

The light of the gospel

2 Corinthians 4.3-6; Mark 9.2-8

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In our church, we often speak of the Gospel. And every week we read from the Gospels, we read from the Gospel of Mark today. Gospel means, Good News. When we speak of the four Gospels, we actually mean, four books that describe the Gospel. But what then is the Gospel, what is the Good News?

Today I like to think about this question based on what we read from the letter of St Paul to the Corinthians.

1. The light of the gospel...

St Paul uses a sentence full of meaning, that we will explore somewhat. He writes about the “light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”. Let us try to unpack that sentence step by step.

The “light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God”.

Of unbelievers, Paul says that their mind is blinded so that they cannot see the light. Blind people cannot see light, that's logical. Spiritually blind people cannot see the spiritual light - just as logical. Paul actually speaks specifically about Jewish people who do not believe in Jesus Christ, but he could just as well have spoken of any person not following Christ.

People who are spiritually alive, *they* see the light of the gospel. For us, it is visible.

But what does it mean, that we see the light of the gospel?

Two things. First, it means that we see the gospel that in itself is a light. If we speak of the light of the sun, we think of that thing in the sky that is a bright light.

The Gospel that we believe in is such a bright light. It gives joy, it gives warmth. It gives life. We rejoice in the message of Jesus Christ; we rejoice in our reconciliation with God. We are happy that we have the Gospel as a precious treasure. It makes our day.

But the term ‘the light of the Gospel’ also has a second meaning - just like the light of the sun has a second meaning. The light of the



sun is not only the sun itself, but it is also the light that it shines that helps us see all things as they are.

And that is what the Gospel is *also* doing for us. It helps us understand the world we live in. It gives us insight in who we are. It makes us enjoy our daily life more. Knowing God has made us new people who live a different life because we see the whole world in a different light.

God himself shone this light into our hearts, Paul writes. He shone into *your* heart. The minds of the unbelievers are blinded, but God went straight to our heart, to enlighten us.

The minds of those who do not follow Jesus Christ just *cannot* imagine how in the world we can believe and follow Jesus Christ. They joke about our faith; they joke about us.

But God has touched us in the heart of our existence. It does not mean we have it all worked out in our brain. How could we - our faith is about God who explodes our brains - or he would not be God.

But he did speak to us in the core of our being. We have received the Gospel light in our hearts, that is why we believe in him, and only slowly can we also work things out, to a very limited extent, with our mind.

Paul compares this work of God in our life with creation. All was dark, but then God said: Let there be light.' And likewise, God also shone light in our hearts.

I love that comparison between creation and what God has done in us. He made us into a new creation. Church Father John Chrysostom once preached about this and noted that for God, *creation* was easy. He just said 'let there be light'. But for piercing our hearts with the Gospel, the spoken Word was not enough. God could not just speak, but the Word - God himself - had to become a man.

That is the Gospel - the good news of God who came to us, for the sake of his Kingdom, for the sake of saving us, for the sake of forever reconciling us to him. For us being forever in a relationship of love with God.

The Gospel is not a theology - although we need theology to explain it - but the *reality* of the Gospel is that God has come to you. It is about Christ who comes to you.

2 of the glory of Christ...

Paul underlines that the Gospel is not a theory, but about Jesus Christ. He calls it the "gospel of the glory of Christ". It is really the glory of Christ that pierced our heart.



We did not become followers of Christ because someone told us a good theory; we follow him, we believe in him, because something very *direct* happened to us. This is comparable to what happened to Peter and James and John, when Jesus led them up a high mountain. They saw Jesus ‘transfigured before them, and his clothes became radiant, intensely white.’

They met with the glory of Christ; they saw the Gospel before them. Efforts to put it all in words are good, and usefull, and we need to carefully express our faith in words.

But in the end, it is about meeting with Jesus Christ. That is the Gospel. It is God reaching out to us. That is the Gospel. It is about the glory of Christ that came into our life.

This word glory - *doxa* in Greek, *kabod* in Hebrew - is the same word used often in the Old Testament for the presence of God in his temple. Israel had been waiting for the return of God to his temple for hundreds of years. And now, finally, God had returned in his glory.

Jesus often spoke of his own glory. Especially in the Gospel of John the theme is important. Let me give some examples.

First, when Jesus prays to his Father, shortly before he is to suffer on the cross, he prays: ‘And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.’

Before the world was created, Jesus was in the presence of the Father and he was glorious as the Father is glorious. And he prays that through the process of his death and ressurection and ascension, he may return to that same glory that he previously enjoyed with his Father.

And when Judas had left the place where Jesus celebrated his last Passover, Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him; if God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and will glorify him immediately.’

