

The Power of Ministry Grace, Part 1

2 Corinthians 4:13-18

2 Corinthians chapter 4, today we're looking at verses 13 to 18, the last part of that chapter. But we will begin by reading the whole chapter, starting in verse 1. 2 Corinthians 4:1. Paul writes, "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled," only, "to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel, the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

"For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants," or slaves, "for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the

glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

“For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, ‘I believed, and so I spoke,’ we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of

glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.”

That chapter describes a true ministry of the Gospel. That should describe, every faithful church. Describes a church that is doing the will of the Lord in the Lord’s way. This ministry is a grace from God. Our salvation starts by his grace, by his grace alone. Our sanctification, also, by his grace. Our participation, then, in Gospel ministry, that is also by the grace of God. It’s God’s grace through and through, from start to finish, from here to eternity.

Since it is the grace of God in the Gospel that explains everything: our salvation, our sanctification, ongoing participation in the ministry of the Gospel, it is fitting that God gets all the credit, and we get no credit. Again, that is contrary to so many purported ministries, things that pass themselves off as churches, and people who pass themselves off as ministers, pastors, who draw so much attention to themselves. Since it’s God’s grace from start to finish, shouldn’t God get

all the credit? Shouldn't he get all the glory? As Paul writes about in verse 15, it's all to the glory of God. And so, for our four points this morning in our outline, I want to show you four graces of God that empower Gospel ministry.

First grace is conviction in ministry, energized by faith. Conviction in ministry comes from believing God. Taking him at his word. As Paul says, there, in verse 13, "Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe," or, present tense: we are also believing, "and so we also speak," we are also speaking." The ongoing habit of our lives is believing, and therefore, speaking. "Spirit of faith," there, that's not another way to refer to the Holy Spirit. He's not calling the Holy Spirit, the spirit of faith. He is talking, there, about a spirit of faith as an attitude of faith. Spirit, that which animates us. So, he's talking here, really, about conviction.

Specifically, it's the conviction that comes simply from believing God. As I said, it's from taking him at his word; reading what it says and trusting, believing, acting upon it. Sadly, it's not a trait that's common among many so-called

preachers these days, let alone a number of professing Christians. But it is a vital, indispensable virtue, energizing a true, faithful ministry in the Gospel. Former Princeton Seminary Professor, Dr. Hughes Oliphant Old: he published a massive, seven-volume work called, *History of Reading and Preaching of Scripture in the Christian Church*. And in volume seven, the final volume, it was on contemporary preachers and one of the preachers he listened to was John MacArthur. Dr. Old took up the question: "Why do so many people listen to John MacArthur?"

Hughes Oliphant Old, is a man who is trained in liberal theology. He's accustomed to liberal preaching. And so, Dr. Old was truly mystified at why so many people would listen to Dr. MacArthur's preaching. So, in his research he gathered a series of sermons from Matthew 8 and Matthew 9, which, Dr. Old had personally found very, very difficult to preach. They're accounts of Jesus calming the storm, casting out demons, healing different people of different maladies. They're stories that all had one theme: a supernatural element. And that conflicted with the skepticism that Dr. Old had imbibed from his enlightenment training.

Dr. Old wrote this, "The place where I have always had the greatest trouble is the whole matter of exorcism. I really do not believe in Satan, demonic spirits, demon possession. Maybe I ought to, but I don't. I'm willing to agree that I may have been too strongly influenced by the intellectual world in which I was brought up to fully grasp the full teaching of Scripture, but that is the way it is. What is more than clear to me, after listening to these sermons, is that those who can take the text the way it is seem to make a lot more sense of it than those who are always trying to second guess it. Surely, one of the greatest strengths of MacArthur's preaching ministry is his complete confidence in the text."

How did John MacArthur find complete confidence in the text? He submitted his reason to Scripture. He let his intellect become a tool to educate his faith. That is what Paul is speaking about here, "We believe therefore we speak." His ministry comes out of a deep believing, a conviction. And that is the same spirit of faith that Paul found attested to all through the Scriptures. It's the common experience of every believer throughout all time that to believe is then to speak.

