

DON'T LOSE HEART
II Corinthians 4:1-6

Intro: Everyone loves a good deal.

- But---sometimes---a deal seems too good to be true.
- We're constantly warned about scams---and we are rightfully cautious about buying into something that sounds too good.
- There is indeed truth in the adage---“If it seems too good to be true---it probably is.”
- However---there is one very important exception to the rule.
- The new covenant God wants to make with us is true---even though it certainly does seem too good to be true.
- It's hard to believe that God wants to give us the gift of eternal life---and all He expects in return is a relationship built on love and gratitude.
- The old covenant is easier to believe.
- It's not hard to believe that if we'll follow the rules---we'll get the reward.
- The problem is that no one can follow the rules.
- And as we noted last week---the old covenant ends up being a ministry of death.
- At least it will---unless it does what it was intended to do.
- Unless it leads us to the new covenant.
- Thankfully---for us---it did just that.
- But God didn't lead us to the new covenant solely for our sake.

- He didn't just make it possible for us to enter into a new covenant with us.
- He made us ministers of a new covenant---so we could offer it to others.
- Sharing good news that seems too good to be true---however---is not easy to do.
- And it can get very frustrating trying to give away something that people are hesitant to accept.
- The Apostle Paul felt that frustration---in fact---he felt much more than frustration for trying.
- He often found himself hated---chased out of town---and even stoned and beaten---for simply offering to people the good news of Christ.
- There were times when he became very discouraged---even fearful---but he never gave up.
- He never lost heart---and it wasn't because he was an eternal optimist.
- He simply understood the forces at work in spiritual transactions---and he understood his role.
- He understood what he could and couldn't do---and what he should and shouldn't do.
- He knew that many would refuse to accept Christ---and he knew why.
- So he expected rejection---as did Ezekiel.
- Just this week in my daily Bible reading---I came to Ezekiel's call to be a prophet.
- And it was definitely not a call to success in the ministry.

- After witnessing the glory of God---and falling on his face---he heard a voice speaking.
- “Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, stand on your feet that I may speak with you!’
- And as He spoke to me the Spirit entered me and set me on my feet; and I heard Him speaking to me.
- Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, I am sending you to the sons of Israel, to a rebellious people who have rebelled against me; they and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day.
- ‘And I am sending you to them who are stubborn and obstinate children; and you shall say to them, “Thus says the Lord God.”
- ‘As for them, whether they listen or not—for they are a rebellious house—they will know that a prophet has been among them.
- ‘And you, son of man, neither fear them nor fear their words, though thistles and thorns are with you and you sit on scorpions; neither fear their words nor be dismayed at their presence, for they are a rebellious house.
- ‘But you shall speak My words to them whether they listen or not, for they are rebellious.’” (Ezekiel 2:1-7)
- God did---however---assure Ezekiel that He would be with him---and that He would equip him for the task set before him.
- “Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces, and your forehead as hard as their foreheads.
- ‘Like emery harder than flint I have made your forehead. Do not be afraid of them or be dismayed before them, though they are a rebellious house.’
- Moreover, He said to me, ‘Son of man, take into your heart all My words which I shall speak to you, and listen closely.
- ‘And go to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and speak to them and tell them, whether they listen or not, “Thus says the Lord God.””” (Ezekiel 3:8-11)
- Like Ezekiel---Paul had been commissioned to speak the word of God.
- And while not quite as explicit---it was made clear to Paul that the reception of his message would not be readily accepted.
- In fact---it would lead to suffering.
- This was made clear to Ananias---before he told Paul of God’s plans for him.
- “But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;
- for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.”” (Acts 9:15-16)
- Paul knew the task set before him would be difficult.
- But he also knew he was working with a God who could get the impossible done.
- In our text for today he gives us insights into why and how He could keep trying to be an effective minister of the new covenant.
- How he could keep offering Christ in a world that didn’t appear to want Him---without losing heart.

I. SET FORTH THE TRUTH PLAINLY

II Corinthians 4:1-2

- “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.”
- The first truth that Paul understood that enabled him to keep offering Christ to others---even when most refused to accept Him---was the fact that he didn’t do so on his own initiative.
- He had mercifully been given the opportunity to accept Christ himself---and the One who had granted him forgiveness was the same One who had given to him the ministry of offering forgiveness to others.
- So his ministry was not of himself---it was of God.
- The offering of Christ to another wasn’t his idea---it was God’s idea.
- And if God said do it---Paul did it.
- Not just because he felt he had to---but because he knew that God would be with him in the offering.
- He wasn’t alone.
- He could at times get discouraged because it seemed as if no one wanted what he had to offer.
- But since he knew that God was in what he was doing---he knew that if he’d just faithfully do what God wanted him to do ---God would get done what He wanted done through him.
- So Paul never lost heart---he never gave up.
- He knew what God could do.
- And even more---knowing that God was in what he was doing ---and that God would get done what He wanted through him---relieved Paul from the pressure to get results.
- He wasn’t peddling the word of God---so he could renounce trying to get results.
- He didn’t have numerical goals and quotas to meet.
- He wasn’t so under pressure to perform that he had to devise ways to get the job done any way he could.
- He didn’t have to think of clever---crafty ideas to get people to accept Christ.
- He didn’t have to resort to shameful manipulative tactics to get people to do what he wanted them to do.
- And he didn’t have to water down God’s word to make it acceptable to the masses.
- He could just tell the truth.
- And---“by setting forth the truth plainly”---as the NIV puts it---he could demonstrate through his life and teaching the truth revealed in Jesus---and leave it at that.
- He didn’t have to argue---and persuade---and cajole people into the kingdom.
- He didn’t even have to be able to answer all their intellectual arguments.

