

# Strength to be a Slave: Motivations for an Enduring Ministry

2 Corinthians 4:13–15

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## Introduction

We return again this morning to our study of Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians. We have turned to this great letter from the pen of the Apostle Paul in order to better understand and to be better equipped for the Christian ministry. My design in choosing to do a consecutive expositional study on the Book of 2 Corinthians has been, from the beginning, to help you understand that if you are a *partaker* of the New Covenant, you are a *minister* of the New Covenant—that if you have been saved by the Gospel of Christ, you have been called to the ministry of that same Gospel. And my prayer has been that through this time in God’s Word together, GraceLife would grow—that you would be increasingly better equipped to minister the Gospel of Christ to the lost who yet stand in need of the forgiveness of sins, *and* to minister that same Gospel to one another: to your brothers and sisters in the body of Christ at Grace Community Church.

And we have turned to 2 Corinthians in pursuit of that goal because 2 Corinthians contains the greatest treatise on the nature of Christian ministry anywhere in Scripture. As Paul comes under fire from false apostles in Corinth, seeking to undermine his apostleship and influence, he is driven to defend the legitimacy of his ministry against these attacks. And in the providence of God, that defense of apostolic ministry provides a wonderful blueprint for Christians throughout all ages who desire to serve the Lord faithfully in ministry.

And in our time together last time, we discovered a great, fundamental, and orienting principle for Christian ministry. And that was that there is a fundamental contrast between (a) the glory of the New Covenant *message*, and (b) the weakness, shame, and suffering of the New Covenant *messenger*. To use Paul’s own language, the glorious treasure of the Gospel message is carried around and ministered to the world in earthen vessels—in ordinary, unremarkable, fragile, inexpensive, easily-replaceable clay pots. The container is worthless, but the contents are priceless. The Gospel is glorious, but God has entrusted that invaluable treasure of the Gospel message to weak, suffering, perishing men and women like you and me.

And why does He do that? 2 Corinthians 4:7: “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.” So that the Gospel does its work, and hearts are awakened and affections are renewed and wills are transformed—when eyes are opened to treasure Jesus, and the fragrance of Christ smells like life—there will be

no doubt about where that kind of transforming power came from. It came from God. It came from His Gospel. God gets the glory, not His ministers.

And so the false apostles accuse Paul of not being a true Apostle, because his weaknesses and sufferings are so disproportionate to the glory of Gospel. But Paul says, “You don’t understand the Christian ministry. The Good News of forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ is an absolutely priceless treasure. But in the wisdom of God, we have this glorious treasure in insignificant, frail, unattractive earthen vessels, so that all the glory goes to God. You’re right. I am nothing special. I am anything but glorious. But so far from disqualifying me from being a true servant of Christ, my suffering and my weaknesses are the very badges of my apostolic authenticity. Because it is these very afflictions that become the means through which God reveals the abundance of His divine power.”

And so we learned that the authentic Christian minister is marked by a life of weakness, of indignity, and of difficulty. The marketing gurus and cultural aficionados, who confuse integrity with personality and true fruitfulness with popularity, paint the picture of “success” in ministry as continual mountain peaks of victory and having it all together. But the Apostle Paul says the true minister of the Gospel always carries about in his body the dying of Jesus. The true minister takes “Christ crucified” not only as his message, but as his *model*. Just as the Master bore the shame and indignity of human suffering—so much so that the King of glory was mocked, spit on, beaten, and ultimately crucified, all in service of the life and health of the Church—so also the true slaves of that Master embrace that same weakness. We live cruciform lives; our lives are nothing less than the continual crucifixion of our own comforts and preferences, and the embrace of the weakness and indignity of slavery, all in service of the life and health of the Church.

We are *in all things* afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down (2 Cor 4:8–9). We *always* carry about in the body the dying of Jesus (v. 10). We who live are *constantly* being delivered over to *death* for Jesus’ sake (v. 11). This is who we are! The Lord’s own ministry was characterized by the laying down of His life in obedient service for the sake of His people. As His followers, our ministry is characterized by the very same thing. We embrace a life of perpetual dying for the sake of the Church. We are the dying living, because—as Paul says in chapter 4 verse 12—death works in us, but life in you. The death of weakness and conflict and difficulty and suffering works in the minister of the Gospel, but the spiritual life of health and growth and edification and holiness works in the people of God as a result of those labors.

