

Widened Hearts
2 Corinthians 6:1-13
June 23, 2024

We have been looking at texts from Paul's letters to the Corinthians. We have had texts from both the first letter and from his second letter which we have today. Paul is appealing to them to also be servants, followers of Christ. Paul, just like you and I have people who seem to be waiting for some better time, some time down the road before they fully commit to the Lord. You know some of the comments on this. Some don't believe that God could be the kind of God that would want them and if He did, they would have to make themselves good enough to be worthy of God. They say they aren't ready now but sometime down the road, they will think about it, once they have gotten out of life what they want before then. Others may say they have something against God or one of His followers and they need to come to terms with that before they would consider following Him.

Paul is appealing to the Corinthians with a plea to not put it off, saying what he and others have had to endure to make sure it isn't them that should keep them from looking to Jesus and His work for them and their salvation and commitment. His appeal is all the more compelling as he is stressing, it seems that as time goes on, things may happen that they will be less likely to look to Jesus and what He has to offer.

Think about it, you are bombarded by all sorts of requests from many different sources. How many times have you thought to yourself that you would look it over more a bit later but never got around to taking the time to analyze it? It never seems to brought to mind or maybe just a stray remembrance which comes and goes without much thought.

I was witnessing to my neighbor that I rode to college and back. He was part of a practicing church family but he didn't really know if he wanted to commit or not. I encouraged him but he said he might get around to it later. He was too involved with living his life the way he wanted to live it.

I never retained close contact with him as I went on to graduate school in New Mexico and then got married the year I graduated. I had heard that he had become a self proclaimed preacher but never got back with him to see what had happened with him.

His is a story that are like many others. They say they aren't interested or maybe just not ready. It seems from the text that the Corinthians are in that crowd. So how does Paul address this lack of urgency? He points to the words from Isaiah 49:8 speaking of the year of Jubilee where every 50th year slaves were set free and the land reverted to the original families. It was a year of celebration, maybe like the burning of a mortgage or other things that now are taken care of.

The people would know what that year was like. They knew it would be a great day, a great year that everyone would look forward to. What Jesus was giving to them was that favorable time, the day of salvation He was offering up to them. It should be a day of anticipation and desire.

Paul begins with this and then he goes on with all those examples of what he and others have gone through, standing up under persecutions and threats of weather and circumstances in life. How did they do it, with sorrow and grumblings, no but *2Corinthians 6:6-7 in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left;*

He then goes on to further explain the things that happened in his life that should have brought him low, should have pushed him to renounce who he was in Christ but because of Christ he could live, rejoicing as he sought to have people brought out of bankrupt slavery to sin, into the riches of the grace of Christ. Yes, the salvation offered by Christ is worth more than all the gold in the world. Paul is offering the riches of salvation to them that can only be found in Jesus.

Paul and by who he and others were as Christians didn't want anything in them to restrict the message of the salvation of Christ to be held back, to be obscured as they with wide open hearts wanted all to come to the knowledge of the truth, teaching that Jesus came for all and paid the price required by going to the cross, shedding His blood for the sins of the whole world.

Paul then, wants them to look at themselves. He lays out that they can't find anything wrong in Paul and others like him but any resistance to this salvation is found only in themselves. He sees them as believers but as ones who are still as Peter writes in his first letter: *Hebrew 5:11-13 About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of*

God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.

A child is prone to just looking to having fun. They must learn to work, to do things that will help others especially if they think it is going to cost them something. They may have to work but then they get the rewards of a “Thank You” or maybe even some other gain but without the work, they would never get to experience what it is like to put some sweat equity into their lives.

I realize as a believer our “Thank You” is already in place. We, because of the faith given and our trust in Jesus have eternal life waiting for us. It is all because of Jesus and we are living out our “Thank You” to Him as we open wide our hearts to others.

We read the Bible and we try to put ourselves and our situations in the place of those being written about. Yes, we need to look at the text and make sure we are looking at it in context, in the way it was meant to be heard by those it was written to at the time. So many do abide by this rule and can find their truth everywhere but they don't let scripture interpret scripture or let plain texts speak to those texts which are harder to understand. With reading and understanding scripture the way it is to be read and understood, children can grow up to eat this solid food we call scripture and they can widen their hearts, looking to others who need to hear the pure Word of the Good News of Jesus and His desire for them to look to Him for salvation and not to their own tainted works.

There are so many who have their own idea of what God is like and how they are to somehow appease God. All besides true Christians think that somehow, by their being good enough they will attain heaven and the promises that await them there. Others falsely think that when this life is over, its is over. What a lie and yet if we are all a result of energized pond scum then I guess that all we will ever be is that pond scum, evolving over great lengths of time with humans no better than other animals or even a tree.

Yes they are being lied to daily as so many think that they have evolved from some lower life form. They have been taught their whole lives by schools that are supported by our tax dollars that they are a result of time and chance and we as Christians have let it happen, not standing up to the lies that go against God's Word

where we have been created by God in the image of the Triune God to be brought back into His family after the separation that the sin of Adam and Eve brought to all creation.

That sin affected all creation and yes, as you know, each of us, still is a part of our lives. Paul listed all the good qualities, the good responses as servants he pointed out and that he and others had dealt with. Had they always lived up to those ideals? Paul knew he hadn't before Christ met him on the road to Damascus and yes he knew of times since where he had faltered, yet overall he had tried to live out his life as a true Christian. He, all the while was wanting to live with a widened heart, open to all as he told of the great gift Jesus came to give to all. He was willing to endure all for the sake of Christ.

Yes, we have sacrificed some and yet as you heard Paul's list, did you see yourselves having to deal with all that Paul listed? Oh, you may have had to endure some but what we know about Paul, we know we haven't had to endure as he did. He talked about what he went through later in this letter in chapter 11:24-29 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?

No, none of us have had to endure anything like that and yet we have been given grace to believe in Jesus and His work for us. Will we be tried? Yes, the Word promises us that. We don't know to what extent but that He will neither leave us or forsake us even though we may have to go through many things.

Did Paul know what he would have to go through? No, and neither do we but we will continue, by the grace of God to believe no matter what may be coming our way. He will be with us and will gives us the words to say as we continue on in Him through His Word and Sacraments.

May the Lord keep us from restricting others as we open wide our hearts to them encouraging them to widen their hearts also.