

The Gospel hidden

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Let us turn now to the New Testament, to the second epistle of Paul to Corinthians, chapter 4 and verse 3.

2 Corinthians chapter 4, verse 3. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost, in whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not.

Lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them.

From the 14th verse of the second chapter in this letter, Paul is speaking particularly about the glory of the gospel of Christ.

He speaks of it as a triumphant movement in which people are caught up. It is either a saver of life unto life or a saver of death unto death.

He then goes on to think of it, consider it as a message which is far superior and far more glorious than the Mosaic law.

[1 : 22] And tells us in the third chapter that when people look by faith to Christ in the gospel, that they are transformed into the image of God by the Holy Spirit.

Having said that, Paul recognises as he continues to write this letter to the Corinthians, that there are many people who fail to see the glory of God in the gospel.

It is preached to many, and there are many who do not believe what is brought before them. To many the gospel is a closed book, or as someone has put it, an impenetrable mystery.

And recognising that, Paul himself says that he is not prepared to give up preaching it. He is not prepared to shrink from the duty of proclaiming it.

Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not. Together with that, he is not prepared to entertain the false approach to the gospel.

[2 : 47] He abhors methods and devious means to persuade men in the hope of being labelled, as a result of that, perhaps a success.

The tactics, he says, of the crooked salesman are abhorrent to him. We have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handing the word of God deceitfully.

The gospel, he goes on to say, witnesses to its own power, my manifestation of the truth, commending yourself to every man's conscience, in the sight of God.

And as the gospel witnesses to its own power, and to its own glory, so there seems to be an objection raised. As Paul is writing this letter, you can almost see someone peering over his shoulder and saying, very well then, if that is what you claim, why is it that there are so few people who believe it?

And he answers, if our gospel be hid, it is it to them that are lost, in whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine into them.

[4 : 06] And he tells us, therefore, that there are two reasons why people don't believe it. First of all, they're blind to its glory, the fault is in themselves, and then secondly, there is a satanic activity going on in their minds, even as the gospel is brought before them, even as they are confronted with the claims of Christ in the gospel.

The God of this world is blinding their minds in case, they believe in case, the light of the gospel should shine into them.

Now, this in one sense, in many senses, is what makes the preaching of the gospel, I suggest to you, so very difficult.

That you come and you proclaim the truths, you present them, and you commend them to people and to their conscience, you bid them look, you bid them believe, and you know that you are asking, as you are blind men, to look at a light which they cannot see.

And that is why Paul goes on to tell us in verses 5 and 6, that notwithstanding that, great difficulty, great obstacle, yet, you preach the gospel as he preached the gospel, and the hope that the God who created life, that the way outside, the God who caused life to shine in the darkness, at the beginning of the creation, the God who said, let there be light, and there was light, who brought light into that darkness, and into that desolation, that is the same God, who alone can bring light into the darkened heart, and into the darkened mind.

[5 : 56] This is the hope of Paul, this is the hope of the preacher, the hope of the Christian church, that as a gospel is presented, as she attends to her God-given duty, that a God himself can break into that darkness.

You know, for example, that people have expressed this, perhaps no one better expressed it from his own experience, than Robert Murray McChain, as he spoke of the way that he lived in dark, in the darkness of unbelief, till the light of the glory of God broke upon his soul.

I once was a stranger to grace and to God. I knew not my danger and felt not my Lord. Though friends spoke and raptured of Christ on the tree, Jehovah said, can you, was nothing to me.

Then he went on to speak of his conversion experience. But when free grace awoke me by light from on high, then legal fear shook me, I trembled to die.

No refuge, no safety, in self could I see. Jehovah said, can you, my Savior must be. The light had broken in upon his darkness.

[7 : 15] Well, that is our hope hope, and indeed your hope, as the gospel is brought before you. As we look at these words very briefly this evening, what does Paul mean when he says, if our gospel be hidden?

What is the gospel? Then secondly, look at why this gospel is hidden, the glory of God and the gospel is hidden to you. There are two reasons, as he tells us here.

