

What motivates a Christian?

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. So Christians are a stubborn bunch, aren't they? Throughout history, they've always caused trouble in every culture with their message about Jesus, no matter what you do to them. Put them in prison, fine them, beat them, burn their churches, they just don't shut up. But why is that? What is it that keeps Christians going and keeps them talking about Jesus in the face of all that difficulty and trouble and persecution?

Well, that's the question that I want us to consider this morning. What motivates Christians to share the gospel of Jesus even when it's hard, even when it costs them? You know, what motivates our missionary partners, Jacques and Julie that we prayed for earlier, Rod and Glenda in Japan, Bob and Pat in Iraq and others, what motivates them to sacrifice all that they do sacrifice to share Jesus with people who don't know him?

What motivates our outreach team who are going out later to go and knock on doors and share the gospel when we could just be relaxing at home, watching Netflix or eating lunch?

What motivates us? What motivates you as a Christian to take the time to share the gospel with your work colleague or your school friend? Because that's exactly what Paul is wanting to explain in this part of the letter to the Corinthians.

He's wanting to explain to this Corinthian church what actually motivates him to go through all this trouble and the suffering he's been talking about so far in order to share the gospel. And basically the reason he gives in this passage in summary as to why he will never stop doing this work, why he is literally a captive of Christ in this ministry.

[1 : 5 2] That's what he describes at the end of chapter 2. Why he is willing to be a captive and go through the difficulty and suffering of this is simply because it is the most glorious and important job a person could ever do.

And he explains that in this passage by comparing his job as an apostle with the ministry of Moses in the Old Testament. And that is quite a comparison to make.

That is quite a bold statement to make for Paul. Because if there was ever a glorious and powerful ministry in history, it was that of Moses, right? And think about what happened under his ministry.

Think about those Sunday school lessons you had. Or think about when you were reading Genesis or Exodus, the passage we read earlier, Exodus, that he fought all the amazing things that happened during his life and his ministry.

I mean, he was called by God through a burning bush to start it all off. Then through Moses, God sent the famous plagues onto Egypt, the Passover being the climax of that.

[2 : 5 9] God caused the parting of a sea. That doesn't happen every day. God defeated the most powerful army of the time, Egypt, through the ministry of Moses.

He gave his law to humanity. He caused things during the time of Moses, he caused things like the ground to open up and swallow people who weren't listening to him.

I mean, imagine that happened at some marks. Wow. That would be quite an effective ministry tool. God caused fire to come down from heaven and consume his enemies during the time of Moses.

So Moses had, let's be honest, quite a lot to put on his ministry CV. Imagine him applying for a job at the local church. I think he would probably stand a good chance.

Actually, with the fire from heaven, maybe local churches wouldn't touch him. But out of all these things, out of all the things that Moses in his lifetime, in his ministry, was exposed to and involved in, the highlight of his ministry, the highlight of all of it, was not the time he stood in Pharaoh's throne room and demanded him to let my people go.

[4 : 08] It wasn't when he stood on the shores of the Red Sea with the Egyptian cavalry closing in. It wasn't when he received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai in a great thunderstorm.

No, the one event that outshone all of these others was the time Moses saw God. When he had gone up to Mount Sinai to receive the law a second time, we read in Exodus 34, Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord.

And that beats anything Moses had ever experienced till that point. Not only did he get to see the Creator God face to face in some form or another, but he was also, we're told, revealed God's name.

In other words, he was revealed who God is in his full glory up there on that mountain. And this was such an epic experience for a human being that when Moses came down from the mountain back to the camp, we read this from verse 29, He was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord.

When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant and they were afraid to come near him. It's quite a scene, isn't it? Moses is just coming down from the mountain.

[5 : 36] Hi guys. And they're all like, whoa, what happened to you? His face was, because he had spoken and stood with the Lord, the Creator of the majestic universe we live in, the effect was that his face was glowing with secondhand glory, so much that people were afraid of him.

