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December 17, 2017

## 2 CORINTHIANS 4:1-6

### 2 Corinthians Series

[PRAYER] Lord, there are so many things that happen as we experience church. We know that the church isn't a building; the church is people, and that your people gather together for a specific purpose. The purpose to worship you and connect with each other as part of a family and to experience your word and its teaching. So we ask now that as we look at your word that you would empower us in a significant way. That we would go from here changed people. That you would use your word to transform our hearts, to renew our minds, to grow us to be closer to you, and to understand life better. It's so confusing sometimes to experience what we experience. So I'm asking, Lord, that you clarify that today. Give us real clarity about who you are and what you want for us in our lives. So we're opening your word in 2 Corinthians, Father, and asking you to speak to us now. In Jesus' name, amen.

Would you stand with me as we read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6? You can open your Bibles to the passage if you'd like. 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 is the passage we're going to be looking at today.

*Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.*

You may be seated. The story of Christmas is told throughout the Bible. In fact the Bible is really the story about how Jesus Christ came to earth to redeem us, to offer us new life. The Bible is the story of Christmas. Although it may not have the manger story in every passage we look at, Christ is central. Now we might in our teaching find a passage and look at the subject of anger, for example, or we might look at money, or we might look at some subject. We do come to those places where right out of the text we see the gospel shine. We see Jesus Christ revealed and it's just obvious. "Here we are at another Christmas story," we can say as we're looking at the Bible.

Well today is one of those passages. In fact I would suggest that this passage today is put between a couple of different passages. So let me illustrate this one.

This is verse 1 in 2 Corinthians 4. It says - *Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.* Now this is a bridge verse that takes us from chapter 3 where we're going to learn about this ministry into chapter 4 starting in verse 7 where we don't lose heart. So he puts both of those ideas together here at the first verse of chapter 4. So when he says *therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry*, he's talking about the last two sermons really that we've looked at in chapter 3.

Let me remind you in case you weren't here. We learned that we are the letter of God. God has chosen to communicate to the world the message of who He is and He's chosen people like you and me to be that letter. That is our ministry. So we have this opportunity to share and be this light, be this letter, be this communication vehicle to the world to let other people know who God is, to tell them about it. And notice it's by *God's mercy*. It's only by God's mercy that we can do that. Because of God's mercy we have this ministry. That's the first part of the verse.

The last part of the verse says *we do not lose heart*. That's referring to the passage starting in verse 7 and following. In fact let me just zip ahead so you can see it's really referring to that. This is verse 7, which we'll look at the next time we come to 2 Corinthians 4. It says - *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power (power is the theme of 2 Corinthians) is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.* Basically he's saying *do not lose heart*. That's what he's saying.

So when we come to our verse today, we see that we have a ministry and we don't lose heart. But right in the middle we have this Christmas story that we're going to read about through verses 2-6. So as I look at this, I'm saying to myself this looks like a sandwich Christmas. You've got the Christmas story sandwiched between these two very important theological ideas and it happens to come right at a time when we could use a Christmas story. So we're going to look at this passage in 2 Corinthians 4:2-6.

In verse 2 then we start with the word *rather*. In other words, we're taking this tangent. We're leaving this subject of ministry and you're the letter. We're going to step back for a moment and we're going to look at the basis for all of it. You need to understand that Christ is central here. Christ is the most important thing. So he starts with this word *rather* which is going to take us on a tangent into the importance of Jesus Christ in each one of our lives. He's going to give a testimony of Christians.

A good testimony, if you want to design one for yourself, is going to talk about what you were like before you were a Christian, how you came to know Christ, and how He's changed your life (those three things). If you want some help developing your personal testimony, there is a Bible study at the information table that talks about how to develop a personal testimony.

But Paul is going to share now a testimony of us as Christians and he says this: *Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways.* I just want to pause there for a moment because you need to know when we're Christian we move to be Christians then we renounce these secret and shameful ways. So if you find yourself now involved in some kind of a secret or shameful thing, you want to stop it. You want to discontinue it. You want to renounce it because it's hindering

your life. Secret and shameful ways, we've renounced them. That's part of what it means to be a Christian. And there's such freedom in doing the right thing. When we're doing the right thing, we experience that freedom inside. It's just one of the benefits of righteousness. *Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God.*

I like those words *distort the word of God* because I find that some people today can use the Bible to prove almost anything they want. So even people who are not Christians will quote the Bible to support their particular idea that they have. Many times the word of God is distorted today. That's why it's so important, I believe, as we're studying God's word that we're actually looking at the text and where the principles come from. I try to show you and even underline sometimes this is where the point is coming from. So in no way are we distorting God's word as we are presenting it as the message of God.

