

## **“What is the point?” 2 Corinthians 4:3-6**

**And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

If you were asked – who were the greatest preachers ever, or perhaps the most influential preachers and theologians ever – what would you say? Who comes to mind? Perhaps, we could suggest – Jesus from Nazareth.

Perhaps, also Saul from Tarsus, whom we know as Paul the apostle. And a bit subjectively we as Lutherans may suggest our Dr Martin Luther. I think the case could quite easily be made that these three men have shaped the world more than anyone else. At least when it comes to shaping it for good.

What did they preach? What did they teach? They revealed to us our situation before the holy God. We call it preaching the Law. They did it clearly, pointedly, boldly, they didn’t pull their punches, nor feared consequences.

Then they revealed the grace of God; what the Triune God has done for us and what He hopes for us. Jesus lived out God’s attitude towards us. For our sake He humbled Himself and become one of us. For our sake, He lived among us.

He invited everyone who is heavy laden to come to Him and to have rest. He said that He has come not only to serve us, but also to lay down His life for us. He called us – His friends, and His brothers and sisters, His family.

Paul became an imitator of Christ. He preached the same message: “No one is righteous, no! no one seeks for God.” (Rom 3:11) Harsh? It is in Paul’s letters where we can read the most wonderful proclamation of the Gospel of grace.

You were guilty before God, but now Jesus justifies you. He takes your guilt and gives you His innocence. You were in enmity with God, and now Jesus reconciles you with the Father, and the Father looks at you with favour.

You were enslaved to sin, death and devil, now Jesus redeems you, He frees you from all these oppressors and gives you a new life, He makes you His own. You were sinful, unclean and corrupt, doomed for eternal condemnation.

Jesus makes you a new creation, He offers you wonderful eternal future enclosed by His family. You were separated from the true God, now Jesus sends His Holy Spirit to dwell with you and in you, and embraces you in the divine and the most intimate fellowship with the Trinity.

Luther, an ordinary man, and at the same time a chosen tool of the Holy Spirit for our sake restored the preaching and teaching of this most wonderful Gospel of God's grace in its truth and purity.

He taught that we can not even comprehend our own sinfulness, but need to learn it from the Word of God. He preached again and again and again... that our God is God of grace and mercy and undeserved forgiveness.

That by His grace alone He commits to devote Himself to us. That all that we need to receive His priceless gifts of forgiveness and eternal life is – to trust Him, to cling to His kindly offered hand. He will do the rest. For us...

Great, magnificent preaching and teaching by these three! We can read and listen to their heart-warming and new life-giving message and exclaim: "Oh, if only we had preachers and teachers like these three, how much we would appreciate their message!"

But don't rush! Remember how their listeners appreciated them? Yes, broken sinners streamed to them. But then there were religious people... and Jesus was given the gift of rejection, beating, mocking and crucifixion. Paul was persecuted, slandered, backstabbed his whole ministry and then beheaded.

Luther lived as an outlaw and at the end of his life wrote to his dear "rib" Kathy that he was so disheartened with the people of Wittenberg, who seemed to despise the Gospel of grace, that he didn't want to return that the town anymore.

How would we have received their preaching? Those three were never good enough to their listeners. They never preached and taught what people wanted to hear. When Jesus tried to engage with the crowds of His supposed followers, they left... for what He was preaching was just too heavy for them...

The same was true about Paul, the same was true about Luther. The Word of God was just too hard, too heavy... who could listen to it! How is it too hard? How is it too heavy? For whom? What sort of efforts do people make?

Sure, the Bible is not like almost everything in our entertainment saturated culture. It requires some efforts to understand it. I can tell you what pastors do. What it takes for us to prepare a sermon or a Bible study.

It takes careful reading and re-reading of the Biblical text. Sometimes it may require going to the original Hebrews and Greek texts to clarify the fine points. Then comes reading and studying commentaries and books written by the Church's brightest teachers.

Then it takes contemplating of our current cultural situation and meditations of how the word of God speaks into our situation, what it reveals, what it teaches. It takes prayers and writing and rewriting of our thoughts until we feel ready.

