Questions on 2 Corinthians 2v14-3v18 ‘The lifted veil’

**Getting started**

1. Would you describe yourself as a bold or shy sort of person, generally?
2. How bold are you in living as a Christian? Is it something that is obvious to other people or is it something you prefer to keep private?

*A key verse for today is 3v12 ‘Therefore since we have such a hope, we are very bold’. Pray as you start for the Lord to strengthen our hope, and increase our boldness, as we see what the gospel has done for us, and can do for others…*

**Into the text**

*Take time thinking about the power of the gospel*

1. **To make us part of Christ’s victory march!**
2. How conscious are you of being part of this this procession?
3. Have you ever thought of yourself as a fragrance – spreading the aroma of Christ everywhere?
4. Have you experienced people responding to you in very different ways? (v15- 16)
5. What is our responsibility with this gospel message? (v17)
6. **To change people – us and others!**

*The false teachers poured scorn on Paul, since he didn’t seem as impressive as them, and didn’t have letters of recommendation to support his ministry…*

1. What are Paul’s letters of recommendation (3v3)?
2. What has happened to the Corinthians (3v3-5)?
3. How can this picture give us greater expectations that our friends, indeed the world, might change as they read the letter we Christians present to them?
4. What should this make us pray?

( C ) **It alone brings true glory**

1. What is the contrast that Paul is making between the ministry of Moses and the Spirit of Jesus?
2. What is Paul is saying is happening to us Christians now, as we gaze constantly at Jesus (3v18)
3. God has given us a greater ministry than that of Moses. Do you believe that? Since that’s true, what difference should it make?

**Stepping back**

1. Reflecting on the 3 sections above, what can we expect God to do in us and through us through the gospel?
2. Is that reflected in the way in which we live together as God’s people?

Sermon on 2 Corinthians 2v14 to 3v18 ‘The lifted veil’

~ I wonder whether you **‘**Would you describe yourself asa BOLDsort of person?’

**Some** people certainly **are**….

* Politicians tend to be bold, as they make speeches
* Advertisers are, as they try to convince us about products…

But **others** of us can be shy, hesitant, reluctant to push ourselves forward…..

Well, our bible reading today was written in order to encourage Christians to be MORE **bold** with our faith – more willing and enthusiastic to **live it out** before others, and to speak about it to them.

So , for Christians, followers of Jesus Christ, God has a clear and important message for us today.

But if you wouldn’t yet call yourself a convinced Christian, please don’t ‘zone out’. For there’s a definite message for you too. God wants to show you what can happen to you, even today. .

There’s something for everyone today, so let’s dive straight into the bible reading, which comes from the 2nd letter the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. It’s in Chapter 2, found on p1160 of Bibles around the church.

There are 3 reasons why we CAN be bold, and here’s the first……

1. It brings people into the greatest victory parade of all time

Earlier this year, the England womens football team was granted a victory march for beating Germany in the Euros. (image of the Lionesses).

Everyone cheered them. ‘*We won’* people said- even though their contribution was watching it on the tele!

Centuries earlier, the Roman Empire did something similar, but on a much grander scale. Victorious generals were granted a ‘Triumph’, and this allowed them to parade through the streets of Rome, with their soldiers and some of the people they had defeated with them. (Image of Roman triumph). Everyone turned out to celebrate their hero, and to feel part of their success.

Well, Paul wants Christians to realise that **they** are part of something even greater than a Roman Triumph. Listen to how he puts it in v14

‘Thanks be to God, who always leads us captives in Christ’s triumphal procession...’

The **ultimate** hero of all times - is NOT some sports team or Roman general, but Jesus Christ. **He** is the victor over sin and evil and death itself, and he reigns now in Heaven, and one day he will return to earth and ALL people will bow before him, some joyfully, others with gritted teeth because they have not followed him during their lives….

‘If we’re Christians’, say Paul, we’re part of the risen Lord Jesus’ victory parade NOW. We’re his ‘captives’ in the sense that we now utterly belong to him, amazed and grateful that this hero was prepared to die for our sakes, embracing for us the death we deserved to liberate us from our sins.

