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II Corinthians 4:1-6 "Why We Don't Lose Heart"  
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Let's open our Bibles this morning to II Corinthians Chapter 4 verse 1.

I think life in a fallen evil world is a struggle. Eliphaz said to Job when he was giving him counsel, "Man is born to trouble, like sparks fly upward." And I don't think it's any different for the Christian life. In fact, the more devoted you decide to be to Jesus and His cause, the more difficult your life in this world will become. Jesus said to His disciples in warning them, "I've told you these things so that you might have peace in the world. You're going to have tribulation." When Paul and Barnabas circled the churches that had been planted in his first missionary journey, we read about their ministry in Acts 14, and it says that they went from church to church strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith. And then they said to them, "You must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Paul wrote in his last letter to Timothy from prison before they put Paul to death, "If you desire to live a godly life in Christ, you shall suffer persecution."

I don't think that there's any way away from or around the difficulties that you're going to face if you're going to walk with Jesus and serve Him. But as the Lord warns us about the hard road, and it is a hard road, He also brings us great comfort to endure. He says to them and to us, "Be of good cheer. I've overcome the world." Says that He will send His Holy Spirit to guide us into all truth, to watch over us, to give us the right words to speak. He tells us in Hebrews Chapter 13 that He'll never leave us, He will never forsake us. The Psalmist wrote in Psalm 50, I think verse 15, "You can call upon Me in your day of trouble and I'll answer you." So though it is a hard road, it is a road that God can lead you through.

And the question becomes how then can we as believers experience the triumph that Jesus promises to give us in the midst of trouble? How can you and I appropriate God's

promises and His help in tribulation? And I think that at least part of the answer is in these six verses we are going to look at this morning. They are bracketed by two thoughts. Verse 18 of the last chapter talks about the glory of God, finding it with unveiled face, in the Lord a transforming power. In verse 6 it says of Chapter 4 here that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God can be found in the face of Jesus. So Paul says that keeping his eyes upon Jesus was not only a vital theological truth, but a necessary and practical one.

If you've been with us going through II Corinthians, you know that this is probably one of the most difficult times ever in Paul's life. He mentions it over and over again, how hard things have gotten. The latest grief was the character assassination of Paul, being led by the false teachers who had taken over the Corinthian church. So even the folks that Paul had loved and ministered to and prayed with and married and buried, and was involved in their family, were now turning against him through the lies of these folks. In fact, he will write in Chapter 11 in this book, "I'm afraid that they are going to turn you away from the simplicity of the gospel in Christ."

How did Paul survive all of that? How was he able to not faint under the attacks? And the answer was, he kept his eyes on Jesus. They had accused him of being weak, of being dishonest, of being ineffectual. They said of him he's corrupt and selfish. They mocked his teaching style, his presentation. Why, they even made fun of the way he looked. Paul had written in Chapter 3 when we finished last time that the power of the new covenant, this born-again experience where the Holy Spirit comes to live in you, was the best commendation that you'd ever find for the message that you have to preach.

Well, this morning as we begin Chapter 4, we look at how a persecuted and difficult life was able to be persevered because Paul had his eye on the One that he was serving. And he could stand tearfully for the saints in Corinth, who now were doubting him, because he knew who had done the work to begin with. He was sure the battle was spiritual. He kept his eyes on the Lord and on the face of Jesus, who had revealed to him the heart of God.

The key theme of Chapter 4 is found in two places: Verse 1 says, "We will not lose heart." Verse 16 says, "Therefore we do not lose heart." And in between verse 1 and verse 16,

bracketed between them, is Paul's explanation to you and I how that we can have great victory in a world that is abjectly against us. And yet we have a work to perform. We have a gospel to preach. We have a nation to reach and a culture to change.

There were plenty of good reasons why Paul could have hung it up. If you've read the book of Acts or the epistles, you want to say to the guy, just quit. What are you doing? And there were great reasons for him to be discouraged, and sometimes he was. But there were also plenty of good reasons to keep at it, and that's what he's sharing here.

Maybe you've thought about giving up. Maybe somebody had hurt you or betrayed you or turned against you or disappointed you. Maybe you feel like nobody cares anyway. Why should you? Perhaps your sacrifices of love have cost you plenty, but the payoff hardly seems worth the effort. Maybe God hasn't responded like you thought that He should. Paul went through all of that. And yet here's some reasons, and we'll look at them in the next couple weeks, why you shouldn't lose heart. But we'd like to give you three of them this morning in six verses.

