

"Live Much in the Smiles of God"
2 Corinthians 4:6
22 November 2020

I chose that prayer for our *Prayer of Confession and Celebration* today because I am tired, weary, and spent. I'm really tired, y'all. I'm exhausted. Really weary. My soul needs a vacation. My soul needs summertime at the beach with a good book in hand and feeling the warm caress of the sun. That's what my heart is craving today. Warm sun. Good book. Why? Because 2020 has taken a toll on me! And I'm sure all y'all feel the same way, too.

This year has been hard on everyone. And all of the changes and how constant they are and all the division and hatred and politics and just 2020 in general has me just plum tuckered out, y'all!

But if we slow down enough to think about it, all that we have experienced this year has actually prepared us for Advent. 2020 has actually done us a favor! It has helped us to prepare for Advent. Perhaps we will never be more ready for and anticipating and as excited Advent as much as we are this year!

Next Sunday is the first day of Advent, and Pastor Greg will be preaching, but our official Advent preaching series will not begin until December 6th. I've entitled it "NEAR." We're going to celebrate the nearness of God, celebrate the truth that Jesus just can't get close enough to His people.

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I miss the Old Testament- *y'all know I love to preach from the Old testament-* so during Advent we will be looking at the Old Testament prophet Haggai. And what we'll see in that book is perfect for Advent, it's perfect for what we've experienced this year, it's perfect for tired, weary, and spent hearts that just need a vacation. Hearts that just want to sit on the beach with a good book and feel the warm rays of the sun. What the prophet Haggai will say to us about God will give us hope and peace and will comfort our hearts.

What human hearts don't need is to constantly be told what to do. We don't need to be told that we should be better Christians. We know that, right? We don't need more law. We need our tired, weary, and spent hearts to be lifted up above all the drama and chaos, lifted up above 2020, and the law can't do that. Only the Gospel can. Hearts don't need to be beat up and bruised, *but rather melted-* melted in the free grace of God; melted by the love of God in Christ; melted by the light of His glory and grace.

And that's what Paul will be talking about in our passage today. Our hearts melt as the light of God's glory shines on them. So, turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 4. What we will see today is just how good and gracious and kind and generous God is. And that is exactly what our tired, weary, and spent hearts need to hear.

Our big idea today comes from something that Puritan Richard Sibbes said. He said,
BE ALWAYS UNDER THE SUNSHINE OF THE GOSPEL.

Think about that. Picture that. The warm sunshine of good news enveloping you. The warm rays of God's glory warming your heart. Here's what Richard Sibbes said-

As when things are cold we bring them to the fire to heat and melt, so bring we our cold hearts to the fire of the love of Christ; consider we of our sins against Christ, and of Christ's love towards us; dwell upon this meditation. Think what great love Christ hath shown unto us, and how little we have deserved, and this will make our hearts to melt, and be as pliable as wax before the sun... If thou wilt have this tender and melting heart, then... be always under the sunshine of the gospel.

In his ministry, Richard Sibbes always sought to get underneath the superficial layer of his church's behavior, so that the Holy Spirit could deal with their hearts, deal with their affections, deal with their desires, their motivations. Many pastors believe that the root of our problems lies in our behavior, in what we think, say, and do. But Richard Sibbes understood that he needed to dig deeper. He knew he needed to plumb the depths of his people's hearts. Sibbes knew that all of the outward acts of sin that are so prevalent in our lives are just merely the reflection of what is going on in our hearts. He knew that to merely get someone to change their behavior, without dealing with the desires in their heart, would only cultivate hypocrisy and self-righteousness. Sibbes knew that hearts must be warmed by the love and mercy of Christ. And the apostle Paul would agree wholeheartedly.

LOOK AT VERSE 6...

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

When Paul speaks of light in this verse, just like the phrase "*the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ,*" which we saw back in verse 4, he's talking about the light of God's glory. He's talking about the warm, heart-melting nature of God's glory, not the blinding, laser-like quality. For Moses and Co. at Sinai, God's glory was like a laser, it was 60,000 watts exposing their sins and hardened hearts. That's why Moses had to wear a veil over his face. God's glory was too much to look at. But in the New Covenant, the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, the light of the *good news* of the glory of Christ is like the sun: warm, not blinding. It's the light of the Gospel, the light of good news that shines forth for sinners.

