October 10/11, 2009

Authentic Ministers

2 Corinthians 4:1-15

Each One Reach One: The Cost and Rewards

Pastor Mark Kremer

If you were to be asked to write a descriptive of the ideal person to be a spokesperson or a messenger for God's good news—the gospel—the best news, the most important story ever to be told in human history, what characters or qualities of a person would you think would be included in the ideal spokesperson for that message? What would you look for?

You know, in a media-driven world like we live in, we tend to look first and foremost at those external qualities: How polished is somebody? Are they attractive, good looking? Do they seem to have it all together? Are they strong?

It's interesting because I'm a big fan (I guess would be the word) of Abraham Lincoln as a president. I read all I can about him and I often think, knowing just kind of what he looked like and who he was, whether he would ever be electable or followed in our world today— because he was pretty unimpressive to look at. He didn't have the manner of polish. In fact he was mocked in his own day for not being very polished, not being very respectable in those external things. So coming from the world where we sit, we probably would think, "You know, somebody who is really going to be an effective spokesperson for God, they really ought to be able to speak well and look good and have their life all together." But the question is, "Is that what God is looking for? Is that what is important to God? Those things?"

Now that's not just an issue in the twenty-first century. That was an issue back in the first century. In fact one of the things that Paul ran up against repeatedly was that people just had a hard time following Paul or listening to Paul because he wasn't very impressive. In fact they were constantly expecting that somebody who was proclaiming such an important message, somebody who was saying, "The truth that I'm sharing with you is the truth that you need to believe and follow," would be way more impressive than what he was. In fact everywhere Paul went there were opponents who would come and say, "Hey, don't follow that guy! I mean who's he? He's weak. He's insignificant. He doesn't speak very well. He's not very impressive at all." Paul faced that especially in Corinth where evidently there was a considerable amount of strife around whether or not Paul was an authentic minister of the gospel.

If you have your Bibles with you this morning, turn to 2 Corinthians, Chapter 4, as we continue to press through this second letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church. Paul had to defend himself as a minister of the gospel, as someone who was a legitimate spokesperson for God and that is what he is going to do in Chapter 4. It immediately follows on the heels of what we looked at last week where Paul explains this incredible, glorious New Covenant that he was proclaiming—that we could receive the righteousness of God and the life of God by faith in Jesus Christ, not through performance, not through religious activity or duty, but purely on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross. And that was a far superior covenant that had far superior ramifications and benefits for all who would live in it. Life came out of the New Covenant. And I think the challenge was, "Well if this is such a great covenant, then why are

you such an unimpressive spokesperson on its behalf?" So Paul addresses that here in Chapter 4 beginning in verse 1.

> **Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.** (NASB, 2 Corinthians 4:1-2)

Paul is saying in verse 1 that there are three main points that he is going to make in the next fifteen verses. First of all this is a ministry that he has received, just as he received God's mercy, as he became a participant in the New Covenant that he'd just been talking about. He received all the benefits of that, so he received this ministry. It's something that God gave him to do and, as he received mercy and he has this ministry from God, he's not going to quit or give up. He's going to persevere in it and he's going to go on to describe all three of those aspects in these next verses.

