "Glory and dishonor, evil report, good report, regarded as deceivers, yet true. As unknown, yet well known, as dying, yet behold we live. As punished, yet not put to death. As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. As poor, yet making many rich." That's his life.

In chapter 10 he talks about the way he was treated. Verse 10, "His critics said, 'His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive and his speech is contemptible.'" You know what that means? He's ugly and he can't communicate. Now look, if you're handsome, it doesn't matter if you can communicate, you can just stand there and everybody's happy; or if you're ugly and you can communicate, they'll listen to you. But if you're ugly and can't communicate, you

don't have a chance. So it was an ad hominem attack. They just slammed him. His presence is unimpressive. His speech is contemptible.

Now you know eleven, don't you? Chapter 11, verse 6, "They say I'm unskilled in speech." And then really a familiar portion, verse 23 he says, "Am I a servant of Christ?" like these false apostles he's referring to. "Here are my credentials." Here's how he shows the validity of his apostleship. Here it is. Not this many converts, this many books written, this many places spoken, no. Here's his credentials. If you don't think I represent Christ in a hostile world, then, explain this, far more labors, far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death, five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. The Romans did that. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I spent in the deep. I've been on frequent journeys and dangers from rivers, robbers, countrymen, Gentiles, in the city, in the wilderness, on the sea, among false brethren. I've been in labor, hardship through many sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, often without food, cold and exposure, and then beyond that, worse than that, is the daily pressure of concern for the churches.

He's not talking about administration. I heard a guy preach on that, "Yes, he was burdened by administration." What? He's not talking administration. He explains what he's talking about in verse 29. "Who is weak without my being weak?" You know what that says? He was such a pastor that if a believer was weak, he felt the pain of that believer's weakness. It also says, "Who's led into sin without my intense concern?" His heart was broken over the sins of his own flock. This is a big load for one man to carry.

Now with all that in mind, you go back to chapter 4 and, of course, the question that we want to direct our attention to is the question, "What in the world are you doing that foments all this trouble?" You have trouble with the unbelievers because of what you say to them, and you have trouble with the church because of what you say to them. Back off.

I met with a leader of one of the largest mega church congregations in America that you would all know, mega, mega church, and sat in his little office, big office really, and he said, "MacArthur, I just have a word for you." I said, "Great, what is it?" He said, "Lighten up." "What? Lighten up?" "Yeah, come on, ease up. Back off."

You know, if you asked me who my hero in ministry is, this is him, Paul. He's on my shoulder all the time. I don't think that would have gone well with him. "Hey, Paul, come on, lighten up. Come on. Lighten up on the unbeliever. Lighten up on the church. Come on, come on." No, because why? Because he understood that you can't equivocate on divine truth. You can't adjust it. You can't marginalize it. You can't tamper with it. You can accept it or reject it, but you can't do anything with it. And the reason that he would go to the extremes that he did and live an entire life of pain and suffering, and end up a martyr was because he understood the glory of the gospel.

With that in mind, we'll back in to chapter 4, and we'll just kind of see where we can go here. I don't even know what I'm going to say, I'm kind of curious myself. So, this is how he viewed his life in light of the glory of the gospel. I'm going to give you several points. I could give you anywhere from four to ten. Okay? We'll just take what we can get.

First of all, he understood the superiority of the New Covenant. He understood the superiority of the

New Covenant. Part of the glory of the gospel was, of course, that it was the New Covenant which was so long awaited. Do you understand what Paul means in verse 1 when he says, “Therefore since we have this ministry”? What ministry? What are you talking about? What’s the therefore there for? The therefore is there to tell you that this is a transitional statement that results from what has just been said, right? Therefore since we have received this ministry. What ministry are you talking about? Go back to verse 8, chapter 3. You have the ministry of the Spirit. How will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more glorious? If the ministry of condemnation was the law, right? The law had a glory, didn’t it? Do you know the law had glory? He shows that in chapter 3 because when Moses received the law, the glory of God was all over his face. The law had a glory because the law was a direct reflection of the nature of God. It had a glory. Verse 9, “Much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.”

Paul saying, “Look, people gave their life for the law. The law had a glory, but the New Covenant, the New Testament, the ministry of the Spirit, and you go back to verse 6, talks about the ministry not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, the Spirit gives life. The ministry of the Spirit, or the ministry of righteousness which is New Covenant salvation has an abounding glory. If we had time to study chapter 3, you would see comparisons there. He compares the Old Covenant with the New. The New Covenant gives life, he says in verse 6. In verses 7 to 9, the New Covenant gives righteousness. In verses 7, 10 and 11, the New Covenant is permanent. In verse 12, the New Covenant brings hope. In verses 13 and 14, the New Covenant is clear. In verses 16 to 18, the New Covenant is Christ centered, and in verses 17 and 18 the New Covenant is Spirit empowered.

