



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

2 Corinthians 4:1–16

Paul and the Ministry: 4

“The Sufferings of Ministry”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are studying the Apostle Paul, and particularly the comments that he makes concerning New Covenant ministry. And we have looked at chapter 2, verse 14 through verse 17—really, verse 12 through verse 17, and we have looked at the things that the apostle set forth there, particularly the solemnity of the New Covenant ministry. And then we looked at the superiority of that New Covenant ministry in chapter 3. And now in coming to chapter 4, verse 1 through the first statement of verse 16, we have the sufferings of New Covenant ministry.

The apostle is not really finished with the supremacy of New Covenant ministry. In fact, in chapter 4, verse 1 through verse 6, he will go on to emphasize that he proclaims the glory of God in Christ’s face, a glory that is now in his heart. And this of course, is something that Moses could not do. He never had the experience that the apostle had, of being indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He didn’t know what it was to have the Lord Jesus Christ in the heart, as even the simplest believer has today. The Lord Jesus said, with reference to John the Baptist that, “He was the greatest of those born of woman, but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” So the privileges that we have make us remarkably different from the men of the Old Testament, and the apostle speaks about this here. We do not any way—in any way, suggest they were not as saved as we are, but their privileges were inferior to ours. That, the New Testament teaches.

Well, finishing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, which he now has in his heart, the apostle implicitly asks and answers the question, “What can we expect as we go forth with the glad tidings of the glory of the Messiah who dwells in our hearts?”

Now, you notice as verse 1 of chapter 4 begins, the apostle uses a phrase, or a clause, that he will use at the conclusion of the passage in the first statement of verse 16. Let me just show you the connection, and then we’ll read the Scripture. “Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.” And verse 16, “For which cause we faint not.” The words in between form the apostle’s statements concerning the sufferings of New Covenant ministry, but as I say, he will speak first of the glory of that ministry, continuing the theme of chapter 3, but then launch into the sufferings of New Covenant ministers in the light of the ministry given to them.

Let’s read now, beginning at verse 1, and I’m going to read through that statement in verse 16.

“Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not. But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully; but my manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hidden, it is hidden to them that are lost. In whom the God of this age hath blinded the minds of them who believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shone 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 earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we who live are always

delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then, death worketh in us, but life in you.

We having the same spirit of faith, as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak. Knowing that he who raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not.”

Now, remember that the apostle, all through this section, has in the background of this teaching, the enemies of the gospel. And we learn later on in 2 Corinthians that the enemies that he had in mind are the Judaizers. Again, those who sought to corrupt the purity of the gospel that Paul preached by insisting upon the observance of certain ordinances of Judaism in order that a person may be in right relationship with the Lord God.

The apostle, as you know from Galatians, thought very strongly about those who sought to add anything to the terms of the gospel. He said in Galatians that such a person was worthy of hell fire. He said, “Let him be accursed.” Even though they may believe everything that we believe about the gospel, if they insist that, in addition to faith, we ought to be circumcised, they have corrupted the nature of the gospel. They have turned the gospel of grace into the gospel of works, and in turning it into the gospel of works, they come under the judgment of God. “Let him be accursed.” Or as that could well be rendered, “Let them go to hell,” for that is precisely the meaning of that expression.

Well, there is a suppressed objection that lies in the background of this passage. Paul doesn’t say it, but it’s obvious from the statements that he makes, that he has it in mind. It’s something like this, and it comes from those who are the enemies of the gospel.

“Paul, you say,” and this is what he did say in chapter 3, “You say that the Jews had a veil on their hearts when Moses was read, but your gospel, which you conceitedly proclaim, is not received by the majority of men either. So if you are suggesting that when the Word of God is read and Israel does not respond because there is a veil on their face and their failure to respond indicates that the judgment of God lies upon them, then what about your gospel? For when it is preached, the majority of people do not respond to it. Does not that suggest that the judgment of God may be upon you and upon your ministry?”

Well, the apostle will answer that in a moment. He will say of course that, “If our gospel is hid, it is hid in them that are lost because the God of this world has blinded their eyes. That’s the reason.” But before he does, he expresses a reaction to the glory which he has referred to in the latter part of chapter 3. Remember he said,

“But we all,” chapter 3, verse 18, “with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord. Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not. But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty. We don’t handle the Word of God deceitfully.”

