

2 Corinthians Chapter 4

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[0 : 00] So many visitors amongst us in other parts of Yorkshire and probably other parts of England as well. We do trust that together, as we come to worship the Lord, we might be aware of his help, his encouragement, and know him speaking to us in his word as well.

We had a lovely afternoon yesterday. We had the joy of a baptism service for two of our folk, and we had lots of visitors there as well, which was great. People who usually don't come to church, and I think it was great for them to see what God is doing in the lives and hearts of people, ordinary people, everyday people, their friends and relatives too.

But we're here. It's Sunday morning. It's the day that we rejoice in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the first day of the week. Remember that Jesus, who suffered and died for us, rose again for us on the third day.

And who is this Jesus? This Jesus we're coming to worship? Well, on the screen behind me is a verse from Hebrews in chapter 1. And it says this, The Son is the radiance of God's glory, and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word.

After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. Who is this Jesus? Well, He is the Son of God, who is the outshining of God's glory.

[1 : 29] In one sense, He's the sunshine of the sun in relation to God. He's the one who shows us just how wonderful and glorious God is. Who is He? He's the upholder of the universe, sustaining all things by His powerful hand.

He's the God who's in control, even of the ordinary things of life. But for us, particularly this morning, He's the one who has cleansed us from our sin, who gave Himself to die on the cross as our Savior.

And He's the one now who is ascended, who is exalted, who is the King of heaven, at work for His church, interceding for us, looking for that day when He comes again, and every eye will see Him, and every tongue will confess, Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God.

Let's sing our first hymn, a hymn of praise to Jesus, our Savior. 305, Christ triumphant, ever-reigning Savior, Master, King.

He is beyond all our expectations. He is worthy of our praise. 305. 305. 305. 305. 305. 305.

[2 : 39] 305. 305. 305. 305. 305. 305. It's through the Lord Jesus Christ, His sacrifice for our sins, His resurrection, and the reality that He is in heaven at the Father's right hand.

It's through Jesus we come to God in prayer. So let us all pray. We've been singing, O Lord our God, of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, singing of His glory, His honour, His majesty, His power, His victory.

We thank You again, O Lord our God, that it was for our sake that Jesus has accomplished all these things. It was Your love for us, Heavenly Father, that sent Your Son to be such an amazing and wonderful and perfect Saviour for us.

We thank You, it was Your love that purposed and planned even before the world was made, that Jesus, the very Son, the eternal Son of God, should take on our humanity and enter into this world that You have made.

Enter in, O Lord, on a mission, a rescue mission, a salvation mission, to bring us back to You, the God who made us and created us, but the God that we have rejected and despised and ignored and blasphemed.

[4 : 03] And Lord, again, even here this morning as we come, we come confessing, O Lord, that we have sinned against You, confessing, O Lord, that in our hearts and in our lives we've not loved You as You deserve, not worshipped You as You are worthy of.

We've not served You and given You of our time as You call us to in obedience. Lord, we are sinners still and Lord, we acknowledge that. And Lord, we thank You that in spite of our sin, You love us.

Lord, You care for us. You have a great desire and longing that we should enjoy You and enjoy the blessings that Jesus won for us in His life and death.

Resurrection and ascension, we thank You, O Lord, that in this life we have just a foretaste, just the beginning, as it were, of enjoying Your goodness, enjoying Your grace.

But Lord, there's so much more to come. Thank You that where Jesus has gone, we follow, just as He has risen from the dead, so we have that confidence and assurance that we too must rise from the dead, that death shall not hold us, that death has no fear for us, that it is but that wonderful way by which we come to God.

[5 : 20] We are set free from the chains and the burdens and the sorrows and the griefs and the pains of this life and brought into the fullness of the love of God. O Lord, we pray that You would help us as we live day by day.

In one sense, without being negative, we are one day closer to death. We have one day less in this world. But Lord, we have one day closer to glory, one day closer to seeing You face to face, one day nearer, Lord, knowing and enjoying and having no barrier separating us from the God who loves us.

O Lord, we pray that this day as we come to bring You our worship and praise, as we come to remember Jesus who has risen from the dead, may it be for us a day of rejoicing and delight in Him, the One who has done everything, the One who is everything to us, the One who loved us.

And therefore, Lord, we cannot help but love in return. O be with us then in this brief time that we have to sing Your praises, to hear Your Word, send Your Holy Spirit amongst us and upon us and give us ears to hear and, Lord, hearts to believe and faith to follow.

For we ask these things all of You, our God, in the name of Jesus Christ, Your Son. Amen. Turn together now in our Bibles to 2 Corinthians and chapter 4.

