

SERMON NOTES & STUDY GUIDE • 2/26/17

MOVEMENT

Our sermon series, **MOVEMENT**, is an exploration of 2 Corinthians. The focus of the series is on the church. The church is not a building. The church is not even a conglomeration of people. The church is a movement, a group of people 'called out' (ekklesia) to meet and glorify God, and to represent His Kingdom to a broken world. The church doesn't sit still; it moves and grows. To be a Christian is to be on the move! Throughout this series we will explore what it means to be a part of this **Movement** of God.

CHRIST TO THE LOST • 2 Cor. 4:1-12 • Tim McConnell • February 26, 2017

Our worship schedule changes next month—March 26. Most are probably sticking with their closest worship service; others are changing their service, which reminded me of a joke. A boy was in the hall of the church reading the names on a memorial board, when the pastor came by. “Who’s this, pastor?” the boy asked. “Oh, those are very special members. Those are members of the church who died in the service.” The boy’s eyes got large and his face went pale. “Which service? 9:00 or 11:00?” Be careful which service you choose!

We are making a change to help us worship well, to simplify our Sunday mornings, and to make inviting friends easier. You might wonder, why make a change at all? Well, the church doesn’t have great traction these days. The church in the U.S., and our own church, have been in decline. Fewer and fewer people come to worship year after year. We need a turnaround. To reach people we haven’t reached before, we have to do things we haven’t done before. Let me put it this way, because it’s heavy on my heart: ten years of steady 5-6% decline and we face institutional collapse in 2027—we would not be able to carry on the same way. I am not going to be the last pastor of First Pres Colorado Springs. Can you commit to that with me? That’s just not going to happen. We are going to adapt, we are going to thrive, we are going to find our way into the next generation and be used of Christ to reach the lost and spiritually darkened of our times. This church is going to flourish for Jesus Christ, and one day long from today, we are going to hand off this church in strength to a generation as yet unborn. How? The same way the church always has—by renewing our commitment to the mission to bring the light of Christ to the lost.

Where have we been in this series with 2 Corinthians? We’ve seen how God wanted a church in Corinth. Not a temple to compete with the temple of Venus; not a theater to compete with the 15,000-seater where Sophocles and Euripides were made famous; not a coliseum to compete with the games, or a market to out-business the businesses. No. A church. A community. A gathering of a humble people saved by the grace of Jesus Christ and committed to the glory of His name. A community marked by certain characteristics—marked by comfort, hope, forgiveness and promise. It is not only marked, but it is overflowing. It is a movement, committed not only to experiencing these things but sharing them with the world around them, declaring deliverance to captives and confidence to the weak. It is fed on the Word of God, and

when the Word is preached and the truth of Jesus is proclaimed and the Holy Spirit of God blows down on this humble group, souls are unveiled and turn from eternal spiritual darkness to everlasting light and eternal life. More than any other mission, more than any other activity, this is the mission of the church—bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to the lost. Do you know? Do I even have to say it? The theater of Corinth is empty. The temples are in ruins. The church, there and from there spread around the world; the church lives. Don’t bet against the church of Jesus Christ.

Jesus set the mission for us before He ascended to heaven. Here are the last words Jesus said, as recorded by Matthew: “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (Matthew 28:16-20) See the primacy of worship there? “They worshiped him, ...then Jesus said to them...” Our purpose is worship and our mission is clear—go and make disciples of all people. Be a worshipping body that makes disciples wherever I put you. This is exactly the mission Paul reminds the Corinthian church about today.

Verses 1-4: “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 everyone’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 that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:1-4) God has given us a ministry. We do not lose heart. God has given us a mission, a cause, a viable ministry of taking the light and life of Jesus Christ into dark places and seeing the darkened unveiled, saved, restored in Jesus name. We do not lose heart. And we don’t have to use deception or parlor tricks or shameful trickery to do it either. We do not distort the Word of God. We set forth the truth plainly. But it’s an uphill battle. The forces of darkness

distort and deceive, blind minds, cover ears, shout down truth, reject God and His light. But we never lose track of our mission. We are a movement to bring Christ to the lost.

Verses 5-6: "For what we preach is not 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 God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:5-6) Some preachers just repeat things louder for emphasis. I'm tempted to shout these verses as loud as I can. We don't preach ourselves. We preach Christ. In fact, anyone who would truly glorify Christ cannot glorify themselves. Pastor Kent Hughes said, "When a man or woman exalts Christ, there is no room for self-exaltation." (2 Corinthians, p. 88) I am going to openly declare to you the glories of Jesus Christ. In your relationships, in your friendships, you are going to display Jesus—not your victories, not your personal conquests, not your power or success or self-promotion. Jesus. And in this the light of Christ shines in the darkness, in this we bring Christ to the lost.

Can the lost see Christ? Can light shine in darkness? Can the veiled be unveiled and see Jesus? In what I consider to be a breakthrough book by a friend of mine, Don Everts, called *I Once Was Lost*, Don explores the possibility of moving from non-belief to belief in Christ in our times. What he found working with InterVarsity Campus Ministry, is that it takes time. We like to think of conversion as an immediate event triggered by the right presentation of the right knowledge at the right time. While that can happen, most come to Christ on a journey of many steps crossing many thresholds. Don identifies five. First, a non-believer must trust a Christian. One of the stories in the book begins with a guy saying to a Christian he knew in his college dorm, "I knew you were a god-guy, and I wasn't the least bit interested in anything that came out of your mouth." Maybe that's where you are with a friend, with a relative. They've stopped listening. You need to build trust; they need to cross the trust threshold and you need to take them across it patiently. You need to be a friend. Do you ever think the erosion of simple friendship and neighborly is a satanic ploy to stop the gospel? Threshold of trust. Then comes curiosity, then opening up to life-change, then seeking after God, and only then accepting Christ and entering the Kingdom. These thresholds can be jumped across in an instant, but they often take years to traverse.

