

Hope in Heaven

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[0 : 00] Tonight's we're looking at second Corinthians four, the chapter we've already read together on page 1160 and also you'll have been given at some point either tonight or this morning inside the notices sheet an outline of the sermon which is there for you.

You said it helps you to follow where we're going but please do keep your Bible open on that page. As we've just been saying tonight we're looking at this chapter, we're looking at verses one to ten and our sermon tonight is titled learning to see with gospel eyes, learning to see with gospel eyes. As a brief introduction the book that we're looking at tonight, second Corinthians it was written about two thousand years ago by a man called Paul to a church in a Greek city called Corinth and as the name suggests it's the second letter that he wrote to them.

It's actually a church that he had already planted so he established it, you read about that in the book of Acts and then having started the church he moves on but he keeps in contact with them and he writes these letters to them and we're looking at one of them tonight.

The first letter he wrote was all about various problems that they had in their church, various practical problems, some theological problems that they had and he wants to get to them in person to pastor them and to help them but he can't get there so he writes this second letter to them and at the very heart of this book, second Corinthians, like in everything Paul writes, at the very heart is the gospel message itself.

[1 : 44] Paul writes books so that people who read them will be drawn to Jesus Christ. We're looking at chapter four tonight, the chapter just before it which Derek preached on last week is all about this idea of glory, that God is glorious and that God does glorious things and that the gospel, this good news message revealed in the New Testament of the Bible is even more glorious than what we find in the Old Testament and this idea of glory as Derek was saying last week if you were here, conveys how much worth something has.

It's the idea of something having splendor, something having grandeur, power, honor, pride. It's the exact opposite of a good English word we use dross, you know dross stuff that you just cast aside, just rubbish.

Something with glory is the opposite of that, it's something with consequence. It's like with pens, you've got some pens that have glory and some pens that don't.

If someone gives you a cheap plastic, biro pen, it's okay, it's useful but you don't expect it to last because a biro pen is light and flimsy, its ink will run out or it will break and when its ink runs out, well you don't think this pen is worth so much that I'll put a new refill inside it, you throw it away. If your biro breaks, do you break down and cry? Unless you're some kind of biro pen fanatic, you don't get upset because it has no glory, it's flimsy.

[3 : 36] In Paul's language, a biro pen has no glory. Imagine on the other hand, a solid silver pen, the moment you pick it up, you know that it's worth something, it's heavy, it's substantial, it has an elegant design, it's made of material that will last.

You don't expect it to break, it's solid silver and if its ink runs out, well you don't throw the pen away because it's glorious, you buy a new refill, you get some good quality ink.

The silver pen has glory, it's not dross, it's worth something. So Paul is saying in effect that God and the gospel message that God gives us, they're the exact opposite of dross, God is glorious, his gospel message is glorious, it's worth something, it's worth the time that it will take for you to consider it.

God and the gospel are both things that deserve for us to care about them immensely. And that's what Paul is saying in the chapter before the one we're looking at, that God is glorious and that we should value him and his gospel more than anything else in the world.

But at this point we say, whoa, wait a minute, I can't see God because God is invisible and when I see Christians and when I see the church, it doesn't look that impressive to me, it doesn't seem all that glorious, it's more plastic, birer than silver, fountain, pen.

[5 : 10] For example, you live in Corinth, if you're one of the people that this letter was written to, you think, well that Paul guy, we've seen him, we heard him, he was here before, he's not that impressive, you know, he's a bit sickly, he's not an amazing public speaker, he's no super apostle, is he?

He's no apollo. And look at the Christians, these people in this church, I mean, they're, they're biro people, they're not that perfect, none of them live perfect lives and their message about this Jesus character who ended up dead on a cross.

Where is the glory in all of that? Where is the splendor? Where is the majesty? I can't see it. It does not seem obvious at all to me because that's our, a really natural response to this whole presentation of glory.

Paul then writes this chapter and it's all about how to see that glory. It's really about relearning the way that we look at everything through the gospel.

And the way that Paul does it is he outlines two very different perspectives on the gospel. The first is, is the gospel in God's sight.

[6 : 26] And then he looks at the gospel in the way that the unbelievers, non-Christians look at it. And after that, Paul tells us how if we don't see how glorious the gospel is, we learn to see how glorious it is.

So our first point is the gospel as seen by God and we're looking at verses one and two. Bearing in mind then that Paul has just been telling them how glorious God is and how God and the gospel, they have this all pervasive splendor and majesty and Paul's own job as a gospel minister is a glorious job.

