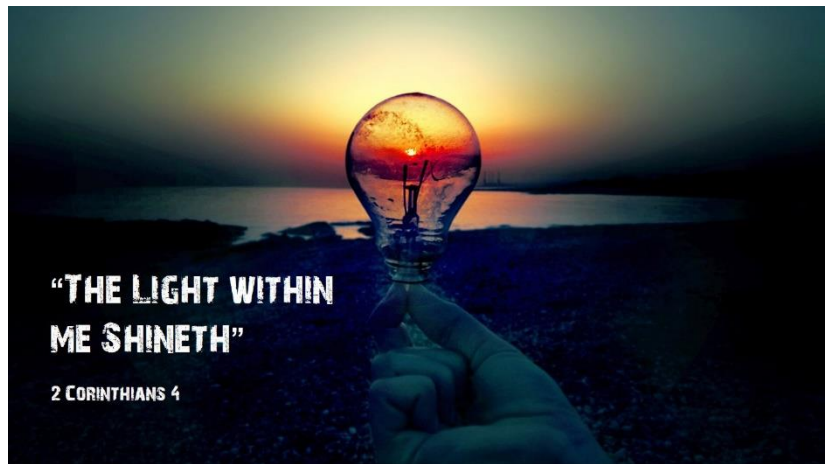


“The Light within me Shineth”

- 2 Corinthians 4 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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2 Corinthians 4 *Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. 2 But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. 3 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, 4 whose minds the god of this age has 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. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. 6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to [give] the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.*

The 1960's musical duo 'Brewer and Shipley' once sang

“The light within me shineth, and the life within me flows
I'll sing a song of the kingdom and hope the spirit grows
I'll sing a song of the kingdom...”

According to scripture, being a reborn child of God means the light of Christ will naturally both emanate from his or her life as well as illuminate the world around him or her because of such. This is not a demand nor a command as much as a natural attribute of an individual who is full of the Spirit of God. What I mean by that is that shining the light of Christ from one's life is not a matter of effort as much as an innate attribute of the presence of Christ possessing an individual. It's *Him* in you, not *you*.

Indeed a life of faith, especially the calling to *serve* God, *does* require a resolute and unwavering heart. The apostle John spoke in length about the “abiding” of the life in Christ. The “enduring steadfast”... the “staying connected to the vine.” Christ also said His way is narrow...that *few* shall find it. And “*find it*” is to be noted! Because that speaks as to our personal involvement. One will not simply “stumble upon” the kingdom of God by accident.

Matthew 7:13-14 calls us to actually act...to move...we are told to *enter* that gate and to *find* that path that leads to life. Those are not my words but God's and that of apostle John. Certainly we all discover quickly that it requires a consistency and a resiliency to remain standing when the winds of trial and attacks of Satan come upon us. One must embrace a devoted spirit and an ardent love...a commitment that is unmovable through the storms of life! Once again, that does not happen by luck or spiritual gravity. For the pull of the world is constant and unrelenting. The storms will indeed come, and each of us will at times have our love of Christ tested in the fires of adversity.

Yet with all of that said, it is important that you don't misunderstand what I'm saying to you...this is not a “pull yourself up by the bootstraps/little-engine-that-could” situation. This is a Holy Spirit indwelling and control situation. *Our* part is to surrender to that possession and life domination. To *allow* Him to be the shepherd of our life and we take the position of the sheep. To answer when he calls. To fall under his authority.

We often will verbally confess our perceived unmovable faith with our mouths. But God is all about the genuine manifest of that love in the actual field of battle. Wars are not fought in the comfort of our warm living rooms, but rather on the front lines of spiritual combat.

Jesus asked, ***“Peter, do you love me?”***

Upon his verbal affirmation, Jesus said to Peter “...*feed my sheep.*” He didn’t say “*well thanks Peter! I feel so much better because of your testimony!*” He didn’t even say, “Read your Bible” or “Go to church.” Certainly these things are crucial to our training and maturation, but if we are actually born again and Spirit filled, the day must come when we actually move out into the fray. For we all are called to engage the streets, our workplaces and classrooms of our personal lives to be the harbingers of truth and the life-witnesses of the good news. We are called to be lights. To shine. To reflect His glory and peace. If we do not, then why would anyone on the outside want it?