And so Paul says of his life of ministry in 1 Corinthians 15:31: “I die daily.” He says in Romans 8:36: “For *your* sake”—that is to say, for the sake of the church—“we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.” He says in Philippians 2:17 that he rejoices—that his life could not be better spent—than to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of the faith of the body of Christ. He says in 2 Timothy 2:10, “I endure

all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” And perhaps the Christian ministry is summed up best here in 2 Corinthians, in chapter 12 verse 15, where Paul says, “I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.”

This is ministry, GraceLife. This is what we are called to. We are called to die daily, to go as sheep to the slaughter, to lay down our lives in a kind of *living death* all so that the body of Christ in this place might be built up and sanctified unto the glory of God.

And the question I want to ask this morning is: How are you going to do it? Where are you going to get the strength to walk in that kind of sacrificial selflessness? Because it’s not going to be easy. As much as ministry to the body of Christ is a singular joy, we all know ourselves well enough to know that this body of Christ is made up of sinners just like you and me—that though Christ has freed us from the penalty and power of sin, we have not yet been delivered from the *presence* of sin in our flesh. And so we know—some of us all too well—that sometimes the sheep bite! Sinners, like you and me, do not always take kindly to the destruction of our idols. Laboring with one another in sanctification—pleading with and strengthening each other to put off sin and put on righteousness—can be a messy, difficult, and even heartbreaking enterprise. Serving those who are hard to serve, loving those who are hard to love, all with little to no thanks or recognition—maybe from anybody. How are you going to persist in joyful, enduring ministry in the midst of affliction?

And it’s not only inside the church. When Paul said he endured all things for the sake of the elect, he wasn’t only talking about the elect who had already *come* to faith. He was also talking about Christ’s sheep who had not yet come into the fold. Paul endured all that he did not only to strengthen the *existing* church, but to add to it, as he proclaimed the Gospel to those who had not yet come to faith in Christ. And it was this task of evangelism that brought him the lion’s share of his persecution. He says in 2 Corinthians 1:5 that “the sufferings of Christ are ours in *abundance*.” In chapter 6 verses 4 and 5, he says he goes about his evangelistic ministry “in afflictions, in hardships, in distresses, in beatings, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, and in hunger.” In 2 Timothy 3:12, he explains that all who simply desire to live godly in Christ Jesus amidst this crooked and perverse generation will be persecuted. And so in 2 Timothy 4:5, as he gives his final charge to Timothy—his ministerial protégé, if you will—just before he charges Timothy to “do the work of an evangelist,” he appropriately exhorts him to “endure hardship.” Why? Because the one inevitably leads to the other. The one who faithfully announces the Good News of forgiveness of sins, must also announce the bad news of human inability and divine judgment. And so he charges Timothy—and the Spirit of God charges each and every one of us, friends—in 2 Timothy 2:3 to “Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.”

GraceLife, are you equipped to endure the hardship that is sure to come from proclaiming the Gospel to this lost world? How? Where are you going to get the resources to withstand the overwhelming pressures that come with living an obedient Christian life? What spiritual weapons do you have in your arsenal with which to battle the temptation of cowardice, despair, and shipwreck?

Answer: You have the same weapons that the Apostle Paul had. Where did Paul get his strength to endure? How could he say he was afflicted *but not crushed*, perplexed *but not despairing*, struck down *but not destroyed*? With all that opposition, why didn't he just give up? Or at least, why didn't he just tone it down a little? Where does this kind of endurance come from? That's the question that Paul answers in our text this morning, in verses 13 to 15. So let's read our text together. 2 Corinthians 4, verses 13 to 15, and starting in verse 12 just to keep the flow of thought. "So death works in us, but life in you. <sup>13</sup>But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believed, therefore I spoke,' we also believe, therefore we also speak, <sup>14</sup>knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. <sup>15</sup>For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God."