It is quite natural for people to hear that and think, where's the glory? I don't see it. Paul seems to preempt that response by pointing out first of all that in human terms, the work that he's doing and the Christianity that he's presenting to us can look and can be something discouraging, something that would make him lose heart.

His work is not glorious because it's glamorous. Paul does not mingle with celebrities. Paul does not holiday in the Seychelles.

Paul does not drive a Bentley. Paul probably does not have a nice house. Glory for him does not equal glamour.

[7 : 55] On a day to day level, Paul's work as somebody that believes the gospel and is trying to spread it, it's hard and yet he still finds it glorious and he tells us that the very reason he doesn't give up on it is the very reason that he is doing it.

Therefore since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart, then he starts to spell out what his life and his work look like as a Christian.

Rather we have renounced secret and shameful ways. We do not use deception nor do we distort the word of God. In trying to spread this message and convince people of its glory of the worth that it should have in your life, Paul doesn't do anything underhand.

He's not in this for the money. He doesn't do what he does for personal gain. If you have digital television, you will have access to the deceptively named God TV.

Please don't watch it if you do have digital TV. It's a wretched hive of heresy and lies and people who twist Christianity to try and steal your money.

[9 : 10] The big name preachers that you get on God TV tend to be ones who preach prosperity gospel. God wants you to discover the champion in you and he's just told me that if you give me \$29.99 he's just going to bless you real good and if you buy my new book 10 steps to a better you for \$25 you'll get healthy and you'll get happy because God wants that for you.

And then you see a big row of perfect shiny teeth and the smile to seal the deal and millions of people fall for it all over the world and as a result these charlatans become multi-millionaires.

The most famous Benny Hinn has an annual income of \$200 million a year. He flies everywhere he goes on a private jet like a modern day fryer tetzel taking advantage of poor desperate ill people who will do anything to try and get well even give him their money.

And what you see regularly with these big name tele evangelists is that they are more often than not involved in major financial and personal moral scandals.

The list goes on Jimmy Swagger, Todd Bentley, Ted Haggard it goes on and on and on Paul's authentic gospel and gospel ministry is nothing like that.

[10:41] Paul starts to give hints of what he means by glorious when he calls his ministry and his message glorious. He's not involved in anything secretive or morally dubious.

He doesn't manipulate anyone. He doesn't deceive people. He doesn't twist the Bible and misquote it out of context so it will support whatever he's saying so he can get whatever whatever is in your wallet into his pocket.

On the contrary Paul says by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Paul's gospel is worthwhile. It's glorious because literally he says in it the truth is disclosed.

So that is a million miles away from what you find in all these fakes and tele evangelists and money grabbers because what is generally disclosed in their message and their lives in their ministry is seedy, sleazy stories usually involving prostitutes, affairs, spending ministry money on lavish living and drug use.

[12:00] You find that over and over as a pattern these people abuse Christianity to make themselves rich. The driving force in their ministry is not to communicate and disclose truth about Jesus and as a result the main thing that gets disclosed is usually personal scandal.

Paul is nothing like that. The reason that he gets up every day is to disclose truth but it's truth about God and our sin and his grace and Jesus' death and our need for repentance.

Paul finds that, that kind of disclosure of truth and not always spectacular, not always entertaining, not always glamorous but consistently truthful life focused on the gospel.

Paul finds that glorious, Paul finds that worthwhile and it's interesting that he appeals to this taking place in the sight of God.

In fact it's really important because God sees what Paul believes and does in his life and ministry and God's verdict is that this is glorious.

[13:17] But there's something really odd going on here because Paul and God don't seem to find glory or grandeur or any real worth in private jets and crystal champagne and expensive clothing and the adulation of crowds.

It's so ordinary that what they're presenting that the glory is almost impossible for us to see perhaps. Some people hear the gospel, they hear that this message is glorious but we don't get it. We don't see why it's so important, this ordinary person giving this message to us. We don't see why that should command the attention of our whole lives.

We, it's imperceptible. Where is the glory in this? Where is the importance that makes it so worthwhile? And Paul knows full well that our natural response is like that.

So he sets out explaining why then some of us, why some people can't see the importance of the gospel and then how to see it as important.

[14:31] Takes us on to our second point. The gospel is not seen by unbelievers. Verses three and four. 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 of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

Paul speaks about those who cannot grasp how significant the gospel is. And he speaks about them with this term, those who are perishing.

And when you read the books that he writes to the Corinthians, you find that he actually uses that term three times. In first Corinthians one, he says that the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.

Then he says earlier on in second Corinthians two, for we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.

