

Explore the Bible: Displaying the Gospel

April 16, 2018

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for May 6 focuses on 2 Corinthians 4:5-18.*

The gospel is more than an inspiring message of hope. It is the greatest confidence for the one who believes and follows Christ. Such good news speaks as profoundly to the lost as it does to the found, and it carries us forward in genuine hope.

Coming from the realization of the Apostle Paul's trials and testing, such confidence and hope is vital. Begin by asking your group: *What does confidence and hope do for us? How do we feel about the days ahead when we have little confidence or hope?*

As we gather to experience the apostle's words, we need to encourage each other that confidence and hope are only as helpful as what we place our confidence and hope in. When it comes to the good news of Jesus Christ, there is nothing more powerful to stake our lives upon.

Proclaim (2 Corinthians 4:5-6)

Personal agendas never should dominate the lips of believers. When it comes to the workplace or any other cultural environment, we see personal desires lead people to do what they do. It is too tempting to bring these same desires to the congregational setting, and that is where we must be careful.

Paul is clear that "we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord." To

proclaim any agenda other than the Great Commission is to stand in the way of Jesus' own command. This means we risk disobedience when we proclaim ourselves before Jesus.

How do we guard against putting our words and plans before Jesus' words and plans? God is the author of wisdom and revealed wisdom to humanity, in part through Jesus's own words. The greatest revelation to us was through the Son of God, and so we should be sure to uphold his wisdom by proclaiming his words alone.

Live (2 Corinthians 4:7-15)

This section is filled with some of Paul's most finely crafted statements, speaking to the eternal nature of the gospel and the vulnerable reality of those who receive the gospel. We are imperfect people who carry the perfect truth. Because of this, we have hope.

Be sure to read these verses slowly and pick a few statements to meditate on. For example, verse 10 brings us to think on what it means to carry both death and life in us. It also points to how Jesus is the constant for how we experience—and do not experience—death and life. The “body” also correlates with the “jars of clay” from verse 7. Meditating and expounding on these statements brings us to total amazement.

Paul was known for celebrating his weakness, and in these verses, “Paul illustrates God's hidden glory and power in his weakness” in order to show God's powerful work through weakness (Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 174). Consider: *How is it possible to be weak and still have confidence?*

Focus (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

Verse 16 brings us back to the first verse of this chapter: “We do not lose

heart.” This reminds us of Jesus’ words in John 16:33b: “In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

With our eyes on Jesus and our hands holding his promise, we see that courage is something we can grasp and see at work. This means we see beyond our humanity and weakness, focusing on God’s eternality and strength. *Is the gospel really the ingredient for such focus?* Paul’s response points to a clear “yes”.

If you think back to the cowardly lion from *The Wizard of Oz*, you see a creature lacking courage because all he sees is his own fear. *Are we guilty of doing the same thing—being blinded by ourselves?* We must acknowledge it often is easier to focus on ourselves instead of God, but that does not mean it is better.

Back to the conversation on trials, Paul emphasizes trials are momentary but glory is eternal. The point is not that we should endure to receive glory; rather, we should endure knowing it is worth it because of God. Receiving glory is nothing compared to receiving Christ as your lifetime companion.

Conclusion

The best way to complete this lesson is to read 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. This is the culmination of the confidence and hope that started this conversation. Perhaps we could ask each other: *What daily reminders do you need to keep your eyes on hope and off yourself?*

Hope and confidence have a way of spurring us forward, and the gospel is the only true hope we have to face uncertainty with confidence. By putting Jesus’s words and call ahead of our own, we can go forward, needing nothing else.

A popular hymn by Bill and Gloria Gaither seems to encapsulate our theme

today: "Because he lives, I can face tomorrow. Because he lives, all fear is gone. Because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living just because he lives."

Heath A. Kirkwood is lead pastor of First Baptist Church in Lorena.