Men are spiritually blind to it, and there is this satanic activity going on in their blindness. He himself is blind, the God of this world, blinding in case they see the glory of God in the gospel.

And then he tells thirdly what the condition of that man is. That man, he says, is lost, if our gospel be hid. And if it is hid to such, they are lost.

And then fourthly, the hope with which the gospel comes to men in their lostness. First of all then, what is the gospel?

[8 : 28] Now I'm sure that you would agree with the definition that someone once gave of the gospel, that it is the provision by a gracious God of the way in which an alienated sinner may come into a restored relationship and permanent relationship with God as Savior.

The gospel comes to us the good news of God's provision of a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It tells us that from all eternity, God made this provision, that in the fullness of time, he sent his own Son into the world, to die for sinners.

You know that the heart of the gospel is a Savior who died that we might save. That Savior lives tonight.

He isn't a dead Savior, he's a living Lord and Savior, resurrected, exalted, enthroned at God's right hand, who is presented to give repentance and remission of sins to men.

The one who can give us the grace to repent and who can give us the faith to receive himself as Lord and Savior.

[9 : 47] He is enthroned as the Savior who has all power and all authority in his possession. The Savior who comes to us with forgiveness and with pardon, with the offer of a restored of life in himself and from himself.

The Savior who can bring us into a living, vital relationship with God through faith in himself.

The gospel speaks to us of God's love for our lost world, of Christ's love for our lost world, of the love of the Holy Spirit for our lost world.

The gospel speaks to us of the ability that God can give you not only to believe in him and to trust him but to love him and to delight in him. It is the good news that comes to every single sinner lost in sin that God has provided a remedy for his ruin by which he can be brought into a living relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

You remember how Paul summed it up again writing to Timothy in what Martin Luther called one of the Bible this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

[11 : 22] And that is the message of the gospel throughout all the ages. It hasn't varied, it hasn't altered, it hasn't changed one little bit and what was true as Paul wrote these words at the end of the first century is just as true as you and I near the end of the 20th century Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Is that not the gospel? Why then secondly do people not believe it?

Well because we are told here because it is hid to them they are blind to it and because there is a blinding activity going on within their hearts and within their mind.

You see what Paul is telling us here first of all is this the fault doesn't lie in the gospel I'm not saying the fault may not lie in the presentation of the gospel but it doesn't lie in the gospel itself the gospel is very very plainly brought before us in the word of God and I challenge you tonight with reference to the gospel you read the bible and I'm sure there are many things in the bible that you will find difficult yes impossible to understand yet I'm sure you'd agree that it is plainly said before you in the bible that there is no way of salvation but through faith in the lord jesus christ there is no way to god but through christ and there is no way to heaven but through christ there is no other way and if you read the bible you will I'm sure at least appreciate and accept that so the fault for not believing the gospel does not lie in the gospel itself it lies with you there is a veil as he tells us here in chapter three speaking of the jews reading the old testament which was pointed to christ they don't see it they refuse to accept it there is a veil upon their face a veil upon their understanding so when you come to look at the gospel and come to hear and come to read it the reason why you don't believe in the trust in the lord present to you in it is because there is this veil of unbelief over your mind and your heart consequently you don't see the glory of the grace of god's permission in the lord jesus christ you don't bow down in wonder and in adoration at the eternal and the divine wisdom that planned such a wonderful salvation you don't thank him that he hasn't left you to save yourself but that he has sent a saviour into the world you don't see that as mcchain put it he just couldn't see it though friends spoke in rapture of christ on a tree jehovah said ken was nothing to me this is perhaps something which is a cause of great wonder for people newly converted and who are full of the wonder and the thrill of having found jesus christ as lord and savior full of zeal and witnessing to the grace of god and wanting to bring and to present the claims of christ before their fellows and they tell them of the wonder of this grace and they're astounded that people don't believe what they're telling them true that there are some of you here tonight who remember when you were newly converted you thought that all you had to do was just speak a few words and everyone was going to believe what you were going to tell them everyone was going to see what you saw but there was no word that for long enough you lived in the same unbelief that confronted you when you brought the gospel to bear upon them people just don't see it blind to the wonder of no matter how plain it is made no matter how how persuasively it is presented to them they cannot see what you see don't see the glory of his grace or of his power of his wisdom and the provision of his heaven don't understand it they don't see the need of it and many don't even want the message of the gospel and when the gospel is preached is prepared to come and hear it as some of you are no doubt and we thank