Beginning in verse 1 and 2 with this thought: I do not lose heart, because I've received mercy from God. Paul writes this: "Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we don't lose heart. But we've renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in the craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestations of the truth we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

It was Dr. McGee who wrote years ago, "Whenever you see a therefore, ask for the wherefore." And you can usually find it in the verses that precede it. Paul believed that God's word preached and the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart could save the hearer. He was sure of that. And he knew that it was a battle and that God's word was the sword of the Spirit, and so he was bold in his ministry, but he realized that the sufficiency that he had was found in the Lord. And here's how he put it: "I've received this ministry. Because I've received mercy, I don't lose heart." Or if you will, Paul knew that God's word worked. It worked in his life. Paul knew that Jesus was his strength, but that didn't make ministry easy. Paul wasn't a popular guy. The Romans didn't like him. Most of the Jews could have lived without him. And now the church was turning against him. There were

more plots in the Bible against Paul's life that are laid out than almost anyone else. He's got plenty of reasons to pack it up and pack it in. But why doesn't he? Why doesn't he lose heart? And the reason is he says, "I've received God's mercy."

What kind of guy was Paul before he got saved? He was a resistant, hardheaded, stubborn mule. Killing Christians in the name of his religion. If God could reach Paul, He could reach anyone. If God can reach you, He can reach anyone. You're amazing. Look at you, saved and all. Who knew? And that's Paul's heart. Paul believed that what God did for Paul, God could even do for those that were blaspheming him there in the Corinth church. So he didn't get discouraged. Oh, they were after him all right, but that was him before. To know it is God's work to save and open the eyes of the lost can take a tremendous amount of pressure off of your shoulders. You can share. You don't save anyone. God saves. And if you know that to be true, that He bears fruit in you, then you're obligated to just share; faithfully, honestly. But just being a vessel for the Lord can certainly bring great opposition.

I think that the easiest place to be a Christian is in America, and the reason is the Christian church in America doesn't stir much trouble. It is weak, it is unwilling to preach, it doesn't take a stand for the name of Jesus; it just melds into the culture. Not God's plan.

Paul told Timothy that though there was a cost involved in preaching, he saw his calling as a privilege, as a blessing, because he had received mercy. He said to him in I Timothy, I think Chapter 1, that "for this reason I obtain mercy, so that first in me Jesus could show forth His lovingkindness, as a pattern to all of those who would follow afterwards." In other words, he said my life ought to be a pretty good argument to you that God is a merciful God, because He took the likes of me and He saved me. Now I'm facing people that want to destroy me, that are against the gospel, that want to ruin the work that God has done, but I have great hope, because what God has done in my life, He can do in their life.

In the Bible mercy is defined as God withholding the judgment sinners deserve. He holds it temporarily for the unsaved, who if they do not believe will face the sure judgment of God in the future. He holds it permanently for the believer through Christ. So Paul could endure the setbacks and the trials because he'd received God's mercy. God didn't give

him what he deserved, and he knew it. And isn't it good that you're not going to get what you deserve? I know you want your enemies to get what they deserve, and that guy down the row from you in the same pew, that guy, he should get what he deserves, but we're so happy we're not getting what we deserve. And that's Paul's point. He could never abandon the work, even if it cost him to serve the Lord, because God had given him mercy.

When Jesus spoke about how the gospel sometimes affects different hearts, He spoke about a heart that was stony. He said a stony heart is kind of like someone who hears the word of God, and he immediately receives it with joy, but because he doesn't have any root, he only endures for a while. And when tribulation comes or persecution comes because of the word in the world, he stumbles. Paul said, "I can't stumble. I've received mercy." You see, your greatest hope in saving your family, your parents, your in-laws, your spouse, your children, your neighbors, your coworkers, is that you've been saved. If God saved you, it's downhill from there. And Paul believed that to be so.

So I can't lose heart. The words "I can't lose heart" is only one word in Greek. It means to lose courage, or to begin to behave like a coward. When things aren't going particularly well, when I face persecution or a lack of measurable fruit, I can't be disheartened to the point of throwing in the towel, because I've seen what God can do. I'm a miracle of God. So are you. So how can we give up?