We’ve received this ministry, this ministry that provides life and righteousness, this permanent ministry, never to be replaced as the Old Covenant was, that brings a lasting hope that is clear, Christ-centered, Spirit-powered. This is the wonder and the glory of the New Covenant.

You know how Paul lived his life prior to the Damascus Road experience? What did he do in terms of his life commitment? He persecuted Christians, didn’t he? From the vantage point of the fact that he was a fastidious legalist, he was a Jew of Jews, kosher to the core. He was a Pharisee. He was zealous for the Law. And with regard to the Law, externally he was blameless. All of that is in Philippians 3, isn’t it? And for him he counted it gain until he met Christ and realized it was manure.

How important do you think it was when he discovered the reality of the New Covenant? Do you think that was a breakthrough? That was an incredible deliverance for a hopeless legalist. You know what Paul is? He’s a rare convert. Do you know how many Pharisees, named Pharisees come to Christ in the New Testament? Yeah, you can’t think of them, so bound in legalism. Only a few. This was a glorious dawning on the apostle Paul. He is the rare older brother in the prodigal story, the rare older brother who repents of his hypocrisy, repents and embraces his sin.

People see sin in their sin. They don’t see sin in their religion. This was the dawning of the glorious day, incredible day. And once the glory of the New Covenant dawned on that Old Covenant Pharisee, he was never the same again. And because we have received this ministry, we do not sin badly by tampering with the message.

If you really ever understand the glory of the gospel of salvation, you could never tamper with it. You see it in all its majesty, and all its beauty, and all its fullness. We don’t need to give people some surfeited, some minimalist, some truncated understanding of the gospel. They need to be given the fool glory of the gospel.

So Paul, first of all, endured everything that he endured because he saw the glory of the gospel and he saw it from a personal viewpoint. Philippians 3, he went about to establish his own righteousness, and then he realized it was all nothing, and he found the righteousness of God in Christ. When you've been truly regenerate, you understand that this is the message that must be preached whatever the price.

Secondly, he also embraced ministry as a mercy. He embraced ministry as a mercy. It may be an interesting concept, but look at verse 1. "Since we have this ministry as we received mercy." There are some people who think they earned the right to preach the gospel. They earned the right to represent the gospel. They earned the right to proclaim the gospel. Let me tell you something. I'm not worthy. You're not worthy. None of us is worthy to proclaim this gospel. It is a mercy that we're allowed to do this. Listen to the words of the apostle Paul in 1 Timothy chapter 1. "I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord," verse 12, 1 Timothy 1:12, "who strengthened me because He considered me faithful, putting me in to the ministry, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor, yet I was shown mercy."

You know why I'm in the ministry? Because God is merciful. I don't have a right to do this. I haven't earned this. "Well, you've been to seminary." That wouldn't do it. "Oh, you have a communication gift." That wouldn't do it. The very fact that I can stand here and open the Word of God and proclaim the glorious gospel of Christ is a mercy to an unworthy sinner, and the elevation of this is so staggering. The privilege is so overwhelming.

Here's the good news. It wasn't my strength that earned this right, and it isn't my weakness that forfeits it. It's a mercy. I don't deserve it. God gives it to me as a mercy. And in spite of my failures and my weakness, He continues to give me this mercy. And because I understand the ministry as a mercy, I don't have a lot of expectations for what I'm able to accomplish. Can you get that thought?

I hear about pastors who have burnout. What are you talking about, burnout? What do you mean? Burnout has nothing to do with hard work. I never saw a plumber that got burnt out. I never saw a ditch digger that burnt out. It's not about effort. Burnout is a thing that happens to people who don't get their expectations met. "I deserve better than this. You can't do this to me. Things aren't working out. I shouldn't be treated this way."

Look, you don't ever want to be treated the way you should be treated. God doesn't even treat you the way you should be treated. People get burnout in ministry. They get warped. They get weary in well doing because they have unrealistic expectations of what they think they deserve because they're qualified, because they're prepared, because they work hard.

