

Having the Heart to Keep Going

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, thank you so much, Inez, and folks, have those verses in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 open in front of you. We're just going to finish this little series, take a break for Christmas, and then come back at the middle of January next year.
- So we thought this was a good place to finish this morning in this little section of the book. And these verses are going to be really timely for us, for all of us.
- They are really incredible. But particularly they're going to be timely for you if you feel like giving up this morning. And you're weary and you're tired and you're wondering if you can go on following Jesus.
- When we were young, our house with three boys in it was utter chaos. And when it was teetering on being too much and she was spent, my mum always joked about her fantasy job.
- She said, do you know what, I would just love to go and I'd love to go and work in a toothpaste factory. And have someone plant me in front of a conveyor belt and tell me that my one job for the day was just to sit there and put caps on top of the toothpaste tubes.
- [1 : 1 5] And it's niche, I'll give her that. But here's why she said that. No pressure, no stress. And I think most importantly, no people.
- Because life gives us plenty of reasons at times, doesn't it, to want to run away. And I guess maybe in our generation we have coined this phrase. And it must have always been a thing, but we've just kind of found a phrase for it.
- This thing that we call escapism. And the thing is, if you've been following Jesus for any length of time, you'll hear him say that to follow him doesn't subtract from those reasons to want to run away.
- Actually, it adds to them. Because living for him will so often feel like in this world that swords are always out for you.
- Right, to stick with Jesus when it comes to the whole relationships thing. It's thing. To strive for purity in a world that says you've got to be true to yourself. In a world that says you've got to find happiness first and foremost.
- [2 : 1 7] It's not going to win you plodits. Striving for purity in a world where sexually anything goes, everything's up for grabs, won't win you any friends. Having Jesus shaped convictions about the sanctity of life, how you understand life and how it affects how you understand the beginning of life.
- And particularly this week, how it helps you understand the end of life. When you have convictions on those things, it will so often lead to you being labelled an opponent of freedom and compassion.
- When you feel like you're constantly losing that daily battle with temptation and sin. When you witness your best friend walk away from faith. When you feel your own weakness and tiredness.
- All of those rivers of discouragement can converge. And we just want to run away. And all that takes me to a gilet that I bought recently.

And I bought it all vintage. And some of you are saying that's your first mistake. But this second hand clothes app. And the thing about this gilet is that all the pictures on the website made it look great.

[3 : 31] But I got it. And all of a sudden I discovered this thing once was full of puff. And now just because of the wear and tear that it's been through. All the puff that was once there has completely gone out of this thing.

And actually now it feels more like a slightly padded t-shirt. But maybe right now that's the perfect metaphor for where you are in terms of your walk with Jesus.

Maybe you feel like all the puff is out of me. I want to run away. I want to give up. I feel weary. I'm struggling. See friends, what this passage does is it puts the finger on.

What I think is the greatest danger for the church today. It might well be the greatest danger for you. And I know certainly it's the greatest danger for my heart as I live this Christian life.

And here it is at verse 1. And then again you get it at verse 16. Which I think is the wee bookends of this section. Here's the danger. That we just lose heart.

[4 : 35] Which is first century language for we just tap out. And if that's you here today.

Here's what you need to know. You need to know that Paul gets you. And you need to know in turn that you get Paul. Because if ever there was a guy who had reasons.

And we'll think about this in the second half of this chapter. You can scan your eyes over it if you want. If ever there was a guy who had reasons to cut and run. It was the apostle Paul. Doesn't hide any of that stuff.

Doesn't paint it up. Dress it up. He says life was really hard. It is really hard following Jesus. This is going to be really timely for you if you feel like giving up. Because we do not lose heart.

Says Paul. And here's the cool thing about that phrase. First person. Plural. Indicative. Active. There's a bit of Greek for you on Nation Sunday.

[5 : 36] Okay. But here's what that means. Why should I care about that? Here's what it means. What's going on here. Is that Paul says we do not lose heart. This is a pep talk that he's doing inside himself.

To communicate to his readers and his listeners. And everyone who's going to pick up this ever since. That I've found a reason to keep going. When I'm all spent. When life is done.

When I feel like tapping out. We do not lose heart. And this is why we do not lose heart. This is an internal pep talk that we're privy to. That the apostle Paul has with himself.

As if to say. Here's why I keep going. And what this passage does though. Before we get there. And you've got to hang on in. Till we get there.

Is it helps us be real. About two reasons. Why we so often lose heart. In the Christian faith. Right. And number one. Is it verse two. And it's when we encounter people's appetite for lies.

[6 : 37] So Paul's outing the motives of these false teachers. Who've invaded this little church in Corinth. And he says. Doesn't he. He takes them on. He says. These are people who practice cunning.

