

2 Corinthians 4 v 1 - 6

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[0 : 00] The Light of the World The Light of the World The Light of the World

Lord, I come to your wholesome presence From the shadows into your radiance By the blood I enter your brightness Search me, try me, pursue all my darkness Shine on me, shine on me Shine, Jesus shine Fill this land with the Father's glory Place, spirit, grace Set our hearts on fire Glory of love What the nations with grace and mercy Send forth your word Lord, I am very light

As we gaze on your heavenly brightness So our faces display your likeness Ever changing from glory to glory Clear, clear, clear, my spirit Shine on me, shine on me Shine, Jesus shine Fill this land with the Father's glory Place, spirit, grace, set our hearts on fire Set our hearts on fire Flow, river, flow Flap the nations with grace and mercy Send forth your word

Lord, I am very light Merry light Well, it's good to be here in this lovely town of Whitby I think I may have told you last time that when I was a young star I used to come up to Scarborough to watch the Scarborough Cricket Festival Does that still happen, does it?

Yeah, it does, yeah Beginning of September, isn't it, usually? I think it was Anyway 2 Corinthians chapter 4 So if you'd like to turn with me to that passage in your Bibles 2 Corinthians chapter 4 Now this morning's sermon was very sort of down to earth Very practical This evening is going to be a little bit more theological But hopefully practical as well But I thought to give the balance of the day We needed to sort of stretch our minds a bit tonight You ready for that, are you?

[4 : 04] Go up the loins of your minds, do a bit of thinking Be good, wouldn't it, really? Yeah Okay, now 2 Corinthians 4 begins with the word therefore And I was always taught years ago That when you see the word therefore in the Bible You ask the question, what is it there for?

Well, basically, it usually refers back to what's just happened And what Paul's just been saying So we'll just start by asking the question What has Paul just been saying in chapter 3? Well, in chapter 3, he actually describes for us The glory of the Christian gospel Now, those of you who are sort of budding preachers I'm going to give you a free sermon, okay?

In the next 30 seconds If you want to write it down, that's fine You can preach it yourself There's no copyright on this, okay? So here are four points you can preach From 2 Corinthians chapter 3 All right, all about the gospel As Paul contrasts the gospel of the New Testament With the law of the Old Testament And he says four things First of all, he says The gospel is not external, but internal That's chapter 3, verse 6 Not a written code, but in the Spirit Okay?

Second point It produces not death, but life Also, chapter 3, verse 6 Third point Chapter 3, verse 9 It leads to righteousness Not condemnation And finally Chapter 3, verse 11 It isn't merely temporary and passing It is gloriously permanent So there you go You can preach that sermon But don't preach it next week Because otherwise people will know Where you've got it from, all right? But there's a free sermon for you Okay Now, what a glorious gospel we have Says Paul Therefore Chapter 4, verse 1 In the light of all of this What does he say?

[5 : 46] Since we have this ministry We do not lose heart In the light of this wonderful gospel There's no room for faint hearts No, he says Let's be bold And by open statement of the truth We will commend ourselves To every man's conscience In the sight of God That may not be your version But that's the one I've got Written in my notes So Paul was so exhilarated, you see By this wonderful gospel of salvation Which he was given to preach For him there can be no question whatsoever In abandoning the struggle For him to preach the gospel Is the greatest The most marvellous privilege In the whole wide world Now You know Martin Lloyd-Jones, don't you?

Well you may not know him personally But you've heard of Martin Lloyd-Jones, haven't you? Should have done in a church like this I hope you're still reading his sermons They're fantastic Brilliant sermons Do get them They're wonderful to read Well you know he didn't start out as a

preacher He was a physician A surgeon, wasn't he?

He was the assistant To a fellow called Lord Horder Who was either the king's or the queen's physician I'm not sure whether it was a king or a queen In charge in those days But anyway He was the royal Lord Horder was the royal physician And Lloyd-Jones was number two, you see And Lloyd-Jones was a really bright guy Really bright So he had a glittering career ahead of him In the medical world You know he was really going up the tree But He decided to give all this up You know And to become a preacher In the back streets of Aberraven In South Wales Now have you been to Aberraven?