We have been called to ministry, GraceLife. Inside the church, we have been called to lay down our lives in sacrificial service of one another—to minister compassion to our brothers and sisters, and to labor alongside them as their servants for the sake of their growth and sanctification. Outside the church, we have been called to be Christ's ambassadors, heralding terms of peace from our Sovereign to His avowed enemies. And so when those enemies resist to the point that the ambassadors are in danger—whether that danger is beatings and imprisonment in the Roman Empire, or slander and salary cuts in 21<sup>st</sup>-century America—the natural temptation is to fail to speak the message. But, Paul says, the faithful minister doesn't do that. And he gives **three motivations for** why the faithful New Covenant minister continues to proclaim the message even in the midst of adversity—**three motivations** by which we are strengthened for joyful, enduring ministry even in the midst of affliction.

### **I. A Sincere Faith in the Gospel (v. 13)**

That **first motivation** for continuing to speak is **a sincere faith in the Gospel**. Look with me at verse 13. Paul writes: "But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, 'I believed, therefore I spoke,' we also believe, therefore we also speak."

And Paul models something here that is just so instructive for us. In the midst of great affliction—of external persecution and the internal daily pressure of concern for the spiritual health of all the churches (cf. 2 Cor 11:28)—the Apostle Paul turned to Scripture. He fixed His mind on truth. He turned the eyes of his heart to the Word of God to behold the character of God,

to be comforted and strengthened by who God has revealed Himself to be—even in the lives of the saints that have gone before him.

He turned his mind to Psalm 116, where David writes a song of praise and thanksgiving to God for delivering him from death. In Psalm 116:3, David says, “The cords of death encompassed me and the terrors of Sheol came upon me; I found distress and sorrow. Then I called upon the name of Yahweh: ‘O Yahweh, I beseech You, save my life!’” Verse 6: “I was brought low, and He saved me.” Verse 8: “For You have rescued my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.” And so there is much for Paul to relate with here. He himself had been delivered from death. He says in 2 Corinthians 1:8–9 that there were times in Asia when he despaired of life and had the sentence of death within himself; he was struck down, but he was not destroyed. He had tasted Yahweh’s deliverance. And as he got back up for more, and marched right back into the storm, he took comfort in the fact that he was not alone, but he stood in a long line of saints who had suffered for righteousness’ sake. And he took comfort in the demonstration of God’s deliverance in David’s life as well as his own.

And as he was reflecting on God’s deliverance as recorded in Psalm 116, he quotes verse 10, where David said, “I believed, therefore I spoke.” Paul seizes on this statement, and he says, “In the same way that the psalmist faced great affliction, even to the point of staring death in the face, and yet nevertheless went on speaking truth, anchored by his faith in God, so also does that same spirit of robust, enduring faith animate my own soul. David believed, and therefore he spoke. So also I will not cease to go on speaking and testifying of the truth of the Gospel—even in the severity of my affliction—because, most fundamentally, I *believe* this Gospel.”

And I love the simplicity of that. “Paul, you are being put to death all day long; you’re like a sheep led to the slaughter every day because of your testimony concerning Jesus. Where do you find the endurance to go on preaching the Gospel amidst that kind of opposition?” And he says, “Because I believe it! Because it’s true! God Himself really *has* become man in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ! The Lord Jesus really *did* bear the fullness of God’s wrath on the cross as a propitiation for sins! He really *did* rise from the grave three days later! And He really *is* willing to freely forgive all those who repent and trust Him alone for righteousness! I believe that message! What else can I do but proclaim the grace of God in Christ?!”

You see, **a sincere faith in the Gospel** cannot help but issue in proclamation. We see this illustrated all over Scripture. When John the Baptist came proclaiming that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, Andrew, one of John’s disciples began following Jesus. And after spending the rest of the day with Jesus and hearing Him teach, Andrew believed that they had found the Messiah! And what was Andrew’s immediate reaction on the next day? It was to tell someone! John 1:41 says, “He found first his own brother Simon and said to him, ‘We have found the Messiah!’”. Andrew believed, and therefore he spoke! And then in verse 43, it

says that the next day Jesus went into Galilee and found Philip and called upon Philip to follow Him. And Philip believed in as well. And what was Philip's immediate reaction? John 1:45 says, "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses . . . wrote—Jesus of Nazareth!'" You see, the reflex-action of saving faith is proclamation.

