

Suffering Servanthood

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[0 : 00] 1 Corinthians 4, 1-21. So in 2010, I had a chance to be a part of a large missions conference in Cape Town called the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization, where 4,000 missionaries from 198 countries attended.

So I was not distinguished enough to get invited to the conference, so I snuck in as a volunteer. And most of the volunteers were actually, they're all pastors and missionaries as well. And one evening at the conference, there was a bit of a stir because of one Anglican bishop that was there who refused to sit down. And his reason for not sitting down was that he is a bishop, but he was given the same chair as everybody else in the conference. He thought as a bishop, he should have a better seat, something that reflects his station as a bishop. At that moment, the volunteer who was attending to him had the presence of mind to get on his hands and feet and offer to him, you can sit on me if you want. And so the bishop was ashamed by his bold confrontation and gesture of humility and decided that, okay, I'll just sit on the regular chair after all. Sometimes I think Christians think that now that we are children of the king, because we are adopted children of the creator of the universe, that our life should be one of ease and comfort and glory.

[1 : 32] Even though we claim to be the follower of a crucified Lord, instead of the cross, we want a crown. Instead of faithfulness to God, we seek success in this world. Instead of serving others, we want to lord it over others.

And instead of glorifying Christ, we like to glorify ourselves. The Corinthian church was experiencing a similar struggle. So Paul teaches in this passage that the life and ministry of a Christian should reflect the suffering servanthood of Jesus Christ.

First, Paul, to that end, offers two examples from his life and the life of other apostles of suffering servanthood of Christ. And then he exhorts the Corinthian believers to imitate him.

So that would be my outline. The first point is in verses 1 to 5, example of servanthood. Second point in verses 6 to 13, example of suffering. And the last point in verses 14 to 21 is the exhortation to imitate.

Paul concluded the previous passage by saying in chapter 3, verses 21 to 23, So let no one boast in men, for all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future.

[2 : 41] All are yours, and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. So the church does not belong in any way to Paul or Apollos or Cephas or any other leader of the church.

Rather, they belong to the church and the church to Christ and Christ to God. But then after having said this, Paul now sets forth the proper way in which the church, the Corinthians, can properly perceive of the leaders of the church.

He says this in verse 1. This is how one should regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Paul already used the word servant in the preceding chapters to describe himself and Apollos in chapter 3, verse 5.

But the Greek word that's translated here as servant is actually a different word here in chapter 4, verse 1. It still means servant, but with a different nuance. So the word that was used earlier in chapter 3 highlights the servant's role as an intermediary between two people, two parties, as someone who is a minister, who is an agent that represents someone.

But here the word servant in chapter 4, verse 1 means helper or assistant, and it highlights the accountability of that person to his own master.

[3 : 56] So it refers to someone who has been given a duty, has been charged with something. He is supposed to discharge that duty without any personal prejudice because he's accountable

entirely to his master, his owner, his lord.

And so that meaning is highlighted by the second word that Paul uses also. It's stewards. A steward in this cultural context was usually a slave, a slave that was entrusted by a manager of managing, by the master of managing the household.

So he didn't own anything in the house. He simply stewarded it. And he functioned with delegated authority from the master and was accountable to the master. So again, the same concept of accountability to the master is in view here.

And the mysteries of God that Paul says he's a steward of is the gospel that he mentioned, chapter 2, verse 7, which he called the secret and hidden wisdom of God. It refers to God's salvation plan, which was hidden in the previous ages, but was revealed ultimately once and for all through Jesus Christ.

And he saw himself and the other apostles as stewards of this gospel, servants accountable to God. They had to safeguard it, transfer it, and they were subjected to and accountable to Christ in that regard.

[5 : 07] And due to this nature of servant and steward, as someone who is under another person's authority, Paul says in verse 2, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

The stewards must be found faithful, which can also be translated trustworthy. They have to be worthy of their entrustment. They have to validate the trust that the master has placed on them by faithfully discharging their duties.

And that means it doesn't matter how successful these stewards look to those outside looking in. What matters is that they are faithful to the master who has entrusted this to them.

And so Paul highlights that it's only the judgment of and the verdict of his master that concerns him in verse 3. But with me, it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court.

This verse confirms our suspicion up to this point that the Corinthian believers have been judging Paul and have been examining him. And so they are acting like they're the grand jury and that ought to determine whether Paul is up to snuff or not.