God for that there is no attempt on your part perhaps to apply the message of the gospel to yourself it comes out in one ear and out the other you don't take a single thing with you consequently you are left unmoved in this sense in that you haven't seen the adequacy of that provision nor your own need of it as it is brought before you that is the sin of unbelief remember how Jesus described conviction of sin when the spirit has come into the world he says accompanying the preaching of the gospel he will convince the world of sin of the sin that they don't believe and it seems that his activity it seems to be more effective he is blinding the minds of people this is the misery that is added to their sin you know the one the shorter catholic when he speaks of effectual calling it's the work of God's free convincing men of their sin and of their misery and the sin of unbelief is that people don't believe in

[17 : 39] Jesus Christ people won't believe in Jesus Christ and the misery of that condition is this that they can't believe they can't and we might as well face facts they just can't and there is someone with them who won't allow them to believe he works on the mind and he works on the heart he wants to keep them you see for himself he is as Paul tells us here the God of this world the God who has us usurped authority the world of mankind man through Adam gave himself to the death he believed the lie so he put himself in Satan's hand and what happens when the gospel comes is that God and Christ in the gospel wants to win people men and women boys and girls

from the from the hand of Satan from the power and from the authority and from the blinding influence of Satan upon the line the gospel bids you look to one who can deliver you from the power of Satan how does he go about this activity how does he engage in this activity well let me just bring before you one or two things if some of you ever come across the book by C.S. Lewis called the Skrute Blech read it get it and read it most interesting it tells you they're the tactics that Satan employs to keep men in a state of spiritual blindness I just mention one or two things to you how many people for example as even as they listen to the gospel entertain false hopes regarding their own salvation and regarding their own hopes for heaven are you saved you don't need to go to the central belt to get an answer to that question like this you can't get it from many people in stone and you're to hold them look are you saved well no but I'm praying at least I'm praying I'm hoping to be oh I'm not a good person yet but I'm not altogether I'm not all that bad perhaps I'm as good as some people maybe I'm even better than most you see there are many people that build their hopes of salvation on their own works their own efforts and this is what cuts across the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ God has sent the saviour into the world he has died for sinners the work of salvation is complete all you have to do is renounce your own works and come to him but there's nothing in all the world more difficult for you to do than that and the devil will suggest to you you keep on you keep on you pray you pray you be as good as you can you keep coming to church if not regularly occasionally give so much and so on you see building your hope for salvation upon your own efforts the blinding activity of sin he will confuse people regarding the gospel he won't allow you to get a clear perception of what he's saying and of your own relationship and your own accountability to God he will confuse you with the teachings of the word of God he will begin to think about salvation as this awful problem that the reformed churches forever seem to harp on what about this doctrine of election and predestination and so on and he will get you to start thinking about these things and these things make it difficult for you to come to the Lord

Jesus Christ and I suppose that this is in one sense where our responsibility as preachers comes in that we have to make it our business to make the gospel as plain as we possibly can look at how Paul speaks of it here in chapter 3 seeing then that we have such hope we use great plainness of speech I don't think that you and I should despise the plain presentation of the gospel there are it is possible as one of the Puritans says it is possible for preachers to paint the glass to keep out the light and that's perfectly possible for us we have to remember as someone has put it that the best oratory is that which draws men to Christ so he will blind you to the glory of the gospel by colouring it in such a way that you don't understand using people like me to present in a way that will confuse you you don't know what is right and what is wrong then the day people wonder what exactly what anyway is the gospel what am