Under the old covenant, Moses had to veil his face to keep people from seeing the glory of God. In the New Covenant, we get to see God's face! We get to see the glory of God shining forth in the face of Jesus...and we aren't consumed! We're not obliterated. We get to bask and rest in the warmth of God's glory in the Gospel.

So, in verse 4, the "light of the gospel of the glory of Christ," and in verse 6, "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" is a warm light. Like the sun. Like basking in the sun's beams on a cool day. Not the blinding light at Sinai that radiated off of Moses face. In the Gospel, that light is dimmed to a warm, toasty ray that soothes and relaxes and rejuvenates sinners as it shines forth from the face of Jesus.

Unlike Paul, the super-apostles just stressed outward obedience to God's law. They told the Corinthians to just get circumcised and keep the rules. That's it. Outward behavior was king. But, Paul knows that true transformation comes, not by keeping the rules, but by beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus. That's how we are transformed from one degree of glory to another: by beholding the face of Jesus.

That's why, as we saw last week, Paul said that he preaches "Jesus Christ as Lord." Because the Gospel is the light that opens blind eyes. Just as God spoke in Genesis 1 and said, "*Let there be light,*"- that's what Paul is alluding to in verse 6- so too, God shines the light of the Gospel in our hearts. This is new creation. Just as God spoke in Genesis 1 at creation, and there was light out of darkness, so too, through the Gospel, God speaks and calls His elect home. We experience regeneration.

It's a new creation. We are made alive, raised up from the deadness of our trespasses and sins. We are forgiven, justified, adopted, and now we are in union with Christ. That's what happens when the light of God's glory shines in our hearts at salvation. So, it's the light of God's glory, the light of good news shining in our hearts that actually "heats up" and "warms" our affections for Him.

But it's more than just *seeing* this light, because in the pages of Scripture the believer also *senses* a spiritual reality, as well. That's why Paul mentions our "hearts." The Gospel shines on the center of our affections, our hearts. We sense and we feel in our affections the glory of Jesus. John Calvin said that when we open up our Bibles, there "we *feel* that the undoubted power of his divine majesty lives and breathes there" (*Institutes* I, vii, 5).

We *feel* God's glory. We feel and sense God's glory when we read His word. We feel His glory when Christ is preached. Our hearts actually *experience* His glory and love. That's why Paul mentions the heart here in verse 6.

Jonathan Edwards said that sensing this sweetness of God is a mark of the truly converted. He describes 2 men and their understanding of honey. One man understands and knows that honey is sweet. But another man, Edwards, says, "*loves honey and is greatly delighted in it because he knows the sweet taste of it*" (*Religious Affections*, p. 209). One man knows it intellectually, but the other experientially. He has tasted honey and he knows that honey is sweet. Edwards is saying that believers are those who enjoy the beauty of God. They have actually tasted the sweetness of God's glory and so they adore and enjoy Him.

Notice too, in verse 6, the words "to give the light"-

LOOK AT VERSE 6 AGAIN...

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

God gives this light to us. It's a free gift! He is the one who has shone in our hearts. He is the one who shares His glory. God's generosity flows out of His love. God loved us and created us because He delighted to share His own goodness, share His love with us, share His glory with us, so that we would taste it and delight in it. And this is how God loves: *He gives*. And what does He give? Himself. He is the gift. His glory is His gift. He shares the light of the knowledge of His glory with His elect people.

So, lurking behind the phrases "*Let light shine out of darkness*" and "*to give the light*" in verse 6 is this truth: God created the world through His Son Jesus because He wanted *to give*, He wanted to share the love and glory that He has been enjoying for all eternity. God's overwhelming generosity flows out of His

love. The reason that He created us is because He takes great delight in sharing His own goodness, sharing His love with us, "to give the light" so that we would see it, sense, and delight in it. The light of His glory is a gift. He shares His glory with us. Isn't God marvelous? He's not stingy! He's not uptight! He's not a miser! He gives, He shares His glory with sinners. And He doesn't do it grudgingly! He delights to share all of His glory with us.

Recall, that the super-apostles stressed obedience to the law as a means of getting right with God. But Paul says it's all a gift. Righteousness is a gift. Salvation is a gift. It comes because God has shone in our hearts. He made the first move, we didn't. God has shone in our hearts *to give* this light. So, if you're doubting God's love for you today, Paul would tell you to do this-

BE ALWAYS UNDER THE SUNSHINE OF THE GOSPEL.