We see this illustrated in Acts chapter 4, as the Sanhedrin instructed Peter and John to stop preaching in the name of Christ. "But Peter and John answered and said to them," Acts 4:19: "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard!" I love that response! "Listen, we have seen and heard these things with our own eyes and ears!" The Apostle John would later write in the opening verses of his first epistle, "What we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands . . . what we have seen and heard we *proclaim* to you" (1 John 1:1, 3). What God had accomplished in their midst was real! Jesus *is* who He said He is! And so "we cannot stop speaking" about these things! We *must* proclaim! We believe, therefore we speak.

And the prophet Jeremiah understood this principle perhaps better than anyone. Jeremiah was commissioned with a message of destruction against his nation, and *no one* would listen to him. He says in Jeremiah 20 verse 7, "I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me." Verse 8: "For each time I speak, I cry aloud; I proclaim violence and destruction, because for me the word of Yahweh has resulted in reproach and derision all day long." Jeremiah knew what it was to suffer persecution for speaking the Word of God in the midst of a culture who wanted nothing to do with God. But what was his response? To stop speaking? No indeed! In the very next verse, Jeremiah 20 verse 9, he says, "But if I say, 'I will not remember Him or speak anymore in His name,' then in my heart it becomes *like a burning fire shut up in my bones*; and I am weary of holding it in, and I cannot endure it." Dear friends, this is the picture of the faithful believer! It is someone who has been so overcome by the message of the Gospel—so ravished by the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God (2 Cor 4:4)—that you couldn't stop speaking it if you tried! It would be like a fire shut up in your bones, that you simply can't hold in! *No* wonder Paul said, "Woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Cor 9:16).

And that is the cry of every true believer in Christ. "Woe is me—*let me be damned* if I don't preach this message!" Paul says, "I believed, therefore I spoke." GraceLife, there is a directly proportional relationship between faith and evangelism. If you believe this Gospel, you will preach this Gospel! And if you are not preaching this Gospel, you need to examine yourself, because you have reason to question whether you believe this Gospel at all.

The believer is a preacher. Charles Hodge said, "Speaking is represented as the *effect* and *proof* of faith" (473). Another commentator wrote, "The Gospel is not some abstract theory that can be

accepted and hidden away in the heart. It *requires* proclamation” (Garland, 235). And Pastor John says, “It was impossible for [Paul] to believe the gospel truth but not long to proclaim it. . . . True belief *impels* strong, consistent, unwavering testimony to the truth. . . . Those who genuinely believe the truth cannot help but speak that truth” (146–47).

Dear friends, do you believe that in and of himself man is so hopelessly sinful, that his very best deeds will earn him eternal punishment at the hand of God’s perfect justice? Do you believe that if left to himself, man is utterly helpless to escape the wrath of God? And do you believe that God Himself left His throne in heaven, and took on the frailty and the indignity of human flesh, to pay for the sins and provide the righteousness for sinners who were doomed to die in their sins? And do you believe that He absorbed every ounce of divine wrath, satisfied the Father’s justice, and rose from the grave so that now hell itself is conquered and heaven itself is opened to all those who would cease striving and simply believe in Christ for righteousness? Dear people, do you believe this message? Do you trust in this Gospel for your own eternal salvation? Then do you *speak* it? Paul says, “We believe, *therefore* we speak.”

What **motivated** Paul to go on ministering the Gospel even amidst severe persecution and affliction? It was his **sincere faith in the Gospel** that compelled him to proclaim it. And that means that when you face the temptation to shy away from the task of proclaiming the Gospel to the unbelievers God has placed in your life, or when you’re tempted to withhold loving correction from your brother in Christ because you’re fearful he’ll take it the wrong way, you can strengthen your resolve to press on in faithfulness by feeding your faith—by feasting your souls on the truth of the Gospel, by bathing and saturating your minds with Scripture, and by acting faith upon the truth of God revealed in its pages.