*On the contrary.* So he says *rather* and then he gets us into the testimony. He says we don't do these things, but *on the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.* When we present the word of God plainly then it's available for someone to receive and it ministers to their conscience. In other words they say, "Yes, this rings true to me. This makes sense." When the conscience is involved you go, "Yes, I feel good about what I'm hearing here." The truth is plainly shared. And when the truth is plainly shared then it just rings true. So what's happening here in the passage is he's saying look, when we come and we start sharing the word of God with people, they can receive it because it makes sense to them.

In our world today, there are a lot of ideas about getting better, stronger, more confident. We call them self-help books that are out there. They communicate things like "if you believe it then it will happen," or "just pull yourself up by your bootstraps," or "think positive thoughts." Or you can take a seminar that will pump you up and inspire you. But in the back of your mind you're saying, "I don't know if this is going to work for me." Because you know you've got some inadequacies. It just doesn't ring true in your conscience. You wish it were true. So you take the class or you read the book, because you wish it were true that you could just humanistically be a better person. But it just doesn't ring true because there are some problems that exist inside of you. Those are real problems. So when the message of the gospel comes, it really rings true. Because the gospel says this: God created you in a very special way.

In fact in the six days of creation and God created people, then He says, "This is very good." He had said *this is good* all the way up to there, but then He says this is *very* good. God created people. He created you and me and there's worth just because of the creation.

But then something happens called "the fall" where sin enters the world. So each of us are impacted by that sin. Sometimes our own personal sin has caused us to be damaged. We've made bad choices, bad things have happened and we need forgiveness. But sometimes it's the sin of other people that wreaks havoc on our lives and the brokenness that exists in our world and the brokenness that exists in our hearts needs something because it's just not working. What we need is something to rescue us from ourselves and that's why Jesus is called a Savior.

So He comes in, something from outside of us then gives us this internal value, gives us this intrinsic something that allows us to shine and be great, not because of something we can do or some self-help book we've read, but because of Christ glowing through us, or because He's given us identities as a letter, or He's given us the confidence that we talked about last week. God has done something in our lives that rings true.

So you look and say, "That's what I want! Because I can't do this by myself." It just rings true in my conscience. It's just plainly shared. So when we share the gospel or the truth plainly, then people go, "I want that," sometimes. The problem is, that doesn't always happen, does it? I think that it would happen everybody would get saved because when the truth is shared plainly you just reach in and you go, "Yes, this is what I want." But there is a problem and that problem is talked about in verse 3. So let's look at the problem that we experience.

In verse 3 Paul says – *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled (that means it has a covering over it) to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

There is this light of the gospel that displays the glory or the *doxa* of Christ, who is the image of God, but people's minds are blinded by this person. The person mentioned there is *the god of this age*. We know that Satan is the god of this age, kind of orchestrating and fueling what we call a world system.

The world system has to do with the philosophy of how we live. Every one of us has a philosophy of how we live. And that philosophy is impacted greatly by a lot of things, hopefully impacted by God's word. That would be the ideal thing. But we live in a world that has a lot of ideas about life. Ideas about emotions, ideas about money, ideas about things, ideas about sex, ideas about pleasure. And the world system is communicating continually about what's important and what's valuable because the god of this present age has this kind of system we call the world system.

It's communicated in our world through our entertainment, through the news that we read. It's communicated through politics, it's communicated through decision-making of those in leadership, in authority. It's communicated through our friends as we start talking because we all develop these little cultures and the culture can be heavily influenced by the God of this age. Worldliness. So you want to be asking yourself what is true here? Should I be buying into what's being said here?

If you're in school, for example, you're reading textbooks. There are textbooks that have to do with science and history and philosophy and psychology and all of them are influenced by the world system. So you always have to be asking the question, is this part of what the world is offering me that is a substitute? Or is this something that's godly that I need to embrace? As Christians we're always picking out of this the things that we know are helpful and trying to leave the things that aren't. But we're so easily influenced.

Now notice who the target is of this god of this age. It says – *The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers*. That’s one of the strategies of Satan. I certainly think Satan wants to attack believers as well. But one of the attacks of Satan goes to nonbelievers, people who are not yet Christians because he wants to keep them that way. They would come to Christ if they saw the word plainly and they didn’t have their eyes blinded.

So much of our job is to share with them windows and doors into the Christian life so they might catch it on the inside and might want to receive Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. So testimonies are really helpful. Because when you hear a testimony of someone who has accepted Christ in their life, you just say, “If it did it for them, maybe it would do it for me.” So we start opening up a little bit. Even those whose eyes are blinded and caught in the world system start to say, “I think there’s more than what I’m looking at. I think I can find more in life.”