He begins by talking about how he conducted himself as a minister of this message. He says ...we've **renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness.** One of the things that Paul was accused of, which his opponents actually were doing, was they accused him of being sly, of being sneaky, of being tricky in the way he did it, of being deceptive as a leader, that he wasn't always upfront and out in the open with things. But Paul said, "We don't do anything in an unscrupulous way. We've renounced those things. We completely reject any means to accomplish an end that is unscrupulous or hidden or scheming or deceptive. That's not what we're about." Instead he says we**...commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God**. "We live an open life. We're not doing anything out of trickery. We don't show up on the stage and deliver our message and then disappear so that nobody really knows what we're like. We live openly before you. We walk with you day after day. We live in community with you so you know what kind of people we are. You judge for yourselves. Use your own conscience to decide what kind of a person I am. Am I the real deal? Am I legitimate or am I a scheming huckster of this message?" Paul says, "I lay myself open before you. I've lived before you in an open way." And he says at the very end of verse two, "We also live in the sight of God". I think that's the third time he's used that phrase**...in the sight of God...** in this letter so far. Paul lived with this continual awareness that everything he did was open to God to see. God observed and saw everything he did in his life. And in chapter five (next week) we're going to see that ultimately Paul understood he was going to stand before God and give an account of what he did, so there was accountability there. Paul said, "I would never do something underhanded or scheming to try to get you to believe this message. I've just lived openly before you and in the sight of God. And," he says, "we don't adulterate the message. We don't mix the message of grace with other human traditions. We don't bring in parts of other religions and mix that altogether. We've just simply been manifesting the truth, revealing the pure truth of God's Word. It's a simple clear message and that's all we've been proclaiming to you. We've not mixed it in with other things."

You remember in the Old Testament the Israelites were always mixing in true worship of God with the pagan worship and pagan traditions of the nations that surrounded them. It all got twisted together and things were added to the worship of God and things were taken away because of all that paganism that was around, that they adapted. The same thing was happening in Paul's day. There were people coming and saying, "You know that Jesus is fine but there's more to the story than that." And they would add things to the message and try to put legalism and rules and other religious things back on to the people. And Paul said, "We just are here to proclaim the pure, true word of God. That's what our message is. It's simple; it's direct; it's out in the open. That's our

desire. We want to declare the message clearly and we want to live in an honest open way before you."

Paul is talking here about his integrity as a minister. It was important to be real in front of people and not to try to pretend to be something you're not, but to be honest and real and keep the main thing, the main thing, and focus on the truth, not trying to hide anything, not trying to cover anything up, not trying to be tricky—just wanting people to understand the truth. That was Paul's heart.

Verse 3:

> **And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.** (Vs. 3-4)

Paul acknowledges that there are some who won't understand and don't get his message. Not everybody, when they heard Paul speak, immediately understood it and got it. So he says, "Yes, there are some who don't understand. There are some who are still under the veil. They're not able to grasp and see who Jesus is. But it's not because we're being unclear. It's not because we're not declaring the message well and speaking it simply and clearly. It's because there is a spiritual battle going on here. There is a spiritual force that blinds people to the truth." He calls it**...the god of this world...**who we would identify as being Satan.

You know, for many of us here this morning, we've known Christ. We've understood Christ—maybe some of us from childhood when we first were introduced to Jesus and we believed in Him—and it has been a part of our life. We seek to share that message with other folks and we just can't understand why they don't get it. I mean, "It's just here! Can't you understand? Can't you get it?" And sometimes we're just failing to understand what Paul understood, and it's not about just getting the facts and understanding them in a way we would understand other facts. There's a spiritual dimension to grabbing a hold of who Jesus is and what He has to offer us but the god of this world blinds people to that truth. He doesn't want them to be set free. He doesn't want them to experience eternal life. He wants to hold them in bondage. And Paul says, "If there are people who aren't getting it, it's not because we haven't been clear and honest and forthright. It's because Satan has blinded their eyes so they cannot see what we're talking about and they cannot understand it." There's a spiritual dimension to this that oftentimes people just can't see.

Paul talked about that in Chapter 3. "Remember," he said "all those who don't believe have this veil covering them and they can't see. The veil is taken away when you turn to the Lord." So how does that actually happen if there's this reality that people don't get it and it doesn't matter how good I am at explaining it or even how well I live out that truth in front of them? What actually has to happen for people to get the gospel and understand it and believe it? Well he's going to tell us how that happened in his life in just a moment. But Paul says very clearly in verse 5:

> **For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake.**

Paul said, "We have one very clear and simple message: It's Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus Christ is the Savior. Jesus Christ is the life-giver. It's through His death, burial, and resurrection that we have eternal life. Our focus is on Him. That's the central message of our life. And we are not

elevating ourselves. We are just bond-servants. We're slaves. We're following in the train of the conquering King—as his slaves. We're just serving Christ, the One who has redeemed us and saved us. So we don't elevate ourselves—we elevate Christ! And we're here to serve, to be slaves and servants of people and of Christ so that they can understand the message."