[6 : 49] 2 Corinthians and chapter 4. If you've got one of the church Bibles, one of the Red Bibles, then that's page 1161. page 1161, 2 Corinthians and chapter 4.

We're going to read the whole of the chapter together. 2 Corinthians 4, verse 1.

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways.

We do not use deception, nor do we distort the Word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

[7 : 59] For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 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 God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed, perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned, struck down, but not destroyed.

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus so that by the life of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

It is written, I believed, therefore I have spoken. Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.

[9 : 27] All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

Therefore, we do not lose heart. Though outwardly, we are wasting away, yet inwardly, we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

So, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

If the young people and children would like to go to their activities now, please. Well, let's open our Bibles again to 2 Corinthians and chapter 4, and this portion of God's Word and this letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the believers there in Corinth many years ago.

Johann Sebastian Bach is a name that we all recognize, whether we are classical music lovers or not.

[10:47] He is the 17th century composer, considered by some to be the greatest of all the composers, certainly by any aficionado to be one of the greats throughout time, written music and pieces.

And he was a very strong Christian, very strong faith. In fact, some of his, a lot of his musical items were written based on things like the Gospel of Matthew and other things like that.

Whenever he had finished a piece of work, whenever he had finished a piece of music, he was happy with it. He would put his signature by it, but he would also write, next to it, three letters.

S-D-G. I'm not going to ask any of you to give me your thoughts on what those three letters might mean. You may even know. They mean solely Deo Gloria, to God's glory alone.

In Latin, S-D-G, solely Deo Gloria, to God's glory alone. Well, over the last several weeks here at Whitby, we've been thinking about the five hundredth anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation, as we were talking with the children just a little while ago.

[12:09] Beginning with Martin Luther and the Reformers, they were men and women throughout Europe who rediscovered for themselves the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that gospel that had been hidden, hidden and covered up for many, many centuries. The wonderful good news of God's love to us in Jesus and the salvation that he brings to people had been concealed by the Catholic Church with its immensely complicated traditions and rituals and false teachings of which one was purgatory, which we thought about just a little while ago.

As Martin Luther and the Reformers learned the truth of the gospel through a return to the Bible's teaching, countless thousands throughout Europe began to enjoy the goodness and the love and the forgiveness of God.

It was a radical transformation religiously but spilled over into socially and politically and has made Europe and the world the place that it is today.

Now as we've been looking together over these several weeks, we've been looking particularly at how the teaching of the Reformers have been summarized into five phrases, five points as it were.

[13:41] And we've looked at four of them already. The first one was Scripture alone. The teaching that the Bible alone reveals to us God's will, what God is like, and how we can be saved and how we can know Him.

Scripture alone was the first thing and for Martin Luther that was particularly the case as a new translation of the New Testament was produced at the beginning of the 15th century by a man called Erasmus in the Greek, in the original Greek language.

Then there was faith alone. That was their teaching and belief that it is not by anything we can do, but only as we place our faith in Jesus Christ and what He has done for us in His life, death, and resurrection that we are justified, that is that we are forgiven and accepted by God.

Then we naturally lead of course to Christ alone, that it's only through Jesus Christ that we come to know God and experience God's love and salvation, not through human person, a priest, or an organization, or through other things.

It's through Christ alone, what He has done for us. And then just a fortnight ago we looked at grace alone. That is that all that we have in Christ is God's free and undeserved gift to sinners.

[15:05] Sinners He's saved without any help, contribution from anyone or anything else. grace. So that was the first four, and this week we're going to look at the fifth of these, which was summed up in those words, or that initials as were written by Bach at the end of his music, Soli Deo Gloria, to God's glory alone.

Each of those first phrases explains how God saved us, how He brought us to faith in Himself, how that work of the gospel affects our lives.

But the fifth of these speaks about why God did these things. What was the purpose in saving us? What was His goal in sending His Son into the world to be our Savior, to rescue us and to make us His children?

Well, to God's glory alone is the reason. God wants us, the people of this world, the people that He's made, to see just what a glorious God He is.

He wants us to experience His glory for ourselves. And we see that, that's the reason I've chosen 2 Corinthians 4, we could have looked in many other places, but the glory of God is a phrase which keeps on being repeated again and again.

[16:25] There in verse 4, the gospel that displays the glory of Christ who is the image of God. Verse 4, verse 15, more people may cause, reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

And then this wonderful promise in verse 17, our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

Because the glory of God is such a big subject, I'm actually going to split it into two. So this week will be part one and then I'm away next Sunday, we're on holiday the following week, so in a fortnight come back for part two.