And later, eventually, he had to cover it up. He had to walk around with a kind of a burqa to cover up his glory, the glory that was shining, God's glory shining through this face of his.

And he did that to spare these Israelite sinners from having to see God's glory for too long. Even in this small dose, it really is quite a picture of how sinners just can't stand the glory of God.

Okay, so Moses' ministry, the work that God did through him and his experience of that, was one of the greatest and most glorious ministries in the history of God's dealing with mankind, which is what the Bible is a record of, basically, God's dealings with humankind.

And Moses' ministry was such a climactic and great and glorious time, and part of that, God revealing himself to mankind.

[7 : 00] But here, in 2 Corinthians, our passage this morning, Paul says that what God is doing through him, you know, suffering, imprisoned, dirty Paul, what God is doing through him, and what God is doing through the church today, by implication, is even more glorious than Moses' ministry ever was.

Paul calls this the new covenant ministry. And he says this new covenant ministry that he is now involved in since Jesus came, it surpasses all the amazing things that happened under the old covenant, under Moses.

And then, for the rest of this passage, he goes on to prove why that is, by comparing these two covenants, the new covenant that he is now involved in, and the old covenant that Moses was.

And so he puts it like this, and this is really the heart of this passage, which we're going to spend our time looking at, from verse 6 to verse 11. So look in your Bibles at this passage.

This is Paul really comparing the two covenants to prove why the new covenant is so much more glorious than the old. And he says this from verse 6. I'll read the whole section. He, that is God, has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit.

[8 : 24] For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. Now, if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily on the face of Moses because of its glory, transitory though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious?

If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness? For what was glorious is now no glory in comparison with the surpassing glory.

And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts? Okay, so, here is another ball of wires and earphones that we've got to unravel to understand what's going on.

It's some complicated language that Paul uses, but let's dive into it and unravel it together. So, Paul is saying that his ministry is the ministry of a new covenant. That is a new type of relationship that humans can have with God.

That's what a covenant means. It's a type of relationship that God has made possible for humans to have with him. And this new covenant was a different type of relationship than the Jews had under the old covenant with God.

[9 : 39] And the major difference, as Paul puts it, between these two covenants, he says in verse 6, is that the old covenant was of the letter, while the new covenant is of the Spirit.

That's the fundamental, foundational difference between these two covenants. Of the letter versus of the Spirit. Now, to explain just what that means, Paul unpacks that difference in three ways.

He shows three aspects in which these covenants are so fundamentally different. And I want us to look at each of these three aspects in turn. So the first difference he mentions is death versus life.

In verse 7 there. So the old covenant, glorious as it was, he's not downplaying the old covenant. He's not saying it wasn't glorious. He's saying it was a glorious time and way that God exposed and revealed himself to humanity.

But glorious as it was, it, in the end, only ever led to death, while the new covenant can lead to life. That's the first major difference between the two.

[10 : 42] Because you see, the way God revealed his glory in the old covenant was such that it could only ever lead to the death of sinners. There was no other outcome of God revealing his glory than the death of sinners.

You know, it's worth remembering right here that God's ultimate goal is not our good. Let me say that again because it's quite shocking. God's ultimate goal is not our good.

God's ultimate goal is to reveal his glory, which happens to be for our ultimate good. But also, while God revealing his glory is for our ultimate good, the very thing which is for our ultimate good can also kill us because we're sinners.

Take the sun as an example. The Bible Project guys that we watch in the evening, they have this nice little villier describing God's glory using the idea of the sun.

Because you see, just as the sun is good and it's what sustains your life, if the sun wasn't here, we would all die because there would be no photosynthesis, no plants, no warmth. The sun is good, but if you get too close to it, it's really bad for you, isn't it?

[12 : 02] Electricity is another example of something that's good but can also be bad for you. And that's why you need warning signs of its dangers when there's an electric fence or an electric substation or something.