Look, Paul was a human being. He was a frail guy. Sometimes he was prone to disappointment, and failure, and uselessness, and feeling useless. But despite the suffering and the vicious attacks upon his person, Paul couldn't lose his courage, because he was confident that what he had seen in the face of Jesus for his life, if they saw the face of Jesus, they could find it too. That's pretty encouraging, isn't it?

So what can Paul do? He says in verse 2, Here's what I can do. I can be sure that the message I deliver is delivered from a life that is practicing what I preach, that is honest and above reproach, that is simple and open to the word of God, without twisting the scriptures. In other words, doing it right, not at all the way these false teachers were. I can enhance the message by my way of life. I don't want to just talk about it; I want to live it, to the best of my ability. So Paul would just turn away from what the false teachers did. He says in verse 2, I'll renounce the hidden

things of shame. It literally is to preach what you want people to hear, but yet hidden in your life is a shameful one. You practice what you preach. He turns in verse 2 and he talks about not being crafty or handling God's word deceitfully, but showing forth the truth by the way that he lives. He practices what he preaches.

Look, the false teachers didn't go to the scriptures for the truth to be established. They went with a concept of what they believed already, and they would find verses to kind of support it. I always think about politicians when they whip a Bible out and they quote a verse completely out of context, and you go, what are you doing? Because he doesn't believe it. He doesn't know it. And you can make the Bible say whatever you want. All you have to do is two things: Avoid the context, and don't look at any other verses. Isolate the text from the context and from the bigger picture, and you can make the Bible say whatever you want. You can say this: The Bible says "God is dead." Actually, it says, "The fool says in his heart that God is dead." But hey, if you're making a point, and you're running for re-election.

Paul says this: I'll let the word of God establish the truth. I'll renounce a dishonorable way of life. I won't be like the false teacher who acts one way in public and another in private. I won't turn to deceit, trickery, deceitfulness, willing to do anything to get the goal. I won't handle God's word deceitfully. It means to twist it, or to turn it, or to manipulate it for gain or power or influence.

If you ever want to read in your Bible about the false teachers and God's heart towards them, just read the book of II Peter. It's a whole book for one cause: The warning about the false teachers. Look, the false teachers in Paul's day, and even in our day, are marketing experts. They see the gospel as a product, and they're the salesmen. Think about if you are a false teacher and want to make your living being a crook. You don't want to offend anybody because you need their income, and so you take a middle ground on everything and stand for nothing. But you also want to have an air of mystery about it.

I was watching this guy on T.V. a couple of nights ago, 2:00 in the morning, and he did this, "Oh, get my book and you'll see it like I see it." Ooh, goose bumps. He knows stuff. There has to be this air of mystery, or he has something that you need. Everybody's always looking for hidden meanings. Have you seen this verse? Hold it up to the light. There's

nuggets there, man. You haven't seen, have you? Look, there's so much obvious truth there that I want to learn, I ain't got time for hidden things. Just teach me the obvious stuff. That's all I need.

Paul had no secret game plan. Paul had no need for crafty, underhanded dealing. He didn't come to use the people, he came to serve them. He said to them in that I Corinthians letter, Look, I didn't come to you with big words of man's wisdom. I come in fear and in trembling, so that you might have confidence in God's word, not in man's word. Why didn't Paul and why wasn't Paul, discouraged? Why did he not lose heart? Because he'd received mercy from God and he was living it out. The message he preached, he lived. And the difference between Paul and the false teachers was Paul had seen God's face. He had seen the heart of God in the face of Jesus; they had not. Paul believed that God would do His part to save, as He had done in Paul's life years earlier.

Second of all, Paul didn't lose heart because he realized that when it came to men and their salvation, he entered into a spiritual battle. He says this in verse 3: "But if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this world have blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." Paul says this: Look, if there is any darkness of understanding, I want to be sure it's not in my presentation or my lifestyle, which should be honest and truthful, but it is rather the function of the enemy of our souls, whose job it is to blind the hearts of men, lest the light of the gospel, or the glory of Jesus, should sign upon them and they would be saved.

So Paul says a second reason I don't lose heart is that I'm engaged in a spiritual battle, and it's a battle that I can't win, but Jesus can win; that my words can't win, but His word can win; that I can't have the power to overcome, but the Holy Spirit can. Paul saw the warfare for the sins of men, and understood why he was getting such different responses to the message of grace.

