

“Greater Than Liberation”  
 Pastor Sam Richards  
 14 April 2024—Eastertide Sunday 3  
 Texts: 2 Cor. 4:1-4

**4 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, 2 but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled [a]to those who are perishing, 4 in whose case the god of this [b]world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving [c]so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.<sup>1</sup>**

It was a new sister’s pain, over guilt and shame that moved me to write last week’s sermon. She was so crippled by guilt and shame that it broke my heart to witness it. Yes, she had confessed Christ as Lord and Savior, but, no, the forgiveness of her sins that comes with faith had not dawned on her—she had been set free from the burden of sin (and shame and guilt over that sin) but she did not understand it yet. In fact, she was free, but still sat in the prison house of remorse. And wouldn’t you know it the timeliness of that word extended far beyond her. Of course, it did. Why? Probably because we were unaware that there is something greater than liberation—and in America we are so into freedom that we might miss this, too!—and that something is justification. We are forgiven by the atoning blood of Christ and declared righteous by God through faith in Christ. It is a good thing that we are declared righteous because in being declared righteous our feelings are side-stepped. What we feel isn’t significant, but what God declares over us is very, very important. Actually what we feel at the moment pales in comparison to the spiritual realization that grows on us having been justified. We are justified when God declares us righteous—and that, all of mercy and grace as well as none of merit, and/or of attainment.

So, as is my custom, I began sermon preparation Sunday evening and the question on my heart was: “Where do we go from here?” I turned to my devotions, particularly to 2 Cor. 4:1-14. It was so full that I decided to investigate my commentaries and to see what I could glean from them. However, I typed in 1 Cor. 4:1 instead of 2 Cor. 4:1 and I reflected on the former rather than the later for nearly an hour. It was only when I awakened, the next day, that I uncovered my error. **We renounce the hidden things of shame and we announce the mysteries of God**, says 1 Cor. 4. It had a nice cadence and rhyme to it. But my bride quizzed me on what I had learned—“What are those mysteries?” I demurred, but promised to tell her in the morning. And here they are, the four mysteries of God which I as a steward of God’s mysteries am bound to announce and declare:

the mystery of the new covenant  
 the mystery of the Spirit  
 the mystery of righteousness by faith

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<sup>1</sup> Footnotes

- a. 2 Corinthians 4:3 Lit *in*
- b. 2 Corinthians 4:4 Lit *age*
- c. 2 Corinthians 4:4 Or *that the light...image of God, would not dawn upon them*

## the mystery of our future glory

All these fall under the heading of breaking news, all proceeding from the first appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. None of these mysteries had been revealed prior to Christ's advent and they are not received except by revelation even now—God has to open our minds to these matters or we will not get it at all. I can announce all I want but unless the Lord graciously prepares my listeners; they will hear little but noise. Furthermore, taken all together, these mysteries are the foundation of our new hope—the hope we have in Christ is a new thing . . . and a great and glorious thing!

Despite my error, the truth is that the themes of 1 Cor. 4 and 2 Cor. 4 are quite divergent. In 1 Cor. 4 Paul is dealing with putting down the party spirit which was dividing the body in Corinth. 2 Cor. 4 is about the nature of the apostolic ministry which Paul claimed to hold in common with Apollos and the other contender for the church's allegiance. Ephesians 4:5ff is the essence of what Paul was aiming at—the center of our unity in Christ:

**5. . . . one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all.<sup>7</sup> But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift.**

The Jewish religion and the Christian religion share one critical attribute: they are religions which seek to make known the things of God to the world. This accounts in part for the antagonism and antipathy directed towards both by other religions in which the mysteries are concealed from the people, are restricted to the initiates (a select few, or the elite in the cults). "Enlightenment" formerly was the broad goal of the Christian religion; but the term was co-opted by various new think philosophers and became a secular and atheistical movement. Progressives hail this as a positive step forward for mankind; but the church should see it for the misstep, or deviance that it is. Rationalism is a very poor substitute for saving faith.

1 Cor. 4 actually situates Paul for us as a true apostle. First, he asserts that having received such great mercy (despite our manifest unworthiness) God has fitted men such as himself to be stewards of His word. Secondly Paul notes that manifold difficulties, trials and afflictions come with the calling, with the territory of the calling. Apostles are known by what they suffer for the Lord and for the kingdom's sake. I have found this to be true: helping hurts the helper in the helping others, the hurting. There are the pangs of heart compassion; there are the groans for their salvation, their justification, an aching for those in bondage, enslaved, addicted, unfree. The calling to ministry steels ministers for what they are to suffer. As stewards we are accounted faithful; we are accepted as servants and entrusted with those mysteries, we are to proclaim and, be supported spiritually in this, we do not desist, falter or fail in our work!

When one speaks of this new covenant, and the mysteries revealed at the time of Christ's appearing, a very significant matter arises: **the transience** of the glory of the old covenant which revealed the law. The shift from ink to Spirit was new in two senses. In terms of time and new in terms of quality. These shifts were implicit in the prophecy of Jeremiah where it was foretold that God would write his law upon our hearts (of flesh, not stone)! Therefore Paul notes the renouncing of deceitful things—things that are shameful, dishonest and cunning—so that we are open, without disguise, eight off hand, subterfuge, guile or corruption. We do not accommodate our taste, or the fashion of others—we escape ambiguity, and opaqueness in our presentation of the gospel truths. **We do not preach ourselves (v.5) The light of the glorious gospel of**

**Christ shines . . . and dispels darkness. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our heart. ( Why? **To give light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.** (v.6)**

And that, too, is greater than liberation! Yes, **justification by faith and knowledge of the glory of God.**

The gospel ministry of Jesus exceeds, or surpasses the ministry of Moses. (2 Cor. 3:9) Justification, the outcome of being declared righteous, is, for believing Jews, a most difficult thing. We are recipients of divine mercy—we did not generate it ourselves and it is not attainable by way of merit! Paul had been merciless as a persecutor, ruthless, a blasphemer (guilty of unbelief, vice and murder) and all of that was passed by in his calling, election and salvation. So it is with us. And that's encouraging. If the chief of all sinners could be salvaged, there is certainly hope for us.

**Amen**