- He could just teach the truth that had been given to him---and let that truth work its way into the conscience of others---as it had into his.
- That's the way we offer the new covenant to others.
- We don't try to out-think anyone---or out-maneuver them---or dream up ways to convince them they need what we have to offer.
- All we do is tell people honestly and openly what God has revealed in His word---and let Him take it from there.
- Now---that doesn't guarantee they will accept it.
- But that's not our responsibility.
- In fact---some people may not be able to see the light of the gospel---and we need to realize that.

II. REALIZE SOME CANNOT SEE THE LIGHT II Corinthians 4:3-4

- “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, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”
- Even though we are open and honest and speak nothing but the truth God has revealed---those who are perishing may not see the truthfulness of what we say.
- Why? Because they have been blinded---they can't see it.
- They're not rejecting us---so we shouldn't take it personally.

- Unless---of course---we are being obnoxious---and trying to sell them on something they don't think they need.
- Most of the time---however---they just can't see the truth in what we are sharing.
- And---we must never forget that we are in the midst of spiritual warfare.
- It's not us offering to them a gift---it's God offering them a gift---through us.
- And they are not alone in deciding whether or not to accept it.
- Satan is doing everything he can to keep them from seeing the value of what's being offered---and he uses every trick in the book to blind them.
- And---as the god of this world---he usually uses the things of this world to blind us to the value of what's being offered.
- He tries to convince us that---contrary to what Jesus said---a man's life does consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.
- And if we don't think we've already got everything we need---he convinces us we won't find in Christ---or in church.
- We'll find it on Amazon.
- Satan is very good at what he does.
- And he can certainly blind men to the glory of the gospel of Christ---to the glory of the new covenant.
- Paul knew that---and he expected it.
- So he didn't lose heart when men rejected God's offer to enter into a covenant with Him through the death of His Son.

- And he didn't take it personally when people rejected the offer that God was making to them through him.
- But he also knew it was only through the faithful preaching and teaching of the truth that eyes could ever be opened.
- So he kept right on preaching Jesus Christ as Lord.

III. PREACH JESUS CHRIST AS LORD II Corinthians 4:5-6

- “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake.
- 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.”
- Paul wasn't out to make a name for himself---so he wasn't concerned about results that would make him look good.
- He was simply a servant of Christ---preaching that Jesus Christ wants---and deserves---to be the Lord of everyone else's life as well.
- Ah---there's the catch!
- It *was* too good to be true.
- There *is* no such thing as a free lunch.
- The “catch” in the new covenant is that you become a bond-servant---a voluntary slave---to Jesus Christ.
- That out of love for Him---and gratitude for what He has done for you---you make Jesus the Lord of your life.

- Now---at first glance---that doesn't look like much of a deal.
- Who would want to be made a slave---especially if they thought they were free?
- And it's not easy to convince people that Bob Dylan had it right when he sang:
- “You're gonna have to serve somebody, yes indeed you're gonna have to serve somebody,
- It may be the devil, or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody.”
- If Christ isn't the Lord of our life---Satan is---there is no third alternative.
- We may think we are free---serving only our own desires---but we're not.
- And it's not our job to convince people that they are already serving the devil---or that they should become the slave of Christ.
- Jesus made it clear in John 16:8 that it was the Holy Spirit who would convict the world concerning sin---and righteousness---and judgment.
- We can't convict anyone that they are sinful---and that true righteousness comes only through Christ.
- It doesn't make sense to the unenlightened.
- We can't even convince anyone that Judgment Day is coming.
- All we can do is preach Christ---and openly teach the truth He has revealed.
- We leave the rest up to the God who caused light to shine out of darkness.

- He's the only one who can enlighten the eyes of a man blinded by Satan.
- He did it with us---and He can do it with others as well.
- If we'll just keep preaching Christ as Lord---and sharing the light of the knowledge of the glory of God as revealed in the face of Christ---God may take the blinders off someone to whom we are witnessing.
- He knows everyone's heart---and He won't violate anyone's freedom to reject Him.
- But He may cause the veil to be lifted---so they can see the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ---if we'll keep reflecting the light He has shone into our hearts.
- So we don't give up---we don't lose heart.
- We don't get too discouraged when those we love fail to see the value in the new covenant we're making known to them.
- We just keep reflecting the love of Christ in all we do---and we keep on teaching the truth that has been revealed.
- And in doing so---we give the Spirit the opportunity to convict the world concerning sin---righteousness---and judgment to come.
- We've been sent into the world with a message that does seem too good to be true---and quite frankly---most people will not believe it.
- But it is true---it's the good news that Jesus has paid the penalty for sin---and that the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. (Romans 6:23)
- So don't lose heart.
- Witness with confidence---believing what Paul told the Corinthians.
- "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord." (I Corinthians 15:58)