Now Paul's opponents were quite the opposite of that. They would come in and say, "Well you know that Jesus thing that Paul talks about, that's okay; that's pretty good stuff. But hey, the real secret to life is what I'm going to tell you." And they would add their truth, their special rules or brand of religion that they would bring into that. And so they would elevate themselves and diminish the person of Christ. Paul said, "We seek to elevate the person of Christ and diminish ourselves. We're not the people you should be following. We want you to follow Christ. Don't follow me—follow Christ! It's not us as apostles that have the power, that have anything special. It's all of what Jesus has. Follow Jesus! We talk about Jesus. We preach Jesus. Everywhere we go it's about Jesus and we're just His servants doing whatever we can so that others can understand and know this truth."

You know in a world that, again, is driven by media, there are many television preachers, there are many writers who have books and the question is: How do you evaluate and understand whether this is somebody who really is proclaiming the truth? How do I decide whether it's somebody that I ought to listen to, that I ought to read their material or that I ought to listen to their messages? Well one of the things Paul is saying here is, "Do they elevate Christ and diminish themselves or is it the other way around?" As you listen to them, as you read what they write, are they putting the attention and the spotlight and the focus on the person of Christ or does the spotlight tend to be more on themselves? Is it their name that is front and center? Is it their particular unique power or ability or anointing that they want you to be impressed with? Or do they want you to be impressed with Jesus and they diminish themselves simply as a slave or a servant who is doing what God is asking them to do? It's important that we all think about that and seek to evaluate the people that we listen to, the people that we take in—to what they have to say—whether or not we should follow or believe what they say. That's one of the important things.

You know I think it's one of the reasons why God designed the local church to be the primary vehicle for the gospel to permeate the earth. Because, in the local church, we live in a community and the leaders can be known and walk and live among the people. You can't have a clue when you watch somebody on television or listen to them on the radio or read their book whether or not they actually live what they're saying. You don't know what their character is, and there are, frankly, a lot of charlatans and hucksters out there who are finding a way to elevate themselves and make a profit using Christ. That's not a legitimate person as a minister. It's only those who elevate Christ and see themselves as bond-servants, as Paul did. And why was Paul able to do that? Why was Christ the focal point of his message?

Verse 6:

> **For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.**

Why did Paul elevate Christ? Because Christ is the one who radically changed his life. He was a recipient of God's mercy. He said that just as God spoke, in Genesis 1, light into existence, God spoke and shone the light of the glory of the gospel in the face of Christ, into his heart, into our hearts he says, so that we grasped and understood the truth. Here I think Paul is referring back to

his own conversion experience that we read about in Acts, Chapter 9. You remember that Paul was the chief persecutor of the church. I mean Paul was a religious guy who believed it was all about keeping the rules and he did it as well or better than anybody else. He was highly respected as a religious person and the people who were proclaiming the message of Jesus were his enemies. He sought to destroy them because they were tearing apart, he thought, their religious system. They were proclaiming that one didn't have to keep all the rules. You didn't have to be religious. You could just believe and trust in Jesus and you'd have this eternal life. And Paul set out to destroy them. You read in Acts 9, on the road to Damascus, he went to go and yet imprison some more people when this incredible light stopped Saul dead in his tracks and it was the very presence of Christ Himself! And God, for a time, blinded Saul physically so that he could open his eyes spiritually to perceive and understand who Jesus was. And suddenly Saul says, "Who are you, Lord?" And in that moment Saul recognized Jesus as Lord and he put his faith and hope in Christ alone. And that radically transformed Saul's life so he became the apostle Paul.