The truth is, every waking day of my life and your life that the Lord gives us the opportunity to proclaim His gospel, it was nothing but a mercy. It is a mercy, and I will never get over the mercy of this. Look, when I was in high school, I didn't know what I was going to be. My dad was a preacher. My granddad was a preacher, and a couple of generations before them were preachers. And it was sort of kind of coming down the line a little bit, but that didn't carry a lot of weight with me. I thought I wanted to be a professional athlete. I got a lot of affirmation, you know, when I had a ball in my hand. And, you know, people cheered and people liked me, and a certain amount of popularity.

I suppose I could have gone a lot of different ways, but God had this for me, and it has never ceased to overwhelm me. It never ceased to overwhelmed me. What a mercy that I am able to do this. I get up here every Sunday, have for well into the fifth decade here. Is there a greater privilege than this? Is there a greater honor than this for an unworthy servant?

Paul never got over that, never got over the glory of the gospel and you'll see that come out as this passage unfolds. So rather than take more time here, I could say a lot more about that. That's what the pastor always says when he's just run out of material. Brethren, we could go on, and you know he hasn't got a thought or a note, so.

All right, number three, how do I know that? Number three, the glory of the gospel, the glory of the gospel showed up in his understanding of the superiority of the New Covenant. It showed up in his understanding of ministry as mercy. And thirdly, it showed up in his understanding of the necessity of a pure heart, the necessity of a pure heart.

While it is a mercy, that doesn't give room for sin. I love what he says in verse 2, "We've renounced the things hidden because of shame." I don't have a secret life. I do not have a secret life. Don't you hate it when it turns out that a pastor has a secret life? That's horrible, isn't it, a hidden life of shame, and all of a sudden he's a scandal and he's on "20/20" or he's in the newspaper. Paul says, "I don't have that. I don't have a hidden life. I don't walk in two worlds."

And how do you defend yourself when somebody accuses you of that? Because that's what they were doing, they were accusing him of having a secret life. In fact, you read between the lines of 2 Corinthians, they were saying he was in the ministry for money, and I've been accused of that, and he was in the ministry for favors from women. And he says, "I don't have a secret life. I renounce that. His defense is in the first chapter, verse 12. He says, "Our proud confidence is this, the testimony of our conscience." Did you get that? You can accuse me all you want. My conscience is not accusing me.

That's where the battle is won and lost, right? James 1, "Sin conceives on the inside and finally shows up on the outside." Paul says, "Bring your accusations, the testimony of my conscience is that in holiness and godly sincerity, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God we have conducted ourselves in the world and especially toward you. I can't say anything more to you who accuse me," and there were false teachers in Corinth just coming after Paul with a vicious campaign to destroy his credibility at this very time. That's why he writes the letter, and he says, "My conscience is clear."

He says that a number of times. He says it later in his life in the pastoral epistles, that his conscience is clear, his conscience is clear. He was dealing with sin in his life. He was confessing it. He was turning from it. As he told the Corinthians in chapter 7, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." The glory of the gospel to Paul showed up in the integrity of his life. How can you possibly affirm the glory of the gospel, the amazing privileged mercy of preaching that gospel and then live like a hypocrite? If you understand the glory of the gospel, if you understand the mercy that it is to be given the privilege of dispensing that gospel, then you are compelled to the purity which Paul proclaims is true in his own heart.

When he gave testimony in Acts 23 and 24, he said again twice, "I have a clear conscience. I have a clear conscience." When you really believe in the glory of the gospel, you want to make sure your life

is pure because you want to be a vessel unto honor. What's the next line? Fit for the Master's use.

There's a fourth point here. When you understand the glory of the gospel, back to chapter 4 – when you understand the glory of the gospel, you therefore are committed to preach the Scripture accurately, to preach the Scripture accurately. I watch quote/unquote Christian TV and Patricia invariably will say, "Why are you watching that again?" And I don't always have a good answer. I will just tell you this. I am righteously indignant over people who do what it says here, adulterating the Word of God. And maybe I just need to ramp up my holy ire. I don't know. I promise you, while some people are sending money to these people, I'm praying the imprecatory Psalms on their heads, and I'm wondering how God can let them go. You know, people who adulterate the Scripture cut me more deeply than anything because this is my life, and this is life, and this is truth, and you can't play fast and loose with it.