It's not You've been there sir Yes It's not the most wonderful place in the world is it? No I hope you don't live there Because otherwise I don't want to be accused of You know and I imagine in those days It was probably full of you know Cold tips and so on and so forth It was a pretty sort of downtrodden place And of course all Lloyd-Jones' friends Thought he was bonkers You know I mean What are you giving up this wonderful career in medicine for To become a preacher In the back streets of Wales To which Lloyd-Jones said this He said The work of preaching the gospel Is the highest And the greatest And the most glorious calling To which anyone can ever be called It is no sacrifice whatsoever To give up being a doctor of medicine To preach the gospel Okay And I hope that you believe this to be true as well That preaching the gospel Or even being a witness for Jesus Christ Is a wonderful wonderful calling To which I will return in a moment But before I do so Let's look at what Paul says here

About the reality of the opposition You see we could very easily Get carried away with euphoria And think to us All we've got to do Is to present Jesus to people Because it's such a fantastic Wonderful message All we've got to do is to preach the gospel And everybody automatically will become Christians Well we know don't we That things are not as simple as that You know that don't you In your own experience And Paul tells us why This is the case Why things are not quite as simple as that And the answer is Verses 3 and 4 here Of chapter 4 Even if our gospel is veiled It is veiled to those who are perishing The God of this age The God of this world Has blinded the minds of unbelievers So that they cannot see the light of the gospel Of the glory of Christ Who is the image of God You see that's the reality of life out there in the world Now non-Christians says the Bible [9 : 30] Are actually blind Blind to spiritual realities So surely this is your experience as well as mine When we share the good news of Jesus Christ With our non-Christian friends In the vast majority of cases Not all cases of course But in the vast majority of cases There is absolutely no response whatsoever Isn't that your experience?

It's certainly my experience There's a massive indifference isn't there out there To the gospel of Jesus Christ And that can be very, very discouraging Do you not feel sometimes As if you're bashing your head against a brick wall?

It's so frustrating isn't it at times Before you want to go and shake people don't you? You know, why cannot you see this? Why is this? Well, Paul tells us people are blind I mean here we are It's incredible Here we are with the greatest possible message That any human being can pass on to another human being Namely It is possible for sinful men and women To be ransomed, healed, restored and forgiven By the almighty creator And most people just don't want to know They could not care less Why?

Because they are spiritually blind There was a guy A few years, well a long time ago actually A couple of centuries ago Called William Pitt the Younger Who, you've heard of him, have you? Yeah? He was the Prime Minister of England And he was a good mate Of a fellow called William Wilberforce You've heard of him, haven't you? I think we celebrated his bicentenary Didn't we, a few years ago?

[11 : 11] I think we had lots of meetings about Wilberforce Who was responsible for abolishing slavery and stuff Well, they were mates Now, Wilberforce of course As we know was a real committed evangelical Christian William Pitt the Younger wasn't Okay?

And one day Wilberforce being the great evangelist that he was And Christian witness Said to his friend Pitt Will you come and hear this preacher in London?

There was a good evangelical preacher In London, a father called Cecil actually In fact he was an Anglican Believe it or not And he was a great preacher And Wilberforce said to Pitt Look, come and hear this guy You see?

And Pitt said yes So off they went to this church And Wilberforce was thrilled Because this guy Cecil Was preaching at his best You know He was really preaching the gospel In a powerful,

dramatic Convicting way You know And he was anointed And Wilberforce was delighted I'm so glad I brought Pitt here You know, to hear this Anyway, end of the service They both went out And Pitt turned to his friend Wilberforce And said, you know Wilberforce says I haven't the foggiest idea What that bloke was talking about Now, humanly speaking William Pitt was a far more intelligent guy Than Wilberforce In terms of his intellect And so on and so forth But as far as the gospel is concerned Pitt was in a state of complete And utter spiritual darkness and blindness And he could not see the truth You see, when it comes to the gospel

Intelligence has nothing to do with it whatsoever You know, you can be the most ignorant tribesman In a primitive jungle in New Guinea somewhere You know Or you can be William Pitt the Younger Prime Minister of England But you can both be totally blind To the gospel And this is the reality That the Apostle Paul is presenting here You see Here in verse 4 of chapter 4 The God of this world Has blinded the minds of the unbelievers You see Now, we've got to be very careful here Because there's a great temptation to think When people won't respond to the gospel There's a great temptation to think That there must be actually something wrong with the gospel You know, otherwise everybody would accept it You see And this is a huge temptation To the Christian church At this present moment in time Because we're not making much impact Round and about us You know, especially in this country As Christians Then there are a lot of Christians thinking [13:48] Well, maybe the gospel needs tampering with Needs perhaps sort of You know, smoothing around the rough edges a bit To make it more palatable to people Because after all Here we are We live in the enlightened 21st century Maybe modern man won't accept Some of these old-fashioned ideas So let's change the gospel, you see When you see that happening All over the place, can't you?

Especially in the mainline denominations Like the Church of England And among the bishops And so on and so forth I mean, we can't believe in miracles I mean, how can any 21st century scientific brain Believe in miracles?