[15:33] And then we have this verse here in chapter four. So when you put it all together, this group of people that hear, Jesus died on the cross for sinners, rejected and they think it's foolishness.

Paul then says that Christians are called to be a reminder of Christ among those people, people who reject the cross. And here again he says they just don't get the gospel at all.

Why don't they get it? Paul explains it with an interesting turn of phrase. The minds of their hearts have been blinded.

Their minds have been blinded. It's a mixed metaphor, isn't it? Isn't it your eyes that are blind rather than your minds? And yet Paul mixes up his metaphors here deliberately.

Their eyes see fine. They have Jesus presented in front of them. He's there. Yeah, we've heard of Jesus. It's not their eyes and seeing that it's the problem.

[16:41] It's that their minds have been made blind. So even though they hear this message about Jesus, even though they see the gospel presented, even with the light of its glory shining on them, they don't grasp it at all.

Even though Jesus is the image of God, what they see because of their blinded minds is a fake as another man is a liar, is a lunatic.

They don't see why he's so special. And the reason this happens, Paul says, ultimately is spiritual. He says that those who think the gospel is a drab rather than glory are under the sway and the influence of the devil.

The God of this age that Paul speaks about. But here the picture that Paul is building up is important. It's redemptive. There's something going on here because even though the God of this age, this reference to the devil has blinded the minds of unbelievers, a key part of what the one true God is doing in the gospel is to transform people to quote Paul by the renewing of their minds. Paul speaks about that elsewhere. It's in Romans 12, for example. God is at work removing this blindness from people's minds so that when they look to Christ, they can see the image of God and the Savior.

[18:13] How do I get that though? If I'm in the position where I just cannot see why this is glorious, what am I supposed to do? Where do I look? How do I relearn how to look at this and to see it from God's perspective?

And that's exactly where Paul takes us next when he speaks about how to see the gospel. And here we're looking at verses five down to verse 10.

The first thing that Paul tells us to do is to look past the messenger, look past whoever is bringing you this message, for we do not preach ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

If you approach the gospel with Simon Cowell like expectations, you will never, ever see that it's glorious.

If Simon Cowell was in Corinth when Paul came to preach and to plant this church, he'd listen to him and say, that was the worst sermon I have ever heard.

[19:20] You're rubbish. You don't look like a star. Your physical presence is nowhere. You've got no glamour. You're terrible. You should never preach again. Find something else to do.

Paul is not preaching the gospel so that people will like him. He isn't out to get the crowd's approval for himself. In fact, his task isn't to draw your attention to himself at all.

What Paul is trying to do is preach about Jesus and to point to Jesus as Lord, as King of the universe. He wants everyone who hears him to look straight past him and instead to look to Jesus and get captivated and caught there.

If you listen to his gospel message thinking, this is another person like everyone else in the world, another speaker trying to do some shameless self-promotion so that we'll buy his book so that we'll give him money so that we'll sign up for his emailing list.

If we listen to Paul thinking like that, expecting that Paul will be just like everyone else out to promote themselves, we have completely misunderstood what Paul is trying to do when he shares the gospel with us because he's trying to communicate Jesus rather than himself.

[20:47] That's what he's doing. That's what we're doing here tonight. I'm not here to preach about myself as though I'm desperate for your approval. If I wanted to be cool, I would not be in this pulpit at all.

I'm trying to like Paul point you to Jesus so that you'll look to him. How depressing would it be if you came here tonight and the best thing that you have to look at is here?

I'm telling you, look to Jesus. Look past the messenger. That's counterintuitive to us in our culture. It's not natural for us to do because don't we so regularly assume that the messenger, whoever is trying to convince us of something is doing it for themselves?

What's this person's motivation? What are they trying to sell me? What do they want from me?

What are they trying to get from me? Paul is saying, I am not trying to get anything from you.

[21 : 54] I'm here, number one, to show you how you can get something treasure, something glorious. I'm here to tell you where to find silver pens and not biros.

I'm here to point you to Jesus so that you'll know him as Lord. And then more than that, in fact, I don't want personally to get anything from you at all. Paul says, I don't preach myself.

I preach Jesus and I preach myself as your servant. I don't want you to give me anything. I want to give to you. I want to give my life and service of you to be a blessing to you to help you.

I am your servant for Jesus' sake and all I want is for you to look past me and to see him as your Lord. So if you don't see the glory, first of all, because you don't look past the messenger and see how ordinary we are, look past the messenger.

Don't stop there. Then the next thing Paul tells us about where to look and how to relearn, how to look at God and the gospel is to look in the unlikeliest of places.