Go back to verse 17. You get a lesson there on why people do it. "We're not like many, peddling the Word of God." Con men, hucksters, charlatans, frauds; there were lots of them in the marketplaces in the ancient world. They would dilute the wine with water. The soap was impure. The pottery they sold had cracks that was covered over by wax. It would melt as soon as you put it on fire. They weren't sincere. They were *kapēlos*. That's the word for peddling, *kapēlos*, crooks, fakes, frauds. Here in chapter 4 Paul says, "He's not walking in craftiness, *panourgia*. *Panourgia* means – *ourgia* comes from energy to work, *pan* means all who will do anything to deceive. Adulterating the Word of God means tampering, and it's particularly a word that's used with diluting wine, corrupting the manifestation of the truth.

Look, if you believe in the glory of the gospel, you don't mess with it. You don't adulterate it. People who can get on television and twist and pervert the gospel to get money out of the pockets of sick people, old people, dying people, people looking for a miracle like a lottery winning ticket, don't understand the glory of the gospel. So he says, "We don't adulterate the Word of God but by the manifestation of truth, manifestation of truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

You know something? The truth has a self-evidencing power. It really does. The truth has a self-evidencing power so that even when it is rejected, it commends itself to the conscience of the rejecter. He fights it.

Some years ago I was spending a lot of time with Larry King, and some of you probably know that. I really like him, care about him. We had some great talks, private talks. He heard the truth, and I think there never was a time when he debated me about it, never, because it just has a commending character even to the rejecter.

In a sense, I think the unbelieving world that watches these phonies on television knows they're crooks better than church people. If you understand the glory of the gospel, you have no interest in tampering with the truth. You want to live a pure life. You understand the immense privilege of the mercy of ministry because you celebrate the greatness of this New Covenant gospel.

Some people say, "You know, we have to kind of change the message cause we're not getting results. You know, we've got to deal with this message because it's not very effective." Really? Well the next point I want to give you is this. If you really understand the glory of the gospel, you know the

results depend on God. Okay? The results depend on God. You remember the parable of the sower? What does it say about the sower? Nothing, absolutely nothing. It doesn't say whether he uses his left hand, right hand, throw high, low, curve ball. It didn't say anything about the sower. What does it say about the bag he carried the seed in? Nothing, didn't say anything about that. What does it say about the method he used to throw it? Nothing, absolutely nothing. It's a parable about soil. It doesn't even say anything about the seed other than the seed is the truth, the gospel. It's not about your technique in throwing the seed. It's about the state of the soil. I don't do soil work. That's Holy Spirit work.

I love that passage in Mark, the parable where Jesus says the farmer sows the seed and goes to sleep because he has no idea how it grows. That's right. You say, "We not getting the results." Really, you think you're in charge of results? I hear there's some discussions, "We have to overcome consumer resistance." Lots of luck. Consumer resistance is called depravity. Consumer resistance means the sinner is unable and unwilling, left to himself.

Look at verse 3, this is so reasonable. This whole presentation of Paul makes so much sense. It just flows the way you think. Some of you are already saying, "Well, it gets discouraging. Paul, look, you're going from town to town to town. The churches are small. The churches are full of trouble. The town rejects you. The leaders reject you. The populace rejects you. They want to kill you. The Jews are after you. You're really not having much success.

Here's his answer. "Our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those that are perishing." That's a category of people. That's the default position of the entire human race. I'm not the problem. Well how did they get like that? Verse 4, "The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God." The problem is not your technique, the problem is the heart. You have all these people coming up with pragmatical ways to do effective evangelism. Really? To overcome consumer resistance to make the message more palatable. We'll say more about that in some of the other portions of Scripture.

You put yourself in the position of – I wrote a book *Slave*, some of you seen the book *Slave*? Imagine trying to sell that message in a world full of slaves. By the way, a crucified Jew in Jerusalem who was rejected by His people, rejected by His leaders, who was executed as a common criminal by the Romans rose from the dead. He's the true and living God, the only Savior and He wants you to be His slave. Oh really? And by the way, you have to reject all other masters, confess your sin, repent, and turn to Him as the only source of salvation.

Who is this again? A crucified Jew? This is what Paul is preaching in the Gentile world. And you need not only to put your faith in Him, but you need to confess Him as Lord and you're His slave. That's a hard sell. You can't overcome consumer's resistance in a pagan Gentile world when you're talking about a crucified Jew to Gentiles who have no Old Testament background, who have no understanding of the sacrificial system, and you're asking them to believe that this crucified Jew is God incarnate, the only Savior, the only true and living God, the only hope of salvation and you're supposed to become His slave. That won't fly, humanly speaking. That's why it says in 1 Corinthians 1, as we will see later, preaching the cross was, what? Foolishness, foolishness.