These are people who tamper with God's words. Can I tell you just. The two of the biggest discouragements for me. Here's number one. Is hearing church leaders around the country. Being cowardly and fudging issues.

Shapeshifting. Changing colors like a chameleon. Like some kind of transformer. And the thinking I guess. Is that if only the church can be cool and appealing. And the message is more palatable and relevant.

People will come flocking in. Can I just say that is cowardly. More so. Two thousand years of church history. Are there to show us.

That that has never been how the church of Jesus Christ. Has flourished in this land. And in this world. The church of Jesus Christ. Is a long and proven track record. Of thriving where and with what.

[7 : 37] In the margins. With the truth. We're just like the world. Thinking that's what's going to attract people to come in. They're not going to come in at all. They'll just think. Well you're exactly the same as us.

Why would we bother? If we can show the world something radically different. That this message really does work. Friends. We really will be a light in a dark world.

Church has always flourished in the margins. Here's Stephen McAlpine. Aussie guy. He's got a book called Being the Bad Guys. How to live for Jesus in a world that says you shouldn't.

Worth it for the title alone. But here's what he says. Signing up to Team Jesus in AD 50. Resulted in the same cultural rejection.

As it does now. Church has always flourished. In the margins. The other thing that discourages me. Is when church leaders. Are one thing in the pulpit.

[8 : 34] And yet another thing in private. And it seems like just the circles that I'm in. It seems like. Month after month. There's another one that comes out. And I reckon the reason is there at.

I can't find it. Those who are preaching themselves and not Christ. And God has just outed their disgraceful ways. Just outed them in front of the world.

As if to say I will not be mocked. It's really discouraging though when you see it. People's appetite for lies. The second thing though is at verse 3. And probably this is a bit more closer to home for many of us.

It's that when we experience people's apathy towards the truth. That friend who you try and speak to about Jesus. And honestly it's like the opposite of Velcro. Remember my dad's when I was young.

We used to play that ball with a pad and the ball. And you throw it and you catch. Glory days the 90s. But it was the Velcro wasn't it? That caught the ball. Things stuck to you.

[9 : 38] You had Velcro on. It's like the opposite of Velcro sometimes speaking to people about Jesus isn't it? Nothing sticks. People don't want to know. Or that family member. And it's to try and shift the conversation towards Jesus.

It's just awkward. The chat is predictable. And it's really hard to move the conversation on. And people really don't seem to care. And I bumped into an old colleague of mine the other day.

Catching up. He's telling me what he's doing. And I'm telling him what I'm doing. I try to get Jesus into the conversation as much as possible. And I can see it in his face. What comes out of his mouth is.

Well we all need to find something really meaningful to do in life. And I can see it on his face. As if to say what I was doing. What we believed in to follow Jesus. Is some kind of response to a midlife crisis.

Like the equivalent of taking up yoga. Or hiring a life coach. But it's the experience isn't it? At times when we try and talk to our friends and family.

[10 : 38] About Jesus. But you need to see what's going on here. Paul wants us to know that there's something else going on. When people show disinterest towards Jesus. And we need to get this reality.

If we're to feel the encouragement that comes in just a few verses time. Do you see verse 3? What does he say? He says there's a spiritual battle going on. And it's sometimes difficult I think living in our western world.

Where we're very materialistic. To understand that there actually is a realm beyond the one that we see in front of us. The God of this world Paul calls the devil.

He is the one who has put a veil over people's eyes. And what that means is the reason that people don't get it. Before it's a matter of the mind.

It's a matter of the heart. So ever since God announced in Genesis 3.15. That he was going to send someone.

[11 : 39] A he. To crush the head of Satan. The devil has been on the prowl looking for that individual. No wonder it felt like.

Felt like an all out attack of Jesus when he was born. The devil recognised that something was up. Something is up. Who else could be behind Herod trying to massacre all those baby boys?

Ever since then he has been in the business of trying to blind people's eyes. Stop them. Keep them from seeing Jesus. It is quite literally his job description as the great deceiver.

And try as hard as we might. Friends. You and I do not have the power to remove that veil that is across people's eyes by ourselves. And that's really painful.

Because I imagine so many of us are sitting here right now. Thinking my heart breaks for dot dot dot. Yeah.

[12 : 39] You're thinking of people. I'm thinking of people as I'm saying this. Maybe particularly let me speak directly to those of us who have children. And they have walked away from Jesus. I think I feel the contours of that in a way that I just didn't five years ago.

If that's you. If you're weeping away inside. Inside your heart. Know that despite all the mistakes friends. That you and I will make. Particularly as parents.