I meant to do where am I meant to come what am I meant to say he will keep your mind engrossed with anything except the gospel he will keep your mind engrossed with the affairs of this life with the world in which you live the world is so alluring you see the gospel is like a light that shines in a dark place like neon light in the center of a city it shines in the darkness but there are the lights of course they don't compare with the light of the gospel like the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ but this world brings its own life to bear upon the lives of men and women boys and girls it is so attractive so allude and the world is so presentable and it becomes so desirable and was Jesus who reminded his own audience what shall the prophet demand though he gave the whole world what of your life is made up day and night with the affairs of this life this life is going to end

[23 : 56] Satan would allow you to believe that you live as though you are always going to be in this world and you want it and you want more and more and more of it anything as long as it doesn't allow you to see the glory of Christ which bursts in through the gospel into the darkness of this world that you light so much then of course you won't allow your conscience to be troubled as long as it keeps you feeling nice and easy sitting in church and reading the bible and hearing the gospel that's fine as far as he's concerned don't start thinking about your sins and don't start thinking about what sin will lead you don't start thinking about going on and on and on in sin he won't allow you to be upset about these things it's great to sit in a church for an hour and a half to feel at peace and to go home and to feel at peace if the gospel was being effective you wouldn't feel like that you ought to feel more troubled about your sin and where it is leading you but satan won't allow you to think like that he will keep you from reading your bible keep you from engaging in prayer jesus said may not always to pray and not to faith search the scriptures he said to his generation search them that the devil will present something else to you he doesn't want you to read the bible and if he does he

doesn't want you to spend too long at it we will divert your attention and your minds from the gospel even as you hear it even as you sat here tonight and if I were to preach the gospel and I wish I could if I were to preach the gospel and say 1520 for 30 minutes look in that period of time the amount of things that you've thought of the places your mind has gone to the people you've thought of the things even you've seen in this church that have taken up your attention and perhaps for time in it you've wondered and you haven't a clue what is being said or what has been said and you're back now well see you've got your attention just for a minute where is your mind straight as you come in here tonight the gospel is god provision for lost sinners through faith in Jesus Christ have you thought of your own sinnership have you thought of your own need of Christ as savior have you prayed even if you sat here tonight Lord open my eyes that I might see the glory of God in the gospel that's his activity he will raise doubt in your mind about the truthfulness and about the trustworthiness of the gospel he will raise up people who will lead you to think that the gospel the Bible ah that's just a collection of Jewish papers that's only a book for the Jews that's not for me I'm far more enlightened than that I don't believe all that nonsense oh yes my friend there were some great men in the world and greater than you intellect intellectual giants like Augustine who said of his own pre-converted days I disdain to become a child again he wasn't prepared as it were to come down to that level and to accept the truth of God and the truth of Christ in the world of his grace and I tell you this if you priding yourself tonight in that kind of attitude one day your eye will be opened but maybe it will be far far too late there are lots of people out there in this lost world who are whistling in the dark who claim that this is just as someone said quite recently in a radio program brought up in this part of the world I don't believe the Bible just a collection he says of Jewish stories and fables priding himself in the

vables of his own intellectual attainment and besides some of the men and the women of God a mere pygmy ah yes what was said by Paul I quote the text ready equally true tonight it's faithful it's worthy of acceptance it has stood the test of time and many people before you have discovered it Christ Jesus came into world to save sinners we will blind you by questioning any convictions that you may have concerning the gospel there are some of you I said earlier that there are some people perhaps you get the impression that some people unconverted people sit unmoved sabbath after sabbath year after year under the gospel that is not true I don't believe for one minute that that is true I pray that there are some people who do have from time to time convictions about salvation and about their own need of salvation but I also know this that the devil is very adept of directing their attention to something else so these convictions are quenched so any thoughts and feelings that they have vanished before they pass through perhaps the door of a church maybe before they get home all you have to do is put someone in your company who will speak about the weather or speak about a television program speak about something else and what you've heard what you've felt it's gone that's his activity do you realize that that's his activity he doesn't want you he doesn't want these convictions to come to anything at all and if you do have them as a continue for a wee while well there's plenty of time for you to think about salvation and about the