So we've got to dispense with the miraculous element In Christianity, you see I mean, no intelligent person today Can possibly believe that 2,000 years ago There was a guy called Jesus Who turned water into wine That's ridiculous How can you believe that?

Or, you know Fed 5,000 people from 5 barley loaves And 2 fishes What rubbish that is That must have been made up by the early church, you see And when it comes to the uncomfortable, difficult truths You know, in the Apostle Paul Like the fact that, you know There's such a place as hell Or a difficult doctrine like predestination Oh, well, we can't believe that You know, we've got to tone that down You see And this is what's going on in the church, isn't it?

And even if Jesus did teach these extraordinary things Well, actually He was just kind of Accommodating himself to the views of his contemporaries He didn't really believe them himself But, you know, that was what was going on There are people who believe that It's extraordinary, isn't it?

[15:25] That's just sheer blasphemy, isn't it? Don't you think? Are we daring to prefer our own opinions To those of the Son of God? Are we presuming to say That he didn't know what he was talking about?

What a dreadful insult to the Lord Jesus Christ My friends, there is nothing whatsoever wrong with the gospel The problem lies in the sinful hearts of men and women Who are unwilling to submit themselves To the truths of God in Holy Scripture But this attitude of wanting to tone things down Is infecting even the evangelical wing of the Christian church And I think that many evangelical Christians Have lost confidence in the good, old-fashioned gospel As the power of God for salvation to those who believe And when it comes to evangelism We've got to be careful We've got to tone certain things down And so, for example In evangelism, people say You can't talk about the wrath of God today Or the judgment of God Because if you do that That will put people off, you see That will drive them away from the church

So what you've got to do Is emphasise the love of God Now don't get me wrong Of course we should emphasise the love of God But we should also emphasise The other side of God's character His justice, His judgment, His wrath and so on To get the balanced perspective But many modern Christians think That actually the plain, old-fashioned gospel Isn't good enough to do the job Therefore we have to tone it down I remember years and years ago When I was at university There was a very clever dick Postgraduate student Who was from America And he was very, very bright He was kind of interested in spiritual things And so we used to speak to him about Jesus Christ and

the gospel And we had some really good intellectual conversations with him And we used to take him to meetings You know, specifically geared to where he was at So if there was a meeting about, say, philosophy and the Christian faith Oh, come along and hear this speaker, you know So we'd drag him along and he'd hear the speaker And nothing much would happen

He'd say, oh, that's interesting Blah, blah, blah You know, a bit more conversation Another speaker about some other highfalutin subject We'd bring him along Well, one Sunday evening I invited him to what I thought Was one of those kind of intellectual challenging meetings About the gospel and science Or whatever it may be So I dragged him along and sat him down Here we were To my horror I got it wrong There was a fiery Welsh preacher that night Actually, he was a mate of Lloyd-Jones A chap called John Gwynn Thomas John Gwynn Thomas, I forget him And he started preaching this sermon About hell, fire and judgment And all the rest of it And I was sitting next to this intellectual American post-grad I was squirming in my seats And I was thinking, oh my goodness What's he going to make of this?

Oh dear, oh dear I've made a right mess That guy was converted that night I'm not joking He was converted that night You see What I thought in my cleverness You know Tone it down You know, take him to the things which are God knows better than we do, you see God knows better than we There is nothing wrong with the gospel The gospel itself is sufficient The problem lies not with the gospel But with the darkness of the human heart I used to live in northeast London actually A place called Leighton Stone I used to be a minister in northeast London And I needed to travel quite often down to Kent Because my mother-in-law lived at Dover in Kent And we used to go down to sea quite often Well to do that, you've got to cross the river Or get a boat, but the best thing is to cross the river And we always used to go to the Blackwall Tunnel Rather than the Dartford Tunnel

[19:31] Because the Blackwall Tunnel is free Actually You haven't got to pay for the Blackwall Tunnel But you have got to pay a couple of quid for the Dartford Tunnel We always used to go to the Blackwall Tunnel Now it was one glorious summer's day In the middle of August It was blindingly, you know, beautiful And I was driving to the Blackwall Tunnel And suddenly to my horror Everything was dark I couldn't see what was going on, you know I could hardly see a hand in front of me You know, it was all blackness and darkness And I thought, what's going on here?