That quotation comes from Psalm 116. The psalmist begins this way, he says, "I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he's inclined his ear to me," and, "therefore I will call on him as long as I live." Why is he calling upon the Lord? Verse 3, because "The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish and then I called on the name of the LORD: 'Oh, LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!'"

So, we can imagine why Paul was reading such a psalm in light of what he has written in 2 Corinthians 4:8. "Afflicted, not crushed; perplexed, not despairing," and so on. Times like that in ministry drive you to the Psalms. And so it was with Paul. He found such comfort there, such hope. He learned how to face suffering. He saw, in and through his suffering, just like the psalmist has seen all through the Psalms, he saw the goodness and the wisdom of God in his suffering. Gave him perspective. It gave him an anchor for his hope. And, as Paul meditated on Psalm 116, which is a psalm of gratitude for deliverance from suffering, he stumbled across a precious gemstone in verse 10. "I believed, even when I spoke," or, in the Septuagint translation, that's what Paul was quoting from

when he wrote it in 2 Corinthians 4:13, "I believed therefore I spoke." And that's followed by, in Psalm 116:10, it's followed by the consequence of speaking out in faith because we believe, we speak. But then, "I am greatly afflicted."

I believe, therefore I speak, even though I know I will greatly suffer for it at times, but that's the pattern, the same spirit of faith shared by all true believers throughout all time, throughout all history, without any exceptions. We believe, and therefore we speak, and therefore we suffer for it. No wonder Paul received such comfort from that psalm there in verse 10, I believed, therefore, I spoke. The Hebrew word, there, translated, believed, in our text, it's the verb *aman*; means to believe in, to trust in, and, inherent in the verb is the idea of not just believing and trusting, but obeying. That's the outward fruit of believing. But from that verb *aman*, interestingly, there come several concepts, and they form the very foundation of practicing any true religion at all. It starts with the noun coming from the verb *aman*: the noun *emet*. *Emet* is the Hebrew word for, truth.

Psalm 119 is a clear example, where the psalmist rejoices in the Torah, the law of God, the truth, the teaching of God, the commandments of God, the statutes. In other words, we believe, *aman*, because it is truth, *emet*. In addition to the inerrancy of Scripture, *emet* also includes an affirmation of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture: that what it says it says with a divine authority, and what it says it says to perfect sufficiency. So what Paul is saying to us, what he's written to us, is that by acknowledging Scripture as true, it obligates you, then, to do something with it; to do something about it. Namely, to speak. Shows up in another word that comes from the verb *aman*, and that's a familiar word we say all the time, *amen*. We say it as, ah-men, or ay-men. Moberly says, "To say *amen* genuinely is an act of self-commitment, for it implies appropriate action on the part of the speaker." Think about that when you say, *amen*. Is that what you mean when you say *amen*? A commitment of obedience? That is true, and, therefore, that is what I will do.

Putting that all together, here's how Paul interpreted and applied that little pearl from Psalm 116 verse 10, he's basically saying: I believed, therefore I take action, namely, I

speak. And folks, that is the conviction of ministry. That believing conviction is what drives all true preaching. If that conviction is not in the preaching it does not come across as authoritative, it doesn't have an exhortative element to it, it doesn't command the conscience, it doesn't call people to obedience; at the very best all it does is just roll out a series of facts for people's consideration. It leaves them untroubled by it, in their conscience. This is a conviction that Paul has in the ministry that's energized by faith. His faith, what he believes, what he knows to be true binds his conscience. That instructs his intellect. That commands his will.