Dear friends, the steel in your spine that will keep you faithful and cause you to press on in enduring ministry even in the midst of afflictions is that you believe this message, and so you’ve got to preach it. You see the beauty of the Gospel of the glory of God revealed in the face of Christ, and there is a fire in your bones. You believe, and therefore you speak.

## **II. A Sure Confidence in the Resurrection (v. 14)**

And so the faithful minister of the New Covenant is motivated to endure in ministry even in the midst of adversity, first by a sincere faith in the Gospel. A **second motivation** to continue ministering the Gospel is, number two, **a sure confidence in the resurrection**. And we see this in verse 14. Paul writes, “We also believe, therefore we also speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us with Jesus and will present us with you.”

Now right away I want you to notice that word *knowing* at the beginning of verse 14. “We also believe, therefore we also speak, *knowing*.” That’s what grammarians call a “causal participle.”

You could translate that: “We believe, therefore we speak, *because we know*.” Now, we learned in verse 13 that the ground for speaking is believing. “I speak because I believe.” But here we learn that the ground for believing is *knowing* something. “I speak because I believe, and I believe *because I know*.”

I want you to notice this connection between faith and knowledge. Faith is not opposed to knowledge. Faith is not what takes over when we run out of knowledge, like: “Well I don’t *know* that, I just *believe* it.” No! That is not the biblical notion of faith; that is a pagan, secular-humanist redefinition that conceives of faith as some sort of leap in the dark, or wish upon a star. So far from being an *alternative* to knowledge, true faith is *based* on knowledge; it has its sure and solid foundation in the knowledge of the truth. And this is so key, because if the way to fuel your speaking is to feed your faith, you have to understand that faith is fed by knowledge of the truth as it is revealed in Scripture. Knowing the truth is the foundation for believing the truth, and believing the truth is expressed in speaking the truth (cf. Barnett, 239).

So what particular truth does Paul know that strengthens his faith, which in turn strengthens his resolve to go on ministering in the midst of affliction? Answer: He knows he will be **resurrected from the dead**. We said it before: Paul faced death every day of his life. He says in 2 Corinthians 1:8 that he was convinced his affliction in Asia was going to result in his death. He says in Romans 8:36, “We are being killed all day long, we are like sheep led to the slaughter.” 1 Corinthians 15:30–32: “We are in danger every hour. We die daily. I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus.” Paul stared death in the face *so much* that he found fellowship with David in Psalm 116, who said “the cords of death encompassed me and the terrors of Sheol came upon me”! And just before our passage in 2 Corinthians 4, he says that he’s *constantly* being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake! And so you say, “Paul, how do you deal with it? Why in the world do you keep risking your life and putting yourself in danger?!” And he says, “Well, first of all, I believe the Gospel, so I’ve got to speak it. But two: I know that even if death should come—even if I lose my life for the sake of ministering the Gospel—I know that God will *raise* me from the dead. The very worst that they can do to me is take my life, but I have a Savior who is Himself the resurrection and the life!” (cf. John 11:25–26).

Oh how precious is the doctrine of the believer’s bodily resurrection! When your heart grabs a hold of this precious truth that no matter *how* your life on this earth ends, that you will live *again*—that on the last day the One who raised Jesus from the dead will raise your decaying body to life again, will glorify it, and will reunite it with your soul for you to live again in the integrity of body and spirit on the New Earth—when your heart grabs a hold of that reality: you become invincible! You live above the fear and power of death! And you become free to *lose* your life for Christ, to pour your life out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of the faith of Christ’s bride! And the world has absolutely no idea what to do with you! What do you do with someone whose joy is entirely untouchable? You see, friends, this is the life of victory in



the Christian life! It's not the ability to command the details of your circumstances through some sort of positive confession. It's not a heightened state of ecstatic spiritual consciousness. Victory in the Christian life is having such a **sure confidence in your future resurrection** that you are free from the bondage of the fear of death, and therefore willingly and eagerly *lay down your life* in sacrificial service in the cause of Gospel ministry!