[6 : 13] So Paul tells them, And notice it's not just their judgment that he's saying is inconsequential.

He says, So the expression human court in the Greek is literally human day. And it's similar to the English idiom, Having one's day in court.

You guys have probably heard of that, right? So it refers to a day of judgment in the human court. By using that expression, Paul is intentionally contrasting this human day with the day that he mentioned earlier in chapter 3, verses 12 to 13.

He said there that, Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest, for the day will disclose it.

Because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. So Paul doesn't care about any human day because his hope is set on the day of God's judgment.

[7 : 21] That's why he's able to say, With me, it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. But Paul doesn't stop there. He goes one step further. He says, In fact, I do not even judge myself.

This offers us a revolutionary insight into Paul's humility. Because when people judge us and criticize us, our instinct is to respond in one of two ways.

And one way is to make too much of other people's judgments and criticism and then beat ourselves up. So we say, It's all my fault. I'm stupid and incompetent.

Or we can go the other way. We discount others' criticisms and make too much of our own judgments about ourselves. We say, There's nothing wrong with me at all.

My critics are unfair and biased, and they would do far worse than I do under my circumstances. But Paul says he does neither of these things.

[8 : 19] But with me, it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. He made much of neither other's judgments nor his own judgment because he was holding out for God's judgment.

He escapes that vicious cycle of peer judgment and self-judgment by reserving himself for God's ultimate judgment. Now, but by this, Paul's not saying that he doesn't ever examine his own life in ministry.

Of course he does, and that's what he adds in verse 4. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.

Paul has examined his life in ministry and has a clear conscience, which is a testament to his maturity in the Lord because I certainly can't say that for myself. So he's saying that I've examined myself.

He's grown to a point where he actually has a clear conscience about his life in ministry.

Nevertheless, he insists that that does not mean that he is acquitted because it's the Lord who judges him.

[9 : 21] Paul knows that he is neither objective nor omniscient when it comes to judging himself and his life in ministry. So he suspends judgment and waits for the Lord's judgment, which is perfectly right and just.

And it's standard legal practice if you think about it, right? So if a judge is personally implicated in a case, it's standard legal practice for the judge to recuse himself, right? But when it comes to ourselves, we are often delusional.

We think that we can be an accurate judge of ourselves. We think that we can fairly and accurately judge our own life in the ministry. And so I want to ask you this morning, are you living today in fear of people's judgments?

Do you find yourself often passing judgment on yourself or on others? Because when you have your day in court, it doesn't matter whether you have a thousand critics or a thousand supporters. It doesn't matter that unknown millions of people have judged you in the court of public opinion. It doesn't matter how many witnesses you have testifying on your behalf in the stands because their opinion counts for nothing.

[10 : 30] And when you have your day in court, it doesn't matter how vehemently you protest your own innocence. It doesn't matter how compelling your own defense is. Your opinion counts for nothing in court.

What counts is what the judge says. What counts is his verdict. So why be so exercised over judgment? So why, whether it's by others or yourself, like why, why did we as God's servant have to curry favor with other people, as other humans, as they were our master?

So then I want to encourage you this morning, step outside of the court of human opinions and judgments and entrust yourself completely to the sovereign God who knows everything, sees everything.

It's his verdict that counts. He is our master. He's our judge. And he is our God. In this book, Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis writes about what this kind of humility and servanthood would actually look like.

He writes, quote, Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man, he will be what most people call humble nowadays. He will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody.

[11 : 42] Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took real interest in what you said to him. If you do dislike him, it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily.

He will not be thinking about humility. He will not be thinking about himself at all. In Paul's words, I do not even judge myself.

People who possess true Christian humility like this live with the sense of freedom and self-forgetfulness. They are able to rejoice in other successes without getting envious, and they enjoy their own successes without getting puffed up.

They can receive criticisms from others without being defensive and dismissive on the one hand or depressed and dejected on the other. They can offer constructive criticisms to others with love and humility rather than anger and pride because they subject all human judgments, including their own, to the ultimate judgment of God.

This is what Christian servanthood looks like. And since Paul is ultimately accountable to Christ and not to the Corinthians, Paul warns the Corinthian believers against judging the servants of Christ.

[12 : 55] He says in verse 5, Therefore, Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.