I listened this week to some videos to people who have become Christians, them telling their stories. Most of the people I listen to are famous people, celebrities who have come to Christ. You can listen to those stories on a website called I Am Second. The point of the website is that Jesus is first and I am second, which is very important for celebrities who can sometimes believe that they are first or they want to be first. So the idea I am second is the website. So they’re telling their story. It’s very inspiring to listen to the various people who are Christians tell their stories. That God has done a work in their lives, that their eyes have been unblinded, the veil has been taken off the gospel, and they can see the light of the glory of God.

The last part of it says *so they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*. The idea of light is introduced here. In fact it’s carried a little bit further as we go into the next verse.

But before we go there, let’s go to the Christmas story, because one of the characters in the Christmas story is really blinded. He’s Herod. The wise men come to Herod and say, “Hey, we hear there’s a king. We’re really excited about that.” Herod is threatened by that. His eyes are blinded because he believes he’s going to lose something. If he finds the Christ, the other king, that he’s going to lose his power. The world system that’s around him says, “You are going to lose something if you come to Christ or you find Christ.” So he’s threatened by the whole idea. That’s why he tells the wise men, when you find him, come back and tell me (so that I can kill him).” He’s threatened.

I would suggest there are a lot of people today who are threatened by the gospel. It’s going to change your life and change is hard for some people. Some people are really ready for a change. You’ve got to know that. People come to Christ – “I’ve got to get away from this. I need something else. I know I need it. I am ready for a change,” so they’re ready for something new. But there are a lot of people who aren’t ready yet for a change, and so their eyes are blinded by that. Herod was one of those people that was blinded and created some discord in the Christmas story as we see it.

As we continue on in the next verses, verse 5 says – *For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord. As Lord*. Not just as Savior, but Lord. In other words, He’s the boss of my life. He’s running my life. He’s controlling me. As He’s controlling my life, He helps me make

decisions. He's guiding where I'm going, what I'm doing, what I'm thinking, how I'm feeling. He's the boss. He's the Lord.

*But Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.*

Notice the word *light*. It was mentioned in the previous verse, verse 4. Now twice it's mentioned here. The theme of light is something that permeates the whole scriptures. We see that when Jesus is transfigured in the New Testament, He shone with such brightness that the disciples fell down. They just couldn't look at Him. Even Paul who wrote these words, when he was converted, do you remember he was on a trip up to Damascus and a blinding light overtook him and he was blind for a while. That blinding light spoke to him. It was Jesus Christ.

Imagine this: Of all of God's character qualities that He has, it's the holiness of God that produces the energy. The energy that produces brilliant light that's out there. So when you see God in His holiness, then that's when the light appears. It happened with Moses when He was on the mountain getting the Ten Commandments that he had to put a veil over his eyes and face because people would see the glory fading. So there was this brightness of God's glory that just came also onto him so that he could enjoy that and he could see what was going on in that situation. Just this brightness all over his face and all over his eyes.

But here we see the story picked up at the beginning. This is a story taken from Genesis 1 when God said, "*Let there be light.*" You know the story. Genesis 1:1 says – *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. God saw that it was good.*

You see this light was very much present in creation, started the whole process of creation to take place. Because then we have day separated from night and we have animals and vegetation and people actually created, but it all started with this light.

The interesting thing is that we are called in the book of 2 Corinthians *the new creation*. When Christ comes into our lives He does this new work in us and we are the new creation. He provides this light. Notice He *made his light shine in our hearts to give us the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ*. It just dwells inside of our hearts.

So if we go to the Christmas story, one of the stories we see is the wise men who followed a light, a star. Now these guys were educated. They were scientists. They were astronomers looking at the heavens and they noticed a new star in the sky. So they must be studying the sky and they saw a new light, which represented for them somehow that a new king would be coming on the scene, and they were eager to find this king. So these three (we don't know if there were three), wise men came looking and following the star. It's a light. They're intrigued.

I would suggest that today there are people who are intrigued by the gospel because of science, or their understanding of the physical bodies we live in, or they study physics, or they study

archeology. Any science that you study, if you go deep enough, you start asking big philosophical questions like, “How did we get here? How do we have all of these things present?”

So these guys were drawn to something bigger. They were intrigued by their science. So they follow the star and it comes to Jerusalem where they talk to Herod. Herod says, “Go find him. Let me know what happens.” So the Bible says they followed the star to where it stopped over the house where Jesus was. Now I have no idea how a star that’s so far in the sky could pinpoint a house. I have no idea what that looks like. I can’t imagine. Maybe it was this *doxa*, which was a spotlight on the house. I have no idea how that happened. But somehow they knew it was there. When they got to the house where the star stopped, the Bible says they were overjoyed and they bowed down and they worshiped the King. Wow. They met Jesus is what happened. They met Him and they met Him in their study of science. In their pursuit of science, they came to this understanding and meeting Jesus that is so interesting.