Spurgeon says, "The most powerful speech which has ever been uttered by the lip of man has emanated from a heart fully persuaded of the truth of God. Not only the psalmist, but such men as Luther, and Calvin, and other great witnesses for the faith, could each one most heartily say, 'I believed, therefore have I spoken.'" Returning over to 2 Corinthians 4, verse 13, Paul has described his familiarity with the affliction that he suffers for the sake of the Gospel and then in verse 13 he focuses on the reason and the comfort for enduring affliction: conviction energized by faith. "We have the same spirit of faith

according to what has been written, 'I believed therefore I spoke,' we also believe, and therefore we also speak."

As Dr. Hughes Oliphant Old, wrapped up that section on John MacArthur's preaching, he returned to that question: "Why do so many people listen to MacArthur? How can he pack out a church on Sunday morning in an age in which church attendance has seriously lagged? Here is a preacher who has nothing in the way of a winning personality, good looks, or charm. Here is a preacher who offers us nothing in the way of sophisticated, homiletical packaging. No one would suggest that he is a master of the art of oratory. What he seems to have is a witness to true authority. He recognizes in Scripture the Word of God, and when he preaches it is Scripture that one hears. It is not that the words of John MacArthur are so interesting, as it is that the Word of God is of surpassing interest. That is why one listens." End Quote. May the same be written of us, amen?

That first grace of God comes in the form of conviction for ministry, and that is energized by faith. Here's a second grace of God, number two: Resolution in ministry, sustained by hope. Resolution, that's just a noun form of being resolved in

ministry. And in ministry we must be resolved if we are going to endure. This is what gives endurance, patience, long-suffering and that is what we need to endure all the affliction and persecution in ministry; the disappointments, the troubles, the sadnesses, the sorrows. A resolution in ministry, it's sustained by hope.

Look at verse 14. Well, we'll back up. We'll read the whole thing. "Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what's been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe, and so we also speak." Then this, verse 14, "knowing." How does he know? He believed, right? So, he's studied. His mind is instructed from the Scripture and now he knows. "...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence." So, he's informed by faith, and Paul now knows, he understands, he carries a deep conviction, and that sustains his endurance in ministry. He is resolved to press on, knowing the hope of resurrection, knowing the hope of final reward.

And I want to give you five characteristics of the hope that produces that resolve. This is a resolve that comes only by

the grace of God. It is super-human. It gives them a great resolve in ministry and causes them to endure faithfully to the end. We see them all in verse 14. First, notice it's a theological hope. It's a theological hope because it's centered on the reality of the true and living God, "...knowing that," notice it, "he who raised Jesus..." Don't get caught up just in Jesus and miss the "he who raised him." This is the same, he, who is going to raise us also. And this is the God that Paul has been talking about all the way through.

In verse 6, he said, this is the, "God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness.'" The same God who "...has shown in our hearts," verse 6, "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It's the God who shined and is shining. It's the God of all power. It's the God of all light, the God of all truth. So, Paul's conviction, here, his resolution, comes in knowing God, in knowing who God is, that he has great power. He knows the will of God. He knows the sovereign purpose of God. It strengthens Paul's resolve because all of his hope is in this living God, all of it.

Second, not only a theological hope, second, it's an historical hope. In other words, it's grounded in historical reality, the actual facts of Jesus that are recorded in the Gospels. "...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus." Paul calls Jesus, Lord here. And he's been using the title Christ, but here, he drops that title because he wants our focus to be on his lordship, and his humanity. Jesus' lordship was most prominent for Paul when he first met this Jesus on the Damascus Road. Acts 9:3 says, "As Saul approached Damascus, suddenly a light from Heaven shone," all, "around him. Falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said," instinctively, "'Who are you, Lord?'" Not, who are you, Christ? Not, who are you, Jesus? "Who are you, Lord?" He knew this is master. And Jesus answered to him, "And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise,'" now he starts commanding him, rise, "'enter the city, you['ll] be told what you are to do.'" Paul is confronted, there on the Damascus Road, with real history.