Then each one will receive his commendation from God. This is continuing the line of thought that we saw in chapter 3 where Paul told us that we cannot in any ultimate, final sense, judge the quality of our Christian labor because only the day of judgment will reveal the true quality of our neighbor. So following that line of thought, Paul's arguing here that the Corinthians are judging and dismissing him, his teaching as immature in a premature way. Now, this doesn't mean that we can't judge in any way or form any kinds of judgments because just in the immediately next chapter, Paul speaks of the need for the Corinthian church to discipline a sexually immoral brother.

Paul writes in chapter 5, verse 12, Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? So he says we need to judge. And in chapter 6, verse 5, Paul encourages believers to settle disputes among Christians themselves instead of suing each other.

So it is necessary for the church as the body of Christ to form certain judgments in appropriate times. But when they do, they have to render appropriate judgment according to God's verdict.

[14:15] It has to be in accordance with God's word, not their own judgments as the Corinthians were doing. The kind of judgment that Paul's forbidding here is different altogether because the Corinthians were judging Paul not by God's standard, but by the standards of worldly wisdom.

And they were doing so prematurely. And that's why Paul is saying, your judgment is inconsequential. So instead of their divisive boasting in certain church leaders and their criticism of Paul, Paul offers a counter example of Christ-like servanthood.

That's the first point. And then having offered the example of Christ-like servanthood, Paul also offers in verses 6 to 13 an example of Christ-like suffering. He says, the life and ministry of a Christian should reflect the suffering servanthood of Christ.

In verse 6, which is a transition from a previous paragraph, he says this, Everything that Paul has said up to this point about servanthood from chapter 3 verse 5 to chapter 4 verse 5, Paul's saying that he has applied to himself and to our polls for their benefit.

And Paul gives two parallel purposes for why he did this, and the two are related, they explain each other. So look at the rest of verse 6. It says, That you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

[15:45] The first clause says, That you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written. The phrase, that phrase is preceded by a definite article in the Greek, which means, if you want to translate that literally, it would read, it would read, That you may learn by us the not beyond what is written.

Right? That doesn't really make sense as you think about it. Right? So that's the standard way in which quotations are introduced in the Greek. So that's why the NIV, if you have the NIV translation in your hand, in verse 6, it says it this way.

Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and I pose for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, Do not go beyond what is written. Right? So Paul seems to be quoting a saying, a maxim here.

And he says, Not beyond what is written. It's likely similar to English idioms that we use, such as stick to the script or stay within the lines or keep within bounds.

Right? So he's saying, the saying means to keep within the bounds of something. But what does Paul mean by what is written? The verb write occurs in its passive perfect form.

[16:51] It is written or it has written ten times throughout 1 Corinthians. And every single time, it precedes a direct quotation of scripture. So I think it's safe to assume when Paul says, Do not go beyond what is written.

He means don't go beyond what is written in scripture. And he cited several Old Testament scripture up to this point. And one that may be most relevant for this is Jeremiah 9, 23, 24, which he cited in chapter 131.

It says, Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man boast in his might. Let not the rich man boast in his riches. But let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. So these verses from Jeremiah will be alluded to again in this passage, actually. So it's possible that this specific passage is something that Paul has in mind as he's writing this. He's saying, Don't go beyond what is written in scripture.

Because Corinthians were boasting in people instead of in God. And that would make good sense of the second purpose that he gives in verse 6. That none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

[18 : 03] By not going beyond what is written, that's what he means. That they would not boast in other people. Instead boast in God. And the language of being puffed up is so great because it conjures up an image of literally like a bloated belly.

Or someone who is so prideful that their head's just swelling up like a balloon. That's the image that he has. Puffed up. And so they're saying when you say I follow Paul or I follow Apollos and boast in that way Paul's saying you're just being puffed up.

You're just full of hot air. And then in verse 7 Paul gives the reason why the Corinthians boasting is out of place and he writes For who sees anything different in you?

What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it why do you boast as if you did not receive it? The Greek word that is translated here as see anything different means to discern or to distinguish.

And it's a cognate of the word that's translated judge earlier. So Paul is basically doing a little word play here to get back at them and he's saying for who you're pronouncing judgment on me before my time but he's saying but who sees anything different in you?

[19 : 09] Who judges you any differently? I'm just a servant who is stewarding God's and entrustment from God and you are no different is what Paul is saying.