Paul opened his heart in these letters in a way that was unprecedented and really found nowhere else in scripture to this extent. As a pastor I readily admit that it’s a hard thing to be that vulnerable. For to do so can potentially expose a gap in your personal armor. One that can easily be exploited later by others to hurt you. Yet to withhold your humanity in the presence of your brethren can have the reverse effect. It can isolate you from the body of Christ and express a fallacy...a facade of indestructibility, a pretense of iron and steel, when the truth is we are but imperfect men that are saved by the grace of God.

4:1 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart.

Paul begins this chapter with a corporate call to ministry. In his declaration, “Therefore since ***we*** have this ministry,” he includes all the Corinthian believers as well as all of us that are reading this letter, in the call to the ministry of the kingdom of God. This is more than sharing the gospel with a coworker or serving at church. It is a ministry of Spirit, of righteousness, *and* of life. In Matthew 5:14 -16 Jesus says *“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.”*

Paul is in no way saying that we are all called to pulpit preaching or church evangelism. Paul expounded in detail upon this issue back in his first letter. He spoke in length about the body of Christ and each individual seeking and fulfilling their God-ordained role within the greater church body as well as the local church.

The reasons this is important are numerous, but especially in that we have effectively built an imaginary two-tiered corporate church to propagate two different classes of people...the “doers” and the “receivers.” Those who serve the Lord and the church, and those who sit back and consume. This division however is contrary to scripture and counter to a righteous body life prescribed by Paul in all of his letters. Indeed there are always newborn babes of the faith who must be fed, nurtured, and given the “milk” of the Word. But such feeding is only for the eventual maturing of each one, with an ultimate moving on to the “meat” of the Word and to the endgame of spiritual adulthood (1 Cor 3:2 and Hebrews 5:12).

From the beginning of this chapter Paul is very straight forward. He does not attempt to paint a picture of a Christian “nirvana” with flower lined avenues: a tranquil realm where God’s primary objective is for you to be happy. No, the fact is, ministry is innately an “off-road” encounter. It is fraught with bumps, rocks, and the occasional spill! Thankfully, God does not send us out there alone, but promises us He will never leave us and never forsake us. Remember, we are not taken *around* the “valley of the shadow of death” but rather *through* it...but we can rest in the fact that “He is with us.”

Paul did not surrender and he did not retreat. Yet he was not always a bastion of emotional strength anymore than we are. Yet his “light” did not shine less because he failed to be a perfect man. God was faithful to come

alongside him and carry him, just as He is faithful to do for us. It seemed the avenue for which he sought solace on that matter was via his interaction with the local church: **he** sought ...as **they** sought, to strengthen him when the going got tough. Honestly that is a rare interaction today. Few flocks will see their pastor through those honest eyes and support him as the man on the front lines of battle.

4:2 But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Verse two begins with the word “But...” Paul realized that there were those among them who were deceivers. These were people who would skew the teaching of the scriptures and the truth of the faith in order to deceitfully draw followers unto themselves. Furthermore, there is always those who will seek to entice others to abandon the front line ministry and join them in an “easy religion.” Not only did Paul never acquiesce to these folks, he also never had much time for them either. He never held back from warning the flock about these folks or for that matter any danger they faced. To the leaders in the church of Ephesus, Paul warned in Acts 20:27-30: “...I didn't shrink from declaring all that God wants for you. And now beware! Be sure that you feed and shepherd God's flock—his church, purchased with his blood—over whom the Holy Spirit has appointed you as elders. I know full well that false teachers, like vicious wolves, will come in among you after I leave, not sparing the flock. Even some of you will distort the truth in order to draw a following.”

Paul was attempting to diffuse the accusations of these wolves who had apparently accused *him* of being the wolf! Paul was not going to just start on the offensive, but instead appealed for the people to simply step back and look at what had been taught to them. Look at the truth. Look at the facts. He could boldly declare that he had never lied to them, and he backed his words clearly through scripture. Could these troublemakers do that?

His record was clean and those in Corinth could testify of that. However, those Paul was warning about never come into the light for a godly discussion, but preferred to lurk in the shadows and lob innuendos from the trenches, just as they do today. At least Paul didn't have to deal with the anonymity of today's social media!

The Philips version renders verse two so clearly:

“We use no hocus-pocus, no clever tricks, no dishonest manipulation of the Word of God. We speak the plain truth and so commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.”

Paul didn't just *speak* the truth, he *lived it out*. He “shined the light” of salvation. He lived the hard stuff as well as the easy. Talking the talk is one thing, but walking the walk is some-thing else. Paul was able to put his life out there as the proof of who he was. His character, his reputation, and his history all spoke the truth of what was in him. He was not hiding anything from them and they knew it.