What we see here also in verse 6 is a sharp contrast between God's power to permeate the darkness and bring the light, as opposed to Satan's power to blind people to the truth. This is not a battle between two equals—Satan and God—Satan having darkness, God having light. No, the light always dispels the darkness. The light always causes the darkness to flee. So when God shines into our heart, the darkness is gone; the veil is lifted and people will come to terms with who Jesus really is. So God is the one who is shone in our hearts. This is all from God. God initiated sending Jesus by His spirit penetrating into our hearts, to help us understand and see who Jesus is. That's all God's work. And Paul says, "Why do I proclaim Christ? Because He has radically transformed my life! I was a murderer; I was a persecutor of God; I was a hater of God and now I'm His spokesperson. I love Him. He has changed my life forever. That's why we proclaim Christ—because the power is in Him."

Verse 7:

> **But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;**

Paul says, "You know, in the religious world, there are a lot of people who are trying to impress others with the outward things. But God chooses to give this eternal life to ordinary, weak human beings so that the greatness of the power will be very clearly not from them. It's not something people concocted *on their own*. It's not something people work themselves up to be able to do and perform for God. But they will very clearly see that these ordinary, weak human beings have something supernatural inside of them that is the very power of God living and dwelling within them." Paul said, "We're just ordinary clay pots, but we have this incredible treasure of eternal life dwelling within us because of what Jesus has done."

That should give hope to all of us. Every person who has experienced that life-transforming work of Christ in our lives is a messenger of this truth. And it doesn't matter whether or not we're very impressive on the outside, whether we have a lot of great talents or abilities. In fact God delights to put this treasure in ordinary weak human vessels so that the greatness of the power will be evident that it is from God and not from us. So many times we're working so hard so that we can be an impressive witness for Christ instead of saying, "You know what, God? This is all about You and Your power in me, not about me performing or doing something or becoming smooth and better equipped to speak clearly your message." And we're afraid. We pull back. We hold back from sharing what God has done for us because we feel inadequate. We feel that weakness. We cower in

fear because we don't feel like we have what it takes. And God says, "You're absolutely right. It's not coming from you. It's not about your talent. It's not about your ability. It's about the power— the treasure that I put within you." God living in us as weak human vessels so that people will recognize that there's something different about us, that what we have is not coming from ourselves but it's coming from God. Paul says, "It's even evident in our struggles and trials."

Verse 8:

> **...we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.** (Vs. 8-10)

Paul faced a lot of difficulty in his life and that was one of the things that caused the Corinthians to say, "You know I'm not so sure that this guy is legitimate because, if he was legitimate, wouldn't everything be great for him? I mean wouldn't God just miraculously take care of everything? Wouldn't he be living victoriously? Wouldn't everything be smooth sailing? I mean wouldn't his life be impressive without pain, without struggle?" That's what some of his opponents were promising—that they had the health-wealth gospel—and they said, "Hey look, everything is smooth for us. What about this Paul? I mean he's constantly afflicted. He's in trouble. He's imprisoned. I mean why would you follow somebody like that?" And Paul is saying that God's sustaining supernatural power was evident in the middle of his struggling and suffering. It wasn't that God immediately took him out of that struggle but that God was with him *in* the struggle, *in* the suffering, *in* the persecution.

These four phrases that he uses here kind of have this building effect of just giving you a taste of what Paul actually experienced in his life. He says**...we are afflicted.** It means to be pressed in on every side. The only image that came to my mind was from *Star Wars* where Princess Leia and Han and all those guys were in a trash compactor and it was just pressing in on them and they're getting pressed in on every side. (For you who are too young and haven't watched *Star Wars*, it's an "old" movie.) But that is the image that came to my mind. I think Paul said, "That's what we felt. We feel like everywhere we go there's pressure and it's closing in on us. But," he says, "by God's grace we're never ...**crushed...** by it. What would crush the person who didn't have the power of God in him does not crush us."

