

## **Sermon – 2 Corinthians 4:1-12**

### **The challenges of life**

**(23 August 2020)**

#### **• Introduction**

- Forrest Gump, "My mama always said, 'Life was like a box of chocolates. You never know what you're gonna get.'"
- In 2019, people seeking to guess what 2020 might hold will certainly not have been right – how could we pre-see COVID19, lockdowns, economic collapse, life and society put on hold?
- It is very easy for us to "sell" the gospel as it were – "All will be well" if you become a Christian and give your life to Jesus. No more problems, challenges or issues. Life will be a bowl of cherries or in Forrest Gump's terms a box full of chocolate
- This is not a biblical or gospel perspective..... and quite obviously it is not true in life as we know it – Paul is quite clear in this passage that we will indeed be hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted and struck down – nowhere in the Bible is the Christian life described as being the easy option – the catch all panacea for life
- Therefore the so-called prosperity Gospel – give your tithes and God will make you rich – give more and God will fill your bank accounts – do church and all will be well– is not the

authentic Gospel - as Paul makes very clear in this part of his letter

- God is not 'coin operated' as it were – either financial or in straightening out our lives with their challenges either
- So what ***does*** Paul say here about the biblical perspective on the challenges that we experience in life

- **Point 1 – The Gospel is not a panacea for life but brings light to us and the world**

- Firstly Paul is very clear that the Gospel brings light
- The Gospel is not a panacea for life and its challenges ***but*** rather brings light to us and to the world
- V4 – the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ
- V6 – God's light shines in our hearts and when it does so we have the light of the knowledge of the glory of God which is seen in the face of Christ
- V5 is the key verse and says it all – we don't proclaim ourselves – we proclaim Jesus as Messiah and Lord – our job is to make Jesus known and then get out of the way! – to make sure we don't get in the way of the light!
- It isn't to present the gospel as some sort of life fix or easy answer to our problems (although indeed God can act supernaturally to

- help us, strengthen us and heal us) and does want the best for each and every one of us
- However God is **not** a good luck charm we bring out when we need him – we are called to be people of the light living in that light
  - Therefore the gospel doesn't depend upon us or development of new techniques or us to 'sell' it as such - we are to present the truth in ways that can be understood and allow God to do his work – this takes the pressure of us and helps us to point to God's saving grace expressed uniquely and completely in Jesus
  - **Application** - The truth of the gospel and its integrity matter
  - So 1 Peter 2:9 "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (NIV)
  - We are to live in the light of the gospel as Christians – whatever our personal circumstances – good, bad or indifferent may be
  - If I am asked by someone if I am "religious" I say "no I am not", "I am a Christian" – the **light** of the gospel draws us to the **person** of the gospel – Jesus Christ
  - The Gospel of Christ illuminates us and our world, whatever our personal circumstances

- **Point 2 – The veil of darkness can mask the light**
  - However, the light of the Gospel is opposed by the veil of darkness
  - Paul is also very clear that Satan – the god of this world as Paul puts it - wants to extinguish the light of the Gospel – to veil its light – to put up a barrier between the light of the gospel and ourselves – to draw the curtains and keep the gospel light out so we cannot see the truth
  - If people refuse to believe the gospel it is not the fault of the gospel or of the gospel messenger but rather because of spiritual blindness (see vv3-4) – because the god of this world has veiled the gospel from them
  - V4 – Satan blinded not the emotions or the will of man, but rather his mind
  - **Application** - In the face of this spiritual battle – the spiritual warfare in which this world is engaged - What encourages Paul to keep going? – seeing the glory of Christ (v6) – this verse echoes the Damascus Road experience where Paul saw the risen Christ in glory – the glory of the exalted Christ can dispel the spiritual blackout of the god of this age (i.e. Satan) – that is why he doesn't lose heart – and neither should we, therefore v8, "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 have read the book – we know the story – we have read the last page and know the ending – God wins – we as Christians are on the winning side!

- **Conclusion**

- When we present the gospel to others we must avoid the trap of being so keen to see people respond that we in some way undermine its content, water down its ethical demands or omit the call for repentance – we need to present the gospel of salvation honestly and with integrity
- However if we present the gospel with truth, honesty and integrity, and there is not a response, it is not because we are ‘failures’ – we are in a spiritual battle and the enemy – Satan – is working to oppose and destroy what we are working for
- Our task is to present the gospel faithfully, truthfully –to proclaim the Good News of Jesus - with confidence and expectation that God’s light will get through the darkness that clouds people’s minds – and to commit those to whom we present the good news of Jesus to God in prayer – for protection against the works of Satan and for the illumination of the light of the gospel to transform their lives – and indeed

ours! So we and they can become more and more the people God made us to be – so that we can be more and more like Jesus!

- Mike Pilavachi, speaking on this passage at New Wine in 2013 focused on the idea of us being treasure in clay jars – battered and broken though those jars may be. In New Testament times rich people hid their valuables in old broken pots so that burglars were less likely to look there and steal their goods
- So here the extension of this idea is that our light - the light to which Paul is referring here - should shine through the cracks regardless. Our valuable light shining through the brokenness of us and our lives.
- I think the apostle Paul would say amen to that! And so do I. Amen!