

## The King's Commission in Light of Eternity

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:11

Grand Avenue Baptist Church

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The story is told of a man who lived in a city. He lived close to his workplace, so he walked to work every day. However, it was a fairly long walk because he had to walk around a large cemetery that took up several city blocks. He could have taken a shortcut through the cemetery, but he didn't like doing that because it gave him the creeps. One Friday, he had gotten off work and decided to stop by the bar with his buddies and have a drink. He stayed later than he intended, and he knew his wife would be mad because he would be home late. By the time he left the bar, it was very dark, and it had begun to rain a little. He knew he could cut 30 minutes off of his walk home if he took a short cut through the cemetery. Well, the fear of his wife was greater than the fear of walking through the cemetery, so off he went into the dark cemetery.

This particular cemetery was very dark. There were no lights, so he had to wander aimlessly in the dark, hoping he was going in the direction of the gate. Well, as it happened, he got off the path and fell into a freshly dug open grave. Remember, it has been raining a little, so the sides of the grave were slippery, and the hole was too deep to jump up and grab the sides. He tried and tried to climb out, but could not. He spent the next couple of hours calling for help, but no one answered. Finally, he just gave up and settled in for the night.

As it happened, another man left the bar and was in a hurry to get home. He also decided to cut through the cemetery. This man had had a few too many drinks and wandered off the path. Eventually, he fell into the same grave as the first man. After the second man regained his senses, he said out loud, *"What in the world just happened?"* To which the first man replied, *"You fell into this grave with me."* Needless to say, the second man got out of the grave. Do you know why? He was motivated!

Last Sunday was Resurrection Sunday, and we studied how Jesus walked out of the grave. The fact that Jesus walked out of the grave alive should motivate us to share the good news with others. Yet, our motivation often ebbs and flows. We're like the first man who fell into the grave who tries hard to get out, but then gives up. We need to be like the second man – motivated.

The title of our little series on evangelism is *"The King's Commission."* We ended our study of the Gospel of Matthew last Sunday with the Great Commission. So, over the next five Sundays, we are going to challenge ourselves to be disciple-making Christians. We will spend the next four Sundays working through 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:21, and Pastor Dean will deliver the fifth and final message from Luke 19:10.

In 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:21, the Apostle Paul gives us ten motives for carrying out our King's Commission. Hopefully, as we examine the text, our hearts will be refreshed and we will be motivated to share Christ with others, whether it is on campus, in the workplace, in our neighborhoods, within our families, or in other cultural contexts around the world.

You see what often happens is that our hearts and lives are distracted from the King's Commission. When this happens, our desire and motivation to share Christ are hijacked. We become complacent or negligent, or we simply lose heart. We are unmotivated and need to be re-motivated.

The Apostle Paul is concerned that Christians do not lose heart in sharing the gospel with others. Just consider what he said in 2 Corinthians 4:1,

*"Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart . . .*

Paul begins 2 Corinthians 4 talking about the experience of his ministry team, but it applies to all disciple-making Christians. Notice his ministry team's experience in vv. 7-11:

*But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. <sup>8</sup> We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed;*

*perplexed, but not driven to despair;<sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;<sup>10</sup> always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.<sup>11</sup> For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.*

The lives of those on the Apostle Paul's mission team had been hammered by suffering and persecution. As a result, they were in danger of losing the heart to share the gospel. So, Paul needed to remind himself, his team, and the church that it is Christ who gives us strength to carry out the King's Commission. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 28:20,

*And behold I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

Friends, suffering as you carry out the King's Commission can suck the life out of you. It can cause you to lose heart and be completely unmotivated to be a witness for Christ. *This morning, we will examine the motive of carrying out the King's Commission in light of eternity.* I have three points to help us walk through the text.

#### I. We Must Keep the Eternal Reality in View (2 Corinthians. 4:16-5:8)

First, look in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18,

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.<sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,<sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

There's a lot to unpack in this text, but for our purposes, we want to examine what Paul says about keeping our eyes on the eternal as we carry out our ministry of making disciples. Paul reminds the church in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 that they will go through seasons of suffering as they make disciples. In those seasons, they are not to look at what is seen, but at what is unseen. It is in those seasons of life that we need to remind ourselves of our eternal home in heaven and let that strengthen our hearts.

Often, when we experience suffering in life, we can only see the temporary. Our bodies begin to fail, and we get discouraged. How about you? Things get hard in my life, and all I can do is focus on my issues. All I see is my schedule, my family, my finances, my suffering, my... Do you get the picture? Are you like me? I take my eyes off eternity and the King's Commission and put them on me.

