

INTRODUCTION

This morning I'm resuming the teaching series from 2 Corinthians entitled, "Hope for Cracked Pots." Our message from 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 today is entitled "Blind-sighted by God." If you're driving along and another car suddenly hits you from the side, it's called getting blind-sided. This scripture speaks of spiritual blindness and light. I want to show you how you can be blind-*sighted* (not blind-sided) by God.

There was a #1 hit song in 1997 entitled "Blinded by the Light" written by Bruce Springsteen and recorded by Manfred Man's Earth Band. You could understand the first phrase "Blinded by the light" but the words that followed were hard to understand, so most people just mumbled them. The actual words were, "Blinded by the light—revved up like a deuce (as in a deuce coupe) another runner in the night."

For all of us baby boomers who listened to songs like that, we're getting pretty old. I'm thinking about putting together a new CD collection of remixed songs for aging Baby Boomers. "For the first time on one CD you get songs like: Herman's Hermits singing: "Mrs. Brown, You've got a lovely walker." Or who can forget this classic by the Bee Gees: "How do you mend a broken hip?" And thrill to this disco hit by Leo Sayer: "You Make me Feel like Napping." Also on this collection you get Roberta Flack's soul-stirring ballad: "The First Time Ever I Forgot your Face." And Paul Simon's rendition of "50 Ways to Lose your Liver." You'll also receive the king of soul music, Mr. Marvin Gaye, singing: "I Heard it Through the Grape Nuts." And the Temptations singing, "Papa's Got a Kidney Stone." Included in this collection is the hit by the Scandinavian group Abba singing: "Denture Queen." And for all the ladies out there, you'll hear Bobby Darin singing: "Splish, Splash, I was Havin' a Flash." Finally, to round out this amazing CD, you'll get the legendary Ringo Starr singing: "I Get By with a Little Help from Depends." Don't wait. Call now for your CD. Operators are standing by!

Popular songs come and go, but the Word of God is timeless. In 2 Corinthians 4:1-6 we're going to learn about how you can be blind-sighted by God.

2 Corinthians 4:1-6: Therefore, [remember, never start reading the Bible with the word "therefore." You must always go back and see what is written before to see what the "therefore" is there for! In the last part of chapter 3 Paul wrote about how Moses wore a veil over his face, and the glory of God faded. But we, with unveiled faces continually reflect the Lord's glory – 3:18] Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. [There's the blindness we're going to talk about, and here's the light we're going to discuss.] For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ."

Paul wrote in verse 2 that he was going to "set forth the truth plainly." In this message I want to give you the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about our ministry; the truth about Satan's strategy; and then the truth about Jesus' identity. First, let's discover:

1. THE SECRET FOR EFFECTIVE MINISTRY: Don't give up!

The Bible says in verse 1, "since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart." Remember, there were some critics of Paul in the church at Corinth. They were telling the other church members that Paul couldn't be trusted. He faced opposition, but Paul's ministry motto was: "Don't lose heart!" "Don't give up!" There was a bloodthirsty group of Jewish radicals who followed Paul wherever he went and they stirred up opposition to his ministry. Because of their vitriolic opposition, Paul had been arrested, stoned, and imprisoned many times. Yet in spite of all these hardships, Paul didn't quit. He kept on preaching Jesus.

Today, there is still opposition to anyone who is bold enough to claim Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. Nobody is stoning us in America yet, but there is a movement in our country to make it illegal a Christian to publicly proclaim that the Bible says God's definition for marriage is one woman and one man.

It's easy to get discouraged in the ministry. I read recently that every year in America, 1,000 people leave the vocational ministry. And sadly, for many more, they don't leave the ministry, instead they stay in the ministry, but the ministry leaves them, and they just go through the motions. Over the past 35 years, I've talked and prayed with hundreds of downtrodden discouraged servants of God. My counsel to them is the same advice that Paul gives, "don't give up! Don't lose heart!"

But this message of encouragement isn't just for those few who serve in places of vocational ministry. One of our core values at Green Acres is that EVERY member is a minister. If you sing in the choir, you're in the ministry. If you pass out bulletins, you're in the ministry. If you're a greeter in your SMBS class, you're in the ministry. I'm passionate about convincing you that God didn't save you so you could simply come to church and be a spectator. God saved you so you can be involved in some area of service, some ministry.