You need a lot of warning signs because this very thing that's helpful for us is also, and good for us, is also bad for us if we come too close. But you see, God's glory is kind of like that in the Bible.

And the Old Covenant was one big warning sign of how dangerous God's glory is for those who have sin in their lives. And that's why God revealed His law in the Old Covenant, the Ten Commandments, in the Book of the Covenant after that in Exodus, in Deuteronomy, you read God's laws, God's reflection of His holy character.

And He revealed that not as a way to give humans a burdensome set of rules like it's often seen, like God just wants to spoil our fun. No, God revealed His law as a way to let us know who He is, as a way to reveal Himself.

These were His holy standards that you needed to keep if you wanted to have any chance of approaching God in His glory. And so that's why good as the Old Covenant was, it could only ever result in the death of the Israelites because as we go on to see, as sinners, they had no actual ability to keep God's holy law, good as those laws were.

[13 : 33] You see, in the Old Covenant, the revealing of God's glory in the law made demands on humans just because of who God was. It wasn't like God was making up laws to make life difficult for us.

No, He was revealing holiness and glory in those laws, but the very act of Him revealing Himself makes demands on humans. That's why people don't want God to be revealed.

That's why when Moses came and His face was shining, the people don't want to see God's glory because the moment God reveals His glory, it makes demands on us. It makes implications for how we should live.

And so the Old Covenant revealing God's glory made demands on humans, but it didn't give them any power to keep those demands and that was the problem. The coming of the Spirit in the New Covenant, on the other hand, is a revelation of God's glory that gives life, not death, like the Old Covenant did.

And the reason, Paul says, is because of the next comparison he makes between the two covenants, which is condemnation versus righteousness. Condemnation versus righteousness.

[14 : 46] Look at verse 9. If the ministry that brought condemnation was glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness?

Okay, so no matter how much the Israelites try to keep God's laws, it could never bring them righteousness. The law could never stop them from sinning, any more than a thermometer can stop a fever, right?

The law only showed how unrighteous people are when they try to keep it. It acts as a diagnosis tool, not a cure. The law didn't make the Israelites sinners, it showed them that they already were.

And so imagine this, imagine you're driving, through a suburban area at a dangerous breakneck speed in your car, like sadly I often see down Limply Road in the early hours of the morning, I hear them all, late at night, people just driving at crazy speeds down suburban roads, say at kind of 100 kilometers per hour.

Now, if you're doing that, you're behind the wheel doing that, you don't need to wait to see a speed limit sign before you know you're breaking the law, right? It's not going to be a big surprise.

[16 : 08] Oh no, the speed limit's only 40. Who knew? No, you know, you know that it's dangerous driving. When you do see a sign, it only confirms what already is the truth, namely that you should not have a driver's license.

Well, you see, in the same way, the law of God, good as it is, as a revelation of God's justice and holiness, when revealed to sinful humans, only confirms to them how far we fall short of God's holy standards.

That's why we don't like it. That's why we try to avoid it. And therefore, that law that God reveals of himself, that reflection of himself, codified in that law, can only condemn us further.

It never makes us righteous. It's a covenant, glorious as it is, it's a covenant of condemnation. That's what that means. It can only condemn us.

The Spirit, however, the Spirit can make us righteous. God's Holy Spirit, living within human beings, actually gives them the ability to reflect God's character by keeping his laws, his good and holy laws.

[17 : 22] That's what Paul's saying here. That's how the Spirit gives life. Not just the Spirit helps us to be happy and joyful and whatever. The Spirit enables us to keep the law. And that's how he gives life.

And to see this, look back with me at verse 1 to verse 3 of this chapter in your Bibles. So here, this is a very important passage, which we'll look at in more detail in our growth groups.

But I'll mention it because of its place in what Paul's saying here. So here, Paul is responding to the Corinthians for him. The Corinthians, you know, if you've been here before for 2 Corinthians, you know the Corinthians were quite skeptical of Paul.