The results depend on God. That's been the joy of ministry. I'm in charge of sowing. I'm not in charge of growing. I can't give life. God alone gives life. And I love this, watch this, verse 5, "We do not preach ourselves." Some method that we've concocted, some personal stories about us. "But Christ

Jesus as Lord," and we're calling everybody to become slaves for Jesus' sake.

You say, "Well how in the world do you expect to have any results at all with a message like that?" Here's the answer, verse 6, "Oh, for God who said light shall shine out of darkness who 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." Is that not the most profound verse? Whoo! You know what he's saying? He's saying creation. God said, "Let there be light," and He spoke it into existence. That's the model for salvation. God steps into the darkness of the sinner's heart and turns on the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

This is what makes ministry so thrilling. If you get all wrapped up in results, you're going to wind up preaching yourself and your technique and your style. You're going to get caught up in your wardrobe and your shtick and your music and your cultural adaptations. Well, if you understand the glory of the gospel, you also understand your personal insignificance. So what have we been saying? If you understand the glory of the gospel, just to review, you understand the superiority of the New Covenant, the mercy of ministry, the necessity of a pure heart, the fact that the Scripture is to be preached accurately, that spiritual results depends solely on God, and that you are personally insignificant, insignificant.

I've gone back to this seventh verse so many times through the years. We have this treasure. What treasure? The treasure of the gospel in earthen vessels. Earthen vessel is a clay pot, clay pot. Okay, now stay with me on this one. Clay pot. What do you use a clay pot for at home? Put dirt in, stick a plant in it. In ancient times a clay pot was breakable, ugly, disposable. But perhaps the best insight into what clay pots were used for was in 2 Timothy chapter 2, verse 20, "Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels." Oh, okay, gold and silver vessels, what do you do with those? You serve the food. Gold and silver plates and bowls, "And there are also vessels of wood and earthenware. The gold and silver are for honor and the wood and earthenware are for dishonor." Are you ready for this? You serve the food on the gold and silver. You take out the garbage in the wood and earthenware, clay pots, garbage bucket, garbage bucket. Take out the family garbage. You know, that's what they said about Luther; he was a garbage bucket.

So, go back to this verse. We have this treasure in garbage buckets. That's a sense of personal humility, isn't it? Personal insignificance. Just a clay pot. In 1 Corinthians, Paul talks this way in some very – for some people, some kind of troubling words that seem to minimize the sense of self-importance that some ministers have. Listen to what he says. Verse 13 of 1 Corinthians 4, "We are the scum of the world, the dregs of all things." Those words refer to the food that sticks to the bottom of the pot after it's cooled and hardened and has to be scraped off. Paul says, in a sense we're just scum. We're just the last scrapings at the bottom of the pot. We're clay pots. You know, you have to be very important when you understand the glory of the gospel not to compete with the gospel yourself, self-elevation. It's such a distasteful thing.

Well, for the sake of time, just a few more. Paul embraced the benefits of suffering. So if you understand the glory of the gospel, this is another point, you understand the benefits of suffering, the benefits of suffering. You want to be more effective, you suffer more. James says, "Count it all joy when you fall into many trials because they have a perfecting work," right? You never understand ministry and effectiveness unless you suffer. And just briefly, verses 8 to 12, we already read that, "Afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted not forsaken, struck down not destroyed, caring about the body and the dying of Jesus and the dying of Jesus manifest in

our body." Verse 11, same thing, "Delivered over to death for Jesus' sake." Verse 12, "Death works in us but life in you." There's the key right there. Death works in us but life in you. The greater the sacrifice of your own life, the more you suffer, the stronger you become.

Turn to chapter 12 of 2 Corinthians because we can't leave this out. Chapter 12 verse 7, "Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations." Paul had these great revelations. You know, he had personal audiences with the ascended Christ on the Damascus Road and several other times as well, and he could have become very proud about it. So to keep him from exalting himself – and then he just talked about his trip to heaven, right? And he saw things that he couldn't even talk about. So he could have used these things as reason for his own pride. But to keep him from exalting himself, "There was given me," he says, "a thorn in the flesh." The word "thorn" is actually a sphere, a lance, literally rammed through his otherwise proud flesh. This lance is described as a messenger of Satan, an *aggelos* of Satan. What is an *aggelos* of Satan? A demon. Was this demon attacking Paul directly? The best explanation of this is that this would be the demon leader of the false teachers who were blasting away at the church in Corinth, which he loved, and consequently driving a stake through his own heart because of his love for that church. Here are false teachers led by demon power doing damage in the church in Corinth, and it's tormenting him. And the Lord will let it happen to keep him from exalting himself.