Volunteer ministers get discouraged too. I've known Bible Study teachers who taught for years, and suddenly found themselves burned out. When you work with preschoolers or children, it takes a tremendous amount of energy and commitment for you to show up every Sunday to love and to teach them. It's easy to get tired and discouraged when you've done that for years. But God's word to every tired, discouraged servant today is: DON'T GIVE UP! DON'T LOSE HEART!

Did you hear about the two frogs who were hopping along beside each other one day? They hopped into a dairy barn. They were thirsty and happened upon an open milk can. Nearly dying of thirst, they jumped in feet first, and immediately sank. The first frog surfaced gasping for air and said, "Oh no! We're going to drown, we can't get out of this can!" The second frog said, "No, if we keep paddling our feet, we'll stay afloat." But the panicked first frog said, "But we

can't paddle forever! I'm scared!" The second, wiser frog said, "Don't stop. Just keep paddling." After awhile, the first frog said, "It's too hard! I'm quitting." I don't have to tell you what happened to that frog. It was easier to complain and give up than to keep kicking. And what he feared most happened because he gave up.

But the second frog kept on kicking away, and soon a funny thing happened. As always happens with milk, the cream rises to the top. The persistent frog had stirred up the milk so much that the thicker cream rose higher and higher. He kept kicking until the cream raised him to the lid of the can and he jumped out and survived! Which frog describes your attitude? If you're ever tempted to give up and quit, just remember that second frog. Keep on kicking! Keep on serving! Keep on trusting! Keep on ministering, and God will carry you through your times of discouragement.

2. THE KEY TO SATAN'S STRATEGY: To blind you to God's truth

Part of the criticism leveled at Paul was that not everyone was responding to his preaching. He points out that the reason the gospel is veiled is because "The god of this age (that's Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel." Satan actively opposes the preaching of the gospel. The word "satan" means "adversary." If you're going to defeat your enemy it's important to know something about him. In this verse there are three things we can learn about Satan.

(1) The devil's domain—he's called "the god (small g) of this age"

In this present time, Satan has a limited amount of power and status. You may recall when Satan was tempting Jesus he took Him to a high mountain and showed him all the splendor of all the kingdoms of the world. Satan said, "All this I will give you if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus didn't argue with Satan's claim that he owned the worldly kingdoms. At the Last Supper, Jesus even called Satan "the prince of this world."

Where did we get the false notion that Satan is some hideous-looking creature living in hell as the boss of the underworld? We got that from Dante's *Inferno* and John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but we didn't get it from the Bible. Actually the Bible says Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. One day, the devil WILL be cast into a bottomless pit for 1,000 years, and after that Revelation 20:10 says he will be thrown into a lake of fire and will be tormented there for ever and ever. But he's not there yet. Now he's free to roam about this world like a roaring lion trying to scare and intimidate people. The devil knows he has been limited to this time, and he will spend eternity in torment, so he's trying to take as many people with him to that destiny as he possibly can.

(2) The devil's target—he primarily targets unbelievers

The Bible teaches that Satan has many strategies. He is the accuser of the brethren, he is the tempter, and he spreads lies. But the first task listed on Satan's job description is to prevent people from becoming a follower of Jesus Christ. He still targets believers, but he keeps his big guns aimed at men, women, boys and girls who aren't yet believers. He knows one day every

knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord, so he tries to prevent people from doing it before they die.

That's why we must be aware of the reality of spiritual warfare. Whenever you are talking to a non-believer about Christ, there are invisible forces at work to keep that person from becoming a Christian. I've seen so many weird things happen just at the point when a person is considering whether or not to accept Christ. I recall talking to a young couple who weren't Christians a few years ago. At just the point when I was about to ask them if they wanted to accept Christ, their little baby started screaming, and we had to stop the conversation. I was talking to a man earlier this summer about turning his life over to Christ and when I was at the point of asking him if he wanted to pray and receive Christ his cell phone rang. He looked at it and said, "I've got to get this excuse me." I've seen wasps fly around a person's head; dogs bark; or television sets suddenly get louder. Satan will use anything he can to distract a person at the point of salvation. If you're here today and haven't yet trusted Christ, then the devil will use everything and anything possible to keep you from coming to Christ.

