

Back to the Gospel: Displaying Beauty

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God...we do not lose heart..

Last week we looked at how important it is to see the beauty of the gospel ... but that how over our hearts is a veil that prevents us from seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ...

And because this veil is over our hearts, there really is nothing we can do... The Holy Spirit has to remove that veil... by giving us a new heart..

And so... in your Christian walk.. as we share the gospel.. as we try to show the beauty of Christ to others with our words and actions... frankly.. at many times we will be tempted to be discouraged... to LOSE heart because we cannot remove the veil over their hearts. BUT... look what it says here... Having this ministry by the MERCY of God.. we do not lose heart. God is merciful. He is saving sinners. He is at work and so we can also go out in confidence...

But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways... we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word... in other words... we don't distort or water down the gospel in order to make it more appealing to the world... God forbid that we use disgraceful underhanded ways to bring people into church... BUT by the open statement of the truth... we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God...

Here's what happens when we OPENLY proclaims the truth to those around us. Jae was sharing two weeks ago about how when we share the gospel...when we proclaim the truth... the appropriate response ought to be ridicule and slander... that's exactly what Jesus says... blessed are you when people persecute you and say all kinds of evil falsely against you on account of me... If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household. If they hated me... they will also hate you...

But even if our gospel is veiled... it is veiled to those who are perishing... In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to

keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God...

SO... there is a veil over our hearts... AND there is the god of this world... Satan... who blinds the mind of the unbelievers in order to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ....

For what we proclaim is not ourselves.. but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants, for Jesus' sake...

If we preached ourselves, about our transformed lives... our testimony if you will... and about what Jesus can do for you! Instead of what He already has done on the cross... if we preach ourselves and not Christ crucified... the world eats that up. IT LOVES the gospel that promises you health, wealth, and a crown.. the vast majority of Christian movement in the world that you hear of that are exploding in parts of Africa and Asia are all fake... They preach a crown without a cross... SATAN LOVES THAT! All Satan wants is for the world to be blinded the the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ... He will open their eyes to the glory of your changed life... but once you start openly talking about Jesus.. that's when we will suffer. We must be sober minded and remember that even our Lord Jesus had many many people following him at one point.. but as he began talking about the COST of following Him...at one point... literally everyone except the 12 disciples left Him...

But even so... we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants, for Jesus' sake... we are servants... jars of clay.. weak, unworthy vessels unfit to carry the treasure that is the gospel... WHY?

Because we know that God who once said, let light shine out of darkness as shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Just as in Genesis 1, where God sovereignly spoke light into the darkness, so even now He is speaking the light of the gospel into our dark hearts... so that we might behold the beauty of God in the face of Jesus Christ...

Notice how Paul makes the point of specifying the face of Jesus Christ... The glory of God is most fully and clearly revealed in the face of Jesus

Christ as He hung on the cross for our sins. It was there that the love and justice and mercy and grace and wrath and patience of God were most FULLY manifest. There is no DEEPER revelation of God... If you try to move on to bigger and better things.. if you fail to hold on fast to the gospel, your heart will be led astray by lesser lights and begin to drift away from the truth... until you are engulfed by the darkness....

Moving on...

But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us... this just clarifies what I said before ... We have this treasure - the gospel - in jars of clay - us - to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

-The means by which God has appointed to proclaim this PRICELESS gospel...US. The means by which God has appointed to proclaim this wonderful gospel is through those who are comparatively found to be lacking. Why? To show that the surpassing power to shine in the hearts of men the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ belongs to God and not to us!

And so, because the surpassing power belongs to God, we step out in boldness and confidence, knowing that to Him belongs the the all-surpassing power to save sinners!

But we are afflicted, perplexed, persecuted and struck down... WHY? As we obey God to openly proclaim the gospel... as we obey this POWERFUL God, He allows us to suffer. WHY?

We are afflicted, but not crushed... perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed...always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Death is at work in us, but life in you. That is the attitude we all ought to have. While we are being persecuted by the world for bowing our knee to King Jesus... EVEN THEN, we think not about ourselves.. BUT about their eternal good! Death is at work in us, but life in you! I'll tell you what's salty and bright - when you are suffering discomfort and pain and disease... you put the eternal good of those around you first! Over and above your OWN needs, you continue to serve in good works and love to those AROUND you. Yes, death may be at work in us, but life - the life of Jesus Christ is being manifest right now to those around me! Hallelujah! And lest you think that this is just something I am coming up with... there are Christians around the world who are even now LITERALLY living this verse out. We have all heard about it on the news, of how Christians in the Middle East are being shot and beheaded. They are dying. And you know How they are dying? You won't find this on CBC... These people are praying for the people who are about to kill them! What's even more crazy is that the family and friends of the deceased are INVITING the killers of their sons and daughters INTO their homes and cooking a warm meal for them!