So the apostle conceives of the—the fact that the gift of ministry given to him is so great—he conceives of that as being so great, that it is a magnificent testimony to the greatness of the mercy of God. And therefore, it leads in his experience to a courageous honesty in the proclamation of the gospel. He is perfectly honest and bold in the preaching of that gospel because he thinks that it’s a tremendous mercy from God to have that gospel committed to him.

“Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not.”

P. T. Forsyth said many years ago—I’ve always liked this statement. You’ve heard me say it in one form or another, but this is what he precisely said. He said, “We have churches of the nicest, kindest people who have nothing apostolic or missionary, who never knew the soul’s despair or its breathless gratitude.”

That is true. We have churches today that go under the banner of the gospel of Jesus Christ, under the banner of Christianity, but as you walk the aisles of the church and speak to the people who are sitting in the pew, they do not really know anything of the soul’s despair or its breathless gratitude. They have never really had the experience of conversion that the New Testament speaks about. Sin has been rationalized away. The doctrine of forgiveness, therefore, is conceived to be superfluous and irrelevant to them.

Now, the apostle, he says, “Ministry has been given to me.” So in addition to the fact that he has that sense of the soul’s despair and the breath—the breathless gratitude, that God met him on the Damascus Road and turned him around radically and made him who persecuted the Church a preacher of the gospel, in addition, God has conveyed to him the privilege of apostleship; the privilege of being the apostle to the Gentiles, and to go all over the western world and plant the gospel of God all over that world.

You can understand then why Paul says, “Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we faint not. We’ve renounced the hidden things of dishonesty. We don’t walk in craftiness, nor handle the Word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” So the greatness of the mercy shown to him in the gift of salvation, and the ministry on top of that, leads to a courageous honesty in the preaching of the gospel.

Helmut Thielicke, who is probably one of the best known of the theologians on the continent of Europe, has said, “I will make bold to say that, even the most Or—most Orthodox churchmen will not enter the kingdom of heaven unless he—unless he is continually surprised that mercy has been shown him.” Well, that’s the other side of the sense of gratitude. Now, I think that’s

particularly true of preachers, too, because they do sometimes give the impression that they really don't have a great deal of that soul's despair or breathless gratitude. But you know, when you really look at yourself, and realize that it is something that God has given you—this great privilege of preaching the gospel—and you realize what you are in yourself, you will be continually surprised that mercy has been shown to you.

Paul says, “Because of this, because of this great ministry given to me, we don't faint, and we've renounced the hidden things of dishonesty. We preach the Word of God without deceit, and furthermore, your live—your looking at our lives will—when you do that, you will see a manifestation of the truth before the sight of God.” So he says we are bold, we are honest, and you can see the kind of life that we live by taking a look at us. We live in the sight of God.

Now, that's the reaction to the glory that has been given to him in the ministry, but the objection, “Paul, why is it that your ministry has not been acceptable to the vast majority of the people?” Paul answers that in verse 3 and verse 4. He says, “It is Satan who is the one that is the tool. He was the initiator of sin in the Garden of Eden, in the sense that he was the tool by which man came to sin. And furthermore, he still is carrying out his ministry of blinding the minds of those who do not believe. It's not that my gospel is not a great gospel. My gospel is a gospel of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The difficulty is with the individuals. They are blind.”

Calvin said, “The sun is no less resplendent because the blind do not perceive its light.” And so the gospel—the gospel is no less resplendent in its manifestation of the glory of God because you don't see it. The trouble is in your blindness, and Satan is the agent by which you have been blinded.

Now, Paul does not preach himself, and he says the reason that his message is not self-condemnatory, but Christ-condemnatory, is found in these words that follow. He says in verse 5 and verse 6, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.” We preach Christ Jesus as Lord.

Luther said, “We always preach him, the true God and Man. This may seem a limited and monotonous subject, likely to be soon exhausted, but we are never at the end of it.” “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake.” For.

Now, often you’ve heard Bible teachers tell you, “Observe those little conjunctions that begin the sentences.” That “for” of verse 5 is important for linking the thought of that verse with the preceding, and verse 6 begins also with a “for,” and it is also important for giving the relationship of verse 6 to verse 5. “For it is God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness.” That’s why we do not preach ourselves. It is God. There’s no place for self-esteem in the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, because it is God who commanded the light to shine of—out of darkness. “And this God has shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Did you notice what he’s doing? He’s saying here that, what God did in Genesis chapter 1 is illustrative of what he does in the hearts of all of the believers. In other words, he’s saying the creation in Genesis 1 is typical of the new creation of a believer in Christ.