(3) The devil's method—he tries to veil the light

In the last chapter Paul wrote about the veil Moses wore over his face, and he continues this image of the veil, but in this case he says Satan's plan is to place a "think" veil between God's truth and the mind of an unbeliever. There are at least three truths Satan wants to keep covered from you. He wants to conceal the truth that you are a sinner in need of a Savior. He whispers, "You're a good person, you don't need Jesus." Satan also wants to conceal the truth about Jesus. He doesn't mind you thinking that Jesus was a great teacher like Plato or Buddha. He just doesn't want you to believe Jesus is the sinless Son of God and the only way to heaven.

Satan even wants to hide the truth about who he is. Satan doesn't want you to believe in him, or to bow down and worship him. In fact, he wants to stay incognito. If you tell a person without Christ that Satan is blinding their minds the most common answer you'll get is, "That's impossible! I don't even BELIEVE in the devil!" You don't have to believe in the law of gravity to fall on your face either, but it's real.

The devil is a liar. Thomas Brooks wrote: "Satan promises the best, but pays with the worst; he promises honor but pays with disgrace; he promises pleasure and pays with pain; he promises profit and pays with loss; he promises life and pays with death." He's the prince of darkness, but thankfully, we're going to see that God's light is brighter and more powerful than Satan's blindness.

3. THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS' IDENTITY: The best picture of God you'll ever see

People are searching for the truth. The main truth Satan tries to blind people to is that Jesus is the only way to heaven. It's not politically correct to say that, and it's such plain truth that some people can't handle it.

They remind me of the story I heard about man who was out on the west coast on a business trip. He called his wife back in Georgia to check in. During the course of the conversation he said, "How's my dog?"

His wife said, "Your dog died."

"Oh honey, don't be so honest. Why didn't you break the news more slowly? You ruined my trip!"

"What do you mean?"

He said, "Well, when I asked how my dog was you could have said, 'He's outside under a tree right now.' Then when I called from Phoenix the next day you could have said, 'The dog is a little sick.' Then the next day when I called from Dallas you could have said, 'I took the dog to the vet.' Then when I called from New Orleans, then you could have said, 'Sorry, but the dog died.' See? That way you could have broken the news to me more slowly."

"Okay," she said. "I've got it now. I'll do better next time."

"By the way, how's my mother?"

(pause)

"Uh, she's outside under a tree right now."

I'm not going to break it to you slowly. Here's the plain truth about Jesus:

(1) Only belief in Jesus as Lord can save

He wrote, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord." (vs. 5) Paul was saying that his preaching was NOT about himself; he was just the messenger to proclaim, "Jesus is Lord."

Sometimes if we make the mistake of turning salvation into a Texas two-step. Step one: you accept Jesus as your Savior; then step two: You enthrone Jesus as Lord in your life. But you can't really accept Jesus accept Jesus as Savior, and reject Him as Lord.

Every year, all the people living in the Roman Empire were required to pay a poll tax and recite the words, "*Kaiser estin kurios.*" (Caesar is Lord). This profession was required by law to enforce the allegiance of the people. But the early Christians refused. Instead they said, "*IESOUS ESTIN KURIOS!*" That's why many of them were arrested and executed for treason. These early Christians didn't say, "Jesus WAS Lord when He walked among us." They didn't say, "Jesus WILL BE Lord when He returns." They declared, "Jesus IS Lord!" That's why the Bible says, "If you confess with your lips, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved!" (Romans 10:9)

(2) Only God can turn on the light in a darkened mind

So if Satan blinds us, how then can we be saved? Simple. God blind-sights us. The Bible says, "(He) made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (vs. 6) If you want to gaze on God's glory, just look at the face of Jesus. In this one verse Paul unites the two most profound spiritual events in history. First, he refers to Creation. God spoke into the midst of chaos and darkness and said, "Let there be light!" And

there was light. Second, Paul takes this creation illustration and uses it to refer to the point of our salvation—the new creation.

Until a person accepts Christ their life is like the formless chaos that existed before the creation. It's into that chaotic void that God comes and says to each of us, "Let there be light!" And suddenly, when God turns on the light, we are set free from Satan's blindness. God blind-sights us. As Hank Williams used to sing, "I saw the light. I saw the light. No more darkness no more night; now I'm so happy, no sorrow in sight. Praise the Lord, I saw the light!" That's what happens when God turns on the light in a darkened, blinded mind.