So if you were to put it in colloquial English he's saying who do you think you are? I mean that's what he's saying. I mean don't why are you judging? Who judges you any differently? Who do you think you are? And then Paul continues in the rest of verse 7 What do you have that you did not receive?

If then you received it why do you boast as if you did not receive it? All that they have every single one of their spiritual endowments they have received freely from God in accordance with God's grace instead of their merit or deserving.

So if that's the case then why are they acting like they earned it and as if they deserve some credit for it? They're acting like like a child right? Who just received like his brother won a match in track and field race or something like that and got a gold medal and he gave it to his younger brother as a gift and then he turns around to his friends and says hey look look at this and he's like I know I don't look kind of fast but I'm pretty fast right?

I mean it's like you're boasting with the gift that you received as if you earned it yourself right? Or like a teenager that has rich parents that just bought him a brand new car and he drives around like he owns all the money in the world right?

[20 : 25] I mean that's it's vain it's puffed up that's what he's saying why what do you have that you didn't receive? Nothing so why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

All the spiritual gifts we have all the spiritual life we have in us every single one of it is a gift that highlights the generosity of the giver so why do we make it a ground for our own boasting?

We're just recipients of that gift and the Corinthians believers possessed many gifts as we see in the following chapters and they saw those gifts as evidence of their spiritual arrival as I mentioned before and they thought of themselves as so mature and so spiritual that they were throwing off of their shoulders even the authority of the apostle Paul and so in a series of short sentences Paul offers some examples of the Corinthians inappropriate boasting in verse 8 Already you have all you want Already you have become rich Without us you have become kings and would that you did reign so that we might share the rule with you The repetition of the word already highlights the Corinthians theological error According to scripture the kingdom of God the reign of God which refers to the kingdom of God refers to the reign of God the rule of God is already here but not yet and it's already here but it's not yet consummated so that's why Jesus says in John 5 25

Truly truly I say to you an hour is coming and is now here and when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God those who hear will live that hour is both already here on the one hand but it's still coming so it's here but it's not fully consummated and so with the it's kind of like with the life and death and resurrection ascension of Jesus Christ it's as if the hourglass of the last days has been turned and so the sand is trickling down and the definite it's definitely coming it's imminent but it's already here in a real sense because that hourglass has been turned but it has not been consummated there's still sand left in the hourglass that's basically kind of the consistent biblical teaching about the end times and that's why the Bible sees even the time of the apostle every all the age is subsequent to Christ as the last days and so some Christians mistakenly think that only the not yet part of this is true and the not yet aspect of the kingdom of God is true people who think that way believe that the new age of Christ's reign is not yet here and because of that they believe

that they don't participate in that reign and that they believe that that's all lying in the future and therefore that the power of God's spirit is not available to them for spiritual growth and victory so the Christians that live with this not yet mentality have think that Christ live as if Christ's coming made no real spiritual difference to how they live here and now and it's only the second coming that will come that will solve all their problems so they tend to live with the defeatist victim mentality right they have believe that they have no power to overcome sin or to change this world and Christians on the other hand like the Corinthians mistakenly believe that only the already aspect of the kingdom of God is true that it's all here and they believe that the new age of Christ's reign is already consummated and because of that they believe they have everything already with nothing left to get in Christ's second coming so already you have all you want already you have become rich without us you have become kings and they live with the triumphalistic mentality so as if everything is within their powers to do everything that they need to do in this world and in their lives and in order to correct that error

Paul now uses his own life and the life of other apostles as an example of suffering to show that the Christians do not in fact have all that they want yet they do in a real way reign with Christ now but that reign has not yet been consummated and so he says this in verse 9 for I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all like men sentenced to death because we have become a spectacle to the world to angels and to men in the Roman gladiatorial games the finale of the show was when the captive slaves were condemned to death or were released loose to fight to their death or if they had people that they were going to kill execute to give them over to the beast that was the finale of the gladiatorial games and so they are Paul is describing himself in that way they are the last of all like men sentenced to death a spectacle to the world to angels and to men that's a striking contrast right to the Corinthians posture they were acting like kings the apostles however are like slaves condemned to death

