

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
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Gracious Heavenly Father, we just pray that you would help us to put amazing back into grace. For truly a young man's response, such as Aaron, defies human explanation and the only understanding of that is it is the mercy of you and your grace. We just pray, Lord, that you would be pleased to allow us to bathe in your grace, and that we think of you correctly so that we may see how amazing it really is that you gave us something that we do not deserve. In spite of our unworthiness we have all the worth because of the personal work of Christ. May it be so this day that you would be pleased to open our eyes so that we might behold you more clearly for Christ's sake. Amen.

I invite you to open your Bibles to 2nd Corinthians, Chapter 2. The title of this series is Triumphant Living; another good title would be Authentic Christian Living. We are looking at these passages where Paul is describing the authenticity of his faith in Christ and of his Christian experience. Paul is describing here a life in the new covenant, the covenant of grace that was instituted because of the blood of Christ and his shed blood. Now, God deals with us based on the shed blood of Christ and Paul is describing what life looks like under that arrangement, the arrangement of grace.

Beginning in 2nd Corinthians, Chapter 2, verse 12. "Now when I came to Troas for the gospel of Christ, and when a door was opened for me in the Lord, I had no rest for my spirit, not finding Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them I went on to Macedonia. But thanks be to God, who always leads in triumph in Christ, and manifests for us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of him in every place; for we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved, and among those who are perishing: to the one an aroma from death to death and to the other an aroma from life to life, and who is adequate for such things? For we are not like many peddling the word of God but as from sincerity, but as from God we speak in Christ in the sight of God."

"Are we beginning to commend ourselves again, or do we need as some letters of commendation to you or from you? You are our letter written on our hearts; known and read by all men, being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us, written not with ink but the Spirit of God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. Such confidence we have through Christ toward God, not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God who has also made us adequate as servants of the new covenant, not of a letter but of the Spirit, for the letter kills but the Spirit gives life."

This is the word of God.

AUDIENCE: Praise be to God.

Last week we began to look at this passage. The historical background is such that Paul is describing the authenticity of his own Christian faith. You will recall historically there were those who thought Paul was not an authentic apostle. They asked how could this man who was once the primary persecutor of the church now be the primary preacher for the church. There has to be a disconnect there, and so people began to question the validity of his faith-like experience. Now Paul does a very interesting thing in this passage and in these chapters that we will be looking at over the next several months.

He says, if you want to know how authentic I am come and observe my life. If someone were to say to you, how can you validate your Christian experience what would you say?

- * Well, let me show you the number of verses I've recognized.
- * I have been to CLC.
- * I have done this or I have done that.
- * I go to Brave Men, or whatever you might say.

Is that how you would validate the authenticity of your Christian experience? Paul says basically, come and live with me, come and view me, come and experience me, and then you determine whether or not I am authentic. Then you determine whether or not I'm a fake. I want you to see my life and observe how I go about living my life, how I go about making my decisions, how I relate to people, how I handle situations, how I handle the hassles of life. And so in this passage, Paul describes for us, and you have this on your notes in your second handout, he describes for us the five characteristics of authentic Christian living.

We looked at the first two last week. The first one was it is a thankful life, a life of unquenchable optimism. Notice in verse 14, right after he left the city of Troas, remember this, he said there was a door opened to him for ministry and he left. Now most people would say that there is a door for me to open and I better go through it. Now just because a door was opened by God, doesn't necessarily mean you and I were called to walk through it. You see Paul understood that there was something bigger going on other than his own personal ministry. He understood that he needed to receive word back from Titus about what was going on in the Church of Corinth, because unless those situations were dealt with it would impact the whole development of the church movement in Asia Minor. So he said there is something bigger going on than just what I want to do. It's not about my personal ministry and me, it's about what God is doing and I need to be an aggressive responder to what I see the Lord doing. So he said yes, there is an open door for an evangelist, it's the ideal situation. And he leaves town. Now humanly, we would say, boy, Paul [UNCLEAR] fellowship, what's wrong, what did you do wrong? He says in verse 14, the very first thing he says is this, "But thanks be to God." You see the first characteristic of authentic Christian living is a thankful life. It is a life of unquenchable optimism. Now I'm not talking about a positive mental attitude. I'm not saying anything like the little red choo choo who said "I think I can, I think I can." I'm not talking about that. The reason you have such an optimistic mind set is because you know God always leads. "But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ."