He says we're **...perplexed.** The word means to be uncertain about which way to turn, not knowing how to proceed. Paul says, "Hey, we don't have all the answers. We don't know exactly what we ought to do next." In fact in Chapter 3, remember he went to a certain place and waited for somebody and, because the person didn't show up, he didn't know where to go and he turned around and left. I mean Paul is saying, "Hey, we are often confused. We don't often know what to do. We don't have all the answers. We're not smooth in our methodology. But," he says, "we're never **despairing**. We never lose hope. We know that there is always a way out that God will provide."

He says we're**...persecuted**. That word means hunted relentlessly by an opponent or enemy. It's the same kind of idea as when David was hunted by Saul. Paul felt there were all these enemies after him, that were chasing him, that were pursuing him, seeking to make his life miserable—to bring him down wherever he went. But he said, "We're never **...forsaken.** We're never deserted by

God. God is always with us, even when we're being hunted, even when we're being chased, God's there for us."

And finally he says that we're **...struck down but not destroyed**. He says, "We actually get knocked down sometimes. We actually lose our footing and fall down on our faces sometimes, but we're never knocked out. We're never out because of God's sustaining grace that's evident in our lives."

Paul says that this dying is similar to the dying of Jesus in verse 10**...always carrying about in our body the dying of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body**. Paul says, "You know the life we live is very much like the life Jesus lived here on this earth." In fact, when Jesus came to this earth, one of the things that just completely confounded the nation of Israel was they were looking for a powerful, conquering king—somebody who would be impressive, someone who would walk around victoriously, someone who would act kingly. And Jesus came as a suffering servant and they stumbled over that. Paul says, "We live our life as God's messengers in the steps of Jesus. We walk in the steps of Jesus. We lay our life down. We're slaves and servants so that others can experience life. Jesus ultimately laid His life down to give eternal life—as the Son of God. But we, as his followers, lay our lives down so that others might see the reality of Christ in us and they might be drawn to the Savior. We'll do whatever God asks us to do, whatever He requires of us in this physical life in order to proclaim Him and to see Him exalted and to see people believe in Him. We'll do whatever He asks us to do. We're going to experience and lay our lives down and die the death of Jesus so that others can have life."

I remember a time six years ago when Donna had her abruption and Sam was in the hospital and Donna was in the hospital, and we had several other huge difficult things going on in our lives—and it all happened at the same time. And frankly, looking back on that time in our lives, I don't know how we got through it, other than the sustaining grace of God. It was just God's presence. We didn't panic in the middle of it. God sustained us. It was evident to us that God was present in our lives. It made a huge difference in the middle of our suffering and struggle. But I would say from the outside, anybody who would observe our family wouldn't say, "Now that's a really impressive family that's got their act together." In fact I thought about that a lot because we had built a little bit of a relationship with one of the neighbors on one side of us—somebody who understood a lot about Christianity and a lot of other religions and really was not going to buy into any of it. But she had built a relationship with my wife and I knew she was watching us and I thought, "Oh my goodness, we just don't look like we have a very good testimony here. I mean there's just stuff going on and nothing is coming together very smoothly right now." But interestingly enough, her comments to us over the years since then are that she saw the reality of God in the middle of the mess and it actually drew her towards God. She continues to dialogue with my wife, calls us to listen. She's still on the journey but she saw something in the middle of our mess that said there's a reality to what they proclaim, what they say they believe. That evidently, to her, really resonated.

I think sometimes we think we have to do it all perfectly, that—you know— if our lives were all smooth and good, if we were really successful, people would be drawn to the Savior. No, I think they'd be drawn to you. I think what draws people to the Savior is when they see us struggle and suffer and go through the very same hard things that everybody else does in life, but with a different perspective—with joy—with a belief that God is there—with hope—with a sense of promise. That makes them take note that something is different in the lives of those people.