4:3-4 But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has 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 makes a bold claim here. Even though he had made great strides and put forth great effort to bring the gospel to this people, he knew there were still those who just didn't get it. They didn't “get it”, because they *couldn't* get it. They were blinded by the world and their flesh, therefore unable to embrace the truth. They didn't want to let go of the world, thus their darkness was evident just as it is now. It wasn't God's fault they were where they were, and it wasn't his either. “*Unless a man be born again...*”

A man must *choose* to see. This is our roll. The freedom to choose is ours to make, but it is “all or nothing.” Remember that. A man must choose the light over the darkness. Until he does, the “god of this world,” Satan, will keep him blind to the truth, and will instead feed him lies that he will inevitably embrace as truth. He will

receive thus because it scratches his itching ears. Proverbs 14:12 *“There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death.”*

The light of Christ is always shining. Satan, however, will place all kind of things over the spiritual eyes of a man to keep him from seeing that light. One of these is pride, the most powerful veil of all. There are, of course, scores of other reasons, such as self-righteousness and rebellion. But none are as blinding as pride. It creates arm chair pastors, religious critics that go from church to church to castigate them for not doing things the way they want them done. They are not students and participants. They are analyzers and judges. Nothing keeps us from the truth more than our own simple pride.

Outside of the church mankind wants to reject Christ because people believe they are free. Such is the greatest coup Satan has ever devised, because men are so clearly *in* bondage to their sin, to the world, and yes, to themselves. They are slaves to the blindness perpetuated by Satan.

4:5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake.

For Paul, it was all about Jesus, all of the time. He was not acting out of self-promotion. How do we know? Merely by his words? No, for by his own admission, words were not enough. We know by his *actions*, the fruit of his labors, and the fact that he laid down his life for the gospel every day as he ministered...as he *lived*. We know by the light that shined forth from his life.

He never sought status among the masses. In fact, he sacrificed his own reputation and any possibility of secular report in order to further the kingdom of God (see 3:1). This he did because he was a “*doulos*.” A ‘bond slave,’ a willing slave of Christ. Being such a *doulos* was not an optional special class of Christian. It simply *was* a Christian. It simply *is* a Christian. Paul did more than *preach* Christ; he *lived* Christ, he *led* in Christ, and he *served* in Christ! That did not make him a popular man in the world’s eyes, anymore than it will make you such! But his love of Christ and his love for the people compelled him to sacrifice his life for the furthering of the kingdom.

Clearly Paul did not seek to be a popular preacher. Such is impossible anyway when you preach Christ crucified and resurrected. Jesus was the “rock of offense” and said *“Do you remember what I told you? ‘A slave is not greater than the master.’ Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you...”* When you preach discipleship and Lordship, ...when you live to promote the “rock of offense” to the world and those veiled by their pride and self-promotion, ...there will be a heavy price...

4:6 For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The God who spoke the light into existence is now calling forth the light to shine *in* our hearts and thus *from* our hearts. Imagine that! The light of creation illuminating the knowledge of God within us. Not just the knowledge of God, but the knowledge of *His glory*. Let me ask you today, do *you* have knowledge of His glory? The word “knowledge” here speaks of the deeper and fuller understanding that comes with spiritual maturity.

The original language has depth even beyond this, in that it alludes to the idea of the *shining forth* of this glory *from* our hearts! Thus His light shone *for* us, so we might shine His light *from* us. It is incredible that He would allow *us* to participate in such an awesome presentation of the person of God! It’s been said, “We are not the terminals of our blessings or exercises, but the channels.”

Paul was one who discovered this fact on his own. On the Damascus road, God showed His glory to Paul, and Paul came to realize the truth of Jesus Christ (Acts 26:9-18). Once enlightened, Paul spent the rest of his life shining the light of Christ to anyone and everyone he came across. That's what true salvation does to you! It fills you with an overflowing light.

Such a light is not work to reflect; it does not require us to muster up the time or the energy. It is something that, without option, shines outward from us if we are born again and filled with the bright light of God's presence. 1Pe 2:9 "*...you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God's holy nation, his very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.*"

This light shining from us is an innate quality of salvation. In this, we know we are saved.

Eph 5:8 "*For though your hearts were once full of darkness, now you are full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it!*"

4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

This light, this blessed treasure, is dwelling inside this humble container, my body. The text speaks of such being found in earthen vessels, or clay pots. Do we even *begin* to understand the magnitude of what that means? 1John 4:13-14 tells us this: "*God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.*"