The Lord has a great sense of humor in my mind because I've gone through some things this week that have driven me up a tree. I'm not going to go into a lot of detail. These hassles, nothing major, are just irritants, I mean they really get under your skin. It's almost like this, the Lord is almost saying, "OK big boy, you've been teaching those guys to be optimistic [LAUGHTER] and to give thanks in all situations in life. Let just see if you can do it."

Let me tell you the irritant of a little hassle. I went to open my refrigerator the other day, I could not, so I banged on it, and finally when I opened it there was a whole sheet of ice because the waterline to the icemaker broke. All I had in my refrigerator was this sheet of ice, so first of all I'm thankful [LAUGHTER], I'm thankful that the waterline didn't break and go all over the floor. So I looked at the floor and I thought...a life of unquenchable optimism. Right! [LAUGHTER]. Now the first thing I'm thankful for is that it wasn't all over the floor. So the first thing I had to do is chip the ice away, remove the food and throw some food away.

So I went down to Sears and bought a refrigerator, I had to buy a new one because we needed a new one anyway. I said to Becky, "This is your Christmas gift." [LAUGHTER]. She said, "Oh, boy, you're so romantic." [LAUGHTER]. I went to down to Sears and ordered it and I measured it. [LAUGHTER]. Sixty-nine inches tall and thirty-six inches wide. So they come to deliver it; I measured it wrong. It didn't fit, so they took the old one out and we had this new one stuck right in the middle of our kitchen because it wouldn't fit into the slot. So the guy said you have thirty days to use this or turn it in. "But thanks be to God." [LAUGHTER]. So we have it standing out there and we were using it. So I re-measured it...it was thirty-three inches, not thirty-six inches.

So I go back to Sears and I said here's the situation: I need a replacement. And we found one that was thirty-three inches, the same model, a Kenmore, which will fit into our slot in the kitchen. I make arrangements for it to be delivered. I take a day off because Becky was at the hospital and I would be there when it was delivered, because I had to take all the food out of the old one and transfer it into the new one and so forth. They said it would be delivered at 2:00 and so I unloaded the refrigerator and I have food all over the place. I have frozen food in a box sitting outside in the backyard because it was cold enough and I didn't want it to melt, so I have food all over the place.

So it's 1:45 and I thought you know I never got a confirmation on the phone that said that they were going to deliver it, so maybe I better call. So I called Sears and was told, "We don't have an order for you"... "But thanks be to God." [LAUGHTER]. I said, "I beg your pardon?" And he says, "We don't have a record of the order you placed." I said, "I did it Saturday morning" and I gave the number and the confirmation code and all the stuff I had. "Well, we don't have it here. Let me get back to you." So they came back with this wonderful explanation. "We had a computer glitch." Right. He said, "We don't have an order." So I said, "Does that mean you won't deliver it today?" He said, "Well, let me check with my delivery truck but it isn't on the truck." I spent an hour with him on the phone and we made the arrangements for delivery. And he said, "We'll bring it [UNCLEAR]. So we got it all set up and I put the food back in the one that is sticking out and the other one is right in the middle of the hallway.

So then I got a call back from a lady confirming delivery for today, and she said, "We're calling to confirm your order of a refrigerator sent to Bill Morris in Charlotte, North Carolina." [AUDIENCE RESPONSE AND LAUGHTER]. And she said, "Is this Mr. Morris?" So I told her I was Bruce Bickel in Pittsburgh. She said, "Bruce, we're talking about the refrigerator you bought for Bill Morris in Charlotte." [LAUGHTER]. "But thanks be to God." [LAUGHTER]. So I'm saying "Lord I got it the first time." [LAUGHTER]. I am really trying to work on this...I'm trying to work on this; I'm not losing my temper, I was very gracious on the phone, everything I could. So finally, after another hour with her on the phone, she worked it out and so they delivered it yesterday between 3-5. Becky was home in the afternoon, but I come home and she's not there, I walk into the house and the big refrigerator is still right in the middle of the floor. [LAUGHTER]. So I had to wait for Becky to get home. She told me that when they delivered it, it had a dent in the door and so they said, "We'll give you \$100.00 off the price if you take this one." She said, "No way, this is a Christmas gift and he's paying for the whole thing" [MUCH LAUGHTER]. So we still have the big refrigerator in the middle of the room and it's going to be delivered next Tuesday. Lord willing. [MUCH LAUGHTER].