Okay? Part one this morning, part two next time. Firstly this morning I want to look at how God's glory is revealed in the way that he provides for us salvation.

I want us to see that this really is the case, that everything that God has done glorifies him, shows him to be marvellous, wonderful, great, good, fantastic.

[17:30] It unveils for us and reveals for us a God that blows our minds, a God that is way beyond our comprehension, a God that's too good for words in that sense.

So what does it mean? What does this phrase mean, to God's glory alone? What was Martin Luther and the other reformers really getting at? Were they saying that our salvation, our becoming Christians, is just God showing off?

Is it that God went to all this trouble, including giving his own son to suffer and die, just so that people would say, wow, what a great God you are?

No, that's not what they were getting at. Wasn't salvation and God bringing us into a relationship with himself is not simply so that we can say, wow, you're so great, God, you're so wonderful, so that he could show off.

They taught something much more deeper than that, much more meaningful. Martin Luther, as we saw when we just were talking to the children, and as we understand the Reformation, was a man who was deeply concerned that the true God of the Bible, the true God of Father, Lord Jesus Christ, was being falsely portrayed by the teaching and the practices of the Catholic Church.

[18:54] In one sense, God was being hidden under so much paraphernalia, so much man-made and human-centered rubbish, that the real God couldn't be seen, for he was.

He was blocked off, he was screened off. The Catholic Church had an almost total emphasis upon outward things, rituals and works and penance.

It had a great dependence upon buildings for glory and statues and priests and men and popes. Not to mention false teachings, especially things like purgatory.

The Catholic Church had made out that God was a hateful and bitter God. A God who lacked compassion. A God who had no mercy. A God who had no real grace.

That's why they were moved. That's why they were concerned. That's what fired them up to such a point that they were willing to lay down their lives and die for this. Because the real God was not being revealed.

[20:01] That's why when Martin Luther was a monk, and we thought about that when we looked at his life some time ago. As a monk, as he was, as it were, overwhelmed with these teachings of the Catholic Church and his practices, his response to God was this.

I hated the just God who punishes sinners. In silence, if I did not blaspheme, then certainly I grumbled vehemently and got angry at God.

The God he saw was a false God. Dear friends, isn't that so relevant? Isn't it the problem that the people that we meet with day by day and seek to share the gospel of Jesus with have such a distorted view of God, such a false, twisted view of God, that that has caused them to turn away from ever seeking after or knowing that God, of any thought or consideration for him?

They either take him as being indeed just a vicious and nasty and uncaring God, or they take him to be a limp, weak, ineffectual God, or something in between over that range.

Isn't the greatest need, as it were, particularly for our generation, where we have lost over the last two or three generations any knowledge of the true God, where children don't go to Sunday school,

where they're not taught about what God is like in school, or by their parents, or in the media?
[21 : 28] Isn't the great need for our day and age a rediscovery and a revelation, as it were, of just what an amazing and good God we love and worship and trust and follow?

And so the reformers themselves, as it were, wanted to tear back the curtains that kept the people in the dark, about the true God, and led in the light of his glory.

Each one of those four solas, those four phrases that we consider, does just that. When we understand them, we see that each one is a peeling back of the layers and a showing forth of what God really is like, of his character, of his glory.

That glory is his beauty, his goodness to be seen, enjoyed, and worshipped. And so, just for a moment then, think about those four discoveries, those rediscovered truths.

Scripture alone, the Bible, is what God has given us, that we might know him. Sadly, the Catholic Church withheld the Bible from ordinary people.

[22 : 40] They never heard the Bible. They never read the Bible. And even if they did hear it, it was always in Latin, never in any language that they could understand. One of the things that Luther did, which infuriated the church, was that he translated the Bible into German.

It's the German of the people. So people could hear it in their own language. And they could read it for themselves. He and the reformers saw that the Bible is God's word to all humanity.

Through which they can know God and receive the truth that sets them free from fear and death.

The Catholic Church wanted the Bible kept away from people.

So that they could maintain their power over them. And present God in their own interests. The indulgence is in prayer of Jesus. One of many examples of how the truth was kept from people because they couldn't have the Bible and lies were fed to them.

So that money could be gained. So that power could be held. So that lives could be controlled.

Scripture alone reveals not a secretive God.

[23 : 51] Not a mysterious God. Not a God who hides himself away. But a God who wants people to know him. Wants people to see him for who he is.

A God who reaches out. A self-revealing God who comes to us and longs for us to be in fellowship with him. He's the God who's communicated with us throughout history.