And as part of his victory parade, we have a role given to us by Jesus. Look how it’s described in v14:

‘... and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of Jesus everywhere.’

Now to understand this image, let me tell you about the job that some people had in a Roman triumph. They burned incense (Image of burning incense) and this produced a sweet smell, and smoke. The idea was to appeal to peoples’ senses, making them realise just how significant the victory was

Well - strange idea I know- but Paul tells Christians to picture **ourselves** as those who spread the aroma, the fragrance of Jesus, EVERYWHERE.

Paul is very honest with us, that not everyone will **like** this aroma.

Rather the same way that not everyone likes all the fragrances that are available for sale today, it’s the same with the aroma of Jesus that we spread

* To people who have **no respect** for God and Jesus, our aroma is a **rank** smell – like rotting chicken- and will repel;
* But to others- well, our aroma through our lips and lives is a **sweet** smell- as it helps them to come to know Jesus personally, to become part of his victory parade themselves….

Paul knew what he was talking about, for he’d seen this in his own experience. Some hated his aroma, - and they beat him up, put him in prison and expelled him from their city. Others loved his aroma, and joyfully embraced his message, and joined the victory parade.

~ ‘***Christians***’ – says Paul – ‘*we can be very BOLD for we are following the one who will one day be acknowledged by ALL humanity as the King of Kings and Lord and Lords. Let all around us be able to SMELL deeply the aroma of Jesus through our lips and lives….’*

~ *‘****Enquirers****? Will you ‘clock’ this picture of Jesus as the all-conquering hero? It’s* ***not*** *how the world pictures him, but it’s* ***who he is****. The* ***true*** *victor in human history is not a sports team, not a general, not a politician – they are here today, gone tomorrow! It is Jesus Christ. Follow him. Become part of his victory parade…’*

Here’s the 2nd reason why we should be bold:-

1. **It really DOES change people......**

Now Paul can say this **confidently** because he’s seen it happen time after time after time…..

He’s seen it in this Church at Corinth, where God changed a very worldly group of people (Image of a group of mixed people) in whom he’s seen a dramatic change into believers in Jesus.

There’s been a ‘ding dong’ going on in Corinth caused by some new teachers who’d emerged, people with impressive gifts, and impressive recommendations. These new teachers were dissing Paul, grumbling at the fact that he had no formal ‘letters of recommendation’.

‘*Well*,’ says Paul, ‘*If you want to see MY letters of recommendation, look in the mirror?!!*

*‘YOU Corinthians are all* ***living letters****, the change in you is evidence that my ministry is a* ***genuine*** *one, one you should stick with*…’

What was true of them, is true of ALL Christians.

We are **letters** [image of a letter on screens] and to anyone under 40, I’ve brought a **prop**. This is what used to be sent before emails, texts, whatapps and the like 😊

Christians are people in whom the God has done a deep work through his Holy Spirit [‘By the Spirit of the living God’] The Spirit has not just chiselled away on tablets made of stone. Rather, he has written on the hearts of people so clearly that the person is a living letter ‘From Christ’, an open letter, one that bears witness to the new spiritual life pulsing through our veins, [‘Gives life’]

~ ‘***Christians’****,* says Paul*, ‘remember what you have become through the Holy Spirit*!’ *He has changed you into a living letter to the world, one from a triumphant Lord Jesus, designed to be read by others who can too be changed by the Holy Spirit…’*

# I love hearing from people I’ve seen over the last 40 years who have turned to Jesus Christ and become living letters from Christ. They encourage me to keep going, keep trusting in that divine work of God in people’s lives.

~ ‘**Enquirers’** says Paul. ‘*Don’t listen to my words wistfully, feeling a bit sad that others have received this miracle from God. For* ***you*** *can receive it* ***too****. The Holy Spirit of God can touch* ***you****, as he has done billions of other people over the last 20 centuries*…’

There’s a 3rd and final reason why we can be bold….