[25 : 18] Paul continues in verse 10 we are fools for Christ's sake but you are wise in Christ we are weak but you are strong you are held in honor but we in disrepute right he's alluding once again here to Jeremiah 9 23 24 which said the wise should not boast in their wisdom the strong not boast in their strength and the rich not boast in their riches but instead in the Lord but the Corinthians are boasting in exactly those things they're saying in boasting in their wisdom boasting in their riches boasting in their honor and the way Paul describes himself is exactly in contrast to this because the Corinthian believers are kind of drunk on their theology of glory and Paul's trying to sober them up with the good dose of the theology of the cross he says in verses 11 to 13 to the present hour we hunger and thirst we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless and we labor working with our own hands when reviled we bless when persecuted we endure when slandered we entreat we have become and are still like the scum of the world the refuse of all things and so he's

I don't know if you are able to catch it in that brief reading but he's directly point for point contrasting his lifestyle with the lifestyle and the boasting of the Corinthians because they were saying to themselves that they already had all they want and then Paul insists that he is hungry and thirsty the Corinthians were boasting that they already had become rich but Paul says that he is still poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless and working with his own hands but the Corinthians believed that they had already become kings and then Paul insists that he and the other Pauls are still like the scum of the world the refuse of all things and Paul's intentionally using very degrading terms to describe himself and the other apostles right the word scum and refuse I mean they're very accurate translations because they are off scourings you guys know what I mean when I say that so it's like when you clean your carpet right if you have a carpet cleaner it's amazing the things that come up after you go through your house like you're like oh I cannot believe

I'm living in this right and so all that accumulated filth and dirt that you have to pour out that's scum right or when you clean all the gunk off your dishes or when you're trying to scrub the grime off your bathtub that's scum that's what Paul's saying that's scum we're scum we're treated like that and he says they refuse it's garbage they're treated like garbage they're like trash in this world that's how the great apostle Paul describes himself his position in this world we have become and are still like the scum of the world the refuse of all things and as such he says when reviled we bless when persecuted we endure when slandered we entreat you could just hear the apostle Paul's heartbeat in that verse when he says that because that's exactly how Paul's currently presently in his writing responding to the Corinthians because they reviled him but he's blessing them they persecuted him but he's enduring them and they slandered him but he's entreating them and so he continues his

entreaty in verses 14-21 and that brings me to my third point the exhortation to imitate the examples of servanthood and suffering that Paul just laid out he now exhorts them to imitate and he says in verse 14

I do not write these things to make you ashamed but to admonish you as my beloved children children he switches his metaphors once again and exhorts them as their spiritual father in verses 15-16 he says for though you have countless guides in Christ you do not have many fathers for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel I urge you then be imitators of me because the members of the Corinthian church came to faith in Christ through Paul's ministry he claims to be their spiritual father and the word guides or guardians in Greco-Roman culture was also typically a slave that was in charge of basically taking the children back and forth to school basically in charge of the kids while the father was not there what present with them and so he's saying that you have many guides and guardians like this in fact you have thousands of guides is the literal translation but he says you only have one father the one who founded this church and brought them to the Lord in the first place so he's here finally reasserting his own authority as the founding apostle of the Corinthian church because they've been challenging his authority up to this point and then he leverages that metaphor to urge them to be imitators of him right

I mean in the ancient world the children were encouraged to follow in the footsteps of their parents their fathers in particular and you still see a trace of this in a lot of people's last names right and I think example some of the people have the last name baker right that means their ancestors were bakers or if you're a smith you're a silversmith or coppersmith or if your last name is bauer that's a German word for a peasant or a farmer so your ancestors were farmers in the ancient world right they were expected to follow in their footsteps right to do those things or in a more kind of basic simple way like I mean we expect children to be like their parents right like father like son right if you have really good looking parents like you're not going to get an ugly child all of a sudden right and if you have really intelligent parents you expect your child to be intelligent right it's people that expect their children to behave like their parents so Paul's using the same logic and he tells them as their spiritual father you should be characterized by servanthood and suffering because that's what my life looks like and I'm your spiritual father and because Paul himself could not be present with them he says he sent

[31 : 22] Timothy for that purpose in verse 17 that's why I sent you Timothy my beloved and faithful child in the Lord to remind you of my ways in Christ as I teach them everywhere in every church like earlier Paul described the need for the stewards of the mysteries of Christ to be faithful and Paul here describes Timothy as faithful and I think Paul's concerned here that because the Corinthians were judging him and dismissing him that they would receive Timothy coldly and so he says no receive him warmly because he is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord and he tells them that when he comes Timothy knows the ways of Christ and that he will show them that because that's the same way he's taught them in every church that he's been and imitation kind of makes us a little uncomfortable I think because we have notions of humility where like oh if you're humble you should never boast about anything you should not be good at anything I mean that's the kind of false humility right but if you have a proper sense of humility we are talking about Christian humility