And more than that has made sure that in every generation we can discover him and know him.

That's why the work of the Gideons, work of the Bible Society, is such an important work, isn't it?

The work of Wycliffe Bible translators. Getting the word of God into the language of the people that they can read. Because it's God speaking. It's not a book.

It's not just another novel. It's not just a history. It's the living and abiding word of God. It's God speaking to us and to me and to you.

[24 : 51] Dear friends, do we know that? Do we recognize that? Don't we want to keep reading and reading and learning and understanding and finding out more? Scripture alone.

God speaks. He doesn't whisper, if I can put it that way. He hasn't hidden away. He's spoken to the world. And then, of course, as they discovered and as they read in the Bible and as Luther and others, they saw that faith alone was the way of salvation.

Faith alone. Again, and this sounds like I'm just having a hammering against the Catholic Church and that's not my purpose at all. My purpose is to show why the Reformers were so keen and so willing to do the things they did and go to such lengths because they saw that God was being hidden and it was the church that was doing it.

And again, surely there's a lesson for us, dear friends, as Christians, as the church today. Do our lives, do our practices, do the things that we carry out actually hide or misrepresent the Lord Jesus to the world or do they actually show him as he truly is?

It's a challenge to us. We've got to learn from that. But the Catholic Church taught that God will only accept people who are perfectly holy.

[26 : 15] God will only let people have any knowledge of him whose lives are good enough, who can live up to his standards. To make that possible, they invented an unending list of penances, of actions, demands that people had to do and to keep, things that they had to carry out every day as if it were to purify themselves, to get rid of their own sin.

And even then, if they did all the things the church did and Martin Luther was a man who said himself, if anybody could get to heaven by being a monk, I was the monkiest of them all. My monkery was the best.

But he failed. Even if you did do all these things, even if you did do all the penances, even if you did do all the prayers and do all the works and give, you never had any assurance that you were actually going to be accepted by God.

You had no confidence that God would allow you into heaven at all, even if you'd done all these things. And so purgatory was this invention of the church where every Christian would go to be purged of their sins that were left over after death to make them eventually good enough for heaven.

But faith alone means that God declares us righteous in his sight simply by placing our faith in what Jesus has done. Not by anything that we can do.

[27 : 43] Romans 5, verse 1 is a key verse. Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith alone says it's not we have to wait till we get to heaven or we have to get to the end of purgatory that we're good enough for God. Faith says when we trust in Jesus, we're made right with God there and then.

Accepts us as we are there and then. God is not a harsh judge who expects people to perform the impossible before he will accept them. God is a merciful God and willingly forgives sins.

Not on the basis of how good we are but because of what he has done for us in Jesus. And we simply have to put our faith in him and trust in him.

Faith alone. That was the key. That was the dynamite as it were in the Reformation. That was what blew apart the religious life of the day.

[28 : 45] And of course, as we've seen, it's faith alone in Christ. Alone. The third of those phrases, the third of those vital truths was that Christ alone is the way of salvation.

It's not by our religiousness or our self-made righteousness. How is it then that God can forgive us? How is it then that God can accept us if it's not by something that we do? It's by what Jesus has done alone. See again, in one sense, the church, the Catholic church of the day had this idea that it held on to a great reserve of goodness, of righteousness.

It had this big bank, as it were, account of spiritual righteousness and goodness. And if you did the things that it wanted you to do or pay the indulgences or whatever, it could give you some of that to supplement your lack of righteousness.

righteousness. This, as it were, would pay for what you couldn't pay yourself. And where did they get all this righteousness? Where did they have this big bank?

[29 : 53] Well, it was because of all the saints. The saints and their good lives and Jesus as well had lived such good lives there was a bit left over from their goodness to go in the bank and that could be shared out with all of you.

So you could get through purgatory just that little bit quicker. But Luther and the reformers saw that the Bible reveals to us that it's through Christ and his work that we're forgiven.

It's what Jesus has done, not what the saints have done or what the church does. It's only Christ alone. They especially, of course, emphasized the death of Jesus as the most glorious demonstration of the glory of God.

They focused upon what Jesus had done in suffering for us. Luther wrote this, it's not sufficient for anyone and it does him no good to recognize God in his glory and majesty unless he recognizes him in the humility and shame of the cross.

That's what the Bible teaches again and again that when we look at the death of Jesus, when we see what he did for us there in suffering in our place, that's the most wonderful demonstration, the revelation of the right character and love of God.

[31 : 07] Romans 5, verse 8, God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God's amazing love, not his hate, not his anger, is revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Love for the sinner, love for those who can never save themselves.