Jesus wants you to feel the warm sunshine of the Gospel. He is not reluctant to let His glorious light shine on you. It's why He came. To flood the darkness of your life, to flood the darkness of your heart, your thoughts, etc with the warm sunshine of His love.

Maybe you're hiding away in sin. Maybe you're sitting in the dark house of guilt and shame. Maybe you have the blinds shut. It's dark in your house. And you're just stuck in that darkness. Jesus wants you to come outside. Come outside and feel the warm sunshine of His love. Throw open the curtains. Let His light, His glory flood your heart.

His glory is that He, the infinitely and eternally glorious Son of God, condescends to save sinners! His glory is His love, His mercy, His grace. So, who is this God? Who would do this? Who would take the blame of their enemies and die in their place? Who would be so kind to rebels? What kind of God are we dealing with here? One who initiates. One who steps down to serve the ugly. One who shows His glory by becoming a servant. One who gives.

We have no category for this, do we? It's "miracle." It's "supernatural." And it is true. And when you believe it, it will warm your heart. You'll begin to feel and sense the warm rays of His glory in the face of Jesus. You'll sense and feel His love for you. As Martin Luther said in his Large Catechism:

"...we may look into His fatherly heart and sense how boundlessly He loves us. That would warm our hearts, setting them aglow with thankfulness." (Large Catechism, II, 23-24)

We look into God's heart and what do we see? That He loves us. Boundlessly. And that's where we get to know Him- by knowing His very heart. Notice too then, in verse 6, the word "knowledge"-

LOOK AT VERSE 6 AGAIN...

For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Understand this: We love, enjoy, and delight in God to the degree that we know Him. If you don't know God, you won't love Him, you won't enjoy Him. If you think that He is first a law-giver, then that's how you will relate to Him. If you think that God is a harsh taskmaster, that's how you will relate to Him. But if you know Him as a kind, loving, generous, giving God, then you will actually enjoy Him! We love, enjoy, and delight in God to the degree that we know Him.

Now, think about this: We can know God! Think about that! Wow. When's the last time you were just awestruck that *you* can know *God*, that you can know His glory, that you can know what He is like? When's the last time you were just floored that the infinitely glorious God of the universe has revealed Himself to you in His word? When's the last time you were overwhelmed that you have Bibles, *plural*, in your language. Because it's in the Bible that God reveals His heart to us. It's in the Bible that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God shines forth.

And the Devil knows this! The Devil says to us, as he said to Adam and Eve, "*God is not good. God's commands are unreasonable. He must be holding back on you.*" But that couldn't be further from the truth! The Devil doesn't want us to know God. That's why he doesn't want you to read your Bible. The daily temptation put in front of us by the Serpent is to keep us from God's word. The Devil does not want you to know that God is good, that His commandments are good. The Devil wants you to think that God is holding back on you. Satan knows that when you read God's word, then God opens His heart to you. That's why the Devil doesn't want you to read your Bible. He doesn't want you to know the glory of God, to know the heart of God.

Listen, if we want to see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, we must go to God's word. When the Word of God goes out- when it is preached, when you read it, when it is memorized, when you

meditate on it- it is then that the glory of God is manifested, that His people are enlightened, and their hearts are warmed. Cold hearts get warmed when they behold Jesus, when they see God's heart.

Let me ask you: Is your heart cold today? Are your affections for Jesus frozen? Then listen up. Robert Murray M'Cheyne said-

Learn much of the Lord Jesus. For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ. He is altogether lovely. Such infinite majesty, and yet such meekness and grace, and all for sinners, even the chief! Live much in the smiles of God. Bask in his beams. Feel his all-seeing eye settled on you in love, and repose in his almighty arms...Let your soul be filled with a heart-ravishing sense of the sweetness and excellency of Christ and all that is in Him. Let the Holy Spirit fill every chamber of your heart; and so there will be no room for folly, or the world, or Satan, or the flesh. (Andrew Bonar, Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne, p.293)

How do you keep your heart from growing cold? Answer:

BE ALWAYS UNDER THE SUNSHINE OF THE GOSPEL.