1. The Christian gospel(It) alone brings true glory

We humans love to **receive** glory – whether it’s the applause of crowd when we score a goal, or the ‘well done’ from our boss when we land a new customer, or the receipt of some public award from our country. We lap up such glory!!

Our problem is that we often try to get glory from places where it’s pretty fleeting, and it doesn’t satisfy our souls. The glory of good looks, the glory of success in our career, the glory of fame can all fade pretty quickly…..

So, it’s good for us to see where true glory lies, and this is the theme of the last section, from Chapter 3v7 onwards

Here Paul puts before us a very strong contrast to ponder….

The first sort of glory is the one experienced by Moses, about 1400 years before Jesus’ birth.

This will – I hope- ‘ring bells’ for regulars since we spent last term looking at the 10 Commandments given by God to this man Moses to show his people – the people he’d rescued from Egypt - how they were to live.

If you’re a guest today, don’t worry – that’s all you need to know 😊

As Moses came down the mountain with the tablets of stone containing the Commandments on them, his face was radiant. [Image of Moses with shining face]

For he had spent time in the presence of the living God, and some of God’s glory was reflected in Moses’ face. It was deeply impressive to the people, but Moses put a veil over his face so they wouldn’t see that glory disappearing hour by hour, as his face returned to what it was normally like.

The ministry of Moses **WAS** glorious – Paul is quite clear about that

BUT we can’t simply look at what Moses did and achieved and say *‘WOW- that’s amazing and couldn’t get* ***even more*** *glorious’*

For Moses brought God’s law to the people, **but they didn’t obey it**.

They stood **condemned** by it [Condemnation]because it revealed them to be law **breakers** not law **keepers**

Instead of vibrant **spiritual life**, it broughtDeath since this is what breaking the law leads to…..

Every time, the message of the law was preached, it was as if a veil came down, separating God from his people, because they couldn’t keep God’s law, and often didn’t even want to try to keep it!

~Well, If that all sounds a bit gloomy, ‘perk up’, because there is an even greater glory that can be experienced by us, and it certainly doesn’t come through Moses!

**This** glory comes through the ministry of Jesus **[**Image of risen Jesus]

* Through him , came not condemnation butRighteousness**.** Because he was willing to take our gult from us, we can hear those sweet words ‘**NOT** guilty’ as we trust in what he did for us.
* Through him came not death, but Life **–** life in all its fullness now, eternal life in Heaven to look forward to
* Through him cameFreedomrather than ongoing slavery to sin
* Through him is coming Transformation

That 4th element comes very clearly in the final verse of the passage, v18. Listen to what is happening in Christians, even today….

‘And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory

Are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory

Which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.’

~ That verse describes the extraordinary miracle that is going on in our lives, day by day….

As we look at Jesus, we see the glory of God the Father in him, and as we look intently at him, the Spirit of God transforms us into the very image of God

~ Last month I watched a bit of the match with one of my heroes, Roger Federer- an elegant, skilful gentleman on the tennis court. As I have watched him over the years, I have admired him, but it’s never transformed my pretty lousy game!

But it’s **different** with Jesus, as we gaze upon him, his Spirit transforms us so that daily, more of the purity and love and character of God become reflected in me.

If you want to see something of the glory of God, you Christian, look at older Christians. Look into the mirror and see what changes God has made over the years, and be encouraged..

~ So as we finish, let me address 2 different groups of people

* To those who would call yourself a follower of Jesus Christ, let me encourage you to feel the force of the power of God – to bring us into the victory parade of his son, to change us deeply from within, and to enable us to see and reflect God’s glory.

God says to you and to me, v12

**‘**Since we have such a hope, we are very bold’

* And to those who are peeking in to the Christian faith, will you too be encouraged to be bold in submitting your life, your hopes, your future to the God who loved you, sent his son for you, and longs for you to enter the victory parade of his son, one that is marching steadily to the breathtakingly glorious destination of Heaven. Be encouraged by v16

‘Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away’

As you turn to trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit touches and transforms your life, and I pray that that mighty miracle may happen in you , even today.…

[Prayer]