I think it's important that you and I see that. That when you go to share with your family or your friends or somebody you don't know at all, and you get these weird responses, that you realize it's a warfare you're in. How do you handle, verse 3, those who are perishing, their response, or verse 4, those who don't believe, who've been blinded in their minds by the God of this world? Paul knew only too well what it

was like to be blinded to the truth. Spent years that way, bound in the darkness until Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. But Paul finally years later stood before King Agrippa on his way to what would become his trip to Rome, he said of him there in Acts Chapter 26, he said to him about his calling, "The Lord has called me to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the power of God, so that they might find forgiveness and an inheritance among all those who have become sanctified by faith in Jesus." Paul saw that as his mission. It's yours too. Why don't you lose heart? Because this is a battle, and you realize what you're up against and what you're facing.

You should know, and maybe you watch those things, but the contemporary prevailing thought in church in America today is to take a much subtler, less offensive approach to sharing the gospel, which they believe, and seminaries teach, will bring greater results. So preaching against sin, nah, that's not going to work. Don't preach about repentance, don't bring up hell or judgment. Those are not good subjects in a user-friendly church. Underlining this modern evangelical movement is the heretical idea that success in ministry is found by the ingenious way you come up with sharing the gospel. They view unbelievers as consumers, the gospel should be cleverly packaged in order to make a sale. And you should know that in the last five years hundreds of churches have sprung up around the country that immediately have grown to 5- and 10,000 people in size. They don't use Bibles. They don't need them. But they are interested in just packaging. It draws people in. Why does it work? Because there's nothing that's required of the person in the pew. No repentance is needed, no guilt for sin is addressed. The holiness of God never comes up. But we got coffee, and artists, and contemporary music. And let me be a prophet for a minute, because, I'd always wanted to be one. It's not going to last. It isn't going to last, and the reason it isn't is that salvation is not the result of human persuasion or packaging. Salvation is a sovereign work of God. "No one comes to Me unless the Father, who sent Me, draw him." That's what the Bible says. That gave Paul great hope. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind.

When God created the world, He handed it over to Adam and Eve; told them to be overseers of all that He had created. When Satan came along and lied to Eve, and Adam followed, through their disobedience they handed the world to the devil. Paul would say to the Romans, "Whoever you obey, his slaves you

are to whom you obey." Jesus twice called Satan the prince of this world. And the purpose for Jesus' coming was to redeem the world back to God; to pay God's righteous price for sin, death, but to do it for everyone in His own body.

When Satan sought to tempt Jesus in the wilderness as He began His earthly ministry of three and a half years, in one of the visions that Satan set before Jesus in the wilderness, he showed Him the kingdoms of the world, and he said, "I will give all of these to You, if you will just simply bow down and worship me. These are mine, and I can give them to whomever I want." Now, if that wasn't true, Jesus would have said baloney. But He didn't argue the point, because man had handed over, if you will, the world. What Jesus wouldn't do, however, was to forsake the cross, which, by the way, is Satan's big message to the world today: You can get to Heaven, you just don't have to go to Jesus. Do your best, find worse people than you to feel good about yourself. Don't go to the cross. Jesus said that that wasn't the will of the Father, that He would go to the cross. He would redeem man. He would purchase man back from the dilemma that he found himself in. But Satan's suggestion to man to this day is, you don't need the cross.

When Jesus first told His disciples about the fact that He was going to die, it was in Caesarea of Philippi, it what 10 months or so before He would end up at Golgotha, after He asked who does the world think He is for their friends, and then He said, "Well, who do you think I am?" And Peter spoke up for the whole group. He said, "We believe that you're the Mighty One, the One that was to come, Christ." And Jesus said, Well, you didn't come up with that on your own. My Father in Heaven showed you that. 10 or 15 verses later Jesus is saying, Well, we're going up to Jerusalem now and I'm going to be handed over to the Gentiles, and they're going to take Me and scourge Me, and they're going to kill Me. And Peter, thinking he was on a roll, thought, no, no, no, Lord. I got one for one, I'm going to go two for two. "That should not be You, Lord. You're not going to die. You're going to live." And Jesus turned to Peter and He said, "Get behind Me, Satan. For you savor now the things of man and not of God." And that's always been the battle, just this message of the gospel and the cross. Peter, thinking he had gotten it right, had gotten it wrong. But, you see, Satan's message to man today is to just forsake the cross. On the cross Jesus overcame the enemy; right? He redeemed the world. He triumphed publicly over Satan. Satan today is a trespasser, and interloper. His job is simple: Blind the hearts and the

minds of men so that they won't see Jesus or His love or the cross. That's the battle we're in.