They had a lot of questions about Paul. And so they had the cheek to ask for letters of reference. Like you would do if someone's applying for a job, right? You would ask letters of reference from their previous employer.

They're asking Paul for letters of reference. And so, look what he says from verse 1. Do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you?

[18 : 29] You yourselves are our letter written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

Okay, so what he's talking about here is he's referring to an Old Testament prophecy from Ezekiel actually when he's talking about the spirit written on human hearts. Ezekiel chapter 36, God promises to his old covenant people that he's going to do something amazing and I'll read, you don't have to turn there, I'll just read from Ezekiel 36 verse 26 and 27.

He says this, his promises to his old covenant people, he says, I will give you a new heart and I will put a new spirit in you. So this was at a time where the old covenant people, the Israelites, realized that the problem of them being unable to keep the law was in their own hearts.

So God promises I will give you a new heart, I will put a new spirit in you, I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh and I will, this is the result of that, I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

So that's God's promise. God was promising his old covenant people that he was going to give them a new heart which would enable them to keep the laws he had given them. Now Paul in 2 Corinthians is saying to the Corinthians, God has now fulfilled that promise in the new covenant and their own lives are proof of that.

[20 : 08] Their own lives are proof of Paul's ministry, that it is a new covenant ministry and it's proof that these Corinthians are members of the new covenant but how?

How is it proof of that? Well obviously because they have begun to do what the prophecy said they would do. That's the only implication that you can draw from this. If Paul is using them as examples of that prophecy in Ezekiel being fulfilled then obviously they have begun to follow God's decrees and be careful to keep his laws which the prophecy said would happen hence proving Paul's apostleship.

Does that make sense? So Paul is using the Corinthians the fact that they are now keeping the law and able to follow God's decrees as proof that they are members of the new covenant.

Their growth in holiness that is evident is proof of the spirit's presence in their life because while the letter of the law brings condemnation the spirit brings righteousness.

righteousness. Now not that we're saved through living righteous lives rather we're saved for living righteous lives.

[21 : 23] It is the most important and fundamental difference between the Christian gospel and all other religious teaching out there. We're not saved because we're righteous we're saved for a righteous life.

You see remember this was right from the beginning even with the Israelites when God first gave his law to the Israelites he gave it to them before or after he saved them from the Egyptians.

After right? He gave his law to them after he saved them from slavery to show what he saved them for. Now as we've seen the law never gave them the actual ability to live those lives that he saved them for.

But now that the spirit has come in the coming of Jesus we new covenant people can start living those lives that God saves people for.

We can with the ministry of the spirit if we do not quench the spirit if we keep in step with the spirit as the bible tells us to do we can live more and more righteously we can put off sin more and more and obey God's law more and more but not only obey God's law we can start to delight in God's law we can start to see the glory of God shining through his law and love it and want to obey it not out of a duty but out of a desire to live that way because we realize that's what God saved us for which is all proof that desire that being enabled more and more to live God's way that is all proof that the spirit is in a person's life that they've really believed and accepted Jesus a true Christian is not someone who who ticks a box and comes to church every Sunday anybody can do that a true Christian is someone who has been changed and it's a change that you can see whenever we go to canal walk

[23 : 23] Jean and I have a little chuckle when we pay for parking at those you know those parking machines you've got to put your ticket in and tells you how much you've got to pay because we have the chuckle because there's a little message just below where there's that screen below where you put your notes your money into it has a very optimistic little message on its screen it says change is possible and we always walk away feeling quite inspired if not a little poorer the thing is you know we look at the history of our world and we see we look at history and if you study history even at a basic level you wonder is change possible in our world humans are still killing each other humans are still stealing from each other can this world ever get better is change really possible will the gospel message is yes change is not only possible but it is inevitable in the lives of those who believe Jesus because the