“For the God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness.” Well, there was nothing but chaotic darkness, Genesis says, and God said, “Let there be light.” There was nobody there to say, “Oh, give me light.” But he said in that chaos, “Let there be light.” And there was light. Now, he said the same God who said, “Let there be light,” and light shone out of that darkness, is the God who has shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Again, it is a creative work. It is the work of God the Holy Spirit, who has brought regeneration and faith. In effect he has said, in the heart of every individual in this room who is a believer in Christ, God the Holy Spirit has said, “Let there be light,” and there has come life and faith, all of the blessings that belong to our salvation, just as sovereignly as the God said, “Let there be light in the chaos” of Genesis chapter 1. There was nothing but chaos in your life, and he said, “Let there be light.” He spoke, and he gave the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Now, the apostle is thinking primarily of what happened to him, of course. We’re making application of it, because what happened to him is a pattern. He tells us in other places of what happens to all of us. “For it is God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, and it is he who has shone in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” He is thinking about Damascus. He’s thinking about that trip that he was taking on the road, and he’s thinking about the fact that, in the midst of that journey, suddenly he encountered Jesus Christ. And if you remember, he said, “A great light shone round about us.” The same root word that is found in Acts chapter 26 and verse 13 is used here. Let’s read that verse. Acts chapter 26 in verse 13. It is the description that he gives in that chapter, of his conversion. Acts chapter 26 in verse 13. The apostle writes—now, he’s speaking to Agrippa,

“At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun.”
[Incidentally, that word “brightness” is also related to the word here “shone,” in 2 Corinthians 4.]
“Shining round about me and them who journeyed with me.”

So he remembered, that as he was going on that Damascus Road, he suddenly encountered the Lord Jesus Christ. There was a great light from heaven, and the apostle realizing that that was really the beginning of the work of God in him, in its culmination. Of course, the work of God began—Galatians he says, “From the time of my mother’s womb.” But here, the fruition of the providence of God issues in the conversion of the apostle, and he’s thinking about that when he says here in verse 6, “Because it is God who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

That is what has happened to us. We have been, by the grace of God, brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ has been manifested to every single one of us who are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. “To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” We have come to understand who

Jesus Christ is; that he is truly Son of God, as well as Son of Man; that he is truly God, as well as truly man. We have seen in the—the great work that he did, and preeminently in the cross, we have seen the glory of God.

John says, “The glory of God tabernacled in our midst.” But we have seen it in Christ; the glory of God’s justice in that Christ died for sins. There is no forgiveness apart from the shedding of precious blood. We have seen the glory of the mercy of God, the glory of the grace of God, in the gift of one to be our representative. We’ve seen the glory of the power of God in his resurrection. All of the attributes of God have been manifested most beautifully, and most gloriously in the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I remember a story of a little girl who was getting ready to go to bed, and mother and father were encouraging her to go into her room and go to sleep. If you’ve ever had children, you’ve all had this experience. When they get to be four or five years of age—or three or four or five years of age, and they’re old enough to go into their own bed, and—and go into their own room and get in that bed and go to sleep. Sometimes they’re not too afraid—too—too happy about going into the dark but are afraid. And so you use all kinds of admonition in order to get them to do it. I can remember with our children, taking them upstairs and putting one in one bed when they were little, and one in the other, and they were not too happy about the light being turned off. Well, I heard of a little girl who was not very happy, and so mother said, “Well, don’t worry. God’s going to be with you.” And she replied, “I don’t want God. I want someone with a face.” Well, Paul says that we have been given the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Now of course, the apostle is contrasting Moses still. Now, Moses had the glory of God on the outside. Paul says, “We in New Covenant times—we have the glory of God on the inside because the Lord Jesus indwells us through the Spirit.” So the glory is not on the outside as reflection, but God himself is inside forever. Think about this for a moment. The light which no man can approach onto, that light in the face of Jesus Christ dwells in the midst of every believer in the

Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, how important it is for you and for me to get to know him. If we are going to be effective servants for the Lord, then we must come to know him.