We read this morning in Revelation chapter 5 that there is coming a day in glory when the title deed of the earth will be held forth, and Jesus alone will have the right to claim it because He had been slain. Yet to this day the blindness of sin, the work of the devil, they impair men's hearts from believing. That's what you're up against. Paul realized that. He wasn't discouraged. He realized that was the battle.

If you don't believe that battle exists, just think about the rational, kind, people that you can sit and speak to, who seem to be wise on so many subjects. They're insightful, they're tolerant, and yet they dramatically change when you say to them, you need Jesus in your life personally. And now all of a sudden rationale goes out the window. Now it's blame and self-preservation, and now the people don't want to hear what you have to say. Now it's the myth starts to happen, and they begin to grab on to the lies of the enemy. When Paul wrote his last letter to Timothy in II Timothy Chapter 2, he said, "Look, Timothy, as a servant of the Lord, you shouldn't quarrel, but you should be gentle to all men. Be able to teach them, be patient. In humility correct those who are in opposition against themselves. If perchance God would give them repentance so that they might know the truth and could come to their senses. They could escape the snare of the devil, who's been taking them by His will." That's the battle. Why did Paul not lose heart? Because he realized there's a battle, and God alone can bring victory.

Satan is lying and binding and blinding the lost. We need to pray that Jesus bind this blinding work of the enemy, and shine His light in the hearts of the people so that they might see Him. I'm absolutely sure if people see Jesus for who He is, they'll get saved. I did, you did, they will.

God gives to man a choice and He will respect the choice that they make. Satan will not. He doesn't want you to have a choice. He wants to hide from you the choice that you have in Christ. It is awfully difficult to pray, "Lord, save Lucy," when Lucy doesn't want to be saved. But if I pray, "Lord, bind the enemy from blinding Lucy's heart. Show her who You are. Open her eyes to Your love," then I think we've got something. Then Jesus, who is the image of God, will shine in their hearts. So don't lose heart, because the antidote to the veil of blindness is preaching Christ. He

turns on the light.

So Paul isn't discouraged. He's not giving up. He's experienced God's mercy, and he realizes that just like his soul, there's a battle for the souls of men, and there's an enemy and he's real.

Finally, verse 5 and 6, we don't lose heart because we preach Jesus, who alone can save. Notice what he says in verse 5, "We don't preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ, the Lord. We are ourselves are bond slaves for Jesus' sake. It is God who commands light to shine out of the darkness, who has shone in our hearts to show us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, and we find it in the face of Jesus Christ." Or in other words, when you see Jesus, you'll know God's glory, and He's the one who turns on the light. You want to know how you cannot lose heart? Because if you preach Jesus, you've got an antidote for the blindness in the hearts of men. You've got an antidote for the lies of the enemy. Paul's response to the warfare was to just preach Jesus; right? And if that meant people lashed out against him and criticize him or go after him or cause persecution, the solution is still the same. You don't preach get better, do better, think better; you preach Christ. Because no matter the response, the gospel can't be altered or changed. No other place for us to turn.

God has turned on the light. How? By sending His Son, who shines in our hearts. So don't lose heart. I love this little line, command a light to shine out of the darkness. That's Chapter 1 verse 3 of Genesis. "And darkness filled the earth, and God said 'Let there be light.'" You open your mouth and preach Jesus. He's the light of the world that overcomes the darkness of Satan and his lies.

So don't lose heart. We got Easter coming up. There's a lot of people you're praying for. Don't lose heart. Yeah, I've asked them nine years in a row. They won't come. It's a battle, man. I don't think they'll ever get saved. Yeah, we thought that about you. He's tired of me preaching Jesus. Yeah, but it's the only message you have. There's only One Name, One Person that can save. Don't lose heart. Don't take it personal. Live the life as a Christian that people will see, realize the war is being fought for the souls of men, and the enemy partners with the flesh and the world to keep men in the dark, but you have the solution. You can preach Jesus, who in His face you can see the glory of God. Don't lose heart. Amen?