Paul said, “There’s nothing impressive about us. In fact we suffer; we struggle; we’re perplexed. Things don’t go real well for us a lot of the time. But we do it all. We lay our lives down. We do whatever it takes so that Christ can be revealed in us. Whatever it takes for Christ to be revealed, we’re willing to do.” He emphasizes that again in verses 11 and 12:

> **For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death works in us, but life in you.**

He says, “If my physical suffering and struggle results in you having eternal life with God, then it’s all worthwhile. I’m willing to do whatever God calls me to do, whatever He calls me to walk through. I’m willing to walk the life of Jesus here on this earth in order for you to experience His resurrected life—the eternal life that comes from Him. But,” he says, “our hope and your hope is not just in God’s sustaining grace but it’s in one day when there’s going to be ultimate victory and deliverance.”

Verse 13:

> **But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE," we also believe, therefore we also speak; knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.** (Vs. 13-14)

Paul quotes here from Psalm 116. It would be thought of more like a little footnote to “See Psalm 116” I think Paul was saying. Paul identifies with the psalmist who was pursued, who was facing death and difficulty. And in the middle of that difficulty and struggle that the psalmist faced in Psalm116, he says, “I’ve seen God’s deliverance in the past and I knew that God ultimately was going to deliver me. Ultimately there is going to be eternal life with God. I am going to have an ultimate deliverance—that physical death is not the end—and there is a life to come.” And Paul says, “Just as the psalmist believed that, I believe that. And because I believe that, I can’t help but proclaim this message because, even in the middle of our suffering and struggle and dying, there’s a resurrection that’s coming. This is more than just going to be with God in our spirit once we’re dead.” Here he’s talking about a physical bodily resurrection—that just as Jesus was physically, bodily raised from the dead, so ultimately all of those who believe in Him will be raised again to live forever with God. And actually he says at the end of Verse 14 that we will rise again because of the resurrection power of Jesus and we will be presented to Christ as His bride. We will be presented or announced before God as the trophies of God’s grace. We will be showcased in Heaven for eternity as the bride of Christ, as the trophies of God’s grace. Paul says, “That’s the hope we have. So the physical suffering and struggle of this life really is nothing in comparison to that. I’m willing to go through this hard stuff in the short term to experience that for eternity.” That’s the perspective of someone who has really understood the gospel of grace. “And,” he says, “not only do I speak with boldness and press on in the middle of hardship because of the resurrection, but” he says, “I do it because of what’s happening to you.”

Verse 15:

> **For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.**

Paul says, "Not only am I doing this because of what I know is going to be my experience for eternity, but I'm in it because of what it's doing in you." The grace is spreading to more and more people. More and more people are experiencing God's grace. More and more are being transformed, resulting in more and more praise being lifted up to God. And ultimately Paul was living to see God glorified.

Think with me for just a second about the amount of glory and praise emanating from the earth in the first century, in Paul's day, compared to today. In Paul's day the gospel was young. It was just beginning to spread. There were a handful of provinces and areas of the world where the gospel had gone out and so you could probably have counted the number of churches, the number of places where people were believing and praising God. Today, in every country this weekend—in every country of the world— in almost every language in the world, hundreds of millions of people are doing what we're doing here this morning. They're praising Jesus Christ. It's because of the sacrifice and willingness to be a messenger of this gospel that you and I sit here this morning—that hundreds of millions of people around the world this morning are proclaiming the name of Jesus, are worshipping Him—following Him—because many of those who believed in this message have been willing to walk in the steps of Jesus, to count their physical life as nothing for the sake of this incredible, glorious message of life in Christ.