Third, notice it's a Christological hope. We're talking about the Lord Jesus, "...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will," also, "raise us with Jesus." He's Lord, so when he

says, follow me, he intends we do that from now on. He intends we follow him wherever he goes, whether it's to affliction and suffering, but also the resurrection, and into eternal glory. And, notice, his command is the very essence of our eternal life. This is the hope of the Gospel, itself. Because of spiritual union with Christ Jesus, the Lord, by God's grace, through faith, we, with Christ, we have also died with him. Colossians 2:12 says, "having been buried with him in baptism, in which you," also, "were raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead." "And he who raised the Lord Jesus, he will raise us also with Jesus," Paul says, elsewhere.

So, it's a Christological hope, it's a historical hope, it's a theological hope. Here's a fourth one: it's a eschatological hope. It's future focused. "...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus," that's past tense, "will raise us also," future tense. He'll raise us with Jesus. Notice Paul's view of the future, here. Though he goes through suffering, and affliction, and trial, and dark times, and disappointments, and suffering, and sadness, his view of the future is never foreboding, it's never fearful, it's never pessimistic. Whether

we die and await the resurrection of our bodies, or the Lord comes and then transforms our mortal bodies “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet,” 1 Corinthians 15:52, “...the dead will be raised imperishable. We shall all be changed.” “...the dead in Christ will rise first,” 1 Thessalonians 4:16, and, “Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.” It’s an eschatological hope. It’s forward-looking, it’s future looking, and the future is not dark and gloomy. It’s bright, it’s optimistic, it’s filled with joy and anticipation.

Brings us to a fifth aspect of Paul’s hope. It’s an ecclesiological hope. And ecclesiology is just a way of referring to the church, the corporate people of God. It’s an ecclesiological hope, which is to say: it’s not merely individual. It’s not just me and Jesus; it’s us together with Jesus. It’s a corporate hope. “...knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.” What sustains his hope. What encourages him to endure and to persevere is that he will stand with these people, the ones to whom he ministered, come with them not only

in resurrection, but he'll be there at the presentation, as well.

He, along with them, along with the churches that he served, is to be presented like a gift, by the Lord Jesus Christ, to God. 1 Corinthians 15:24, "...when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father..." Christ will present us. He'll raise us from the dead. We'll do that together. We'll go up together, and then, when we enter into the throne room, into the glorious majesty of the king of heaven, himself, God, who is there. Jesus says, "Here I am, and the children that you have given me." What perspective, right, for ministry. I mean, does any affliction even show up on the radar as a blip when you think about that majesty and that glory?

Just a quick thought about applying the points from that verse to ourselves. If you're someone who's prone to gloomy foreboding thoughts about the future, if you struggle with being a somewhat negative person, perhaps even a bit critical-spirited, look, meditate on this verse. Let them change your heart. Try this, go to 2 Corinthians 10, 11, 12, and trace all of Paul's suffering and then go to Hebrews 11, not the part

about reward, but the part about suffering for faith and go through that. And then compare your struggles to those struggles. Think about the power of hope to completely change their orientation, on the pages of Scripture, change their orientation toward the future, to change their attitude, and then ask the Lord to do the same for you. Cause he will. He loves to show himself faithful and powerful to give his grace to those who struggle, like all of us.

So, don't be a joy-stealing drain on everybody else around you, okay? By being a gloomy, sad-faced, negative attitude person, I mean, I'm not busting any of you, I've been like that; I've been that person. And you know what I say to justify it: Oh, I'm not a pessimist, I'm a realist. If you want to be a true, biblical realist, then you have a positive outlook about the future. You're not negative in your attitude. A true realist knows that God is triumphant. That the resurrection is true, that there's power in us, working in and through us, through the conviction of the Gospel. So, believe the Scripture. Know the truth. Meditate on the hope that's yours because of Christ and his Gospel. It's all centered in God, it's grounded in historical reality, it's incarnated in Christ, it's shaped by a

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triumphant future, and shared by all the Christians around you.

So, let's do this. Let's do this.