George Whitefield—I spoke about him on Sunday. He preached a sermon in Glasgow once, on the duty of a gospel minister. This is what he said. He said, “You will never preach with power feelingly while you deal in false commerce with truths unfelt. It will be but poor, dry, sapless stuff. Your people will go away out of the church as cold as they came in. For my part,” he cried, “I wouldn’t preach an unknown Christ for ten thousand worlds. Such offer God’s strange fire, and their sermons will but increase their own condemnation.”

But you know, as believers, we can do the same thing. We can talk to people about Jesus Christ, and how he’s the way of salvation, and we can urge them to receive Christ. But when we don’t live in the light of the gospel that we proclaim, we’re trafficking in truths unfelt also. It’s no wonder that the people that we talk to often don’t respond to the things that we say to them. That’s not the only reason, “for their minds,” Paul says, “are blinded.” But one of the reasons we don’t have influence is because the life does not agree with the teaching that we are pressing upon them. It’s clear that that’s the case in many instances. One can often tell whether a person will be a successful soul or not by the kind of life that they live. They know the gospel, but the kind of life that they live is a contradiction of the things that they proclaim. So it is of great importance that we come to know the God that we press upon our friends.

Now, Paul is talking about himself as an apostle but that principle pertains to us who are simple Christians. Maybe one of the reasons you haven’t been able to win that relative, or that neighbor, or that close friend, is because they know that the truth has not gripped you very deeply.

Well, now the apostle turns to the sufferings of the ministry, because you see an objection, again implicit, that might easily be raised by an enemy is like this—is something like this, “Paul, if the ministry is so glorious, why are its ministers so weak and contemptible?”

Now, you say, “Wait, is Paul contemptible?” Well, yes. That’s what they said. If you’ll turn over to chapter 10 in verse 10 of this same epistle, the apostle repeats what he heard that they were

saying about him. This is what they were saying about him, “For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.” Well, the chances are, he spoke with an accent. [Laughter] His bodily presence was weak. He wasn’t a magnificent looking fellow, that you could say, “Well, he could have played right tackle for the Cowboys.” No, I take that back. “For the Forty-niners.” [Laughter] His bodily presence was weak. Evidently, he had eye trouble, and that was not a very pleasant thing, because he besought the Lord several times, that it might be taken from him. It was a messenger of Satan in the flesh.

The descriptions that are given him later on of course don’t tell us anything really about Paul’s appearance, but the chances are from this, that he was not an imposing fellow. I can just imagine him being a little Jewish man, bent over with a unusual kind of nose. In spite of what Bailey Smith has said, it is characteristic of Jewish people to have a little different nose. That doesn’t mean necessarily that there is anything bad about that. We Gentiles have enough flaws ourselves. I’m sure when they’re honest, they talk about us in certain ways, too. I can imagine that, that’s the way the apostle looked. He was bent over. He was small. He was weak, and his speech was contemptible. That’s the way they looked at him. “So Paul, if your ministry is so glorious, why are the ministers of the New Covenant so weak and contemptible?”

Well now, Paul speaks about the outward picture of the ministers in verses 7 through 9. He says,

“We—we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

I’ve often heard people, when they hear certain Christian teachers and ministers say, “Is it magnificent the way he can speak? He has such beautiful diction, or such a beautiful flow of words. He’s so impressive in appearance, and his learning is so great.” The apostle said, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” For the

tendency, when a man has great natural gifts, is for an individual to seek to link his—the success of his ministry with his great natural gifts. And they think that the reason God has used some of the great men—like George Whitefield, Dwight L. Moody, Martin Luther, John Calvin—the secret lay in the gifts that were given them.

Now of course, God gives gifts, and in the sense that we recognize that, that’s all right, but usually what results, is that a person thinks that if just had those gifts—those particular gifts—he’d have the same result that these men have. But the real secret of the successful ministry of the Word of God lies in other things. It lies in the gift—the spiritual gift—that God has given, and in the purity and in the sincerity with which that gift is exercised and, finally, it lies in the sovereignty of God. God blesses some men, and he doesn’t bless another, and it doesn’t necessarily mean that the others are out of the will of God. He chose the Apostle Paul to do a magnificent work, but that doesn’t mean that Paul was greater than Thomas or Matthew or one of the other of the apostles. It was the sovereign activity of God.

