

Someone once said, “The church is always just one generation away from extinction.” As we’ve studied the 1st century church in Corinth, we can certainly see how such an assumption might be made. For it was filled with all kinds of issues, any one of which could have killed it.

Indeed, none of the churches Paul planted, nor the churches Peter, James, John, or any of the other apostles built stand today. And there’s a reason for that: Man is his own greatest enemy in matters concerning his relationship with God.

This morning we’re going to talk about how the Lord sustains his church despite man and what that has to do with our walk with God and with one another.

OPENING PRAYER

2nd CORINTHIANS 4:13-15

But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE,” we also believe, therefore we also speak, ¹⁴knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you. ¹⁵For all things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.

Belief: I once believed in the Seattle Seahawks, that is until that stunt it pulled that lost them the 2015 Super Bowl. My favorite team now is whoever is playing the Hawks!

I once believed in my stepdad until he started beating on us kids and my mom. I once believed in Michael Jackson, but, well you know the story.

Paul wrote, “**But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE,” we also believe, therefore we also speak” (v.13).**

The belief Paul was talking about was very different than the belief I used to have in people.

For that which Paul believed in transformed his life from darkness to light, from anger and rage to love, and from desperation to joy. What Paul believed in lifted him up, and it inspired him to share it with other people.

Paul quoted a Psalm in this passage. He wrote, **“I believed, therefore I spoke.”** These words were originally written by King David, who had been seriously ill. But he recovered, and because he believed it was the hand of God that saved him from certain death, he couldn't help but praise the Lord and share with others what the Lord had done: **“I believed, therefore I spoke.”**

And there's a sense of urgency in Paul's message. In the next chapter he wrote, **“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2nd Corinthians 5:10).**

Paul believed God's judgment was real, and when he had come to faith he realized that the fires of hell had been licking at his heels. In one breath he must've been both terrified and thankful. He'd come within a hair's breadth of being consumed by the flames, but for the grace of God that saved him. And he couldn't help but share this Good News about God's overwhelming, unconditional love and compassion for him, a sinner.

Paul wrote, **“For all things *are* for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God” (v.15).**

I attended Oregon State University, “the land of the Beavers”! Go Beavs! On game day, everyone in Corvallis, Oregon, is pro-Beavers. OSU flags and pennants fly from car antennas, in lawns, and in trees; orange and black bumper stickers are plastered everywhere; and homes and businesses display OSU posters in their windows with pride. Everyone is a believer and they glory in the awesomeness of their team. Go Beavs!

This is the way it was for St. Paul, but with eternal consequences. Everything for him rested on the awesome work of Christ on the Cross and his Resurrection. But this was only part one of the story. Paul knew that our salvation **“may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.”**

The original sin of Adam and Eve was not that they ate the forbidden fruit. The original sin was their motive. The serpent had promised the first couple that if they ate the fruit, **“you will be like God” (Genesis 3:5)**. That’s the sin: the pride, the arrogance, the conceit of man, saying to God, “I don’t need you; I can run this show all by myself.”

When Paul came to faith Jesus Christ, he realized the problem with the religion of the day: It had returned to the original sin: man glorifying himself! Thus he proceeded to preach about how everything we do must **“cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.”** Returning the glory to God is the exact opposite of striving to be like God.

Paul believed, therefore he spoke; he couldn’t help himself.

You know how after you’ve washed and dried your sweaters a few times they can get nappy? Several years ago I discovered the lint shaver. I saved at least a half dozen sweaters from Goodwill! I was so excited I told all my friends about it. They thought I was weird. But I couldn’t help myself!

Haven’t you ever had a sense of enthusiasm for something that was so great that you couldn’t help but tell others about it? Maybe it was a piece of music or a movie. Perhaps you bought a new car, and when you got to work you made all your coworkers come out to see it, to sit in it, to listen to it as you revved up the engine; you couldn’t help but tell everyone you knew about your new car. That sense of urgency you experienced was like what St. Paul experienced for the Gospel, times a thousand.

As we reflect on the awesomeness of God, about how he humbled himself and gave us his son, Jesus, who died on a tree for us, saving us from sin, death, and the devil, something inside of us changes.

Later, Paul wrote to the Romans that they should **“be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is” (Romans 12:2)**.

When we make Christ’s love our love, when God’s mercy becomes our mercy, when the compassion of Christ becomes the compassion which flows from our

hearts into the hearts of the people around us, what we believe has become something more than knowledge. It's become a way of life. It's become real for us. And it's something we have to talk about: We believe, therefore we speak.

The church, the individual congregation that stands on the corner, the church made of brick and wood, is always one generation away from extinction. But the church of Jesus, the people gathered at the foot of his Cross to worship him, to glorify him, that church will never end, for these people, you and me, are sons and daughters of the King of kings and Lord of lords, and we are card carrying members of eternity in his grace, and we give thanks that his glory may abound. Let the glory overflow! May that be our prayer this week, that the Lord's glory would overflow in our conversation and good deeds in the name of Jesus.

This week let us reflect on everything the Lord has given us; let us give thanks until our hearts ache with a sense of urgency to share our love of God with another person.

This week let us pray that the Lord would preserve our little church on the street corner, the church made with brick and wood, that it would be a living legacy of God's grace for the whole community until he comes again.

And this week let us share this Good News with another person who really needs to hear it, in the name of Jesus. Amen.