

## 2 Corinthians 4

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, welcome. Thank you so much for coming. I wonder if we turn to page 888 in the Bible to John chapter 3, for this evening.

We pray that you would enable this sermon to be a training sermon for us. We dare to pray that what we learn now would stay with us all our days and would be for the great good of many and indeed for ourselves and would cause you a great joy.

So, Lord, please, may we hold this in our hearts, root it in our souls and speak to others. Amen. Amen. Well, it's great to have that outline of the Easter mission that we're going to be doing this year.

I wonder if you can take it away, put it in your diaries. That's a practical thing, and practical things are spiritual issues. It's spiritual that we get these dates in place. And I want to begin by saying that if you're concerned about doing evangelism, and by that I mean telling others about the Lord Jesus, if you're concerned about that, then you're right at the heart of God himself, who is also concerned about evangelism.

In fact, he's so concerned about evangelism that he sent his son to die. Can we see John 3, verse 16, as we look down? Do we see what it says there as we come to the verse?

[ 1 : 40 ] For God so loved the world, do you see halfway down, that he kept it to himself. He so loved the world, he kept it to himself. No, God so loved the world that he sent, he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

So this sits on the sort of halfway point between heaven and hell. The pulpit sits there. We don't want people to perish.

And if you're concerned about evangelism, then you're right at the heart of godliness. It's an amazing thing, you know. You meet people and they want to be godly and yet they never do evangelism. But right at the heart of being godly, being like God, is telling others about the Lord Jesus.

It's extraordinary. I meet Christians, they don't do evangelism, yet they think they're being godly. But to be godly is to be like God, so we're to be telling others, brothers and sisters. And God takes no pleasure in the spiritual death of the wicked, of people perishing.

He rejoices when the wicked turn from their wickedness and they repent. And so right at the heart of evangelism is a concern for people and God's concern for people.

[ 2 : 49 ] And to be engaged with evangelism is to be born up into the purposes of God. Because God doesn't just want to save us, he wants to use us to reach others and to have his heart.

And so what is my identity? I can be an ambassador for Christ, the dignity of that. Right through my life, I can be one who shines out for the Lord Jesus. What a dignity.

But if you're like me, you'll find that that desire to tell others of Christ is combined with fear of what might happen to you as you tell your friends.

That's the fear, brothers and sisters. So I have a real desire to tell people and yet a real fear of speaking. And whenever a chance comes along to speak, I find that there's, well, not so much a butterfly, but an eagle in my tummy.

And I don't know anybody who isn't relatively fearful about what might happen as we seek to tell our friends about Christ. Can I say, everyone I know is frightened. There is a fear, but what I've discovered is this.

[ 3 : 56 ] The people who never do it think that the people who do it are not frightened, and that's why they do it. But that's a great mistake. I haven't known anybody who isn't apprehensive that their friends and neighbours and loved ones might reject them when they hear the gospel from them.

The only difference is that some people do it in spite of the fear, and other people don't. Now, what does the Bible tell us to think when we're frightened? When I'm frightened, what am I to do? Well, it's going to be great to be praying, and we'll meet together and pray that we'll be bold. So in the Acts of the Apostles, the prayer is, please, Lord, give me courage that I can speak up. But also, what I must remember, and this happens as we come to communion tonight, that my identity is in the grace of God.

So whether you accept or reject me doesn't make me valuable. Brothers and sisters, what makes me valuable is Christ died for me. So as we're thinking about evangelism, it's wonderful to be coming to communion, because at the heart of my identity is, Lord Jesus, you know all about me, you died for me, and that's where I'm loved, in that grace.

Victor Hugo said that actually life's greatest happiness is to be convinced we're loved. Well, that's communion, and I've got that in place. So whether my friends or neighbours reject or accept me doesn't make me valuable.

[ 5 : 15 ] What makes me valuable is Christ died for me. So great to have communion as we think of these things. Well, let's now turn on, can we, to 2 Corinthians 4, 2 Corinthians 4, our passage this evening.