I don't want to make light of that but I just think it's...the timing is sometimes...God's timing is impeccable. It is almost like he's saying, "OK, you think you're so smart, you think you've got your theology right, let's see if

it's really authentic. Is it really authentic or is it just theory?" You see, that's what Paul was up against. Is it just theory that you and I know that God always leads in triumph and, therefore, we have a thankful life, a life of unquenchable optimism, is it theory or is it really life-changing stuff? Listen to what Aaron said, "Why would I want him to take it away because God gave it to me." That's the description that is unexplainable of human life and nature. Psychology can't explain that. You see there is something that happens when you are in God's grace and he gives you what you don't deserve. Our responses to the normal hassles of life are radically different than anything else, it's beyond human description. There is no way a young man can say, "I don't want the pain to be removed because God gave it to me for a reason."

You see that's grace. That's what it means to live in the covenant of grace, because God gives us what we don't deserve. The authenticity of our life is demonstrated in the normal hassles of life. It's not in our teaching or our preaching per se, but it's how you handle the hassles that everybody else handles. You see, you and I handle it differently because we handle it with this attitude: I don't know what's going on, but I do know that my deep-seated gut tells me that God always leads us in triumphal procession. Therefore, I can have a thankful life, a life of unquenchable optimism; not pannaism, not Pollyannaism, not Mary Poppins-ish but it's a deep-rooted confidence in the fact that God leads and I'm just going to hang on and believe.

Yes, Ian.

***Ian:** For me what's both ironic and actually hard to get my head around is that not only are these circumstances given to us out of God's grace, but even the optimism itself which we look at as our own optimism, even that isn't ours, it's God grace as well.*

That's right. The optimism that we're talking about isn't something that you generate. It is not something that you **achieve**; it is something that you **receive**, that's grace because of the blood of Christ and the new arrangement. He now deals with us through the accomplishments of the personal work of Christ. And so part of God's grace is that you have a whole different mind-set; your desires are different, your thoughts are different, your responses are different because it is a gift that God gives us. And Paul says the authenticity of our life and the first demonstration is this, that you have a thankful life. Now that doesn't mean you get some cheap little thing that says "Thank you Jesus my car blew up." I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about something that is unexplainable to the world that basically says how can you say, "I want to be with my King?" And "You don't need to take away the pain. I want to be with my King," how can you say that? You see that's something that is supernatural. That's the authenticity of how we live. And the real proof of the pudding for us, guys, it is not how we talk about our theology that forms the basis of everything and that is why we study it; but it's through the practical application of the truths we see in the Scripture that transform our life.

Paul tells us in Romans 12, "Do not be conformed to the system of this world." You see I was explaining the refrigerator situation to some people at work. And they said, "Well, you just ought to go down to Sears and throw a hand grenade." [LAUGHTER]. That's the normal response. "Go down there and cuss them out, go down there and tell them they owe you one free." You see, the world's response is all about us. But Paul is saying that authentic triumphal Christian living is about him because our responses are a reflection of who he is. That's all [UNCLEAR] so I think the Lord's timing in my life is rather humorous, but not necessarily easy. So we have a thankful life, a life of unquenchable optimism. [UNCLEAR].

So now, the next characteristic is successful living. A life of unvarying triumph. You notice the passage where we went through this military description of a parade that is described for us. It was a triumphal procession. It

was a parade where the commanding Roman general was brought into the city of Rome on a white chariot, guided by white horses, a gold-laden chariot with all the captives in front. And all of his troops were in the back, thousands of feet, and people would throw incense and flowers in front of this marching hoard of people and it would give off an aroma. As we went through this last week in some detail, the real issue of the success of your life, brothers, is not in what you achieve, it's in the fact that God leads. Now notice the expression... God always...the Greek literature of this and original language of the text is this: God always, ALWAYS, always leads. In other words, there is not a time that he does not lead. There's not a time that he is not leading. Now that's what gives us the success. Our success is in the fact that we know that God is always leading, always, always leading in triumph. Everything is a triumph. The refrigerator situation is a triumph. I just need to see it work itself out. It's in the process of being led in to a triumph in some way. I do not see all the images of that yet but it will happen because God always leads in triumph. That's why you and I have a life of unvarying success. It is a life of successful living.