CONCLUSION

I love dramatic conversion stories of how people who were spiritually blind and living in darkness were blind-sighted by God. That's what happened to Paul. He was blind to the truth about Jesus to the point that he arrested Christians and approved their execution. Then one day on the road to Damascus, God said, "Let there be light!" and God blind-sighted him.

2,000 years later God is still blind-sighting people. He blind-sighted me when I was nine years old. Let me tell you about another guy who was blind-sighted a few years ago. If you watch television or movies you've probably seen actor Stephen Baldwin. He has starred in over 65 films. As one of the notorious Baldwin brothers, he had a reputation in New York for being a party animal. His older brother Alex said that Stephen was "the greatest playboy in the annals of Manhattan nightlife." Stephen admits today he was hopelessly addicted to drugs and alcohol and was living a wasteful life.

Stephen's wife, Kennya, is from Brazil, so a few years ago they hired a Brazilian nanny named Augusta, to clean their home and take care of their two young children. Augusta was a vibrant Christian who couldn't speak English, but she knew English songs about Jesus, so she was constantly singing them as she worked. One day Kennya, who speaks Portuguese, asked Augusta to tell her more about Jesus. When she did, Augusta doubled over laughing. Kennya said, "What's so funny?" Augusta said, "It's funny that you think I came here to clean your house. But before I left Brazil God told me that I was coming to lead both of you to Christ and that you will both serve Him through a ministry." When Kennya translated that to Stephen he laughed and said, "That'll never happen!"

After a couple of years, Kennya did become a Christian, but Stephen was still living in darkness. August and Kennya were praying for him and sharing Christ with him, but he was blind to the truth. They told him Jesus was going to return, and his only reply was "impossible."

But on 9/11, when the jets slammed into the World Trade Center, and the Pentagon, God got his attention. He said if someone had asked him on September 10 if it was possible for a handful of terrorists to bring our nation to a complete stop, he would have answered, "Impossible."

To quote Stephen: "After 9/11 I realized that Jesus Christ could come back to this planet. Then the next thought I had was, if that's true, then where am I at with everything that represents? And

this incredible quantum leap occurred in my heart. I'm a skydiver—and I decided to go the other way. I decided that I was going to become the most insane follower of Christ."

Stephen said he walked out behind his house and climbed up on a boulder and lifted his hands to the sky and said, "I'm telling you, Lord, that I give myself to you. I fully dedicate myself to you a thousand percent. You want me to stand on a box in Times Square and be mocked for being a Christian, I will. I'll be mocked in Hollywood. I don't care what they say about me, just as long as you reveal yourself to me in the most powerful way you can."

God gloriously opened Stephen's eyes that day. He had been walking in darkness, blind to the truth, and God blind-sighted him. And Augusta was right about the ministry part too. Since becoming a Christian, Stephen has partnered with Kevin Palau and started an evangelistic ministry using skateboarders and BMXer's to share Christ with young people across America.

If you're a follower of Christ, you share the same testimony as the Apostle Paul and Stephen Baldwin. There was a time when you were living in the darkness of sin, and God came into your life and said, "Let there be light!" And He blind-sighted you with the truth about Jesus. For some, it came like a brilliant flash-bulb of revelation that left you seeing spots. For others, the light of truth came more gradually, like a sunrise peaking over the horizon. But all of us who have been blind-sighted by God can relate to these words written by John Newton: "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now I'm found; was blind but now I see."

Maybe you're listening to me today and you consider yourself a spiritual seeker, or even a skeptic. You're interested, or perhaps merely curious about being a Christian, but right now your honest opinion about it is, "I just don't see it." Thanks for being honest. But if you don't see the truth about Jesus, will you at least entertain the possibility that there may be a malevolent presence in this world who is trying to keep you blind to the truth?

If you'll welcome Him, the Spirit of the Living God can come into your heart and mind. Into your confusion, chaos, and darkness He says, "LET THERE BE LIGHT!" Look out! God is ready to blind-sight you today!

OUTLINE

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"since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart." (vs. 1)

2. THE KEY TO SATAN'S STRATEGY: To blind you to God's truth

- (1) The devil's domain—the god of this age
- (2) The devil's target—unbelievers
- (3) The devil's method—veil the light

3. THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS' IDENTITY: The best picture of God you'll ever see

- (1) Only belief in Jesus as Lord can save

"For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord." (vs. 5)

- (2) Only God can turn on the light in a darkened mind

"(He) made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." (vs. 6)



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes