

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

Ordination Service for Brad Boatman

The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ

As human beings we like to ask the big questions of life – where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? The age old problem with man is that he has sought the answer to these questions in himself, separated from God. But man cannot answer such grand questions unless God, our Creator, the Giver and Sustainer of Life, speaks first to man to provide us with the answer.

The answer begins with the fact that you were created in the image of God **to see God** - to fellowship with Him, to love Him and be loved by Him, and to reflect His glory by living your life by every Word which proceeds from the mouth of God. This is what it means to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. But sin tragically entered God's world when your father Adam chose to disobey God, breaking fellowship with God, by loving himself more than God, and seeking his own glory in opposition to the glory of God. The result of Adam's sin was that no man can see God and live (**Ex. 33:20**). But how are we to live, to enjoy life, when we can't see God? If the only way man can find complete flourishing of being, to be ultimately happy and enjoy life to the fullest, by seeing the face of God then how will we ever reach our chief end of life if we are cut off from the source of life Himself? The good news is that this is why Jesus came into our world. It is His eternal gift to you to enable you, the sinner, to once again see the face of God.

Now, once sin entered our hearts a new question became necessary: How can you, as a sinner, look upon God's face and live?

The apostle Paul answers this vital question that the only way you, as a sinner, can see the face of God is in "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (**2 Cor. 4:4**). Paul describes the "gospel of the glory of Christ" as "light" because light reveals, it makes things clearer so we can see them. God, who is invisible – Whom no man can see – is revealed to us through the express image of God, Jesus Christ (**v. 4**). Jesus Christ has made the invisible God, visible (**cf. Col. 1:15**). We can speak of "light" as "revelation" so that God revealed His glory ultimately "in the face of Jesus Christ" (**4:6**), so that when we have seen Jesus Christ we have seen God (**cf. John 8:19; 10:30; 14:7, 9**). Just as when God spoke into the darkness of this created world and revealed Himself when He said, "Let light shine out of darkness" so now He has shown in our hearts "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" in the "face of Jesus Christ"

(4:6). Now think about what Paul is saying for a moment. If the greatest desire of man in all of his life is to once again see the glory of the face of God, where will you see it?

Think for a moment of how tragically pulpits in America completely miss this goal every LORD's Day. Many preachers will fill their sermons with diatribes exposing the social vices in our nation, like divorce, abortion or homosexual marriage, or they will provide much practical advice for being a better man or woman, a better husband or wife, a better parent or child. They will sometimes say many good things, even truths we need to hear. But the approach of the American pulpit has dreadfully been reduced to merely telling the church how to be good people when the folks in the pew know better. We are not good people and all the many list of do's and don'ts are not ever going to make us good people. Oh, they may make us more gentlemen-like, more social, more decent men and women. They might make us more righteous citizens, but hell is full of good people. No law, no commandment, no ordinance can make us ready to see the face of God. But the preacher trudges on giving more and more practical advice to people who should be crying out, "Show Me Jesus!" As the people of God, you ought to be crying out to your preacher every Sunday to show you Jesus. Why?

Because it is only when you see the face of Jesus, through the preaching of the Word and Sacraments, that you will once again see the glory of the face of God. That is why Paul says in v. 5, "for we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as LORD." How many preachers usurp the LORDSHIP of Jesus every Sunday for the lordship of "ourselves," where you are the beginning and end of the sermon.

You should settle for no less than every LORD's Day to cry out to your preacher to stop showing us "ourselves" and get on with showing us Jesus Christ. To plead with your It is only in Him that you will see the glory of God. It is only as you are brought face to face with Christ each LORD's Day that you once again see God's Almighty glory. If the preacher stops short of the gospel of Jesus you should rise up and cry, "Let him be anathema!" It is not enough that he tells you how to be good NOR is it enough for him to tell you that Jesus was good and if you will follow His example, then you too can see God. That is not the Gospel of the glory of Christ. The heart of the gospel is that you are not good people and all the rules, which could be numbered before you, will never make you good people. God has sent His one and only Son, the exact image of God, into your world to be good for you – in fact to be your perfect righteousness before God – and He took your sin upon Himself and was condemned in your place so that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (**cf. Rom. 8:1**). Jesus, in your place, is the Gospel – the good news - which alone brings

you to glory of God. What you couldn't do, He came and did for you. You got yourself into this mess; Jesus came to get you out.