THIS IS CRAZY! And the world looks on with amazement... WHAT IS THAT? I've never seen that before!

The history textbooks you learn from in high school fails to tell of the many men and women of God who laid down their lives for Jesus.. who were eaten alive by cannibals and beheaded... who were killed within minutes of arriving on shore at the very village they were going to share the gospel in... this is NOT just talking about third world countries. THIS is Australia. This is Europe. This is the United Kingdom and Canada. This is KOREA! Before God impacted our nations with the gospel, we were THOSE people who KILLED Christian missionaries - men and women who left behind the comfort of their well paying jobs and safe homes to go share the good news of Jesus Christ with the lost!

Displaying Beauty through Suffering

-It has been said that you will suffer for those things that are important to you... If you hold something to be precious, you will not hesitate to go through suffering for it.... If freedom is precious to you, if your family's

safety and your nations safety are important to you... you will risk your life to go to war to protect these things...

In the same way... if the beauty of Jesus is precious to you.. if you are PASSIONATE about other people seeing the beauty of Christ through you.. then you will not grumble when suffering comes.. you will not turn to God in anger when He allows you to suffer... because you know - God is at work to display the life and power of Jesus Christ through your mortal flesh through the way that you handle suffering and loss! And so.. even in the midst of darkness, you don't MUMBLE. You don't GIVE UP! You don't stop coming out to church.

Rather, by the grace of God, you try that much harder to live for the good of those you are making you suffer!

When your co-workers and friends and neighbours SEE that. When they see you have a hope that actors your soul even in the midst of the dark storms of life... they will look at that and think... HMM... What's that? I've never seen that before... That's salty! and that's bright!!!

-Many people read the book of Acts as a case study of what the church should look like and what God can do through His church. And a lot of the times, we tend to focus on the excellent preaching... and the miracles... and the hundreds and thousands of people that were added to the church... but very rarely does anyone stop to notice those verses that directly precede it..

What do these verses talk about? Suffering. The Bible tells us that right from the beginning, the church suffered. They were afflicted... they were slandered... persecuted... and perplexed... but in the midst of it all.. here is the attitude they maintained.. and it is the attitude we must have to suffering and in the midst of suffering if we are to see lasting change in the city of Coquitlam through this church..

Acts 5:41-6:1 ... they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonour for the name [of Jesus]. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus. Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number...

Lets not be naive and think we can reach the lost for Jesus or to try to live for the kingdom of God without suffering for His sake. The god of this world is blinding the minds of unbelievers and they all have veils over their hearts that make them HOSTILE toward God.. and so when you try to live for God... the world and satan all become your enemy. lets not be naive.. Jesus warned us that just as the world hated Him, the world will also hate us...

But we do not lose hope because it is not meaningless. Our suffering - if it is for Christ, HAS PURPOSE. ETERNAL SIGNIFICANCE. We get to display the beauty of Christ to those around us!!

I don't know about you. but for me, there is nothing scarier than trying to wrap my head around the meaning of suffering. IF THERE IS NO MEANING IN DEATH AND SUFFERING AND DISEASE. If there is no MEANING and PURPOSE behind the death of a child...

John Paton and his PREGNANT wife... his PREGNANT wife Mary, arrived on the island of Tanna on November 5, 1858. They had left behind the comfort of their homes and jobs and settled on a island that had already killed and eaten several missionaries. The following year, in February 12, their baby was born. But due to the strain of childbirth as well as repeated attacks of ague and fever and pneumonia and diarrhea and delirium... she died on March 3. And then 17 days later, on March 20th, their baby boy died... I don't know about you, but at this point I would have returned home. But not John... He stayed... 4 years... and returned later again for 41 years... And served amongst these island people... who were CONSTANTLY trying to kill him. You know what happened? The people who were trying to kill John watched as this white man who had just lost his wife and child... they watched as he prayed for people and desperately tried to share the gospel with the very men who tried to kill assassinate him... they watched.. year after year.. and the result... ENTIRE villages were won over to Christ.

The title of this message is displaying beauty. You can display display the beauty of Christ in many ways, but you display his beauty most clearly when you are able to suffer loss for His sake and count it gain.

SO the next time you step out in courage and share the gospel... the next time you are slandered because you believe in Jesus... pause.. think... and remember... REJOICE... when people persecute you and say all kinds of evil against you on account of me, because it is then that you can display the beauty of Christ to those around you. When you rejoice in Jesus the midst of suffering and do good works to those around you... people are going to ask you the reason for the hope that you have.