And remember this...it's always a triumph. If you're on this side of the parade...remember as I went through the history of that military procession...they only had this parade if the commanding general captured a minimum of 5,000 enemy troops. So he had 5,000 enemy troops in front of his chariot in their fetters and chains marching down the via sacra of Rome. Behind his chariot was his own army in full battle dress, thousands of men. So you had about 10,000 people in this parade. Now this is what Paul was saying, "But thanks be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession." The success of your life and my life, brothers, depends on what side of the parade you're on. If you are on this side of the parade and have been taken captive by Christ and his grace and his holiness, and his judgment, and his wrath; if you have been taken captive you are going to reveal his triumph over your sin. You see that? It's a triumph. If you're over here, you are going to share in his triumph because you have been overcome by his grace, his mercy, and his love. But either way it's a what? It's a triumph. It just depends upon which side of the parade you're on. If you're over here, you reveal it through his justice and his holiness. Over here, you share in it from his grace and his love, and his mercy. But either way, God is going to triumph in life. Either way, it's a triumph.

Yes?

Ted: *Bruce, have you ever thought about what you just said [UNCLEAR]...Chapter 8, verse...where it says [UNCLEAR]...he led a host of captives and gave gifts to many. I just don't [UNCLEAR]...very similar.*

Oh, my sake, I never correlated... that's a good correlation, Ted. He leads people captive and he gives gifts to some. Here would be the captives and over here would be the gifts. You see the real success of your life depends on what side of the parade you're on.

So the first characteristic we see is a thankful life. A life of unquenchable optimism. Then we saw the second characteristic of authentic living, of successful living, a life of unvarying success and triumph.

Now the third one is this: consequential living. It's a life of unforgettable impact. Look at verses 15 and 16 of that chapter. A life of unforgettable impact. "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved, and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for such things?" Now do you realize what Paul is saying here, authentic Christian living has life and death consequences. Your life, because you are associated with the personal work of Christ, has life and death consequences in this world.

Now let's go back to the imagery of what he's talking about in this triumphal procession. Now as these 10,000 troops were coming into the city of Rome, on the via sacra to the capital, people along the way would throw flowers and incense in front of these marching feet. So what happens when you have flowers and incense on the ground and somebody comes along and steps on them, what happens? An aroma is given off. Now notice there is one aroma, but two consequences. See that? We are an aroma, present tense reality, notice the verb tenses, to those who are being saved you smell one way, present tense reality, and to those who are not being saved, you smell another way. One aroma, but two consequences. Now it's an aroma of life-to-life to those who respond to the gospel of Christ in your life in Christ; but death to death to those who reject the personal work of Christ when they see him in your life. But either way, it's a triumph isn't it? Now here is what Paul is telling us, because we are associated with the personal work of Christ, our lives in this world have life and death consequences. Some people will be absolutely turned off, because of your authentic Christian living. And to them you are the smell of death because it just reveals that they are on this side of the parade, but to some other people the authenticity of your life in Christ is going to be so refreshing and so appealing and so attractive because they see and discover God grace because of your witness to them. To them it is a sign of life, but either way it's a triumph.

Now the reason Paul uses that imagery, at the end of the day when the parade was over these 5,000 troops had one of two things happen to them, they were either executed or sold into slavery. That's the smell of death. These 5,000 troops marching and stepping on that aroma knew this: at the end of this parade...we sure hope it lasts a long time...because at the end of the day, I'm going to be executed or I'm sold into slavery. That's a death to me. Paul said to some people you are the smell of death but to the people over here on this side of the parade who shared in his triumph, and his grace and his mercy, it's the smell of life. Because at the end of the day, these 10,000 troops would spend the next three years as a praetorian guard in Rome and they would be Cesar's personal bodyguards. A great tour of duty in the city of Rome for the next three years before they would be sent out to the outreaches of the Roman Empire. To them it was a smell of life. They were no longer in battle but got to serve the next three years of duty stationed in Rome as Cesar's personal bodyguard. To them that was the greatest life they could have. The smell of death to some, the smell of life to others.

