

## Study following Sunday February 14th

**Prepare:** Think about the different ways you have seen the gospel portrayed.

**Praise:** Spend time thanking God for never giving up on us, but continuing to shine his light into our lives.

**Passage:** Read 2 Corinthians 4. 3-6

**Ponder:** In the second letter we have that Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church, it is clear that Paul is having to defend himself, and the Gospel, from false teaching that has arisen there. It seems that one criticism, that is levelled at Paul, is that not everyone he has preached to has believed the message. Paul does describe times when people are receptive to his message - see 2 Corinthians 2.12 - but at other times the listening crowd are not convinced and even turn violent towards him.

- see Acts 18. 1-8 for Paul's first visit to Corinth and the varied reception he received. When Paul references a 'veil' in verse 3 of our passage we might look back at another reference Paul makes to a veil in chapter 3 verse 13. Paul's earlier reference speaks of Moses covering his glowing face with a veil - see Exodus 34.33. Coming back to our passage, Paul is showing that those who don't believe have been blinded by Satan, their eyes are veiled to see the light of the gospel. In some ways he seems to be claiming that the result of his preaching is always due to supernatural forces.

- if we think about those we know who don't believe, what reasons might we suggest for their unbelief?

Some may suggest that we do not need to follow up on those who reject the gospel if it is all about the supernatural realm. The truth is that we never know exactly the position of the hearts and minds of those we come into contact with, and we also don't know whether the devil has worked in some faults of the way the gospel was presented to them. As Best explains 'We must always continue lovingly to understand those to whom we present the gospel and to seek to explain and interpret it in our words and living so that they will give it a willing hearing.' The task of displaying the Gospel is a lifelong challenge to show our faith in our deeds and words, thank goodness we don't do it alone but with one another and with God's Holy Spirit to guide and encourage.

- How might we sustain ourselves for the lifelong task of displaying the gospel?

In verses 5 and 6 Paul attempts to counter arguments that his preaching focusses too much on himself. He has encouraged the Corinthians to imitate him - see 1 Corinthians 4.16 - and we are reminded that the gospel is not a set of truths but a way of life. Paul points the Corinthians, and us, to see Jesus Christ as Lord - Jesus the one who lived, died, rose and ascended. Paul knows that this implies he is Christ's servant and so moves on to declare that he, and his companions, are servants to the Corinthians. His hope is that they would get a sense of their own call to be servants to one another.

- How do you see the call to be a servant to others?

Finally in our passage, Paul draws from Genesis chapter 1 verse 3 to speak of a light that illuminates the darkness. Paul himself knows this light personally after his Damascus road experience (see Acts 9.1-3). The outward light was a symbol of the light that shone into his heart and transformed it. The light of Christ draws us to God, the two cannot be separated. God's glory is seen in the face of Christ, Christ exalted in heaven and Christ on the cross.

**Pray:** Pray for those we know who don't yet believe and ask God to help us to understand them and reveal Christ to them in our words and deeds.