Holy Spirit comes to dwell and change them from the heart from the inside out and it was through Paul's ministry that the Holy Spirit is given to people it's through people coming to hear about and put their faith in Jesus Christ as their savior which was Paul's message it's then that he pours his life-changing spirit into their lives which the old covenant could never do because people's sins had not been dealt with in the old covenant only when Jesus came and died on the cross and substituted himself for our sins was the problem of sin dealt with and the possibility of righteousness made available to us so that's the second difference between these two covenants and then the third and final difference Paul mentions between them is the old covenant is temporary while the new covenant is permanent verse 11 and if what was transitory or temporary came with glory how much greater is the glory of that which lasts what he means by that is that the old covenant was never meant to last it was only ever meant to be temporary it was only ever a necessary step on the way to the new covenant which was always

God's plan it wasn't as you know it wasn't like the old covenant was was plan A and then God saw oh they can't keep the law so I better make another plan plan B no the old covenant was necessary in order for the new covenant to come because if God had never given his written law we would never have been convinced that we're actually sinful and and we would have never been convinced how much we actually need a savior to come and keep the law for us and die for our failure to keep it we would have never seen the need to trust in Jesus and receive his spirit to enable us to keep the law if if we kept thinking that we could keep it ourselves that's why the old covenant was necessary before the new covenant came and so God bringing people into this new covenant this new way of relating with him was always the aim of the old covenant the the old testament was necessary for the new testament to happen and that's why we have both testaments in our bible the old testament which is the old covenant and the new testament which is the new covenant and so in that way I mean think about it the old the old testament is the scripture of the Jews the

Judaism and so in that way Christianity is not so much a different religion from Judaism as it is the completion of Judaism but then you might ask as Paul's opponents did well if that's the case if the new covenant was always the goal of the old covenant and it's the completion of the old covenant then why aren't all Jews Christians good question and Paul goes on to answer that exact question in verse 13 have a look in your Bibles he says this Moses who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away but their minds were made dull for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read it has not been removed because only in Christ is it taken away even to this day when Moses is read a veil covers their hearts but whenever anyone turns to the Lord the veil is taken away so

Paul is talking about the Jews here in his own day the first century and he's saying that the whole thing about Moses covering his face was was more than just a miraculous event it was a symbolism it was symbolizing the fact that God's glory could never be fully revealed or understood in the old covenant it was covered it was veiled and Paul says to this day his day but just as much our day today Jews who are still under the old covenant they have a veil preventing them from seeing and understanding God's glory in it and the purpose for it because Paul says they have dull minds now the original says their minds are hardened so it's not talking about a lack of intelligence in fact most of the Jewish people I've met are far more intelligent than me it's talking not about a lack of intelligence it's talking about a stubbornness not to admit that they can't keep God's law a hardness of mind a hardness of heart Jewish people still think that they can be accepted by

[29 : 16] God through keeping his laws and that's why Paul says only in Christ is that veil taken away only when a person comes to trust in Jesus rather than themselves can they truly appreciate God's law and its place in God's plan of salvation and so you see Jesus is the key that unlocks the meaning of the Old Testament if you remember Jesus on the Emmaus road in Luke 24 he he for the first time he his Jewish disciples he unlocks for them what their whole Old Testament means and so we can never really understand what's going on in the Old Testament unless we read it in light of the New Testament if you open your Bible for your quiet time and you read the Old Testament you will never understand what's going on there unless you see it through the perspective of the gospel and what Jesus has done and how Jesus has fulfilled it and what that also means is think about it a Christian who knows the gospel is technically able to visit a local synagogue and explain to the people there better than they can what their scriptures really mean the Old Covenant was a temporary stepping stone to the New Covenant which came when Jesus died for sin so so that whoever trusts in him Jew or