The Lord will give you enough trouble as pastor to keep you from exalting yourself, even if He has to use demons to create the trouble. He said it three times, "I asked the Lord that it might leave me." He said, "My grace is sufficient for you for power is perfected in – " what? " - in weakness." The more you exalt yourself, the more you force the Lord to humble you. If you understand the glory of the gospel, you understand the benefits of suffering. Suffering makes you more effective as an instrument because it grants you power perfected in weakness. Paul got the message. "I'll boast about my weakness that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties for Christ's sake for when I am weak, then I am strong." The more you exalt yourself the more you become useless.

Just two thoughts to end. To understand the glory of the gospel is to understand all these things. I won't go over them again, and just two other things to consider. It's to understand the necessity of conviction. To understand the glory of the gospel, and this kind of sums up everything we've said, it's to understand the necessity of conviction. Again, this is a passage that I go back to often. Verse 13, "Having the same spirit of faith according to what is written," and he's quoting out of Psalm 116, "I believed, therefore I spoke. We also believe, therefore we also speak."

People have through the years said to me, "Well you just don't hold back, do you?" No. One guy introduced me at a book sellers convention as "John MacArthur is much nicer in person than he is in his preaching." And, you know, there's a sense in which I understand that. I'm not trying to pick a fight with everybody. I'm just trying to proclaim the truth and I understand that the truth creates its own enemies, but this is about the necessity of conviction. This is what integrity is. You can't preach something and then not care whether it gets enforced. You can't say, "Well, I believe this, but I'm not going to say it because people will be offended." If it's true, you have a mandate to proclaim it. I believed, so I spoke. Whatever you hear me say is what I believe.

People say, "Why are you so passionate about everything?" Because when I come to the conviction that this is what the Word of God means by what it says, I get excited about it because it's the truth. I believed, so I spoke. This is spiritual manhood. This is acting like a man. This is manliness, speak

with conviction.

So what have we learned tonight? And we've just covered it briefly, but we have learned that if you understand like Paul did the glory of the New Covenant, it has all kinds of implications in your life. You will never get over the superior glory of the New Covenant, you will always understand the privilege of ministry as a mercy that you don't deserve. You will commit yourself to a pure heart because you don't want to do anything that would render you less useful in the proclamation of this glorious gospel. You will be responsible to accurately interpret the Scripture, and never adulterate it. You do know that the results depend solely on God who gets the glory through the gospel. These are things that are so foundational. You see yourself as a clay pot, personally insignificant. You embrace the benefits of suffering, which bring out divine strength in human weakness. You understand that this is a gospel worthy of conviction, worthy of a life of integrity in which you believe it, and that's exactly the way you proclaim it.

And finally, in the end, when you understand the glory of the gospel, you put future reward over present difficulty. In verses 13, 14 and 15 he said, "I believe, therefore I spoke. And if I'm going to die," verse 14, "Jesus will raise me and He'll raise you and present us with you, so I go on speaking because the truth that I'm preaching, the truth of grace is spreading to more and more people, etc. It will cause a redounding of praise to the glory of God in heaven to come." And with that view of heaven, sort of introduced at the end of verse 15, he comes to verse 16 and we're moving fast through that, "Therefore we do not lose heart," which is what he said in verse 1, "because we esteem the eternal over the temporal, the future over the present. Though our outer man is decaying, our inner man is being renewed day by day. Momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison. We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen, for the things which are seen are temporal; the things that are not seen are eternal."

I'm not looking for a reputation in this life. I'm not looking for success in this life. I'm far more concerned about an eternal weight of glory, about a faithfulness that will be rewarded in the future by a faithful God. I don't care about momentary light affliction, and I haven't had much compared to so many. I'm not looking at the things that are seen, and I don't want my life to be explained humanly. I want my life to be explained only divinely. So Paul understood the glory of the gospel.

Now, in the morning, we're going to look at what made this New Covenant so glorious as we talk about the satisfying reality of the gospel.

Our Father, we thank You for Your profound kindness to us in granting us Holy Scripture. Thank You that it has the ring of truth, and no matter how many times we read it, it always comes to us fresh and alive. Thank you that it is unassailable, that it is life. Thank You that it is perspicuous, that it is clear, we understand it. It fills our minds with truth and it warms our hearts with zeal and passion, moves our feet in obedience. Be honored and glorified in the days that we spend together as we look at the Word. Accomplish Your good purpose in every life, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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