How do you keep your heart from growing cold? Answer: *Live much in the smiles of God.* How do you keep your heart from growing cold? Answer: *Bask in His beams.*

We have to expose our hearts to the light of His glory. We have to open up His word and look for the face of Jesus, and then we'll be transformed.

But, listen, the Christian life is not about behavior modification. It's just not. The Christian life is all about beholding Jesus and what He has done for us, not what we are called to do for Him. It's only as we behold Jesus that our hearts melt, so that we want to obey Him. Beholding Jesus melts the heart, and then and only then, does behavior follow.

You see, like Richard Sibbes said, we have to get *underneath our behavior*. We have to get underneath our behavior and get to the heart, the affections, the desires that we have. If we just seek behavior modification, then we'll just end up creating hypocrites and self-righteous people. We'll become like the super-apostles. Remember, the law cannot change us. The law does not have power to change us. Being told what we must do will not change us. So our goal is not behavior modification. The Christian life is not about behavior modification, it's about heart transformation.

And in order to change, our hearts must be melted, not beaten with the law, not beaten with what we must do. They must be warmed and melted with the love of Jesus, the light of the glory of God, warmed and melted with what He has done for us. Our evil desires must be eclipsed by stronger desires for Jesus. We have to get underneath our behavior and appeal to the heart where we speak of how merciful and kind and gracious and loving Jesus is. That kind of talk, not the demands of the law, warms hearts and transforms people.

Now, we can stare at the face of God and live. And what do we see on the face of Jesus? A frown? No. We see a smile. When you approach Jesus, He's smiling. There's joy radiating from His face. And that's what His face will look like for eternity! Imagine seeing Jesus for the first time. Will it be white-hot, 60,000 watts of infinite, blinding glory? Or, will it be the warmth of sunshine? I think you know the answer, but in case you don't, let me give the floor to Jonathan Edwards again. Reflecting on seeing Jesus in glory, in eternity, he said-

The nature of this glory of Christ that they shall see, will be such as will draw and encourage them, for they will not only see infinite majesty and greatness; but infinite grace, condescension and mildness, and gentleness and sweetness, equal to his majesty...the sight of Christ's great kingly majesty will be no more terror to them; but will only serve the more to heighten their pleasure and surprise... the souls of departed saints with Christ in heaven, shall have Christ as it were unbosomed unto them, manifesting those infinite riches of love towards them, that have been there from eternity... Thus they shall eat and drink abundantly, and swim in the ocean of love, and be eternally swallowed up in the infinitely bright, and infinitely mild and sweet beams of divine love; eternally receiving that light, eternally full of it, and eternally compassed round with it, and everlastingly reflecting it back again to the fountain of it. ("True Saints, When Absent From the Body, Are Present with the Lord," in Works, 25:233)

We shall see Jesus and not flee in terror. We will see Him smile at us as He holds out His arms to embrace us. We will see Him and not run from His glory, not be terrified of His glory, we will actually be drawn to Him and encouraged to do so. We will see Him who died in our place and His face will heighten our pleasure and surprise. We will truly sense and feel His love in that moment like never before! We will swim

in the ocean of His love. We will be swallowed up in His glory and not be consumed. His glory will be like warm sunshine.

Think about this: Jesus, with all of His dazzling glory, has made Himself accessible- accessible to sinners, of all people! Wow!

Let me ask you: Is your heart cold to Jesus today? Where do you need the warm sunshine of the Gospel to shine on you? Where do you need the radiance of the glory of God in your life to shine in? Where do you need His love to come in? Where has your heart become cold? Where does the love of Jesus need to shine bright in your heart?

Look to Jesus. See His face shining. See His smile. Live much in the smiles of God. Bask in His beams. Feel the warmth of His glory. Feel His all-seeing eye settled on you in love, and repose in His almighty arms. Let your soul be filled with a heart-ravishing sense of the sweetness and excellency of Christ and all that is in Him.

How do you keep your heart from growing cold? Answer: *Live much in the smiles of God.* How do you keep your heart from growing cold? Answer: *Bask in His beams.* How do you keep your heart from growing cold? Answer:

BE ALWAYS UNDER THE SUNSHINE OF THE GOSPEL.

Take heart weary, tired, and exhausted ones. You will live much in the smiles of God for eternity. Hang on just a little while longer, y'all. Soon we will see His smiling face and feel His warm embrace forever.