Do the hardships in life rob you of your eternal perspective when it comes to sharing Christ with unbelievers? When this happens, we must contemplate heaven and eternity. Eternity is long and hard for us to fathom, but it is the true reality in which we live as Christians, and whether they know it or not, it is the reality of those who are lost.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *"The Screwtape Letters,"* provides an excellent depiction of how the enemy's goal is to prevent us from thinking about and living for eternity. Just in case you are not familiar with Lewis' book, it is written from the perspective of the demon *Screwtape*, who writes to his demon nephew, Wormwood, to give him advice on how to tempt the human he has been assigned to keep from becoming a Christian. He writes,

*"The humans live in time, but our Enemy (God) destines them for eternity. He therefore, I believe, wants them to attend chiefly to two things, to eternity itself, and to that point of time which they call the Present. For the Present is the point at which time touches eternity . . . Our business is to get them away from the eternal, and from the Present."<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis, *"The Screwtape Letters,"* 75-79.

Screwtape goes on to tell Wormwood to introduce his human to the word “*complacency*.” That is truly what the enemy wants to do. He wants us to be complacent disciple makers. He wants us to put it off for today. He wants us to procrastinate because the more we put it off, the more we “*lose the heart*” to share the gospel.

The Apostle Paul knows that we often fail to live life in light of eternity. So, in 2 Corinthians 5:1-5, he returns to the fact that our bodies are temporary. Why would he do that? He does it because he knows that the temporalness of life consumes us, and when that happens, we do not live with an eternal perspective. To make his point, he tells us twice not to lose sight of the eternal reality of life. Listen to what he says in vv. 1-5 of 2 Corinthians 5,

*For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. <sup>2</sup> For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, <sup>3</sup> if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. <sup>4</sup> For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.*

Notice what Paul has done. In 2 Corinthians 4:7, he says our bodies are like jars of clay. Now, in 2 Corinthians 5:1-4, he changes the metaphor and says our bodies are like tents.

In other words, our bodies are not brick and mortar. They are more like tents and fragile clay jars - easily destroyed. He wants to drive home the point that we have been given the eternal treasure of the gospel in our fragile, temporal bodies. We are temporary, but the gospel is eternal; therefore, we must remember that we carry the glorious, eternal gospel of Jesus Christ around in our fragile, decaying bodies.

Our bodies age and no longer function as they once did. We get wrinkles, hair turns gray, or turns loose, our eyes get weak, and walking becomes more difficult. The list of health problems goes on and on.

However, Paul also says that although the physical body gets old and quits working, those who are in Christ have the assurance that our bodies will one day be, what he calls, “*swallowed up by life*.” In other words, a new body is coming, an eternal body. Again, it is the eternal perspective that Paul is trying to get us to see.

His point is that we are all going to die physically. At last check, research showed that every one out of every one person dies. No one will live forever in the body they currently have. One day, it will quit working, and you will die.

But look at what the Apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:5-8,

*He WHO has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. <sup>6</sup> So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, <sup>7</sup> for we walk by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*

In vv. 5-8, he tells the believers to be of good courage. I do not know about you, but when someone tells me I am going to die, courage is not the first thing that comes to my mind.

However, his point is that we are called to view life from an eternal perspective. He says we walk by faith, not by “*eyesight*.” This world is not all there is. Eternity is real. Heaven is real, Hell is real, and people will spend eternity in one of these two places, so we need to be sharing the gospel with those who do not know Jesus because one day this temporal reality that we see will pass away. And if you know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you will go to heaven, but if someone does not know Jesus, they will go to Hell. Bottom line: The reality of heaven and hell should motivate us to share the gospel. James 4:14 says,

*For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.*

Life is short; do not waste it. We do not have much time to share Christ with unbelievers, and they do not have much time to repent of their sins and trust Christ. Let's not allow suffering, complacency, or excuses keep us from sharing Christ. Let's keep the eternal perspective in view and live in light of eternity. Let's not lose heart!

## II. Our eternal desire is to obey our King (2 Corinthians 5:9)

*"So whether we are at home [with the Lord] or away [here on earth, in our bodies], we make it our aim to please him."*

In v. 9, the Greek word for *aim* means *ambition or desire*. You really need to hear what Paul is saying. He is telling us that the desire to please or obey God is not just a temporal thing we do, but it is an eternal desire. One that is given by the Holy Spirit when we are born again.

What this means is that v. 9 gets to the heart of the issue. It means that sharing Christ with others should be the natural overflow of a new heart that desires to please God.

However, what happens when we lose heart? What happens when our desire becomes weak and we are no longer motivated to please God? When this happens, obedience is not a priority.

Think about it this way: There are times when evangelism just happens as naturally as breathing, and it becomes the overflow of a heart. We just want to share Christ with others. We show up at some place, and the next thing you know, you are talking about Jesus with the person. That's amazing when that happens.