You see, brothers, you and I have tremendous impact upon this world and don't let anyone tell you differently. And the impact is not because of who you are or what you do, it's not because of your background, it's because you are associated with the personal work of Jesus Christ. The most offensive words in our culture today are these two phrases: Jesus Christ; the most offensive words you can use in our cultural today. Mention the words Jesus Christ or yes. Now the question is this: when somebody is turned off by you did you've do something inappropriate, stupid, critical? It does not give us freedom to be ignorant. All I'm saying is when somebody is turned off by you and the authenticity of your Christian faith, you are not a failure, it's a triumph. Do you see that? Now it doesn't give us the prideful big head to say "I can do whatever I want and become a Bible [UNCLEAR]." I'm not saying that at all. You've got to look at yourself and be discerning, you need to be wise to make sure you are not doing things to irritate people.

I had someone come to me recently...I think I told you this before. At the Naval Academy football reunion several years ago for the team I played on for the national championship in the Cotton Bowl against Texas. We had a reunion of our football team and one of my players that I hadn't seen since graduation, who was an upper classman when I was a youngster, a sophomore, and he was a senior. He came up to me rather drunk at the officer's club and said "You know Bruce I just never liked you when we were in college and playing ball together." Oh, thanks! [LAUGHTER]. I mean I was stunned and my heart just dropped. I hadn't seen him in twenty years and the first thing he said was "I never liked you." My first response was this, "Did I do

something to offend you? Is it something I said or did I do something inappropriate that caused you to have those feelings toward me?” “No, not at all, it’s just...I didn’t like being around you...hic.” [LAUGHTER]. And I said “Did I offend you?” And he said “No.” Then he asked what I was doing now and I told him I was a pastor in Chicago, “Oh, great, terrific.” Then he just walked away. Now all that was is this...what does that say? First of all, I wanted to make sure I had not done anything because if I had then I would have had to apologize and ask his forgiveness. That is my responsibility as an authentic believer, regardless of who is right or wrong. It’s never right or wrong, if you know, you go. If I knew that I had offended him, I had the responsibility before God to say “would you forgive me for my sin against you?” Whatever that would have been; and that’s why I asked him that question, and he said, “No, you’re clear.”

Then I know what? He’s just on the wrong side of the parade. That’s reality. He’s just on the wrong side of the parade. Now I’ve never talked to him since, I pray for him as the Lord brings him to mind. I have no idea what’s going to happen. I pray that the Lord will take him from that side of the parade to this side of the parade. But I do know this, that’s a triumph. Do I understand that emotionally? No. But I believe it because Paul says that authentic Christian living is a triumph and you will have unforgettable impact upon the people because you are associated with the personal work of Christ. The thing is we need to make sure that we don’t do anything stupid and then say, “I’m covered because it’s a triumph.” No, that is not what I am saying.

You have to be discerning, you have to be gentle as a dove and wise. Pray for discernment but realize this, do not let the evil one come and say, “See you blew it didn’t you?” Now what happens when you share your faith in Christ with somebody and they reject it? What is your first thought, be honest. “What did I do? What did I do wrong? Maybe I should have used another verse. Or maybe I shouldn’t have used that verse.” But suddenly you begin to think “I cannot do this well, God cannot use me.” That is satanic influence playing on your mind, deceiving and defrauding you because you are associated with the personal work of Christ. The last thing he wants you to do is get up off your butt and go do it again. You see, he wants you to believe you are a failure. Well, yes, we are failures and that is why we need a Savior. You see that’s the real test of our maturity in Christ. That’s because God always, ALWAYS, always, leads in triumph.

Now notice the next question Paul asks: “Who is able to live a life like that, who is adequate for such things?” What does he mean by “such things?” He is asking, who is adequate to live a life that has such life and death consequence? Who is adequate? Are you and I? Absolutely not! The answer comes down in Chapter 3, verse 4. “Such confidence we have through Christ toward God, not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy comes from God.” Sometimes another translation might translate that word to “competent.” We are not competent in ourselves...adequate. What he is basically saying is, you do not have the resources to live a life that has life and death consequences; only God can do that. That is why Christ lives his life **in** us. You see he has the resources to do that; you and I cannot handle that. I cannot handle the fact that my life is going to be a smell of death to some people and the smell of life to others. I just have to trust Christ that it is happening and I do not have to control the consequences. It also means this, every time you are in a position to share your faith in the personal work of Christ, whether verbally, teaching, or living it out in the conduct of your life, you are successful. It may not be the response you want but you are successful because of what? God always, ALWAYS, always leads in triumph. You see, you may be the one person who plants that seed, or you may be the person who comes and waters, or you may be the person who harvests. But whenever you are sharing Christ in your life through conduct, through the decisions you make, the way you handle the hassles of life, when you teach, when you share your faith in Christ verbally, you are successful because it always leads in triumph if you live a life of unforgettable impact. You just do not know what the impact is going to be.