And can I say that John Chapman, the Australian evangelist, taught me that the first six verses we're looking at now in 2 Corinthians 4, so that's on page 965, 965, these first six verses are the most important verses on evangelism in the Bible.

So as we're trying to train others or tell others of the Christian faith, and we're to be disciple, making disciples of Christ in life, can I say, if you've got these six and you can pass them on, you couldn't be doing any better than that.

These are the best six verses to pass on in Scripture. So I hope you've got them there, 2 Corinthians 4, verses 1 to 6. And they tell us what we're to do in evangelism.

Most of all, they tell us what we're to leave to God. And I can't overemphasize their importance, because if we understand what we're to leave to God, it delivers us from discouragement.

[ 6 : 23 ] And the thing about evangelism is, the parable of the sower tells me it's very discouraging. There are lots of times when people reject the gospel. So what do I do about the discouragement?

Because the parable of the sower says the birds pluck away the word, the rocky places, the thorns. There's loads of discouragement. So what do I do? Well, have a look.

Can we see chapter 4, verse 1 there? Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we don't lose heart. So how do I not lose heart? I look at the passage here.

So in the face of discouragements, in trying to make sure I don't lose heart, I come to 2 Corinthians 4 and these verses.

Not least because they celebrate what a great God we have and what he's done in our lives. And if he's done it for me, he can do it for others.

[ 7 : 16 ] That's the issue. He's done this for me. He can do it for them. So let's look at these verses and see how they keep up our morale and cause us not to lose heart. Now, again, if you're going to teach this to others, do jot these down.

Here are three headings. This is the best little passage on evangelism I can give to anyone. So here are the three headings. God's part, the devil's part, and our part. So three headings for us this evening.

God's part, the devil's part, and our part. First of all, God's part. God's part in evangelism. So let's try and isolate what God's part is. And we need to do that because if we don't and we try and do God's part, it's going to be very frustrating.

Because as we'll see, you've got to be ever so terribly good to do God's part. Very good. Now, God is ever so terribly good, so he can do it, and he's been doing it a long time. Now, can you see God's part?

Hold on to your seats, and let's have a look at verse 6. God's part is verse 6, brothers and sisters. And let's see what happens. Verse 6. For God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus.

[ 8 : 25 ] Now, if you want to summarize that, you'd do it by saying, God gets us to understand that Jesus is God. That's what happens. So he shines the light of that knowledge into our hearts.

And there's a moment, do jot this word down, of illumination, when God, by his Holy Spirit, shines into the human heart. And that moment of illumination is a moment of identification.

So do you remember what happened to Paul on Damascus Road? Acts chapter 9. There was a blinding light on the Damascus Road. Paul says, who are you, Lord? The answer is, I am Jesus. And the moment of conversion was that moment of recognition of Jesus. Gosh, this one I've been persecuted. It's you. I'm Jesus. That's what it is to be converted.

It's to recognize for the first time in our lives who Jesus actually is. I mean, to my shame, as I was an early teenager, he was a swear word or a figure of history or a great moral teacher.

[ 9 : 26 ] He wasn't God, but the moment of illumination is a moment of identification. Now, how? That's the question. How has God caused us to recognize who Jesus is?

Well, can we see back to verse 6? Can we see what happens in verse 6? Again, hold on to your seats. It's just extraordinary, verse 6. For God who said, let light shine out of darkness.

Where's that from? Anyone know where's it from? Well, Genesis 1. So the God who caused the world to be created and shone light out of darkness, here's the word to jot down, does a miracle. And the one who thundered the universe into being, who said, let there be light, now takes that power that made the world, shines it into my heart, and recreates my heart.

So he doesn't do a miracle of creation, but a miracle of recreation. And he gets me to see that Jesus is God. He causes people to have that knowledge.

[ 10 : 33 ] And that's, if you want to jot this down, that's what it means to be born again. What does it mean to be born again? God does a miracle with the power that made the world, and he causes you to understand that Jesus is God.