Do you know what happens right after that? What happens right after that is God starts to speak to them. And He says to them in a vision, “Don’t go back and tell Herod what’s going on. Go back a different way.” So they went away. They’re listening to the Lord. They came in contact with the Lord, with the light that was there.

This theme of light takes us through the scriptures and brings us to another story, the story of the shepherds who were out in the hills. These are different than the educated, learned people who were in the classroom. These are the worker bees of life. These are the managers. These are the people doing the nightshift, like some of you are doing the nightshifts. These are the people who keep the world running. They’re taking care of the sheep at night.

In the midst of that it says an angel appeared that shone and light was there. And then there’s a host of angels that sing a song because this is the birth announcement of Jesus. Here is a Savior born in the city of Bethlehem and you’ll know Him because He’s wrapped up in cloths and lying in a cow’s eating dish. That’s how you’re going to know who He is. So they sing this great song, “Glory to God in the highest! In excelsis Deo,” and then everything disappears, it’s quiet, it’s dark again, and they’re looking at each other.

That’s the end of the story. Except that they say to each other, “You know what? Let’s go check this out.” They weren’t told to go check it out. They said, “Let’s go check this out.” So they go, and sure enough they find the baby wrapped in these swaddling clothes, these cloths, and lying in a cow’s eating dish. They were so excited after meeting Jesus that the Bible tells us when they left they spread the news to everyone they met. They wanted to tell everybody about the story. It started with a light, the light that shone in the darkness.

This theme of light is a pretty significant one for us because when you think about it, there’s blindness that the people experience who don’t know Jesus. We have the light, so we can see. It’s like walking around in the dark for many people. They don’t know where they’re going. But we have the light, so we can see clearly what’s going on. *For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.* I don’t think we realize what we have sometimes.

I'm going to show you a video in just a moment. It's a video of a ten year old boy who will see color for the first time, and you'll get to see his response for getting to see color for the first time. I like this particular video because I think there are a lot of people today who live in a black and white world. I'm not just talking about those guys who are colorblind. I'm really grateful that I can see colors. I can see the reds and the greens and the blues, and when I go out I can see the colors in creation. Like today is a black and white day. But when you get out there and you see the colors, it's just beautiful.

Ed and I were sharing some favorites this week and his favorite season is spring because of the colors that come up. I just can imagine. There are the daffodils that are yellow and the tulips come out of their bulbs that are purple and red. He and I both have them in our yards. So the color comes out in the springtime and it's just beautiful. I love seeing that. I am so grateful I can see color.

Now if you can't see color you don't know what you're missing. If you just can see black and white, then you and I are both accustomed to that. That becomes your life. You're not disappointed. You don't say, "Oh I wish I could see color," because you don't know what color is. You haven't experienced that. But when you see it, you go, "Whoa! Look what I've been missing!" That's what the Christian life is about.

I just want you to feel that today. I want you to feel that you have something very special that you can enjoy. When you've accepted Jesus Christ as Your Lord and Savior, you look at life differently. You look around and you see life differently because life is different than what you see just in the black and white. You see the color. It's just an amazing picture.

In this particular video this ten year old boy is going to receive some glasses that will allow him to see color. I'm only showing you a short part of the video. You can watch the rest of it online on YouTube if you'd like, but I want you to see his response and how he handles this idea of seeing more now than he saw before.

[Video played]

Wow. When I saw that I just cried. I can't imagine.

I'm grateful that I'm a Christian because I can see in color. There are so many people today who are lacking that. They want it. They need it. They don't realize. They just don't understand because their eyes are blinded. They can't see the truth plainly. So part of our job is to be able to communicate that truth. It's Jesus who communicated this to us. He said in John 8:12 – *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

Ah man. I love the way that boy just says, "Thank you." I am just so grateful for what God has done for me in my life. I want to share that with other people. I want to live the life that God has provided for me.



He says at the end of our passage – *For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.*

Wow. What a privilege we have to know Jesus Christ. So at Christmastime, it’s just a time for us to understand glory, *doxa*, light shining, the spotlight shining, and to just be so grateful for what God has given to us. Wow. It is such a privilege.

If you’ve never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, wow, what a great Christmas gift to give to yourself. God is the one who has given it to you, but to receive His special gift is just a privilege. I encourage you to make that decision today, to ask Jesus Christ to come into your life. He’ll allow you to see life in a completely different way and then we walk in this new kind of life, this new light that God provides for us.

Let’s stand and pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we say a big thank you to you for the gift of Jesus Christ. We’re so grateful that you’ve given us the ability to see clearly, not be blinded. But we know there are people around us all over that don’t realize what they’re missing. They really need you, Lord. We’re asking that you would give us a testimony that we’ll share like the shepherds did with others so that they can see the light, they can understand what you have to offer. Most importantly Father, we come to you with grateful hearts thanking you for what you’ve done for us. We’re grateful. In Jesus’ name, amen.