Years ago I told you of another situation in my life when I was playing ball at Navy, I used to sit by one of my classmates who played defensive back. He and I competed as quarterbacks our first year and they converted him to a defensive back our sophomore year when we played varsity. There were times we sat together. There were times when I would do what I thought I had to do spiritually, what I thought I was supposed to do. I am supposed to tell him about Jesus before we go play Oklahoma. Now I am not making light because sometimes we have been so programmed to think this is what I ought to do, rather than worrying what I need to be. So there were several times I attempted that. I whipped out the Four Spiritual Laws or whatever I was going to use, the little thing I was going to whip on him, and his response the first couple of times was, "Don't give me that stuff...I need to look at my physics book." You see I blew it, I failed. So I just quit doing it. Now about fifteen years ago he called me and said "Bruce I've been trying to track you down for the last fifteen years. I finally got a hold of you and I want to tell you this: just want you to know I came to a saving faith, I'm now an elder in my church, I'm teaching a Bible study and I just want to thank you for the seed you planted in me twenty-five years ago. On the plane when I turned you down, something happened and I always went back to that. And God in his grace has granted me a regenerating new saving faith and I want to thank you for being the one who planted the seed."

Now, that was [UNCLEAR] mercy for me because in my pasturing in Chicago at the time, I was a little bit discouraged. I wasn't seeing the results that I thought I should be seeing, and I'm thinking what do I need to do to change; do I need to change this, should I do this, get this new program, change the way we worship? You know, change the music or whatever is needed. I have to get a response. All of a sudden, it was as if the Lord said "No, just continue preaching the truth." God always leads in triumphal procession. So Jim and I have stayed in touch through the years and he is a wonderful dear brother. But the point is you have to understand this, guys, because God always leads in triumph, whenever you are sharing your faith you are always successful. You may be the seed planter, the one who waters, or you may be the harvester. You just do not know, but you do know this: it is going to have an impact and you trust God with the results. Be faithful, just make sure you do not do things that are stupid, and be wise in the ways you share your faith. Remember, the Bible was not given to us to beat people over the head. If you are going to beat on somebody, make it your own head. Beat yourself but not someone else. But look at this, authentic Christian living is a thankful life of unquenchable optimism, a successful life of unvarying triumph, and a consequential life of unforgettable impact. Who is adequate to live a life like that? God alone is adequate. That is why we walk by faith; it is Christ in us, the hope of glory. It is not ourselves.

The next one...we will touch on one more and then we will finish this next week. It is faithful living; it is a life of unimpeachable integrity. Notice in verse 17. "For we are not like so many peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God we speak in Christ, in the sight of God."

It is a life with the Word of God and it is unimpeachable integrity. So now Paul says in connection with God's Word and preaching the gospel, we live a life of unimpeachable integrity. So he says we do not need gimmicks in ministry. Because God is in control and always leads in triumph, we do not need to alter the Word of God to get the response we want. He says you do not need to do that and why don't you need to do that? Because God always leads, that's it. We keep coming back to that. God always leads. You don't need to change the gospel just to get a response. My perception today of the gospel is not real clear because I think we have substituted in the American church a substitute gospel. What we offer are the results of salvation and we have turned the message that says the gospel is about God helping mankind to be happy, and it's about God helping mankind. What the gospel that Paul is talking about is the gospel of the glory of God. It's man centered vs. God centered.

And so what do we do? Would you like to have peace, how about would you like to be happy, would you like to be content, would you like to have a life full of joy? Well then, come to Christ because that's what Jesus will give you. Now what Jesus is going to give you is redemption from your sin, the **consequences** of which will be joy and happiness, contentment, and all those things we offer. You see we sometimes offer the consequences of the gospel but we do not offer the gospel.