God you young people tonight on the threshold of life perhaps the last thing on earth that you want is conversion to Christ it's going to spoil everything on you isn't it all your ambitions all your aspirations all your hopes all the plans that you have many people thought like that before you but to my friend Jesus doesn't spoil a life he makes it and what's more perhaps there are old people in this church tonight who had similar convictions such as you have when they were young they put them off there was time enough wait till they sow their wild roads wait till they get into their thirties and their forties and fifties you ask them tonight no convictions now just hardness of heart and barrenness of life and Christ further away from them than ever before in their experience that is what the devil does he blinds the minds of people in case they see the glory of Christ if it be that there are some who perhaps may have may have these convictions and may have these thoughts Christ may have that yearning that seeking after the Lord he won't leave you like that my friend the Lord won't receive you anyway you're praying for forgiveness tonight you're too great a sinner you've gone too far no one has ever been forgiven the sins that you've committed you better forget it throw in the towel no point in thinking that he's going to accept you but as the Bible tells you that Jesus says he will in no wise cast out any who come unto him there are many people tonight whose minds are troubled beyond almost relief by the thought that he implants in their heart that God will not receive them that's the blinding activity of Satan perhaps and just mention two other things one that tactic is very fond of a favourite of his is well we can reform your life there is no need to think in

terms of conversion no need to think in terms of coming to the Lord Jesus Christ there is no need to think in terms of giving up everything you know the spirit with which Pharaoh approached Moses say a challenge and Moses demand let my people go that they may worship alright he says bit by bit he went a wee bit further yes but don't go too far you can go but don't take your children you see it's alright religion it's alright as far as but don't really you don't need to become all that committed it is all or nothing says Jesus son daughter give me thine heart thine heart give me your life give me your all you must place yourself consecrate yourself on the altar of obedience to his revealed will and there was one man I leave it at this there was one man in the history of this world and it took him years to discover that he was being blinded by the activity of Satan in his life and that was Saul of Tarsus man who wasn't religious he was very religious man who was very zealous on the sight of his

[33 : 02] God so zealous that he didn't want any other in name or any other movement to interfere with the religion of God in Israel when this Christian movement rose this man Jesus and his followers he hated that and blinded by religious zeal he persecuted the church of Christ as he himself even unto prison and unto death until the light dawned in the darkness of his heart and his mind and then he said God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ no my friend where does this leave you tonight where does it leave you well if it is that you're blind and being blinded the condition that you describe in here is this if a gospel be hid it is said to them that are lost this is a present reality you're in a lost condition and you're heading in that condition to an absolute certain lost state in eternity here you're lost in the blindness of your own unbelief and lost under the blinding influence of Satan in your life nothing can be plainer as someone put it than the doctrine in these verses that a man's faith is not a matter of indifference he cannot continue to reject the gospel and yet go to heaven when he dies he is on a hellward course not a heavenward course on a hellward course lost heading for the lostness of hell itself in the spiritual darkness of spiritual death heading for the darkness of eternal death oh my friend is there any hope for you tonight and there is the glorious hope of the power of God in the gospel of his grace the God who can save from the blindness of unbelief and from the blinding influence of Satan and then is how Paul introduces for us here the miracle of grace as someone has put it

God invading the darkness of a sinner lost in sin with a light which God is himself God's grace coming in God's light coming in and God enabling you to see the wonder and the glory of Christ our Savior and to see your own need so that you will cry from the depth of your heart Lord save me or I perish God will bring such into the life and the fellowship and the power and the grace and the favor that is available to you in the gospel of his son so my friend once more the gospel bids you or Christ bids you in the gospel look to himself remember the way the hymn writer put it turn your eyes upon

Jesus look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will go strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace let us pray bless oh god thy word oh we thank thee that thou art the god of all grace and of all power as do Thou shine in our hearts so that we might see what we cannot see apart from the enabling power of thy grace we thank thee that in our weakness in our hopeless inadequacy in all our native inability that we are confronted with the power of one who says all things are possible unto me. Forgive us for thy name's sake.
Amen.