You say, "How did Paul know that he would be raised from the dead?" Notice the first part of the verse: ". . . knowing that He who *raised the Lord Jesus* will raise us with Jesus." God has already proven that He has the power to raise the dead by raising Jesus from the dead. And in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul calls Christ "the first fruits" of those who are raised from the dead. And those who belong to Jesus are not just associated with Jesus; they are *united* to Jesus—just as members of the body are united to the head of the body. And just as surely as the harvest follows the firstfruits, the resurrection of the members of Christ's body will follow the resurrection of the Head (Harris, 353). Romans 8:11: "But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you." 1 Corinthians 6:14: "Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power." You see? The resurrection of Christ is God's own pledge of the resurrection of His people. Our resurrection is as sure and certain as Christ's resurrection (Hodge, 476–77).

Charles Hodge puts it beautifully. He writes, "Now as the fact of Christ's resurrection was no more doubted by the apostles . . . than their own existence (for they had seen and heard and even handled him after he rose from the dead), we may see how assured was their confidence of their own resurrection to eternal life. And as to us no event in the history of the world is better authenticated than the fact that Christ rose from the dead, we too have the same ground of assurance of the resurrection of those who are Christ's at his coming. Had we only the faith of the apostle, we should have his constancy and his joy even in the midst of the greatest afflictions" (477). Dear friends, the worst that they can do to us is kill us. And we serve a God who will raise us from the dead. May we live in such a way that only makes sense if we're going to be raised from the dead. Let us live so boldly in our proclamation and ministry of the Gospel that we need a God who can raise the dead! Let's be willing to hold our lives loosely. Let's look for ways to lay our lives down in the name of love for God and neighbor rather than seeking only what's safe and comfortable. In Luke 21, Jesus looked at His disciples and told them: You'll be betrayed by family. You'll be hated by everyone because of My name. They'll even put some of you to death. *And not a hair on your head shall perish!* Oh, let us be fearless!

Now, some of you say, "Mike, that's inspiring stuff and everything, but I'm not the Apostle Paul. And I don't live in the first-century Roman Empire. I mean, things are getting bad in America, but the fact is I don't face death every day! How does this apply to me?" Well, it's true that the doctrine of the resurrection galvanizes us for dangerous evangelistic ministry to the world. But it

is also the ground of risky, sacrificial, tireless ministry to one another in the body of Christ. You may not be called to be killed for Christ's sake, but you *have* been called to lay down your life—to die to self every day, and be one of the dying living that gives your life for the sake of serving the Church.

I'm talking about real life ministry, now. I'm talking about living life together, and serving one another as family. See, it's so easy to be tempted to think, "Pastor, you are asking me to give up my life! Is that all I'm going to do with my life? I break my back at work every day so I can provide for my family (or, in the case of the mom: I break my back raising the kids every day so I can nurture and edify my family unto the glory of God); I go to fellowship group, main service, and evening service every Sunday; I go to Bible study, and I even meet with the people in my Bible study outside of Bible study every once and while. And with the little bit of free time that I have left, you want me to go visit people in the hospital? You want me to go to clean someone's house? You want me to do one-on-one counseling and discipleship and talk about my *sins*? You want me to try to convince other people to deal with sin in their own lives? That's what you want me to do with my *free* time? My whole *life* is going to pass away!" And the Holy Spirit of God, through this text, as it were looks you dead in the eye and says: *You will live again*. And so you can be free to *give* your life away in service of Christ's Church, and to know the joy of the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.

"Lord! Behold, we have left everything and followed You!" "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake"—there is no one who has ever made *any* sacrifice for the cause of Gospel ministry—"who will not receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, . . . and *in the age to come, eternal life*" (Mark 10:28–30). What motivates you to persevere in difficult ministry? Number one: a sincere faith in the Gospel; and number two: **a sure confidence in the resurrection**.

### **III. A Deep Satisfaction in the Glory of God (v. 15)**

We find a **third motivation** for joyful, enduring ministry even in the midst of affliction. And that is, number three: **a deep satisfaction in the glory of God**. Look with me at verse 15. Paul says, "For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God."