Those are strange words... as if the crucifixion itself was a glorification our Lord Jesus Christ. And indeed it was. Not his death in itself, but the fact that even to his last breath, Jesus loved God and loved his neighbour, that was his glory.

Finally a man who truly obeyed God against all odd! Finally someone who truly lived and died to honour and glorify God!

That is the Gospel, is it not? That is how God and humankind could be reconciled. Look at Jesus and you see the light of the Gospel.

In his prayer that we often call the ‘high-priestly prayer’, in John 17, Jesus prayed for us as well. ‘Father, I want those you have given me’ - his disciples, and that includes us - ‘I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.’

Jesus prayed that we will be with him in his glory. This is Gospel. This is Good News.

And Jesus also prayed to his Father, ‘I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.’

The Gospel is not a nice theology - it is about us being united with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jesus has given us the glory that he had, which he had received from the Father, so that we are fully at ease with God and God is at ease with us.

The light of the Gospel shone in our hearts - the glory of Christ entered into us. His illumination means God is in us. The glory of God returned and entered into his temple. Into you, believer in Jesus Christ.

3 ... who is the image of God.

We enjoy ‘the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ’. But Paul did not finish that sentence. He added, ‘Christ, who is the image of God.’

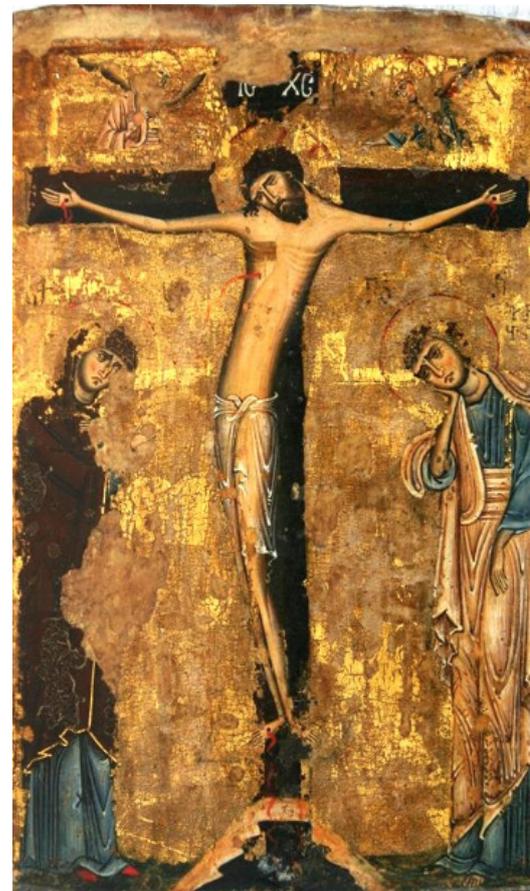
He is the image of God. In Hebrews 1, we read that Jesus Christ is ‘the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.’

And in Colossians 2, Paul says that ‘in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.’

The Gospel is not about difficult theology, so I will not make it too difficult, but with these carefully chosen words, the apostles underlined the complete divine unity of Jesus Christ and the Father. They are different but they can never be separated as they share the same divine glory.

And when Paul speaks about Jesus and God, it even seems they are interchangeable. We heard Paul speak about the ‘glory of Christ, who is the image of God’. And in the next verse he says that we know ‘the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.’

If you look at Jesus, you see God in his glory.



Paul calls Jesus the image of God. The Greek word for image is *icon*. Jesus is the icon of God.

In Egypt I have so often been to Coptic Orthodox churches where I could enjoy icons. And we have many in our home in Utrecht.

In the Coptic Church, they do not consider these icons as just pictures. They are believed to help people enter into the world that belongs to God. You stand in front of an icon, you may touch it, and by doing so in faith, people touch the world of God. They are windows into God's presence.

Compare it even with an icon on your computer. It is small, it is just a few bits. But you touch it and you are part of another world.

And is that not who Jesus is? You touch him, and by doing so, you are with God. You listen to Him, and you listen to God. To the three disciples on the mountain, God's voice from heaven said: 'This is my beloved Son; listen to him.'



This light has entered into our hearts; this Gospel is the heart of our existence. God is with you, through Jesus Christ. That is Good News!

Conclusion

So what to do with this? Touch Jesus Christ. Yes, okay, but that sounds too vague.

* Pray to him. Talk with him. Being in his presence has tremendous impact on your life. It heals the heart. It heals the soul. It is even good for the body.

* Think about him. Fill your mind with who he is, what he did, what he said.

* Do what God said when he spoke to his disciples from the cloud: If you have seen the glory of Jesus, then be serious about it and 'listen to him'. That means of course, listen and do.

That is the proper response to what God has done for us. That is acting in the "light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God". That we listen to him, and do what he says. And he summarized this by saying: "Love God, and love one another."

+ Amen