I think there is a place where imitation is good and it should be commended in fact it's an essential part of Christian discipleship is to because when we hang out with people certain people we tend to act more like them to talk more like them and that's an essential part of Christian discipleship and so Paul urges believers to imitate him in many of his letters and he will do it again later in this letter in 1 Corinthians 11:1 where he says be imitators of me as I am of Christ and that puts a weight irresponsibly on all of us doesn't it because we have to live in a manner worthy of our calling and be examples to those around us I mean that puts the pressure on the teacher if you have to tell people to imitate them right and this is one of the reasons why being a member of the church being in a regular Christian community is so important because there are things you can't learn from just reading a book that you have to learn from observing the lives of people and more mature believers among us need to say to younger believers among us come watch me

I'll show you how to study the Bible come watch me and I'll show you how to pray come watch me and I'll show you how to serve your wife and family come watch me and I'll show you how to respect and serve your husband come watch me and I'll show you how to share the gospel with an unbeliever and then Paul turns his attention more specifically to the instigators of this problem in the

Corinthian church who arrogantly rejected his apostleship he writes to them in verses 18 to 19 some are arrogant as though I were not coming to you but I will come to you soon if the Lord wills so some of the Corinthians were boasting and criticizing Paul as if Paul would never come back to correct them and Paul maintains that he is definitely planning on visiting them but he doesn't give a specific timetable right he says if the Lord wills and he's experienced wanting to go somewhere for his missionary journey but not being able to go before so he's more tentative as he says this but he does say he has definite plans to come he will come soon and when he comes he says in verses 19 to 20

I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power for the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power this is awesome right the word arrogant here is the exact same word that was translated earlier as puffed up right and the word talk here is the same word that was translated in the preceding chapters as word so in 117 Paul said that he intentionally did not preach the gospel with words of eloquent wisdom lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power and similarly in chapter 2 verses 4 to 5 Paul said his speech and his message were not in plausible words of wisdom but in demonstration of the spirit and of power so that their faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God right so Paul's using the same concepts here because the puffed up Corinthian believers were boasting in their worldly wisdom and word of eloquence and then but Paul warns them that when he visits them he will test not their word but their power because God's kingdom doesn't consist in word but power and that those previous references to the word power helps us understand that Paul is here referring to the power that is associated with the cross of Christ in chapter 118 he said the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God right so Paul's contrasting the Corinthians word of worldly wisdom with the word of the cross which is the power of God and so what he's saying here is that the power to save does not lie in persuasive rhetoric or philosophical fluency it lies in the crucified Lord the gospel of Jesus Christ and the proof of this power is in the Corinthians themselves because Paul came and simply preached that gospel and the Corinthians converted they came to faith in the Lord and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and as a result of that they possessed many spiritual gifts that were causing some problems in their midst so they themselves were proof of the fact that power lay in the cross of Christ and so Paul's just

I mean taking them to task here he's so confident and I love that confidence in the gospel that he has look at it he's not afraid of his impending confrontation with these Corinthians instigators even though they're probably experts in Greek rhetoric and philosophical writings and sophistry but even though they have all of that Paul's not worried one bit about them he's not worried that he would be overpowered by them because he's so certain of the powerful manifestation of the gospel itself that that will be his vote of confidence when he comes Paul's confident that the puffed up Corinthians eloquence will not produce gospel fruit that it will not lead to transformation of people's lives and it will not lead to the filling of the Holy Spirit and the distribution of the gifts of the Holy Spirit I hope all of us can have that confidence in the gospel because the gospel is not a gimmick it's not a fad we should strive to make the gospel the main thing in our ministry not because of our theological or denominational commitments or traditions but because that's what Apostle Paul did because that's what scripture itself enjoins and if we don't have this confidence in the gospel we will be hesitant to share the gospel if we doubt its power to save and transform people's lives then we will be tentative and reluctant witnesses it's only when we share