However, let's face it – most of the time, making disciples and sharing the gospel doesn't happen that way. The fact is that, much of the time, it is not our *aim* or *ambition*. We simply don't think about it, nor do we "*feel*" like sharing the gospel. What do we do when this is the case?

Brothers and sisters, if we only share Christ when we "*feel*" like it, we probably wouldn't share Christ at all. *That is why our desire to please God is really an issue of obedience and discipline.* When we make evangelism the overflow of our *spiritual discipline* or, as the Puritans call it, *a habit of grace*, we demonstrate our desire to please God, even when we don't feel like it.

Discipline is not *compulsion* or *coercion* but a reflection of a heart that aims to please God even when the feelings or emotions are not there, even when your heart is not filled with joy. So, even when we don't "*feel like it*," we still must *aim* to please the Savior who, for the joy that was before Him, gave Himself on the cross for us. We must see the joy that He saw as He looked at the cross. When we see the future joy before us, then we will set the cross before those who have yet to believe.

Friends, even when evangelism is a spiritual discipline, it can be *glad-hearted obedience*. Here's the bottom line: The spiritual discipline of evangelism is planning ahead for the days when you don't "*feel*" like sharing the gospel.

Our enemy, the devil, will put all kinds of excuses and obstacles in our paths to prevent us from sharing the gospel with those who are lost. You will think you do not *have enough training*, or you will *fear saying the wrong thing*, or you will *think you do not have time*, or you will *fear being rejected*, and perhaps, depending on where you live, *you may fear being arrested*. We must be wise as we share the gospel, but also not allow excuses to hinder us from sharing it.

One of the biggest excuses that the enemy will use is that we are sinners, and the people we know we need to share the gospel with know we are sinners, and they may even know our sins. Listen, if God did not use people like us as His witnesses, then no one would share Christ. Friends, there are no perfect witnesses, and that is why evangelism must be a discipline that you practice and not simply something you do when you feel like it.

Dr. D. A. Carson, in his book "*Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus*," warns of the danger of spending time with God only when we "*feel like it*." I believe this applies to us in the context of the spiritual discipline of evangelism. Listen to what he writes:

*"How dare you approach the mercy-seat of God on the basis of what kind of day you had, as if that were the basis for our entrance into the presence of the sovereign and holy God? No wonder we cannot beat the Devil. This is works theology. It has nothing to do with grace and the exclusive sufficiency of Christ. Nothing. Do you not understand that we overcome the accuser on the ground of the blood of Christ? Nothing more, nothing less. That is how we win. It is the*

*only way we win. This is the only ground of our acceptance before God. If you drift far from the cross, you are done. You are defeated. We overcome the accuser of our brothers and sisters, we overcome our consciences, we overcome our bad tempers, we overcome our defeats, we overcome our lusts, we overcome our fears, we overcome our pettiness on the basis of the blood of the Lamb."*<sup>2</sup>

Friends, evangelism is the overcoming work of grace in your life. It depends on the Holy Spirit. Asking God to do in you what you cannot do. It does not necessarily mean you will be out preaching on the sidewalk or handing out gospel tracts everywhere you go, but our grace-driven obedience to please God will change the context in which you live, making you more intentional and determined to see the lost come to Christ.

Some people say they cannot be a witness because they do not know anyone who is lost. If this is you, then you need to begin praying that the Lord will bring those who don't know Jesus into your life. Think carefully about how God can help you overcome the barriers or excuses that stand in your way, and ask God for the strength to overcome them.

Your witness to others may be as simple as the way John Bunyan heard the gospel. John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, one of the most popular books in history, insists that the conversation of some poor women, talking of the things of God while sitting in a sunlit doorway, was the critical turning point in his coming to faith in Christ.<sup>3</sup> So, it may be as simple as giving thanks to God in public, or sharing a gospel tract, or praying for someone.

The bottom line is that you make it your aim to please God, not in your own strength but by the Spirit with a grace-driven effort. Listen, simply begin to discuss Christ in your daily conversations. You never know who is listening and what God may do.

III. We must give an account of our lives to our King (2 Corinthians 5:10)

Look at 2 Corinthians 5:10; this is another verse that puts eternity into perspective:

*"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil."*

When we, as Christians, appear before the judgment seat of Christ, we will not be judged based on our salvation but on our stewardship of the salvation Christ has given us. You see, He accomplished salvation for His people and then He left His people here to be His hands, His feet, and His mouth to proclaim His gospel to a lost and dying world.

Think about it: Why doesn't God just zap us to heaven after we get saved? It is because He has a purpose for us — to reach others with the good news of the gospel. John Piper says he keeps a sign in his office that has this motto on it,

*"Only one life, 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."*<sup>4</sup>

This little motto reveals the importance of the stewardship that God has given us in our ministry. In his first letter to the Corinthian church, the Apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2,

*"This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. <sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy."*

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<sup>2</sup> D.A. Carson, *Scandalous: The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus* (Re:Lit), 103.