The sure test on the LORD's Day that you have heard the Gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ is if you can say at the end of the sermon that you are not even thinking of "ourselves" but only "Christ Jesus as LORD" (v. 5). If you walk out of the sanctuary thinking only of yourself, for better or for worse, you were never ushered before the glory of God. Do you think Moses came down from Mt. Sinai filled with visions of his goodness and how starting Monday morning he will be a better man? Do you think Peter, James, and John came down from the mountain with a notebook filled with practical advice of how they should be better husbands or fathers? No! They had just seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The LAST thing they were thinking about was "ourselves"! Paul says later in **2 Cor. 11:2-3** that he "wed you to one husband, as a pure virgin to Christ alone" and warns you to beware of anyone who would lead you astray from a "sincere and pure devotion to Christ alone." As the people of God, don't allow your preacher to lead you into "spiritual adultery" by making you look at anyone other than your true husband, Jesus Christ – even if that other man is yourself. Cry "Foul!" if they turn your attention away from "a sincere and pure devotion to Jesus Christ."

Otherwise, you will lose heart (**2 Cor. 4:1, 16**). Why do so many in our churches daily lose heart? Because we do not shine upon them the "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (v. 6). How can the bride of Christ be filled with joy if she never sees the face of her Husband?

And there are going to be many times throughout your day that you will need to see the face of your Husband! Paul describes the nature of your Christian daily life in a very somber, realistic manner (**vv. 8-10a**). How are you going to be "afflicted in every way, but not crushed" when life smacks you in the face? Who among us isn't often perplexed about what to do with the struggles and difficulties of living in a fallen world and yet are ever driven to despair? When we stand up for Jesus Christ before a world who hates Him, do you often feel the fear and loneliness of being persecuted for His name? Do you feel forsaken in those moments? Who among us has been utterly struck down and yet feeling as if you are knocked out and can't get back up? Who are you going to turn to in those moments of your life when you are left with nothing else in this temporary world to hang onto? In those moments the last thing you need to hear about is "ourselves"! What you desperately need is the "light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"!

And these difficult moments are never by accident. They are all gifts of God's grace to you. Why? Paul says in v. 7 that we have this treasure – what treasure? “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” hidden in jars of clay – that's you! – Why? So that you will know that the surpassing power of your daily life belongs to God and not to you. Think about what Paul is saying here. Why must you daily pray that your pastor will come to the pulpit on Sunday morning to preach Jesus Christ and not “ourselves”? Because in the difficult realities of what we call life you must see that the power of your life is not found in you, but outside of you, in your husband, Jesus. This is what Paul means in v. 10 when he first explains your life as a Christian as “carrying in your body the death of Jesus”? Jesus told us what the cost was going to be to follow Him – deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Jesus wherever He leads you! That is what we do for one another – we remind our wife when she is “afflicted in every way” – we remind our children when they are “perplexed” – we remind our pastor when he is “persecuted” – we remind our parents when they are “struck down” that what sustains each of us is “the life of Jesus,” which is given to us weekly through Word and Sacraments.

It is not because God frowns on you or despises you that you feel the weight of the “outer man wasting away” (v. 16). That is what sin has done to our world. But we do not lose heart. Why? Because tomorrow we will turn over a new leaf? Tomorrow will be better because we now know what we are supposed to do and we plan to get on with it? That's not Paul's prescription. The hope of your life will never be found in you – in “ourselves” but in the face of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the surpassing power of God and He is the only One who will give hope to your inner man day by day. Only He can give you the proper perspective on your daily struggles so that you can call them but “momentary light afflictions” (v. 17). You know the troubles you face. They sure don't feel like momentary, light afflictions, do they? They will if your pastor shines upon week-in and week-out the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” It is only as he points you to Him – to the One who unseen, to the One who is eternal (v. 18) that you will see eternal weight of His glory of which your “momentary, light afflictions” are not worthy to be compared. Beg of your pastor, pray for him, love him enough to tell him often to never leave the sermon focused on “ourselves” but only proclaim Jesus Christ as LORD that we may once again see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!

Amen!

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