So the apostle answers the question. He says,

“Take a look at what we are. We are troubled on every side,” verse 8. “We are not distressed; however, we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.”

The frailty of man is a challenge to the power of God. Think of Gideon for a moment. Gideon had thirty-two thousand men with him, and they went to face one hundred and thirty-five thousand Midianites. Four to one. Gideon, no doubt, was thinking within his heart, “How can we do it, Lord? They are four for our one.” But then God said, “Gideon, you’ve got too many men.” “Got too many men?” “Yes, you’ve got too many men. Ask how many of them are fearful and afraid, and tell them to go home.” So Gideon stood up with his thirty-two thousand, and he said, “All of you

who are fearful and afraid and who want to go home, go home.” I’m sure he must have thought that there’d be a few people tail off—a few Arminians around there somewhere [laughter], but anyway, he was amazed. Twenty-two thousand of his thirty-two thousand left. Two out of three.

Now the odds are thirteen to one. “Lord, this is going to be rather difficult. We’re going to need something of the power of God. I know that one good Hebrew can lick ten Midianites, but thirteen? That’s something else.” And the Lord said, “Gideon, there’s still too many.” “Still too many?” “Yes.” So Gideon is asked to give a little test, and the little test is; they’re to go down to the brook, and they’re to take a drink of water. And this water test is going to determine how many are going to do battle for the children of Israel. “Everyone who laps of the water with his tongue, as a dog lappeth, set him by himself. Likewise, everyone who bows down on his knee to drink.” Well, ninety-seven hundred got down on their knees—in full sight of the enemy, incidentally. No doubt, there was a little stream there. Those armies were right near each other. Only three hundred lapped like a dog, keeping their eyes on the enemy. I guess Gid—Gideon must have said—thought to himself, “Well, the three hundred will go. We still have got ninety-seven.” But God—ninety-seven hundred—but God said, “We don’t need the ninety-seven hundred. Three hundred is all we need.”

Now, you know that has a very, very important application for a Christian church. Sometimes people get disturbed, because people leave a congregation. They get very upset. They disturbed and—they get disturbed, and particularly if a number of people leave. Their hearts begin to flutter, and they are fearful, but they don’t realize that, often this is just the way that God weeds out the saints, for these were saints. In order that the servants may do the work of God, and that God may obtain the glory thereby. So three hundred. Why Paul says, “Look at us. We’re not much. We’re persecuted. We’re not forsaken, however. We’re cast down, but we’re not destroyed. We always bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.” He talks about the inward purpose of the sufferings in verse 10 through 12, and the idea that is predominant is; death in us, but life in you.

Now, the apostle is talking about the experiential side of our position in Christ. Remember in Romans chapter 6 Paul says every one of us has died with Christ. We've been buried with Christ. We've been raised together with him, because he's our representative. He has stood for us at the cross, bearing our penalty. So in the sight of God, as Christ died, as he was buried, as he was raised from the dead, we died, we were buried, we have been raised together with him. But that which has happened positionally in our representative, is something that is to be seen in our lives in a practical, experiential way. Do people see the cross of Jesus Christ in us? Do they see that it is true, that the old life is a life that is crucified, and the new life that we're living is dominated by the new life that we have by virtue of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ? Is our preaching and teaching of the Word of God that kind of thing?

Preaching in choirs Bishop Quayle, is the art of making a sermon and delivering it, and then answers his own question by saying, “Why no, that's not preaching. Preaching is the art of making a preacher and delivering that.” That has its application to the Christian too. It's not only what we say when we preach the Word, and teach the Word, and talk about Christ; it is also what we are that is important. John Milton said, “If anybody was going to be able to write well, he himself ought to be a true poem.” In other words, there should be something of his life that was parallel with what he was trying to do. So the apostle speaks in a similar way.

Chaucer, in one of his speech—in one of his works, speaks of a good priest, and he said, “Christ's lore and his apostles twelve he taught, and first followed it himself.” That's pretty good. In other words, the priest not only taught the gospel, but he followed it himself.