[23 : 01] It's in verse seven. He makes another completely counterintuitive statement, but we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

If you were going shopping in Edinburgh, let's say you wanted to find something of enormous worth. Let's say a perfect diamond. If I give you that task, give you one hour to go out, locate a perfect diamond, where do you go?

Where you go straight to George Street, don't you? You go and find the best, most expensive, most plush jewelers that you can find. Isn't that where you would expect to find treasure?

Imagine if I told you that actually, that you don't need to go to George Street. Actually I want you to go to Liddle. I want you to go to the budget supermarkets.

And not just Liddle generally. I want you to go to the reduced to clear bargain bin section, and I want you to rummage around it. At the bottom, you will find a perfect diamond.

[24 : 08] Wouldn't you think, what are you talking about? That's utterly ridiculous. I'm not going to find a perfect diamond in the reduced to clear section in Liddle. I'm going to George Street in Paul's world.

If you want to find treasure, I'm not sure where exactly you'd go. You would probably have to go to a rich man's house, or probably to a palace. You would go and find where the emperor, the king lives. And he would have some secure room with guards stationed outside it. And his treasure would be there under lock and key. It would be in a diamond encrusted chest.

Paul tells the Corinthians to do something utterly against their instincts. To look for treasure, look in jars of clay.

Look in the thing that we use to keep water. Look in something that externally doesn't seem remarkable at all. And you may be find water there, the best in a jar of clay.

[25 : 13] You may be find some wine or some perfume. But you would never find the most utterly life transforming, glorious treasure. It's like the glass milk bottles that you might remember, which we don't seem to use anywhere now in Scotland, but from your childhood or from previous generation, you'll remember them.

Really mundane, ordinary, unspectacular, ten for a penny, they're everywhere. And yet Paul is saying, look in there for treasure.

Paul is saying that God works in the unlikeliest of people, and that his glory is found in the unlikeliest of places.

Paul is saying, look past the messenger, but even the messenger is a normal person, a clay jar, a milk bottle, if you will, in whom was a tremendous treasure, the glorious good news about Jesus. And at this point, Paul really cranks it up with making us relearn how to look for glory. Not only do we look in the unlikeliest of people, normal people like Paul, to find treasure and glory and something that lasts.

[26 : 29] Paul then directs us to the most unlikely of places, the most unlikely of events for our greatest treasure and glory.

In verse 10, he tells us to look to Jesus' death, to look to a death in order to discover life.

We are in verse 8, we are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed, perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned, struck down, but not destroyed.

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

At a human level, the death of Jesus Christ, it seems like the strangest place to go, if you want to discover life, and if you want to find the center of glory, the greatest treasure that you could ever

have.

[27 : 25] He was a man born 2000 years ago in the back of beyond, in an unfashionable place. He lived largely in obscurity among persecuted, politically disempowered people.

He lived before the era of global mass media, he ended up dead on a cross, like a common criminal. And yet Paul tells us that if you want to find an utter transformation in your life, in fact, if you want to find life, if you want to go from spiritual death to vitality, this is the place that you go. The unlikeliest place, the most astonishing truth that in the death of Jesus, we find life, and we receive life from Christ.

Paul tells us that this is where to look. If you don't, if you just do not get why the gospel is glorious, you haven't come to the cross, gone to the foot of it, and found there that the Son of God became human, and died for our sins.

But when we go there and when we get that, everything starts to unravel, and we start to realize that this is glorious, and that this message, which seems so counter cultural and counter intuitive, is so worthwhile.

[28 : 53] We find that everything else that we previously thought was so important, is just like a pile of rubbish, biral pens, because now we have solid silver, we have something that is truly of worth.

Paul takes us to the cross. Amen. Let's pray together. Lord, our God, we thank you for what your word tells us, for how it points us to Jesus, and for how it teaches us in Him to look at life, and to look at you, and to look at your gospel in such a different way.

Lord, we struggle naturally because of our sin, because of how our minds have been made blind by the devil. We struggle so much to find your gospel worthwhile, to find you so worthwhile that we would center our lives on you, and that we would want to have your glory as the very meaning of our lives.

We thank you that you point us to the cross, and we pray tonight that remembering what Jesus did there, remembering the nails in His hands and feet, remembering His pierced side, remembering His perfect holy love, and the joy set before Him that led Him through it.

Lord, that remembering these things, remembering His sense of anguish and separation from you, remembering His cry to you, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

[30 : 28] Lord, in remembering all of these things, we pray for you to renew us, for you to help us to see your glory in the gospel, for you to help us to look to the unlikeliest of places and people to find what is truly worth.

Lord, please help us. Please change us. We pray. Amen.