And I did what most people do when they run into trouble They start blaming everybody else, don't they? Under the sun, you know Why do we bother to pay our rates? You know, they can't even lighten the tunnel properly these days And all that kind of stuff, you know And then I suddenly realised what the problem was I still had my sunglasses on You see, there was actually nothing wrong with the lighting in the tunnel The problem was with me And my ability to see And that's the problem, you see The barriers that have to be removed are not in the Gospel Therein blind men and women John Calvin once wrote this He said The blindness of unbelievers in no way detracts from the clearness of the Gospel The sun is no less resplendent Because the blind do not perceive its light This, my friends, is the basic reason

Why men and women will not repent and believe It's not that somehow if we sweeten the Gospel pill They will be more likely to swallow it The problem is this, says the Apostle Paul The God of this world has blinded their minds And what is required is not a watering down of the message But what is required is nothing less than a miracle Of God the Holy Spirit Which is exactly what the Apostle Paul Goes on to talk about now in verse 6 Let me just read verse 6 to you And we will stay with this for the rest of our time Verse 6 For God who said Let light shine out of darkness Made his light shine in our hearts To give us the light of the knowledge Of the glory of God In the face of Christ Friends, when a person becomes a Christian What happens is this God, the Holy Spirit Opens their previously blind eyes

So that now for the first time in their lives They can see and understand The glorious truth of salvation It's as if there's been a veil over their eyes Says Paul But now that veil's been removed And immediately Gospel light begins to dawn And my friends This is something which only God can do We cannot remove this veil ourselves You won't remove the veil By dressing up the message And making it palatable to people This has to be A supernatural work Of God, the Holy Spirit And if you think about it That has to be the case, doesn't it?

I mean, ask yourself this question Can the blind Make themselves see? Can the dead Bring themselves to life?

[23:06] I mean Conduct an experiment Try talking to a corpse You know, and see what happens You know? It's not possible, is it? You can preach You and I can preach the Gospel Till we're blue

in the face We can flood the countryside With publicity We can run evangelistic services And by the way I'm not against any of those things Don't think I'm against any of that I'm not We can arrange Christianity Explorer courses And I'm all in favour of that But Not a single person Will become a Christian Apart from the work And the ministry Of God the Holy Spirit Opening blind eyes Here in verse 6 Paul compares the work of conversion With God's work In creating light Out of darkness At the beginning of time Look at that He says For God who said Let light shine out of darkness He's the one who's made his light Shine in our hearts

To give us the light Of the knowledge Of the glory of God In the face of Christ This is a very powerful illustration Isn't it? Think about it A number of things Which are relevant to this Number one This means That Christian conversion Has to be A sovereign act Of God God didn't say To the darkness At the beginning of time Darkness Would you like me To shine light out of you?

Of course he didn't This was a sovereign decision Wasn't it? On God's part The same is true When a person becomes The Christian It is a sovereign act Jesus said in John chapter 3 The wind blows where he wills And nobody knows Where he's coming from Or where he's going to So it is with everybody Who is born of the Spirit The wind does What the wind pleases You and I can't direct The wind can we?

We can't tell the wind What to do Apparently last Wednesday You would have wished You could have done Because it was blowing Very hard from the north So I gather around here But we can't do that And we can't direct Or manipulate The work of the Holy Spirit Neither can we decide Where and when And upon whom The Holy Spirit Is going to act He acts According to his Sovereign will And purpose So when a person Becomes a Christian If you're a Christian Here tonight And I hope you are If you're a Christian This is not ultimately Because of anything You may have decided Or determined It's that God In his sovereignty Has chosen To bring you To faith in Christ That's what the Bible says In fact the Bible Goes even further And says He chose you Even before the foundations Of the world Were laid That's a mind boggling

Truth isn't it Isn't that incredible Long before this world Was created If you're a believer Tonight God decided That you Should be the recipients Of his eternal Love and grace And forgiveness That is an extraordinary Thing isn't it What a mind boggling Truth Just as he chose To shine light Out of darkness At the beginning of time So he shone the light Of the gospel Into your heart And to my heart Because you and I Don't know When and where God is going to work So what we have to do Is this We have to be faithful In making the gospel Known to as many people As possible And then to leave The results in his hands We can't bring people To faith in Christ By our own eloquence Or wonderful words Of persuasion Our job Is to share the message And allow the Holy Spirit To do the rest of the work You see So this doesn't

[27 : 09] Opt us out Of evangelism We still have a massive Responsibility To preach the gospel To people Absolutely Jesus says Go into all the world And preach the gospel To everybody But ultimately It's only God The Holy Spirit Who does the job Of conversion So it's the first thing To say From this extraordinary Illustration about light And darkness and creation The work of conversion Is a sovereign act Of God A second thing to say Is this It is nothing less Than a new creation It is a miracle Every bit as stunning And powerful As the work of God In bringing light Into the world At the beginning of time Now I do think You know There is a tendency These days To undervalue The wonder Of Christian conversion There are some people Actually Who get more excited These days About somebody Being healed From a physical disease Than they do About somebody

