**Be Encouraged – 2 Corinthians 6:8-10**

Proving the Gospel Works (Part Three)

Turn with me to our text in 2 Corinthians 6; we have been looking at what it means to prove the gospel works and we are looking at verses 3-10. Here, in this passage of scripture, Paul is proving that his message is the real thing, it is authentic, it is not just a phase he is going through, and it is not something he uses to manipulate people to promote his ministry. The message the Paul preached is about Jesus and not himself, it’s about the power of the Holy Spirit and not his own power, it is about the hope of heaven and not just the earthy hope.

So far, Paul has proven the authenticity of his ministry by the way he has handled some of the most difficult circumstances of life and by the way it has grown him, matured him and developed in him. Nothing preaches louder than a faith that endures, survives, and even thrives in the midst of difficulties, and a faith that is active, alive, growing and developing, making a person a greater example of Jesus to this world. Church, how we lean on our faith and how we allow God to develop our faith has a great impact on how we share our faith.

* **How we lean on our faith and how God develops our faith impacts the way we share our faith.**

There is nothing more powerful than a life that practices what it preaches. **Amen.** That is what Paul did; through all the trials, persecution and loss, Paul remained faithful. Through all of the hurt, rejection and abandonment Paul allowed God to do a work in him; a work the changed him. How many of us desire the same thing? I want my life to not only make a difference but also show a difference.

This morning as we complete this mini-series, Paul speaks to the church about another evidence of authentic faith and goods news. Let’s look at our text in **2 Corinthians 6:3-10** (specifically in verse 8-10):

*3 We live in such a way that no one will stumble because of us, and no one will find fault with our ministry. 4 In everything we do, we show that we are true ministers of God. We patiently endure troubles and hardships and calamities of every kind. 5 We have been beaten, been put in prison, faced angry mobs, worked to exhaustion, endured sleepless nights, and gone without food. 6 We prove ourselves by our purity, our understanding, our patience, our kindness, by the Holy Spirit within us,\* and by our sincere love. 7 We faithfully preach the truth. God’s power is working in us. We use the weapons of righteousness in the right hand for attack and the left hand for defense.* ***8 We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. We are honest, but they call us impostors. 9 We are ignored, even though we are well known. We live close to death, but we are still alive. We have been beaten, but we have not been killed. 10 Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything.***

This world is not our home, this world is not our goal, and this world is not our priority. Church, we live in a tension between heaven and earth, and it’s not easy to stand for something when people and things around us oppose us. **Amen.** I am not talking about people having justified accusations against the hypocrisy of the church; what I am talking about is the dichotomy of being a Christian in a non-Christian environment.

Every day we walk out into this world, we are faced with opposition. And to keep up our stance as followers of Christ in the midst of it all is hard and difficult. No one knew this more than the Apostle Paul who faced it all simply because he declared the good news of Jesus; it was a message that changed him and others, and yet people were so offended and enraged by it. Paul told the Corinthians in **1 Corinthians 1:23-24**:

*23So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Jews are offended and the Gentiles say it’s all nonsense. 24But to those called by God to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles,\* Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

The question for us this morning is “what do we do when we face opposition to our faith?” It’s one thing to face the stresses, the heartache and the losses in life, but what do we do when our faith is being brought into question? When there are those who are doing all they can to disqualify us and ridicule in an effort to weaken the message we possess? Does our faith go undercover or do we stand tall in the midst of accusations and ridicule so that our faith shines through? Peter wrote in **1 Peter 2:11-12**:

*11 Dear friends, I warn you as “temporary residents and foreigners” to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls. 12 Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world.*

In others words,

* **The way the world reacts to our demonstrations of faith should have no bearing on our obedience to God.**

We are to obey God no matter what. That is what Paul tells us in **verse 8**, *“We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. We are honest, but they call us impostors.”* That’s hard to do isn’t it? It is difficult not to have a reactive faith (repeat). When someone doesn’t agree with us it is difficult not to let it affect or influence us. And yet the opposite is true as well; when someone does agree with us, or even honors us and puts us on a pedestal it is hard not to let it affect us or influence us. Reactive faith.

* **The only reaction we should have is to God; all other reactions are either self-preservation or self-promotion.**

The way the world reacts to our message and our living out our faith should have no impact on our focus and worship of God. We serve God whether people speak highly of us or not, we serve God whether they make fun of us or not, we remain honest even when they question our motives, we let our lives shine even whey others tell us it has no influence. The only one our faith is to react to is God and his leading. **Amen.**

Paul was not moved by people’s opinion of him. In fact, Paul writes in **1 Thessalonians 2:4-6**:

*4 For we speak as messengers approved by God to be entrusted with the Good News. Our purpose is to please God, not people. He alone examines the motives of our hearts. 5 Never once did we try to win you with flattery, as you well know. And God is our witness that we were not pretending to be your friends just to get your money! 6 As for human praise, we have never sought it from you or anyone else.*

What people said about Paul didn’t affect what he did. And even more important though is that no matter what did to Paul, it didn’t affect what he did either. In **verse 9** Paul gives us a list: “*We live close to death, but we are still alive. We have been beaten, but we have not been killed. 10 Our hearts ache, but we always have joy. We are poor, but we give spiritual riches to others. We own nothing, and yet we have everything.”*

Even though Paul faced murderous threats, even though he was punished and beaten, even though he faced the heaviness, uneasiness and the grievous acts done against him, even though he did get the honor he deserved and faced lack because of it, Paul didn’t lose hope. His faith helped him to see that he was truly living, he was blessed, he had much to rejoice in and be glad about, he had spiritual riches to give away that meant more than earthly treasures, and he had everything he really needed. Church…

* **No matter what people say or do to us because of our faith, remember who you have and what you have in Jesus Christ.**

There is much to celebrate. **Amen**. And in the end we will have everything we truly need because that is the way our God is. The key is to stay focused on what really matters without letting the distractions to come and undermine what God is trying to do in us and through us. Paul told the Philippians church (**Philippians 4:11-13**):

*11 Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. 12 I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. 13 For I can do everything through Christ,\* who gives me strength.*

A theologians once put it this way:

*The minister of Christ surrenders in a large measure his right to a place in this world, to the honor of this world, to the wealth of this world. But through surrendering it all, though it seems he may be literally throwing away his life, in Christ he has everything.*

Life on earth is not about people’s opinions of us, or the things we possess, or the titles we have achieved;…

* **Life on earth is about walking out our God-given calling.**

And for each of us that is going to look different. The faith journey that God has for me will be different for you, and vice versa. But, is the main goal of our lives to love and serve God? And will you do that no matter what it looks like or what it requires of you? When we read the great chapter of faith in Hebrews 11 we read that each person’s journey with God led them into different paths. **Hebrews 11:32-39**:

*32How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets. 33By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, 34quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. 35Women received their loved ones back again from death.*

*But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. 36Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. 37Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half,\* and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. 38They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.*

*39All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised.*

Does that sound like God’s calling is the same for everyone? Some accomplished incredible feats, while others suffered, but what really matters is that they kept their eyes on God and his will and purposes for their lives. Are we willing to serve God no matter what? Because…

* **Proving the gospel works only happens when we live out our God-given destiny and purpose no matter what.**

Paul told the Romans in **Romans 12:6-8**:

*6 In his grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. 7 If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. 8 If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly.*

Use whatever gift or calling God has given you and he will use it for his glory. React to God, not the world. And when things get rough because of it, remember Paul’s word in **2 Corinthians 4:17-18**:

*17 For our present troubles are small and won’t last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever! 18 So we don’t look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.*

Trust God to work in your life and through your life as you serve him. Amen. Let’s pray.