Can the lost ever see Christ? "Since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart." (2 Corinthians 4:1) You have a ministry. You are in the relationships you are in to bring Christ to the lost. Do not lose heart. Can the lost ever see Christ? Well, you did. "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 God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6) Can I just yell it? I want to yell it until we get it! Can the lost see Christ? You did! I did. The same God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," the same God who spun all things into being at creation, the same God who brought being itself out of nothing, who made life, who caused the sun to shine, who formed the mountains and the seas and the animals and the plants, the same God who made us, formed us, gave us life, the same God who brought order out of chaos, this same God by the very same power that brought light into being—this same God, by this same power, speaks to you today. By the same power that brought creation into being, God casts darkness out of your mind, shucks off the veil over your heart, casts out confusion and doubt, and shines the light of Christ into your darkened heart. Can it happen? It happened to you. Why do you doubt it could happen to your son? Your mother? Your coworker? Why do you doubt it could happen to your friend at school? Last weekend another teenager in our community took his own life. And God bless Young Life Ministry for trying to rush toward him with the message of Jesus, rushing toward him and so many others with the light of Christ. Christians. Believers. Church. Should we just sit idly by while darkness and hopelessness take root in the next generation? Do not lose heart. We have this ministry. We can find a way to bring Christ, the light and life of Christ, to the lost.

We won't do it in our strength. We'll do it in our weakness. Paul knew this. He reminds the church in Corinth, and by the Spirit and providence of God so reminds us, "we have this treasure in jars of clay." It's through the cracks in our armor the light of Christ shines through. It's when we share our vulnerability that others can see Jesus in us. The greatest evangelistic method I know is summed up in three words: be a friend. Be enough of a friend to know your friend, and for your friend to know you. Cracks and all.

But, you know, we don't want to. Let's be honest, we don't want to do these things. I don't want to, most days. Let's go back to the level of church. It's not that hard to do things as a church to be more effective for Christ. Pastor Craig Groeschel leads a church with

mostly video teaching, in two dozen locations in multiple states. They opened a church in Kansas a year ago that hosted 1700 in worship last week. It's not that hard to do a few things to make a church more helpful to Jesus, a more effective instrument in His hand. But we don't want to do those things. I don't want to do them! Maybe we can be open to some change, can't we? Not silly things, not flash in the pan things, but responsible, Biblical, thoughtful things. Sure we can. But it will mostly be about our hearts. Yours and mine. I don't want to be the last generation of Christians at this church. Do you? It's about our hearts. By the mercies of God we have this ministry, you have this ministry. Do not lose heart.

This is a movement. It's a living, breathing movement of God. Will you be a part of it? What one risk would you take this week to bring Christ to the lost? Will you take one step closer to the heart of Jesus? What relationship, what friendship, is waiting for you to take one further risk, to cross one more threshold, one more step toward the light of Christ breaking in? Who does God want you to invite to worship next week? It is still the case that eight out of ten people would say yes if their friend invited them to church. Just because we're friends. "Hey, would you like to see my church? It's a big part of my life. We're friends. I'd love to have you see it. We can grab a sandwich after or go for a bike ride." "How about coming to see a gallery of inspiring art work based on one of Jesus' most famous stories? You wanna?" A friend in the church loved that invitation to revival from 1877. I love it! But he thought I was going to announce a revival meeting this summer. No. We're past that. That's not far enough, actually. We are going to participate in revival, we are going to be a revival church. The invitation to revival is every Sunday morning. Every Sunday morning is a chance to know Jesus Christ. Every Sunday morning is an opportunity to be changed, forever. Every Sunday morning the Word is presented, the Gospel is clear, Jesus is present, the power of God is present. Every Sunday morning the same God that brought the world into being and brought light out of darkness is here, to dispel the darkness, and shine the light of Jesus in your life. Don't lose hope, don't lose heart, we have this ministry.

STUDY GUIDE "Christ to the Lost" 2 Corinthians 4:1-12

Start It

- According to Don Everts in his book *I Once Was Lost: What Postmodern Skeptics Taught Us About Their Path to Jesus* (InterVarsity Press, 2008), there are a lot of ways to look at being lost. The word itself should probably be avoided when talking to a non-believer, because it carries a tone of judgment. "Lostness, of course, looks different depending upon your perspective and personality... 'Lost' may be an accurate description of non-Christian friends from our perspective, but it may not feel like lostness to them." (p. 26) Like different reactions to getting lost while driving, each person has his or her own perspective on being spiritually lost.

Study It

- Some drivers know they are lost and immediately ask directions. Some never realize they are lost and continue down the road. Others think they may be lost but carry on with confidence they are just about to figure it out. How about when someone is spiritually lost? Read Isaiah 59:1-2, 8-11. Can you relate to that kind of lost?
- Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6. What is the "ministry" they have been given by God's mercy? (Refer back to 2 Corinthians 3). What could "secret and shameful ways" mean? Why are they avoided?
- Will the ministry they have been given be easy? Why or why not? What power should they expect to bring light to darkness?
- Read 2 Corinthians 4:7-18. Are you ever tempted to show only your strengths to those around you? Do you think it helps the spiritually lost more to see our strengths or our weaknesses?

Pray It

Almighty God our Maker, by Your power all things were brought into being. By the same power that brought light out of darkness, shed Your divine light in my heart, O Lord, and in the hearts of those darkened and lost around me, that they and I may together find hope and salvation in Jesus' name. Amen.

Live It

You have a ministry. Define it in one sentence. Do not lose heart!