Now, the apostle in verse 13 through verse 16 speaks of glory through sufferings to glory by resurrection power, and he cites a passage in the Old Testament from Psalm 116. I wish it were possible for us to read that Psalm. It's a Psalm of thanksgiving for deliverance from death. The apostle knew the Old Testament like the back of his hand. Today, biblical commentators suggest the apostles misused the Old Testament. He knew it like the back of his hand. It is the commentators today who don't understand the Old Testament. The apostle reached back into the Old Testament,

picked out the Psalm of the resurrection—very fitting here, because it was a Psalm that spoke of afflictions, and how God was going to raise the individual who had those afflictions, because afflictions he said, can never destroy us. Ultimately, we too shall be raised up from the dead, and even the ultimate affliction—death—cannot destroy the Christian’s life. We’re fearful as we approach death. We don’t like the thought of it, but Jesus Christ will sustain us and raise us up after that death.

Afflictions, Paul says for us, means more grace for many other people through the ministry, and more grace to them, means more thanksgiving rendered up to God, and thus more glory to God. So we preach the gospel. We suffer affliction, because of our identification with Christ, but by doing it, more people respond to the gospel and are converted, and they give thanks to God for what they have received through the gospel, and God is glorified by it. That’s Paul’s concept of the ministry. That’s the concept of the ministry that anyone has—a simple Christian. When we lead someone to Christ, gratitude rises to God because of the new life they have in God is glorified by that.

So what difference does it make if they think you’re a fanatic? If they utter words of scorn, what difference does it make? In fact, it should be an encouragement. I guess I’m in the company of the saints and the faithful and the apostles. I’m getting the same kind of objection.

The golden-tongued John Chrystostom, forced out of his church in Istanbul, chased all over Armenia, finally died and said, “Glory to God for all things. Amen,” as his last word. William Tyndale had one thing he wanted to do; translate the Bible into English. The church didn’t like the idea, so they chased him out of Britain. He went over to Europe. He was in Germany. He also was in Brussels. I’ve stood at his grave outside of Brussels, near the Castle of Vilvoorde where he was, and when I was there, it was covered over with grass and everything else, but he was one of the great men of faith. The only thing he wanted to do was just translate the Bible into English, and thus have the common man read the Bible for himself and learn the grace of God. And so they finally strangled him to death and burned him there. Wasted life? No. Everybody knows of Tyndale. Who knows one name of those who strangled him to death? Nobody knows that. We’ll find out one day, when the great, white throne of judgment takes place.

So Paul says, “What can we expect?” Sufferings, troubles, distress, perplexity. What can we expect? The dying of Jesus. Deliver unto death for Jesus’ sake. Death in us, but life in others. We may be broken like the alabaster box of ointment that Mary, but the ointment’s odor will fill the house, as it did on that occasion. What can we expect? Paul says, “The glorious presence of the living Lord, now and forever afterwards.” We’re not only heralds of the historic event, but we are mediators of a living presence.

Wordsworth had some plaintive words for Milton. He said, “Milton, thou shouldest be living at this hour. England hath need of thee. She is a thin of stagnant waters.” If men were to cry today, “O Christ, thou shouldst be living now,” well, there would come back the answer from the apostles, “He is living now.” He is alive. He can be seen in his saints. “I’m he who liveth and was dead, and behold, I’m alive forever more.”

I like the story of Sir Robert Stopford. Sir Robert Stopford commanded one of the ships with which Nelson chased to the West Indies, an enemy fleet nearly double in number. When he described the desperate hardships of that daring adventure Stopford wrote, “We are half starved, and otherwise inconvenienced by being so long out of port, but our reward is; we are with Nelson.” Isn’t that magnificent? “Our reward is; we are with Nelson.”

And as a servant of Jesus Christ—and we’re all servants—as a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ—I’m a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and some of you are—there is nothing greater than the fact, that we are with Christ. May God help us to learn more and more experientially of what it is to be with him.

Let’s bow together with a prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these magnificent words from the apostle, who suffered as few men have suffered but who suffered with joy. O God, give us something of the boldness of the apostle. Deliver us from cowardice. How terrible it is to claim that the Lord Jesus is

king of kings and lord of lords, and dwells within us by the Holy Spirit, and then to be fearful to speak to others concerning Christ. O Lord, deliver us. Forgive our many failures.

Bless this company of believers. Bless this assembly; its elders and its deacons. May Thy hand be upon it for good, for the glory of Jesus’ name. And may, through the preaching of the Word—by the tape, over the radio, by the individual testimony, by the publication ministry, through the work among the children—may there be gratitude that rises out of saved hearts, that God may be glorified.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.