

Growing for the Glory of God

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Date: 15 September 2024

Preacher: Chris Oswald

[0:00] and kids we will come get you for the baptism afterward. Well we were supposed to be in Exodus this week, Exodus chapter 20, dealing with the fifth commandment of honoring our father and mother and that is in my opinion one of the most important texts of the whole Bible and I knew that we would be pressed for time.

We're just getting started and it's 1040. We are not going to be able to have a full sermon today. So I thought instead we would just redeem this time by looking at a small passage and talking about some of the future things that many of us at Providence have been praying for for quite some time. So if you'd open your Bibles to the book of 2nd Corinthians chapter 4, I'm just going to give you a little sermonette this morning. 2nd Corinthians chapter 4. Let me read verse 15 to begin with. Paul is writing to a church who has undergone a great amount of difficulty and much of that difficulty has been self-imposed. They have been stubborn against their best friends, against their best leaders, and against the very word of God. They have been puffed up and so forth and yet God won. Peace has settled in on Corinth. Truth has settled in on Corinth. There has been some repentance that has taken place and so Paul is in a position now not only in the church of Corinth but in other churches as well where he is uniquely able to see the glory of God spreading to more and more people. That's what he says in chapter 4 verse 15 of 2nd Corinthians. For it is all for your sake so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. Paul is looking at a lot of the seeds that he planted coming to fruition and we see that in other passages. For instance in Colossians 1 he says this, we always thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ when we pray for you since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of truth the gospel which has come to you as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing as it also does among you since the day you heard it and understood the grace of truth, the grace of God of truth. So Paul's in this position where he's actually able to see it's working guys, you know, he's actually beginning to see his ministry bear significant fruit not only in individuals but at a greater level like a kind of a macro level. And the one thing

I think is important to understand is that this growth to Paul would not have been unsurprising. It would not have been surprising. This growth for Paul would not have been surprising. We're walking through Exodus for those of you visiting us and one of the great challenges with the book of Exodus is to show that yes this is a covenant that points us to a greater covenant. Paul's theology, we're going to look at a passage in chapter 3 of 2nd Corinthians in a minute, Paul's theology had a category for what was happening in the world. The gospel was changing everything. It was merging both Jew and Gentile. It was eliminating all of these caustic distinctions between class and gender and so on and so forth. It was uniting the people. It was spreading throughout the world. It was only a matter of time until it upended the Roman Empire and Israel. And I don't think he was surprised at all by that because he knew that the covenant he was ministering was indeed a great covenant. So you're in 2nd Corinthians 4, go back to chapter 3. Look at 2nd Corinthians chapter 3 verse 7 and listen to how Paul compares the Old

Testament, the Old Covenant with the New Covenant. I thought this was relevant considering we'll go back to Exodus again next week. 2nd Corinthians 3 7. Now if the ministry of death carved in letters on stone came with such glory that the Israelites could not gaze at Moses's face because of its glory, which was being brought to an end, that's a covenant that was being brought to an end, will not the ministry of the Spirit have even more glory? For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, the ministry of righteousness must far exceed it in glory.

[4:40] Indeed in this case, what once had glory has come to have no glory at all because of the glory that surpasses it. For if what has been brought to an end came with glory, much more will

what is permanent have glory. Since we have such a hope, we are very bold. Not like Moses who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites would not gaze on the outcome of that which was being brought to an end, but their minds were hardened and for this day, for to this day, when they read the old covenant, the same veil remains unlifted because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts.

But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. So theologically, here's where I think Paul was at, even as he began his ministry.

He looked back at the Old Testament glory and said, Jesus Christ has come. A whole new world has opened up. A completely new level of fruitfulness and glory has emerged because God has put on flesh, lived a perfect life, lived a perfect life, and offered himself up as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

He calls the law the ministry of death. He calls the gospel the ministry of life. And he says, if there was glory associated with the ministry of death, how much more glory is there to be associated with the ministry of life? If there was some glory associated with Moses, how much more glory is there to be in the ministry of Jesus? I'm doing my best. I've been working on cracking Isaiah, really understanding the book of Isaiah. I've spent about a year studying it just privately. And one of the things that has emerged in my study is, is that chapter 53 stands as a division in many respects of God's whole purposes.

Chapter 53, if you don't remember, is the passage that talks about Jesus as the suffering servant. This is one of the verses for Isaiah 53. But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. And with his wounds, we are healed. That's 53. And when you turn the page over to chapter 54, you start reading things like this.

[7:22] I mean, you can, we could talk about eschatology some other day, but you've got to explain to me why you're not an optimist.

When the God of the universe came to earth, put on flesh and shed his precious blood for the sins of the world. You got to explain to me why that doesn't change everything. You got to explain to me why we don't live in hope now.

I think we do. I think that's what Paul was saying. And I don't think Paul was surprised. When the whole world was turned upside down with the glory of God, God had come to earth.

And he says it very clearly. He says in 2 Corinthians 3, Since we have this hope, we are very bold. The truth is, is that the storehouses of God's riches have been opened up wide because of the sufferings of Christ.

That is where we stand today. God came for us. He gave himself up for us and is right now seated at the right hand of the Father, reigning until all of his enemies are made his footstool.

[8:50] So Paul was seeing this success that was emerging from his ministry, and I do not believe he was surprised in the least. Well, I bring this passage up because over the last year, Dove, Cohen, myself, Doug, and Daryl, and John, and the two Noahs have been meeting and discussing just the future of Providence Community Church.

As you know, over the last five or six years, we've done a lot of work on the building. You wouldn't recognize it, frankly, from maybe six, seven years ago. And we've really reached the point where this is kind of the last, for the video game generation, this is the final boss.

This room, this room is the final boss. And so we have been working, and Jake Combs, my son-in-law, has helped with this. We've been working on imagining how we can add an additional hundred seats to this space.

This space was originally built to go the full length of the room. This wall was not here. The ceiling was much more traditional. And we just have decided, like, we're just going to put this before you as we think it's time to add a hundred seats.

We think it's time to add seats. It's not going to be a substantial financial burden, but it will be the biggest one we've undertaken as a church. We don't anticipate this taking very long.

[10:18] And good news, we are not planning on doing most of the work for the first time in six years. We kind of run some of those guys dry.

They were, you know, Noah and the two Noahs and Hegarty were like, guys, like, I can't. I just can't anymore. We ran them ragged. So the aim, just to be clear, is to make room so that what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4.15 can come to pass, that more and more people will come to know the grace of God.

And we have some pictures, I think, in the slides. Yeah, there we go. These are all done by Jake. And thank you, Jake, for your work. And so this is what we would envision having done here. This would just expand that wall there and return the ceiling back to the original form it had before. And so this is the vision. And we're not going to get into talking about funds or anything like that, but we're not even going to ask for money today or anything like that. But we think this is probably, we have some relative confidence that this is within the ballpark of around \$150,000 total to get this done. And so you'll be hearing more about this over the next several months.

[11:35] But to me, the big thing is, hey, like, are we doing this for the right reasons? And are we going to do it the right way? So I really needed a text.

I really needed a theological undergirding for why is this the time and so on and so forth. And my text is this, what I read in 2 Corinthians 4.15, so that more and more people encounter the grace of God and that as they encounter the grace of God, thanksgiving abounds to the glory of God. Now, I think that our Sunday morning assemblies are special. I think that our fellowship adorns the gospel in a way that I am eager for all people who do not know Christ to come and experience. So I actually believe that making room for more and more people to be here is actually making room for more and more people to encounter the grace of God. Not only the grace of God as it's preached, but the grace of God as it's practiced.

I think our fellowship is actually miraculous and I think it winds up being a kind of evidence that demands a verdict. And when people attend Providence for a length of time, they wind up usually thinking the same thing as well.

[12:50] So in part, this is about adding more seats so that more people can see who Jesus is as expressed not only in the preaching, not only in the singing, but just in our being together, just in the fellowship itself.

And there's another piece of this as well. Not only are we thinking about those who don't know Christ, but we're also thinking about those who do. See, we live in a world that's a little different from Paul's in this respect.

Right now, all over Kansas City, there are many, many people who know Christ, who have been saved, but who do not understand, really, the beauty of sovereign grace.

Those are two different things. The one is, Jesus saves you. The other is, oh, he really saved me. Like, I had nothing to do with it. He really did everything, as Jesus says in the Gospels. I've chosen you, you've not chosen me. Many of us in this room have gone through these two experiences.

[13:55] We were saved, and later, we came to understand what grace really was. And so, not only are we thinking about adding 100 seats so that we can have more people come who don't know Christ and hear the Gospel and see the Gospel lived out in our midst, but we're also thinking of the great number of people.

I don't know if you've noticed, but the churches in America are in a great reshuffle. At the hand of the Lord, he's doing something, and he's moving people around, and we won't get into why and how and so on and so forth, but I will tell you this.

There are many people, good people, Christian people, in Kansas City today whose great, whose thanksgiving would abound if they were taught what was taught for the last 500 years at least, since the Reformation, and that is, we are saved by grace alone and not of works, lest any man should boast.

So I see thanksgiving abounding in two ways. One, lost people coming to faith in Jesus Christ, and two, Christians just being taught what the Word says about grace and being instructed that they are the chief of sinners and that they have no room to boast and that it was Jesus.

While they were still enemies, Jesus came and offered himself for them. You may have heard, and I'll just tell it quickly, we do not, the gospel is not, I was drowning in a lake and Jesus rode out in the rowboat and threw me a line and I grabbed hold of the line and together, he and me worked my salvation.

[15:27] The gospel is, I was dead in the lake. Jesus rode out, picked me up, put me into the boat and put new life into me and brought me back from the dead and brought me into new life with him,

which is going to be symbolized in baptism here in a moment.

So that's the vision and just, we're about done. I just want to add two more things that we kind of pledge to you as we walk through this over what we think will probably be 12 months.

And the first is just this. We do not want to do this in a manipulative or coercive way. I've been part of multi-million dollar building programs that made me feel icky.

I was not the guy in charge of them. I was one of the guys executing them. I've been in charge of different campaigns and fundraising things. And I have just walked away from all of that thinking, man, I sure would prefer God just show up than me speak this into existence.

And I want you to look at the text because that's another reason why this text stands out to me.

Look back at 2 Corinthians 4. Paul is celebrating in verse 15 that the gospel has gone to more and more people, grace to more and more people.

[16:46] He's celebrating that. But, you know, that's only awesome if it's not you who did it. If you manipulated your way to a thousand conversions or a hundred thousand dollars raised, who cares?

Like, that's not fun. That's not exciting. That's not faith building. And so Paul made a commitment in his ministry and it was particularly true of the Corinthians or at least he felt like they needed to be reminded of it and that was I did not manipulate you.

Look at verse 1 and 2 of 2 Corinthians. Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways we refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

Paul's not into tricking people or getting people into an emotional moment where they do X, Y, or Z. And you know why he's not into that?

I mean, because he's honest for one thing. But you know what else? Paul loves to see God. And we all have a choice, by the way, just in life. We can either manufacture counterfeits or we can watch God do miraculous things.

[18:03] Those are our two options. In the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul said it more explicitly in chapter 2. When I came to you, brothers, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom, for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in the demonstration of the spirit and of power, so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Friends, we are really always choosing between manipulation and miracles. In our marriages, in our parenting, in our ministries, we're always choosing.

God's giving us a chance. We just have to walk in weakness and he'll show up for us or we can make it up and counterfeit it. And we're just making a commitment that we are not going to do that. We want to see God. But here's how I wrote it down. I think we need a bigger sanctuary. I know we need a bigger faith. So we want to do this in such a way that our faith grows.

[19:20] Whatever happens besides that is up to the Lord. So we just make a commitment to you to be communicative but not manipulative. If you don't hear about it for a long time, that's because you need to pray and we don't need to remind you over and over again.

Let's just let God do what God's going to do. And number two, we're almost done, is not only are we going to just be not manipulative, but we're also just going to be honest and say the only way this happens is through sacrifice.

That's the only way it happens. That's the only way the gospel moves out into the world is through sacrifice. We see that in this text as well in verse 8 of chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians.

Paul says, We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying in the life of the body of Jesus, life of 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. Look at verse 12. So death is at work in us but life in you.

[20:35] This is the only way the gospel moves. People lay down their lives for their friends. That's the way it works. And rather than hide that, why not just talk about it openly and say, Friends, this is how the gospel has advanced for thousands of years into the world by saints making sacrifices.

And I will tell you that all those saints for all those years who've made sacrifices, none of them regret it. Right? But they did, it did cost them something.

It did cost them something. We have to learn how to suffer for the sake of others. That's a big part of love is to suffer for the sake of others including others we don't even know yet.

So I conclude with Paul's words again in chapter 4, We do not lose heart though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. As we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen.

[21:43] For the things that are seen are transient but the things that are unseen are eternal. At the end of the day this isn't about having a nicer sanctuary where people won't be embarrassed to get married in it.

It isn't at the end of the day about having 300 people instead of 200 people. It's not about those things. It's not about the visible. The visible is just a representation of something greater.

What this ultimately is about is this great joy that we will all have in being united forever in eternity with Jesus and seeing that he gave us faith to serve him in ways that were scary to us in ways that were challenging to us and for us to look around at all the faces and say this was worth it Jesus you were worth it.

And so with that we will end that discussion and I want to launch us into a conversation about the Lord's table. We're here today because fundamentally Jesus Christ has promised to build his church and that the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

Has it ever hit you that the God of the universe was born as an infant lived a perfect life for the express purpose of offering his perfect righteousness as a payment for your many sins?

[23:05] Has that ever hit you? What an amazing thing. Well if you're here today and that's not hit you I would just tell you straight up there is nothing required of you except to say to Jesus I gladly receive the gift you've given for me that I cannot pay on my own.

And so I would just encourage you during this time of communion if you don't know Christ just stay in your seat and just do business with God and say I want to be saved in the way that these young men were talking about today and then come and talk to me and just let me know that God spoke to you today.

For the rest of you whether you're members here at Providence or not whether you are a regular attender or not we would encourage you to come and participate in the Lord's table with us. We do this every week so that we know that for sure whatever happens in the sermon whatever happens in the service we always wind up keeping the main thing the main thing.

That God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. And this is given for you so that you may be assured that Jesus has indeed paid it all.

As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 11 or 1 Corinthians 11 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he'd given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you.

[24:32] Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way also he took the cup after supper saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Father God we start this time of communion observation by celebrating the fact that you are the image of the invisible God Lord Jesus and that you you've created all things and hold all things together and that all things exist for you.

Lord if anyone is here today floating out as their own little spiritual free agent not acting in conformity to you would you through your Holy Spirit kindly draw them to yourself so that they can be reconciled to you by the blood of your cross.

And as the rest of us celebrate this time of communion let us understand that without your work without your care without your grace we would not be saved. Thank you Lord in Jesus name Amen.