"All things are for your sakes." That is to say, everything that Paul goes through—all the hardship that he endures—all the beatings and imprisonments and stoning, all the sufferings and afflictions that come with constantly being delivered over to death, all of his labors in preaching and teaching—all of that is for the benefit of the church. "*For your sake* we are being put to death all day long" (Rom 8:36). "I endure all things *for the sake of the elect*, that *they* may obtain

salvation” (2 Tim 2:10). “I will most gladly spend and be spent *for your souls*” (2 Cor 12:15). Paul’s life of ministry was entirely oriented toward the benefit of the people of God. He was motivated by love for the Church!

But notice the precious truth that this text teaches us: that Paul’s love for the Church was not the *ultimate* motivation for his service of the Church. His love for the Church stood upon a more ultimate foundation. “All things are for your sakes, *so that*.” That means that there is a more ultimate purpose that undergirds his enduring ministry to the people of God. And that is: “so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to” what? “**The glory of God.**” Follow Paul’s reasoning here. The more he labors for the salvation and sanctification of the people of God, the more God’s grace spreads to more people. And the more people experience God’s grace in salvation and sanctification, the more people rejoice in and give thanks to God for His grace. And the more that God is praised and rejoiced in, the more He is honored and glorified. And *that* is at the bottom of Paul’s affections! There is nothing he desires more than for the glory of Almighty God to exalted, and treasured, and magnified!

And that is the case for every true believer in Christ. If you’re a Christian—if God has regenerated you, if He has shone in your heart to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6), so that you have come to hate sin and to love Jesus—the glory of God in Christ is your greatest treasure and delight! That’s what it means to be saved—to be freed from the bondage of seeking satisfaction and fulfillment in your sin and in yourself, and to find all your satisfaction in the magnification of His glory! And so you love when God’s glory is treasured and worshiped by others in a way that He is worthy of. You love when other people come to see and know God’s glory, so that they esteem Him rightly and worship Him in the way that He deserves! And Paul says, as people hear the Gospel preached and are saved, *worshippers* are created! More voices are added to the chorus of praise to God! And as Christians continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ, their worship is strengthened! The voices in that chorus of praise are raised as it were unto sweeter and sweeter song!

Why do I go on preaching the Gospel in the midst of a hostile culture that promises me certain death? How can I be content to humble myself as the slave of God’s people—to give my life away for the sake of the health and growth of the church of God? Because there is something that I treasure more deeply than comfort! more deeply than ease! more deeply than my own personal hobbies and interests and ambitions. I can lay down my life because I treasure something more deeply than my life, and that is the glory of God shining in the face of Christ! Oh GraceLife, are these things true of you? Can you heart speak these declarations with integrity? Do you long for the glory of God? Is His honor and praise the very foundation of your joy? If it is, you will preach this Gospel. If your **deepest satisfaction** is in the glory of God, you will go on joyfully ministering even in the midst of affliction—because God deserves the praise of saved sinners and

sanctified saints! And your labors in Gospel ministry are the instrument through which God gets what He deserves from His people! Can there be any greater motivation to spend and be spent for the souls of God's people than to know that the laying down of your life magnifies and multiplies the glory of God? That your sacrifice works to exalt God as supreme in the affections of His people?

Dear friends, this is what sustains you in ministry. The glory of God is the fuel of the fire that burns in your bones! Gospel ministry exists because worship *doesn't*. There are people in the world and in the church whose praise God is *worthy* of, but which He does not yet have. You and I have been commissioned to proclaim the Gospel and to serve the saints in order to see that God gets what He is worthy of. We evangelize—we preach the Gospel of forgiveness of sins in Christ—to turn people into worshipers of the God who is worthy of all worship. We serve the church, and we live life together, and we fight sin in one another to add higher strains to the chorus of God's praise. And if that's the case, I don't care what Satan and this world throws at me—I am *in*! I am ready to die! And I am ready to die *daily*, to be poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of the faith of the people of God, to spend and be spent for souls, to be the slave of all.

May God grant that it would be true of me—and that it would be true of all of us in this place.