I remember years ago, it's going to be amazing to have Hope Explored next Monday. Not tomorrow, but in a week's time. But I was on a little course called Christian Explored. I was running it, and there was a girl called Davina on the course.

And she was so angry. I don't know why she was there already. Week one, Christians are hypocrites. Week two, you can't trust the Bible. Week three, what about suffering? On this went on, this rage. Week six, we got to week six.

And I said at the start of the evening, any questions? She said, well, no, not so much a question, but a statement. And I thought, oh, great. We're on statements now. Great. So I gave her my wetty little Christian smile. You know, okay, Davina, what do you want to say?

She said, last week, as I went home on the Bakerloo line, between Embankment and Waterloo, I realized Jesus was God. And we said, what? She said, no, no, no. He's amazing.

[ 11 : 30 ] I've had an incredible week with him. God had done a miracle. Can you believe it? On the Bakerloo line. Honestly, I sit there between Embankment and Waterloo. I wait for a miracle. Nothing happens.

I have another Mars bar. Nothing happens. He opened her blind eyes on the Bakerloo line. And do you know what? That was 30 years ago. She has been a radiant Christian ever since.

I saw her at Christmas back at my old Churchill Souls. Radiant Christian. God caused her to be born again. And for my friends and your friends to become Christians, it's never just a matter of telling them the gospel.

If it was simply a matter of telling them the gospel, do you know what we'd do? We'd get John Silver. He's the sort of techno man I've learned at this church. We'd get a great big loudspeaker with his boys. We'd drive around Ealing and just blare it out.

And that would be it, wouldn't it? If it was just telling them the gospel. But no, to become a Christian, God must, by his Holy Spirit, shine the truth of the gospel into people's hearts so they see the truth.

[ 12 : 30 ] And just to say, you can't do that yourself. It's a miracle that needs the power that made the world. I mean, let me tell you how it was with me. I mean, before I was a Christian, I never worried about God.

Although I do remember praying that I would pass exams. So I said things like, oh God, please help me to pass the exam tomorrow and I'll become a pastor. Yeah.

And here we are. Here we are. But I didn't care about God as long as he looked after his bits and he left me alone to do mine. I didn't care about him. But after I was born again, I started to love him.

It was the most extraordinary thing. And I was so glad at what he'd done for me. And it was amazing. It was an amazing change. And before this happened to me, the Bible was just gobbledygook.

Honestly, it was read. I couldn't understand what people was going on about. I used to, we had primary school, we had scripture lessons. And I used to flick through the Bible I had and look for

references to rugby.

[ 13 : 32 ] I found a number I was pleased with. One to referees in John 9 verse 1. I knew a man blind from birth. Well, that was good. One to foul play in Acts 13 verse 3. So Paul and Barnabas were sent off. And my favourite one was to crash tackling in Acts 20 verse 24.

It's better to give than receive. And that was the result of four years of Bible. I just thought it was for the birds. But after I was converted, there'd be a little school Christian meeting and they'd teach the Bible.

And it was like it had my name and address in it. And the guy would start speaking and I would be thinking, can you never stop? Can you never stop speaking? Because I found my heart burned within me as he taught about the Lord Jesus.

It was an absolute miracle. And it was what God had done. And before I became a Christian, I only ever prayed when I was in trouble. But after God changed me, I wanted to talk to Jesus like a friend. And before I became a Christian, there were many sins. And I didn't give a fig about them as though I wasn't found out. But afterwards, they became very ugly to me because I knew they distressed the Lord Jesus.

[ 14 : 34 ] And I loved the Lord Jesus. And I kept distressing the Lord Jesus. It was a miracle. It was being born again. And it's not something we do. It's something that God does.

And with my friends, I couldn't understand how they didn't flee to him. Because the Bible was so alive, I couldn't understand it. Well, what God had done is had mercy on me and opened my blind eyes.

But here's the second issue. Why couldn't my friends see it? I mean, Jesus is so wonderful. Why can't they see it? You'd trust him with your granny, wouldn't you?