And we play that shoulda woulda coulda game all the time. Don't we? Their decision. Wasn't primarily to do with your parenting skills. Or lack of.

Primarily. It is to do with this. And conversely. Opposite story is also true. If our friends and family do come to know Jesus.

And we pray that they would. Again it's nothing to do with our brilliance. Or our eloquence. We might be the means that God uses to reach people. But we are certainly not the reason that anyone comes to faith.

[13 : 45] Grace saves our children. Not our perfect parenting. You know a friend told me that a few weeks ago called Jay. One of my good friends. I was having a stinker. Of a couple of days as a parent.

And he took me aside. Just put his arm around my shoulder and said. It's grace that saves our kids. Not our parenting. Brilliant. Where does that leave us then?

I take it it leaves us out of resources. Doesn't it? You know I've got a friend called Gordon. Always catch up with Gordon. And we find ourselves talking about things that are just well above us.

He always says. Bro. It's time to call in the air squad. And what he means by that. It's time to pray. It's above us. We can't do it.

It's well beyond our capabilities. It's time to call in the air squad. And what is prayer. Other than falling on our knees. And saying to God. Father this is well beyond us.

[14 : 44] A spiritual battle means that we take up spiritual weapons. And on that note. Let me invite you to come to the prayer gathering tonight. Craig's going to mention it at the end I'm sure.

But friends. That is the place where we go to battle. Private lives. Praying in our own times. But together corporately. As we come together. Half past five in the upstairs hall. We are coming together to pray. And I know there's a prayer meeting after it.

Specifically people getting together to pray for their children. Wouldn't that be a great thing for us to come to and devote ourselves to? Even if it's your first time. If you've never done it before. Please come if you want to.

We're getting pizza before. Half past five. In the upstairs hall. But this is how we do battle. Call on our heavenly father. Plead with him.

And that takes us to the one big reason to keep going. Paul says therefore. Which is a link. Do you see it? In verse one. To what has come before.

[15 : 41] And Ian did a fantastic job. The week before last. Or was it last week? I forget. Looking at chapter three. About this ministry that Paul has.

Paul says we have this ministry. And he's talking about the new covenant ministry. That is so superior. In Christ. That's so much better than the old covenant. And you say.

Why is it so much better? What does it do? Well let me just. Maybe help. Remind us of Paul's pattern of ministry.

Do you remember? The series title. Boasting in weakness. That's what Paul is saying. We'll come back to it. Next time we jump in. At verse seven of chapter four. We have this treasure in jars of clay.

Think about it like this. Okay. The shape of Paul's ministry. Think Susan Boyle. When she first got up. And Britain's Got Talent. Do you remember that scene? Right. This unemployed. Forty six year old woman.

[16 : 36] From West Lothian. Who turns up before the judges. In really shabby clothing. But also just has cringeworthy chat. The judges roll their eyes. Thinking there's nothing good.

To be seen on the outside here. But she opens her mouth. And what comes out. Is the voice of an angel. And that's what Paul's message. And ministry is.

If you want to think about it like that. This is what the gospel does. It's not about changing the outside. It's about change. Happening on the inside. The gospel is the only thing. That can transform our hearts.

And our lives. Look at the last verse of chapter three. What does this gospel do? We are being transformed. From one degree of glory to another.

As we see what? As we behold Jesus. We are transformed more. Into his image.

[17 : 30] And where does that transformation happen? You see Paul says. God has shone into our hearts. The false apostles message.

Might look outwardly good. But it's got no power. To transform the depths. Of the very place. That we need to be changed. Let me just say. Trying to use behavior modification.

Trying to use religious observance. As the thing that is going to transform. The human heart. It's like giving a deep sea diver. A torch. And asking him to hit the bottom. Of the marina trench. And shine his light there.

It's just not going to work. However Paul's message. Has the power to transform people. Internally. That's the ministry that Paul has.

But notice him say. Why he has it. Verse one. And you've got to see this. Why he has this ministry. He has it by. Mercy. And you hear Paul's testimony.

[18 : 34] All over this section. Here is a man. Who grew up a devout Jew. Here is a man. Who's got dead Christians. On his CV. And on his conscience. Here is a man.

If ever there was one. Who well and truly. Had a veil. Over his eyes. If you're here this morning. And you think you've got a checkered past. This guy Paul. Would take you to the cleaners.

And back again. He just did not see. He did not understand. He was antagonistic. But. Jesus exploded. Into his life.

As he was heading to Damascus. Trying to get a death warrant approved. So he could get. More. Christians. Killed. And all of a sudden. You hear. Paul in this passage.

Talking about. A light. A light from God. That opens people's eyes. Here he is talking about.

[19 : 29] Light. And when he says. The God who let light. Shine out of darkness. He's quoting there from Genesis 1. Verse 3.