<sup>3</sup> Don Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 112.

<sup>4</sup> I heard this in a John Piper sermon a long time ago and cannot remember which sermon it was but it stuck with me.

Then in his second letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul comes back to the stewardship of the ministry we have been given in 2 Corinthians 4:1, 5,

*“Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart . . . <sup>5</sup>  
For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves  
as your servants for Jesus’ sake.*

If you belong to Christ, you have been given the King’s Commission from Matthew 28:19-20. We all will appear before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of how we have carried out the King’s Commission. We will be held accountable with what we have been entrusted.

Let me close with a question that we need to answer. What does success in the King’s Commission look like? Does it mean every time you share the gospel, someone must repent and believe? In his book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Dr. Don Whitney asks:

*What is success in evangelism? Is it when the person you witness to comes to Christ? Certainly, that’s what we want to happen. But if this is success, are we failures whenever we share the gospel and people refuse to believe? Was Jesus an “evangelistic failure” when people like the rich young ruler turned away from Him and His message? Obviously not. Then neither are we when we present Christ and His message, and they turn away in unbelief. We need to learn that sharing the gospel is successful evangelism. We ought to have an obsession for souls and tearfully plead with God to see more people converted, but conversions are the fruit that God alone can give. In this regard, we are like the postal service. Success is measured by the careful and accurate delivery of the message, not by the response of the recipient.”<sup>5</sup>*

Yet, the question still remains: What motivates you to share the gospel of Christ? I believe one of the great motivators is to understand how the gospel will change someone’s present and eternal destiny. I believe when we remember that Jesus stepped out of eternity, came to earth, paid for our sins on the cross, and rose from the dead it motivates us.

Friends, Jesus went into the grave because we were spiritually dead in our trespasses and sins. We could not get out of our spiritual grave unless Jesus got out of His grave, and get out He did. He defeated Hell when He walked out of that tomb. Now, those who trust in Him will never have to feel the heat or even smell the smoke of Hell. He gave up His life so that you may be given a new life in Him. Now, the King commissions us to carry out His disciple-making ministry.

How we carry out the King’s Commission won’t look the same for all of us. For some of us, we will be bold and vocal with the gospel, and others of us will serve quietly and serve others in the name of Christ, but all will be stewards that carry out the King’s Commission.

A while back, I read the story of two high school friends, Mike and Kyle. I don’t remember where I read it, but the story has stuck with me and reminds me of how a small act of kindness can change a life. Here’s what happened.

When Mike was a freshman in high school, he saw a classmate named Kyle walking home from school, carrying all of his books. He thought to himself, *“Why would anyone bring all his books home on a Friday? He must be a massive nerd.”*

Moments later, Mike saw a group of kids running toward Kyle. They ran into him, tripped him, and knocked all of his books out of his arms. He landed in the dirt, and his glasses landed in the grass ten feet away. When the boy looked up, there was a terrible sadness in his eyes. Moved to pity, Mike jogged over to Kyle, handed him his glasses, and said, *“Those guys are jerks. They should get a life.”*

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<sup>5</sup> Don Whitney, *“Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life,”* 103.

Kyle looked at Mike and simply said, *"Thanks!"* as a smile of gratitude spread over his face. Then Mike plucked up the courage and asked: *"Where do you live?"* *"Nearby,"* said Kyle. *"Why haven't I seen you before?"* Mike asked. Kyle told him that he just transferred in from another school. Then Mike asked him if he would like to play a little football with his friends this weekend. *"Sure!"* said Kyle.

Kyle, Mike, and his buddies soon became friends. In fact, over the high school years, Kyle and Mike became best friends. When they were seniors, Kyle was class valedictorian, but far from a nerd. He was a good-looking young man and everyone's friend.

In his [valedictorian] speech, Kyle said, *"Graduation is time to thank those who helped you make it through those tough years."* Mike listened in shock as Kyle recounted the story of their first meeting. Kyle told the audience that he had planned to take his own life that weekend. The reason he had been carrying all his books home was so his mother would not have to clean out his school locker. A gasp went through the crowd as this handsome, popular boy described the darkest moment of his life. Then Kyle looked at Mike and smiled, saying, *"Thankfully, my friend saved me from doing the unspeakable."*

Friends, you never know when a small word of gospel encouragement or a kind gospel witness of Jesus' grace, in word or deed, will not only change a person's life in the *present*, but also for *eternity*. A simple act of kindness in Jesus' name holds out hope of salvation. It is rare, of course, for a small, simple act of kindness to have such a great impact as in Kyle's case, but success and big results are not our concern, are they? What Jesus wants us to do is join Him in the King's Commission. He will see to the results.