The golden rule taught in seminaries is that 1 min of sermon requires 1 hour of preparation. And, sure, pastors have their specific calling, to study the Word, to agonize with it, to digest it and then to bring it to their fellow saints so they can easily receive and enjoy it. How hard and heavy is this to ordinary Christians?

Sure, we still need to bring ourselves to the Service or to the study, we still need to listen what has been prepared for us. Christian life is not easy. If only we had preachers and teachers like Jesus, or Paul, or Luther... then...

Brothers and sisters, just think about this illustration. Imagine, that you received a message that contains directions to this incredible medicine. It would make you so healthy that you would never need to worry about any health issues ever. Besides, you could freely share it with others, and it would never run out.

It's just that the message is not exactly that clear as to get it with the first attempt. What do we do? "Oh... too hard...". Do you know many who would have such reaction? Here we have the message from the Creator of the Universe. He Himself explains what His message gives to us:

"[All of this is] written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31)  
Eternal bliss in New Heavens and New Earth seeing Jesus as He is; no more sin, nor death, nor crying, just eternal joy and blessedness. It is too heavy?

Paul was dealing with similar attitudes among Christians in Corinth. This is what he wrote: **"And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing."** It was not his preaching and teaching that was too heavy, or boring, or not relevant to their situation. The problem was in the hearts of his listeners.

The Gospel is clear. It only remains veiled to those who are perishing. Why is that so? Paul continues: **"In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."**

What does the Gospel do? Paul puts it brilliantly. The Gospel enlightens us, it illuminates us. It reveals us the truth. The Gospel helps us to see the glory of Christ, it reveals what an incredibly beautiful person our Saviour is.

For He is the image of God. When you see Jesus, you see God. When you look at Jesus, you learn about God attitude towards you. Direct and harsh to those who imagine that they are better than others. Gentle and forgiving to those who come as beggars with repentant hearts. The Gospel shows us God in Jesus.

If someone expects that the Gospel will tell them how good they are, how much they have done, or will entertain them, or teach some self-help techniques, then the Gospel, this most wonderful and life-giving news, remains veiled.

Paul goes on: **"For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake."** This theme sounds in Paul's letter again and again.

People looked at Paul and his fellow workers with suspicion, as if they were trying to gain something for themselves. Surely, there always have been enough preachers who choose carefully only what people want to hear. They don't preach Jesus; they don't preach repentance or forgiveness. Instead, they tell funny stories and give motivational speeches.

And you know, they usually attract great crowds, those may be among the most numerous congregations. That is not surprising at all. As Paul warns elsewhere: “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.” (2 Tim 4:3)

Concluding for today – what is the point of heeding to the Word? Why do we need it preached and taught week in and week out? **“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”**

Paul had seen the risen and ascended Jesus, and not just once. Paul had been taken up to the third heaven, and seen realities that words can’t describe. Peter, John and James had witnessed Jesus transfiguration, as we read today in our Gospel reading. More than 500 people had seen the risen Jesus appearing to them. They all had seen the true God.

They had seen the Holy One who said in the beginning: “Let light shine out of darkness!” They had seen God who has now begun His new creation. This God had shone into their hearts, and this marvellous God also shines in our hearts.

We may not have seen and experienced what those fellow saints saw and witnessed with their own eyes. That’s okay, for the Triune God still longs to give us the knowledge of His glory even today.

He does it by speaking in His word, and when we listen to Him, He allows us to experience and participate in His story. Then with the help of the Holy Spirit we begin to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ as He serves us.

As He humbly comes to dwell with us in that rural place of Nazareth, in that harsh time of Roman rule. As He undertakes ordinary vocations of a son to His earthly parents Mary and Joseph, of a brother to His brothers and sisters, of a carpenter – serving His neighbours with His own hands. The eternal Son...

As He begins to reveal His generous and gentle heart by preaching, healing, serving, and loving real sinners who deserve none of that. How He delivers Himself to be executed for what we have done.

And as He rises triumphant, the Lord of lords and the King of king, the Ruler Supreme to whom all authority is given in heaven and on earth. As your God, as your Protector, as your Brother.

I pray that the god of this world would have nothing against us, that we all would gladly listen and embrace the Gospel of Jesus Christ, unveiled and glorious in its beauty and power, and that the light of God’s glory would shine brightly not only in our hearts, but through us into this world.

Amen.