There's not a part of Jesus' life you want to reject. Why can't people see it? Well, let's see why they can't see it. Now, this is heavy. And let's have a look down and see it again. When we get this in place, it almost changes all of life.

So let's have a look and see why people can't see it. Can we look down verse 4? Verse 4. Why can't people see it? In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

[ 15 : 44 ] Ah, so with tears. Here is the reason so many reject the gospel. So at this point, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, the curtain is drawn back and it reveals a supernatural battlefield.

Please don't be naive and not think this is going on. Londoners hate being told they're naive. But if you don't get this, you're totally naive. And we realize that it is not a case of somebody simply accepting or rejecting Christ.

The devil is at work preventing people recognizing Jesus. He has, do we see verse 4, blinded their minds. Now, of course, the very phrase, the God of this world, is a contradiction in terms.

If there's one thing certain about divinity, it's that it's not confined to this world, or as the Greek word actually means, this age. Divinity, by definition, must be eternal, must be timeless.

So clearly, the God of this world is no God at all. But there is a spirit abroad in this age who many serve as though he were indeed God.

[ 16 : 54 ] And to make things of this world, this age, our God is his aim. To blind us. That's what he's wanting to do. You know, if you want to know what the devil's doing at heart, it's not Ouija boards.

I mean, they're very serious things. But lots of people think, oh, that's the focus. No, this is the focus. To blind people. To any other world. One commentator put it like this. It's an idolatrous preoccupation with the material things of this passing world, which renders the spiritual things of the next world undetectable to men's gaze.

So do you know people like that? You talk to them about the things of the Spirit and of Christ, and they're absolutely blind to them. There's a sort of, oh, Rico, what have you done with your life? You just wasted your life. What are you doing? It's just this pretend world. Maybe you know people like that. Perhaps you spent Christmas with them. Members of your family. Nice people. Normal people.

But their concerns are totally contained within the here and now. So it's the career, the family, the house, the property, the presence, the essay, the girlfriend, the boyfriend, the jobs, the exams, the ashes.

[18:03] Putting food on the table, the rent, the job hunt, the grind of life. There's a complete inability to see that there might be anything beyond an obsession with the here and now. But the Christian who has had their eyes opened, can we see over the page, chapter 4, verse 18, what happens to the Christian who's had the miracle done?

Verse 18, end of the chapter. As we look, as we look, not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

They place me in a story that never ends. So there it is. And these sort of blind people are obsessed with the here and now, and they can only see Jesus in the here and now as perhaps a great moral teacher.

What's interesting culturally is they're going, actually, we terribly miss Jesus, even though they only see him as a great moral teacher. Someone like Tom Holland isn't converted, and yet he says, gosh, we're missing the influence of Christ.

But they only see Jesus as a great moral teacher and his use in that way. But any eternal significance to Jesus is completely lost on them, and they're confined to the here and now.

[19:19] And please notice, can we see as we look down, back over the page to verse 4. Have a look at verse 4, because it's so important we see this. In their case, the God of this world has blinded, do you see what he's blinded?

The minds of the unbelievers. He's blinded their minds. You know, that's what's at the center of it. You know, it's not the emotion that leads us astray or the will.

No. Satan knows that the human mind is the Achilles heel. That's what he goes for because of the human capacity for intellectual arrogance and self-deception.

Romans 1 verse 18. The godless and wickedness of men who suppress the truth. It's a suppression with the mind. So Satan knows that prejudice can keep the mind shut.

Sin can nail down its portals. And other philosophies cut out any light. And it is a spiritual battle. So we get the phrase. Can you see it?

[20:19] This piled up phrase in verse 4. Do you see the phrase here? Has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

That piled up phrase, what it means is Satan stops people recognizing Jesus. So at the mission, why Easter? We're going to keep saying to people, what do you think of Jesus?

Will you look at him? In the Sermon on the Mount, he said, love your enemies. Pray for those who persecute you. As he was being murdered, he cried out, Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. What do you make of him?

Have you ever seen forgiveness like it? So we keep talking about Jesus. Now this application here of the devil and his work has three applications.

Three things to say about God opening my blind eyes and the devil blinding people. The first one, brothers and sisters, the first application is this. On this first Sunday of the new year.

[21:14] Brothers and sisters, it's gratitude. Have you knelt by your bed today and said, oh Lord God, I can't believe you opened my blind eyes and did the miracle.

But I can see who Jesus is. And if you took your Holy Spirit from me, I'd revert to godlessness at this very moment. And have you knelt by your bed and said, Lord Jesus, I'm so grateful.

I just can't believe you did it. And to do it, you took the power that made the world. That's what it took. And you did it for me. So let's just be so thankful, particularly in this week of prayer.

Lord God, thank you so much. Secondly, pray. For our loved ones and friends and colleagues to become Christians is a matter of spiritual warfare.

The battle for blind eyes to be opened. And God calls us to proclaim Christ, but to pray. You know what Spurgeon said, talk to God about men before you talk to men about God.

[22:15] Could you please pray for my prayer life? I battle to do this. It's hard. Fortunately, I'm natural on cleaning my teeth. I do it morning and evening, but not with prayer.

It's such a battle. Let's help each other. It's great to start this week. Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday to be praying. It's a wonderful start. But thirdly, so number one, be thankful. Secondly, pray. But thirdly, brothers and sisters, this is so important. The results belong to God. We are not going to get in a state about the results of this Y Easter mission.

They belong to God because he has to do the mission because he's got to turn the lights on. Our job is to faithfully preach Christ. But if you see, now if the results belong to me, what happens? Well, I'll either get proud if people do become Christians or discouraged if they don't. And either way, I'll be a pain in the neck to all of you. Much better than that. We just say, Lord, everyone who's converted, we just give such thanks to you.

[ 23 : 12 ] But our job is to preach Christ. And we'll see that in a moment. Only he can switch on the light, God. So we just leave the results to him and get on with it. I remember doing a mission with John Chapman in Oxford in 1993.

And there was a very overzealousist missionary who kept on wanting to tell us who professed faith. And Chapo, the leader, he'd just get up and leave the room. He said, that's not my job. He said, the results belong to God.

Please talk to me about whether I proclaim the gospel faithfully. He'd leave the room and not hear about the results. It struck me very deeply. Now, thirdly, just as we close, what is our part?

Brothers and sisters, what are we to do with why Easter? Let's have a look. Verse 5. Can we see verse 5? What are we to do? Verse 5. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

So my job is to tell people the gospel and leave the spirit of God to convict them of its truth. So I am a messenger servant with a message about the identity of Jesus.

[ 24 : 18 ] And that's my part. I am a signpost to say, look, here is Jesus. He's Lord. He's supreme. He's God on earth. He now rules the universe.

He'll judge the world. He died for you. You've ignored him all your days, but he died so you can be forgiven. He's risen again to prove it's true. Just look at him. And do you know what's amazing about Easter?

The world is expecting us to invite them along. Easter's such an ask. They're expecting us to invite them along and explain these things. They know that's our job. They know we're huge on Easter. And God alone can then illumine the human mind. And our task is to keep saying, Jesus is Lord. Don't you think you can trust him to know what's best? I was having a conversation in the autumn with someone.

And honestly, it's hard to get Jesus' name out on the mat. But we were discussing someone and a friend of his said he's rejected the Christian faith. And I said, oh, really?

[ 25 : 17 ] Well, ask him what part of the life of Jesus he's rejecting. Oh, she said, I don't think he's rejected Jesus yet. And I said, well, that's what we're on about. We're on about Jesus.

And don't you think he's wonderful as you look at the gospel? So Hope Explored. I can't wait next Monday to get out Luke's gospel and to say, what do you make of Jesus? Jesus, we're totally unashamed of him.

There's lots in the church we are ashamed of, but not him. And a herald, can we look down this word proclaim? This word proclaim in the original is the word herald. A herald, verse 5, a proclaimer, is someone who brings an important announcement about the king.

So we're heralds bringing news of the king about the king to his kingdom. And what is to be our manner? Now, again, this quiet revival that's going on nationally, whatever is going on, one of the roots of it is that wonderfully people like yourselves, brothers and sisters, have lived godly lives.

So the non-Christian is looking across and they look at the liberal progressive folk, the individualists, and they go, well, they've lived quite selfish lives. But they look at the Christians and they say, do you know, that Christian's the nicest person in the family.

[ 26 : 28 ] That Christian's the most caring person in the office. And it's yielding fruit, so keep going. Keep being a servant at home, at work, on the street. And the word servant, interestingly, is the word slave in the original.

We are to be slaves of others. Oh, my goodness, what a me-centered culture we're in. But this one says, no, be their slave. And Paul was determined to present Christ to others with no glory subtracted through self-promotion.

And his words here were undoubtedly aimed at the new ministers in Corinth, whose preaching apparently focused on themselves and had the effect of making the Corinthians serve them.

So here are the preachers. And the objective is to manipulate the congregation into serving them as preachers. These ministers were the first of many subsequent ministers who, in the name of Jesus, have put the spotlight on themselves in order to gain material or psychological advantage from their

followers.

So paradoxically, Paul insists that the message of the glorious Lord is only effectively conveyed by those who have the mind and manner of a servant, a slave.

[ 27 : 38 ] Calvin commentated here, he that would preach Christ alone must of necessity forget himself. And what a challenge this is, again, in the me-centered culture, where we all run our lives around our precious time.

So, you know, it's my file of facts. But my wife said, you're the only one still with a file of facts. But it's about me, isn't it? I run my life. What's convenient to me? Or my diary on my phone.

And this says, no, no, no, as we reach out with Christ, what does it mean to lay our lives down in service of others? As I know many here do. Brother, sister, keep doing it.

It's having an effect nationally and locally. But, you know, you can't fake genuine care for someone, can you? You know whether someone cares for you. You can't fake it.

And that's why, by the way, prayer and evangelism goes together. Because we meet to pray 5.15 every Sunday afternoon. But you know what? You meet to pray or you pray in the morning.

[ 28 : 39 ] The next thing you do is you text them to see how they are. So as we pray, we care. They go together. Write the friends down. Pray for them. As you pray for them, you'll be serving them.

And say, Lord Jesus, please, you did it for me. Open their blind eyes. Do the miracle. May they see who you are. And just as we close now, what else are we to do?

Verse 5, let's close with this. Verse 2, as we close. Here we are. But we have renounced disgraceful underhand ways. We refuse to practice cunning or tamper with God's word. But by the open statement of the truth, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience of the sight of God. In other words, brothers and sisters, what do we do here? We tell the truth. People come along and they say, do you know what? At IPC, they were transparently straight. They told me about the difficult things.

They did it graciously, but they said, there is a place called hell. They said, you've got to trust Jesus and know what's best and turn from everything he says is wrong. We're going to transparently tell the truth.

[ 29 : 40 ] And again, in Corinth, they had these false teachers who weren't being straight with people. They weren't being straight. And the result was Christ was dishonored.

So we never grind out decisions. We never manipulate. We never treat people. We do tell them the cost. We tell them what's at stake. And why don't we do that? Why do we do that? Because we've got to preach Jesus as Lord in order for God to open blind eyes.

He's not going to honor the preaching of Christ unless we're straight. This is why I left the Church of England. I left the Church of England because the Jesus that was being preached was not Jesus as Lord.

And therefore, the Holy Spirit will depart. We are. You know, it's ludicrous. We need the miracle. So how can you possibly not preach Jesus as Lord? Because otherwise, blind eyes won't be opened.

So we tell others of Christ. We pray. We leave the results to God. And in all of this, we remember that as we speak to others, our identity is in the grace of God.

[ 30 : 41 ] Let's pray together. Let's pray.