The question is: Are there just a handful of people who are called to this ministry? Is it just the apostles and a few special missionaries and a preacher? I think Paul said, "As we receive mercy, so we receive this message." In other words, everyone who has experienced this life-changing message of grace is a messenger. We're all messengers. This is the call of God on every one of us— to do whatever it takes so that others can experience and know this. We're willing to suffer whatever we have to go through in order to see Christ be formed in someone else—not just for them to come to know Christ but to see them grow up in Christ. And we'll go to the trenches with them and for them so that they will understand. We'll do whatever it takes because we've experienced the amazing transforming power of God and we want others to experience the very same thing. This is not something we add to a list of things that we ought to do, to be more spiritual. "You know I really ought to be a better minister; I really ought to proclaim Jesus more." No, if you've experienced God's transforming power in your life and you are growing in your understanding of what that means, you *are* a messenger. You are a messenger and you can be an authentic messenger by just simply continually pointing people to Jesus and seeing yourself as a servant, willing to do whatever it takes to help others experience what you've experienced by the power of God. My prayer is that each of us would be like Paul, that we would have the same attitude, the same heart that Paul had, that because of what he had experienced he was willing even to die so that others could experience the very same thing.

Our Father, I pray that You would make that a reality in our lives—that we would truly grasp all that we have in You and, having understood it, having experienced it, that we would proclaim it—whatever the cost. Not everyone is called to suffer and be persecuted but we're all called to get in the trenches and serve others so that they can experience what we have experienced. God, make us willing even to lay our lives down for the sake of Your great name. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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October 10/11, 2009

Study Questions
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2 Corinthians 4:1-15

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Opening Discussion

1. What do experts do to determine the authenticity and value of an object? Why is it difficult for people to tell the difference between the real deal and a fake?

2. In a fast paced, media driven culture, how do you know whether or not a leader is telling the truth and living by that truth themselves? What are the dangers of following someone that you don't really know?

3. What are the marks of an authentic follower of Christ? A Christian leader? Should there be a difference between the two?

Bible Study

1. What is the ministry that Paul says he has in verse 1? From whom did he receive it and when did he receive it?

2. Why does Paul not lose heart or give up in ministry?

3. In verse 2 Paul distinguishes his ministry from that of his opponents in both the content of the message and in the way it is delivered. What are those contrasts? Why is this important for the Corinthians to understand?

4. What is the significance of Paul commending himself to "every man's conscience in the sight of God"? (vs 2)

5. Paul's opponents tried to convince the Corinthians that Paul was hiding something from them. In verses 3-4 Paul concedes that some may not understand the message he was delivering, but why was this so? How did this reality shape Paul's ministry? Why is this spiritual reality so important to understand as a messenger of the gospel?

6. What was the essence of the message Paul delivered everywhere he went? What was Paul's own experience with this message? (verses 5-6) As a result how did he view himself?

7. In verse 6 how does the language Paul uses connect his message with his own experience with Christ in Acts 9 and connect the gospel to the overall plan of God?

8. Why was it important to Paul that the Corinthians (and us) understand that the "treasure" he possessed was distinct from and far superior to the "earthen vessel" which contained it? (vs. 7)

9. What purpose did the struggles and difficulties outlined in verses 8-12 serve? How did his experience reveal the power of Christ and confirm the truth of his message? How did it serve a larger purpose for the Corinthians? (vs. 8-12)

10. How does Paul connect his own experiences of suffering and dying to that of his Savior Jesus? (vs. 10-11) How does this authenticate the message and himself as the messenger?

11. What was the basis of Paul's confidence in Christ? How did Paul's experience connect with the experience of the writer of Ps 116? (vs. 13)

12. Having experienced God's deliverance in the past, what is he confident will take place in the future? On the basis of what event does he know he will be delivered along with all who believe in Jesus? (vs. 14)

13. In the end, why was Paul willing to endure and press on in ministry in the face of so much opposition and suffering? (vs. 15) What was the payoff in ministry for Paul?

Application

1. Share with someone else how you came to believe in Jesus Christ as your Savior. How has the Spirit transformed your life? How is He continuing to transform you?

2. Do you believe you are called to be a minister of the new covenant? Are you being effective in living out your calling? Why or why not?

3. In what ways has God used you to introduce others to Jesus and help them grow in Him? What would you like to see God do through your life?

4. How do you view hardship and suffering in your life? How have you experienced God's power in the midst of those hardships? Are you willing to endure whatever God allows, even hard things in order to proclaim Christ more effectively?

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