Becoming a Christian When somebody Becomes a Christian That is a far Far Greater Miracle Than anybody Being healed Of a physical disease And I tell you One of the reasons Why The work Of conversion Is the one Work That the devil Can never Counterfeit The devil Is quite capable Of performing All kinds of Signs and wonders You know Do you remember The magicians of Egypt Who turned Rods into serpents And rivers into blood When I was a vicar In Leighton Stone Years ago A bloke knocked On my door And he said Can you tell me How to become a Christian Doesn't happen very often Does it That kind of thing I thought Wow Come in Come in You know Fantastic So I explained The gospel to him And You know He was all ears Very eager to hear Everything And he seemed To understand it all You know And He said

Well You know You really want To turn to Christ Do you In repentance And faith Yes He said Yes I do I said Well Is there any reason Why you can't do that Now at this very Moment in time If that's what you Want to do You know I thought This is fantastic Here we go So he said No no I'm happy to do that And then It was as if There was Something that was Stopping him And he was Totally

Friends, you and I have been given the most wonderful message in the whole wide world. What a great privilege we have to pass it on to other people. Here's a question as I close.

Are we as excited as Paul was about this glorious gospel? What is more, do we have the confidence as Paul had that it is indeed the very power of God for salvation to all who believe? Nothing else, my friends, will do in this sinful world. Without the gospel, men and women are perishing and heading for a lost eternity. Hudson Taylor, great missionary of the 19th century, lay sleepless at night, gazing at a map of China on the wall and he repeated those words again and again, a million a month in China, dying without Christ, passing to a Christless eternity.

And because those words had burned into his heart, Hudson Taylor was a man whom God could use to evangelise a nation and he did. And so we had the China Inner Mission and now today, I think it's called the Overseas Missionary Fellowship.

[37 : 23] Do you really believe, do you really, really, really believe in your heart of hearts that those nice, respectable, non-Christian friends of yours, maybe even members of your family, neighbours, friends, people with whom you work who are not Christians, do you really, really, really believe that if they die without Christ, they are going to what the Bible calls hell?

Now I've got a sneaking suspicion, you know, that many of us, although we believe that in our heads, actually when it comes to the heart, we're not quite sure. I mean, they seem so nice, these people.

You know, I'm not sure. I mean, would God really condemn them? What does the New Testament say? There is salvation in no one else.

There is no other name given among men by which we must be saved. What does Jesus say? I am the way, the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except by me. Do you really believe that? I think because the church today has lost that eternal dimension, to a large extent, it's lost much of the motivation for evangelism.

[38 : 52] somebody once said, if this is really true, I would be prepared to crawl across England on broken glass to bring people the message of salvation.

May God open our eyes, friends, to these light and dark, life and death issues. And then may it please God by the work of the Holy Spirit that we would in our generation see the eyes of the blind opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped, as men and women are brought from the darkness of sin and from the power of Satan to the light and life of the gospel of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. May it be so for his name's sake. Amen. Heavenly Father, we have to confess to you that even in evangelical churches we have a tendency to go around with our spiritual blinkers on for much of the time.

We don't see things as you see them. We tend to look at things rather superficially in the short term. We don't see as the early church obviously saw these issues of life and death, of heaven and hell, of light and darkness.

And so we pray, Lord, that you'd just open our eyes wider and wider to the eternal realities of what's going on in the world that you've made. We do want to thank you, Lord, those of us who are Christians here tonight, that you did in an extraordinary way reach down to save us.

[40 : 29] We thank you for that amazing grace which chose us. Lord, we deserve nothing. We deserve your judgment. And yet, you chose to have mercy on us. And we don't know why that was, Lord.

There was nothing in us that merited that. But in your mercy and your love and your grace, that was your free, sovereign decision. Lord, we are totally amazed and overwhelmed by that and we pray that we may never, ever be complacent about it.

May we never, ever, Lord, for one second take that for granted. We pray that we would just be overwhelmed as was the Apostle Paul by the love of Jesus.

Lord, we do thank you for the Apostle Paul. We thank you for his great zeal for evangelism and church planting. But, Lord, we look at ourselves and we feel much less enthusiastic sometimes.

And we ask your forgiveness for that, Lord. So we pray that you just continue to open our eyes wider and wider and wider that we might grasp something of your amazing grace, something of the width and length and height and depth of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[41 : 44] To know that love which surpasses knowledge and to be filled with all the fullness of God. And now, to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all that we could ever ask or imagine according to his power that's at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus

throughout all generations now and forever.
Amen.