Paul says in Romans 1, verse 16. "I'm not ashamed of the gospel for **it**"—a preposition—"it is the power of God unto salvation to all who believe." Now what is the "it?" The "it" refers to one specific thing—not the style of worship, not the kind of music, not a denomination. It refers to verbal words describing a message known as the gospel. In other words as it goes in the pulpit, it goes in the people. As it goes in the pulpit, it goes in the people. If you don't hear the clear message of the gospel in the pulpit, you are not going to see the clear gospel in the people's lives by changing their conduct.

You see, what is the ministry that really changes lives? It is the ministry of the proclaimed Word of God. Notice, I want you to see this. Go to John, Chapter 1...Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and I think it's about verse 14. "...and the Word became flesh; and dwelt among us" That was Jesus himself. "And we saw his glory, the glory of Christ. Glory as of the only begotten from the Father. Full of grace and truth." Notice, full of grace and truth. The words of Jesus are filled with grace and truth. Those same words of Jesus in Revelation 19 are wrath and judgment. The same words. The words on this side of the parade are wrath and judgment. The words on this side of the parade are grace and truth. It is not our responsibility to take this word and change it so these people will grab it. Paul says we are not peddlers of the word, we are not mimickers; we don't profit by the preaching of the Word. We don't need gimmicks; we just need clarity of the message. And the message of the gospel is about the personal work of Christ, it's about the holiness of God, it's about the sinfulness of man. It's about repentance and the personal work of Christ. His person is his sinless perfection and his work is his perfect obedience. It's also about our response, repentance and faith.

Charles Vergennes said you don't take a person to the university of election or predestination until you take them to the college of repentance and faith; so you see what is the gospel? Is it a man-centered message that says, God is just making you healthy? Or is it the message that says God died for you, paid for your sins, and now you get credit because when you are justified by faith alone you get credit for his sinless perfection and his perfect obedience. That's what he gives you. God looks at you differently now. And the result is, yes, you are going to understand what it means to have a life of unquenchable optimism, a life of unvarying success, a life of unforgettable impact, and a faithful life of integrity with the Word. Guys, the last thing you and I need to do is reinvent another message. The message has been given to us and it will be the message that converts people. People are not converted by dancing or singing the gospel. People are not converted by singing the gospel, and they are not converted by having a play about the gospel. People are converted by preaching the gospel. It is designed to appeal to their mind and to their soul. Now granted music and dancing, and those other things that people use as a means of sharing the gospel, it may be a means to get people drawn to them; but what is going to convert their mind? It's when they hear the gospel of Christ preached to their mind and to their soul. That's by design. You don't need to come up with another mechanism. Paul said we are not peddlers; we are people of faithful integrity with the Word. So don't change it because I know that God always, ALWAYS, always leads in triumph and when you preach the gospel of Christ with all of its clarity and all of its power, it changes lives because it was designed to do that.

I read an article recently...do you realize that fifty-two percent of all American teenagers said they have a personal experience with Jesus Christ? Fifty-two percent of all American teenagers said they have a personal

saving relationship with Christ. Do you realize that every twenty-eight seconds a teenager tries to commit suicide? The most severe, damaging place for a teenager is to experience a death within his home. There is a disconnect there folks. But if someone says that fifty-two percent of our teenagers have saving faith, where is the evidence? What changed their lives? Did they just buy into something that says “Oh, it’s going to make me happy?” Or did something happen in my soul that changed the desires of how I make my decisions?” It’s called a new regeneration, a new birth. We’ll talk about this more next week because the time is running out. But I just want to plant a seed in your mind; notice what he said, “We are not peddlers of the Word of God; we handle it with sincerity as people speaking sincerely as speaking from God.”

The fourth ingredient of authentic Christian living that Paul models for us here, in defense of his own life, is this: it’s a faithful life, a life of unimpeachable integrity when you [UNCLEAR] the word of God.

May it be so that God will permit us to do that here with the Brave Men.

Father, we thank you that you alone are adequate. Far be it from us to think that any adequacy lies within us to live the life that you have called us to live. Deeply embed into our soul and to our spirit, Lord, the realization that you lead and that you lead in triumph. Give us wisdom to discern how we need to respond and may we be aggressive responders to what we see you doing around our lives so that our life will be a testimony to the grace that you have implanted within us. Father, remind us that you alone are adequate. Help us in our unbelief and our faith. And may it be so for Jesus’ sake. And all the Brave Men said: Amen!

Bring the same handout next week, we’ll use it.