Turn there. And here's what you will find. God created the world. God. Ex nihilo. Now again. Nation Sunday. There's Latin for you. Okay. Ex nihilo.

God created out of nothing. He didn't use pre-existing materials. God did not take a ladle out. And get creative with some primordial soup.

God created out of nothing. Nothing. He created out of an overflow. Of who he is. As father. As son. And as Holy Spirit.

Our universe was quite literally created by love. This world is the brainchild of the God who delights to bring life out of nothing.

[20 : 25] Of the God who specializes. And get this to your friends. In light swallowing up and banishing darkness. It's what we're going to think about next week. The light has come into the world.

That light has shone. And the darkness. Has not overcome it. It's what this God does. It's what he does.

And what Paul is saying is what is physically true. Is also spiritually true. Because every human being on this planet by default is spiritually dead.

We are in a Michael Jackson thriller video here. We are walking zombies. We are sleepwalking our way towards an eternal death and God's righteous judgment.

That's what he says. Verse 3. We were perishing. This is all of us without Jesus. And we were all this before God got involved. What we've got to understand.

[21 : 27] That word mercy. God is not like a football talent scout. I always remember that when we were young. And you got word that there was a scout in the stands at the side watching you.

He's there. He's there. God is not like that. God is not turned up watching people thinking they would make really good players for my team. How does anyone become a Christian?

And allow verse 1 to tell us. It is because of God's mercy. His mercy. Grace is getting something that we don't deserve.

Mercy. Other side of the coin. It is not getting something that we do deserve. And no one. And I mean no one knows that better than the Apostle Paul. Let me apply.

This means that if you are a Christian here today. You are one. Not because you grew up in a Christian home.

[22 : 26] Not because you went to Sunday school. Not because you once sang kumbaya around a campfire. Not because you grew up in a Christian country. Not because you had a Christian friend.

Not because you did good stuff. You and I are Christians simply because. God has shone his light in our lives.

And he's opened our eyes. By his grace to see the beauty of Jesus. There is no other reason. No other reason.

And if we get this. It should lead us to our friends and our family. It should lead us not towards frustration. It should lead us towards compassion. Towards those who don't get Jesus.

The good news here. Is that the God who said. Let light shine out of darkness. Dear friends. The good news is that God can do this.

[23 : 26] For anyone. And the reports of that. And I was thinking this last Sunday. With Ruben's testimony.

Reports of that. Will not make the front page. Of the BBC News website. And they won't make. Your street WhatsApp group. But when God does this transforming work.

In our hearts. As you see it. Happen in people's lives. You better believe that that is showing up. On the news feed of heaven. You know just as we close.

Here's something my predecessor. Always told me. When I was starting out. He told me that he kept a note. Through the back. In the top drawer of his desk.

And contained on that note. Were all the reasons. That he first decided. To follow Jesus. And on the other side. Were all the reasons. That he wanted to go into Christian ministry.

[24 : 24] And he said. See when life gets really tough. What I do. Is I just go into that drawer. And I pull it out. And I just make myself. Read it. Now in all my years. Working with John. I never once saw that letter.

I don't know whether he just waited. Until I was out of the room. Maybe I was one of the reasons. That he had to read that letter. I don't know. But I never once. Saw him read that letter. But here's the thing. I made my own. And I'd encourage you to make your own as well.

When life gets really tough. And those two big reasons to lose heart. Keep coming. What is it you come back to? When the chips are down. Where do you go?

I just nicked mine from verse 15. Of chapter 4. As hard as it gets. See if there is. A man called Jesus.

And see if he really did live. And he died. And he paid my debt of sin.

[25 : 22] And if it's true that he loves me. And he holds me. Have I been in his thoughts. Since before the foundation of the world. If he promises to be my good shepherd. Who will carry me right through.

To the other side of death. To his very presence. Today's another day. Not to lose heart. So friends don't lose heart. Jesus said.

I am the good shepherd. I know my own. And my own know me. Just as the father knows me. And I know the father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep.

That are not of this fold. I must bring them also. And they will listen to my voice. Lord thank you so much. That we've heard your voice today.

As we've opened the pages of the Bible. And particularly Lord. I pray for those of us here today. Who feel weary. Who feel battered. Who are struggling in the fight.

[26 : 18] Lord I pray that the news of the resurrection. That you are the God who shines light. Into the darkest. Darkest of situations. Father may you by your Holy Spirit.

Graciously get us back on our feet. Father thank you for one another. Thank you for our church family. We pray Lord. Help us to be a people marked by prayer. And this is our petition to you Lord.

Heavenly Father. Thank you that you hear us. Because we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.