Gentile will be able to enter God's presence the New Covenant has always been the way that God has planned to save people from sin and to give people eternal life and that is a permanent way there will never be another way that God saves people the gospel message that Paul shared with the Corinthians in the first century is the same message that you and I share in 2019 and it's that same message a Christian in the year 2095 will share if the world is still around then the gospel of Jesus has always been and will always be the way that God saves people and changes people in this world and changes this world through the gospel and nothing else don't forget that because lots of churches are forgetting that and they're they're down playing the gospel and preaching all kinds of things except the gospel and that's not that doesn't have any power to change because only through the gospel has has God decided that's the way forever that he's going to change people he's going to save people and that is why it is more glorious than anything that has come before or anything that has come since or anything that can come in the future and that is why the gospel is worth going through whatever sacrifices and suffering we need to go through to make it known Paul says in verse 12 therefore since we have such a hope we are very bold can that be said of you both of those those parts of what he says there since we have such a hope can that be said of you do you have such a hope is the spirit dwelling in your life and can you see evidence of the spirit dwelling in your life by your delight in God's law and your increasing obedience to it that will show you whether the spirit is dwelling in your life don't call yourself a Christian and pretend if that's not the case so can you see evidence of the spirit dwelling in your life or do you need to go on your knees and come to God and realize that you've been quenching the spirit that you're you're still living your own life that you actually have no regard for God's laws no desire to keep them is that you well then you need to do business with

God before it's too late and you don't have hope if the spirit is not dwelling in your life there's absolutely no way that you can say that you're saved and have eternal life if you don't see evidence of the spirit in your life and so do you have that hope and then if you do are you bold are you bold to make the gospel known to others to talk about Jesus to others to be involved in the work of the church because we today at St. Mark's have the same ministry that Paul had in that we are messengers of the gospel to the world around us and there is no greater work to be involved in in all the world if you're a Christian and you are saved and you do have the spirit in your life but you're not involved in the work of God on earth in eternity you're going to look back and say what a waste of that time I had on earth you're going to realize that the greatest thing you could have been involved in the best thing you could have spent your time doing was doing the work of the Lord the most glorious thing the thing that counts for eternity and so are you bold to make the gospel known to be involved in the work of the church because only through the gospel of Jesus can the veil be taken away from people's hearts and can people be changed and that's why we must be bold to share it every opportunity that God gives us every door he opens be ready to step through it and and use conversations that God gives you opportunities to share the amazing most glorious gospel of Jesus Christ with those who don't know it yet and as another preacher says that I listened to this week he says although not every preaching of Christ will bring results it is still the only way results can come remember that not every preaching of Christ will bring results when you share the gospel not every time will people will something happen not every time will people react favorably but it is still the only way results can ever come so I want to you know I want to take a little sticker with me next time I go to canal walk to stick underneath the parking machine message it says change is possible with the sticker saying only through Jesus Christ because it's okay it's cheesy but it's true only because of Jesus and his death on the cross are we able as Paul says in verse 18 with unveiled faces to contemplate God's glory to know God as he truly is to enjoy him as he truly is as we look to and follow

Jesus who is the exact representation of God's glory for us and when we do that when we decide to stop messing around and wasting our time but to look to Jesus to follow Jesus to get involved in the work that he's given us to do on earth and when he is our Lord day in and day out and he is our king Paul says we are being transformed into his image with ever increasing glory which comes from the Lord who is the spirit and I hope that we will be a church of Christians who are being transformed into ever increasing glory into the image of Christ so that we will look back on this life and say we didn't waste let's pray Lord we do thank you so much for your spirit to help us to understand your word and to see how it affects and and speaks into our very very lives and thank you for the glory of the new covenant that we can be part of that brings righteousness that brings life that is permanent that is the way you save people help us Lord to put aside anything in our lives that are inhibiting you changing us and and help us to give the spirit a place in our lives so that we will be changed that we will delight in your law and be enabled to keep it more and more and help us Lord to be so taken and captivated by the glory that is revealed in the new covenant that we will be bold to share that with others and we pray this all in Jesus name

Amen