Now, dear friends, as we present the gospel to the world in which we live, we need to present to them and, as it were, we need to correct the thinking which is within each one of us, which is this, somehow, I can be good enough for God.

Somehow, by doing certain things, by giving to charity, by being a nice person, I can be good enough for God. Now, the trouble is that that self-justification is something that even we carry into the church as well.

Sometimes we justify our Christian lives by what we do, or we seek to justify ourselves to others by what we do in the church. I want people to think I'm a really good Christian.

[32 : 16] I want people to think that I'm right with God and that I'm living for him because, so I'm going to do this and then do that. But if we're doing it from that motivation, if we're not doing it because of love for Jesus, if we're not doing it joyfully and gladly, then we're actually doing it with the wrong hearts.

We're doing it in a self-justifying, works-based faith. And if we want to tell the people of this world the gospel of Jesus, then we have to tell them very clearly and in one sense harshly, you can never be good enough for God.

And none of your good deeds, God doesn't want you to do all those good things. You only need to put your faith and trust in Jesus and what he's done for you. It's God's salvation and it's God's work and it's our gift.

And that brings us to grace alone. The fourth of these summaries of the Christian faith. The inescapable conclusion of grace alone. It shows that God has done it all himself.

From start to finish, being a Christian and knowing God and being forgiven is all about what God has done. Every part, every aspect, every part, not just 99% or 99.9%, but 100% God and it's grace.

[33 : 41] There's no reason why God should save us in ourselves. There's nothing about you or me that God should say, yeah, I like that about them. So I think, oh, I'll do these things for their sake.

Every one of us is on that same level. We're sinners, fallen short of the glory of God. Every single one of us are lost without Christ and without God.

And God has saved us alone because it's his good pleasure to do so. Because he wants to.

Because, you see, that's the gift, isn't it? You see, if there is something in you and me that God catches God's eye, if I can put it that way, so that he wants to save us because there's something nice about us, well, actually, that belittles the love of God, doesn't it?

It makes God to be just like us. People who like other people because they're likable. But God's love and grace is so extraordinary that there's nothing in us that catches his eye.

The only thing that we've got to show God is our sin. Grace says just because he wants to, just because he delights to, just because he's such a good, gracious, forgiving, loving, merciful God for no other reason than that, because he is himself, he's gone and sent his son to save you and me and to rescue us for himself.

[35 : 09] See, the Catholic Church of Luther's day and even churches today sadly portray God in one sense is begrudgingly forgiving sin. Oh, you've got to twist God's arm by your good works to get him to let you off the hook.

It's against his better judgment allowing you to sort of know him and even then he just wants to keep you at arm's length. He doesn't want you to know that you're loved.

He doesn't want you to enjoy his embrace. But salvation by grace alone states that God did everything to secure our salvation gladly and willingly even in the sacrificing and giving of his only son the most precious possession in the whole of the universe.

He did not do that because he was forced to or he had to but because he willed to because he wanted to because he is a joyfully generous God.

Grace alone is God not merely forgiving our sin and letting us off hell. Grace alone is the abundance of his children giving us a share of all his wealth and all his glory treating us as his delight and his highest joy.

[36 : 31] This God is our God. This salvation is his gift to all and everyone who wants him. Is this the God we're displaying to the world today?

Is this the God that we're showing by our worship on a Sunday? By our work on a Monday? Is this the God that we are talking about in our conversations with one another?

The God that we are talking to unbelievers about? Are we saying this God is so great. If only you knew what a wonderful and marvelous and great God is.

If only you met him like I've met him. Surely, surely, dear friends, wouldn't the people around about us at least be piqued in their interest to find out about this God, to know him for who he is.

Our great privilege, and this is where we'll come to in the following week, our great privilege is to be mirrors of the glory of Jesus. Jesus. We are to be displayers.

[37 : 34] We are to be the light set upon the hill. We are to be the ones through whom God's glory is revealed to the world and bring glory to him and glory to us.

So let me ask you, just as I close, is this your God? Is this God your God? Is he the one who thrills your heart, who is so glorious that word's failure?

And if he's not, then why isn't he your God? Why are you making do with a second-hand poor version of God? Why are you living your life for a God which is perhaps your career or a God that is perhaps your family or a God that is perhaps your enjoyment or your pleasure or your hobby or your sport?

Why are you living for those sort of gods when this God wants and desires to be your God and for you to be his child?

We're going to... Now to him who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly, above all that we ask or even imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout every single generation, today, tomorrow, and forevermore.

[39 : 16] Amen.