[38 : 19] Paul's confidence in the power of the gospel to change people that seem to be totally beyond saving that's when we be bold witnesses that's when we will be effective evangelists and in the conclusion of his appeal in verse 21 Paul resorts one more time to the father children analogy that he used and he says what do you wish shall I come to you with the rod or with love in a spirit of gentleness the rod is a figurative representation of fatherly discipline and the spirit of gentleness is an expression of fatherly love right and so they're both expressions of fatherly care but whether he comes with the rod or with the spirit of gentleness will be determined by the Corinthians behavior will they change their ways will they reform their ways and will they repent and that last verse shows clearly that for Paul the Christian life there was no alternative but the life that reflects the suffering servanthood of Christ Christ has sanctioned no other type of Christian life and ministry and that's why even if it takes a rod

Paul will correct them he says because they were living in a way that's contrary to the cross the path that Jesus took to his glory his ascension and his his seating and his sitting down and ruling at

the father's right hand the path that he took to that glory was the path of the cross and it's the same for every single Christian the path to glory for us is path to through the cross and look at the prophecy in Isaiah how it describes our Lord Jesus Christ in Isaiah 53 and please don't take this passage for granted just because it's so familiar and then tune me out as I'm reading it okay listen to it actually listen to the words that the author uses to describe it he says he had no form or majesty that we should look at him no beauty that we should desire him he was despised and rejected by men men of sorrows and acquainted with grief and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised and we esteemed him not surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows yet we esteemed him stricken smitten by God and afflicted but he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and with his wounds we are healed he was oppressed he was afflicted yet he opened not his mouth like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before it shears is silent so he opened not his mouth by oppression and judgment he was taken away it was the will of the Lord to crush him he has put him to grief when his soul makes an offering for guilt he shall see his offspring he shall prolong his days and the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied by his knowledge shall the righteous one my servant make many to be accounted righteous and he shall bear their iniquities it's through the anguish of his soul that the Lord

Jesus found satisfaction in redeeming his people it's through his despisement his affliction grief sorrow and slaughter that our Lord Jesus saved us do you desire to be wealthy powerful beautiful if that's your goal in your Christian life you have chosen the wrong path even the rich and famous Christians that you hear on podcasts or at conferences if they are faithful to the Lord they experience sorrows and griefs that we know not of precious that we know not of every path of the path toward glory for every single Christian is the path of the cross and that's why Jesus said to his disciples in John 15 20 a servant is not greater than his master if they persecuted me they will also persecute you if you are not yet a follower of Jesus then I want to dissuade you from following Jesus unless you're willing to pick up your cross pick up his cross and follow him why then should we want to be a Christian if that's what Christian life entails because what does it profit a man if you gain the whole world yet forfeit your soul because as Christians we believe that this momentary suffering that we have in this life prepares us for the eternal weight of glory because we would rather be a suffering servant of our Lord Jesus than be insufferable kings in this world because we'd rather be the scum and refuse of this world with Christ than be the jewel of this world without Christ that's why because Christ is worth it all and if you are already a follower of Christ then let this be a warning and an encouragement to you because if you start to feel home in this world if you start to feel comfortable in this world then you're losing touch with your true home in heaven but if you are treated like dirt in this world remember what

Jesus said in John 16 33 in this world you will have tribulation but take heart I have overcome the world when we are ridiculed for our faith in academia or in our workplaces when we're caricatured as ignorant as regressive bigots when Christians in Muslim countries and Buddhist countries and Hindu countries are persecuted and martyr for their faith when they have to go underground to proclaim a prohibited gospel and in many smaller ways when we in each of our own lives make small sacrifices and endure suffering to advance the gospel when we serve the church though it's hard and difficult at times when the church comes together to serve a brother and sister that's getting married even though it's a lot of work and you're all exhausted on Sunday morning when we serve the church and when we forego earthly pleasures earthly riches so that we can be more generous and give sacrificially to others and toward

[44 : 52] God's mission when we take difficult and thankless jobs like many of you have to stay here so we can minister be a part of a church plant to be missionaries here when you're working those jobs even though you don't want to do because so that you can put food on the table for your family when you are daily you have your hands full with dirty diapers and dirty clothes and dirty dishes so you can serve your family when someone hurts you in the church or uses harsh words or snubs you and you cover that with love and forgiveness when you overcome your own fears and anxieties to share the gospel with your unbelieving neighbors in a hundred little ways when we deny ourselves each day for the sake of Christ we're imitating the suffering servanthood of Christ and as such we become pictures representations of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the watching world so take heart today if you're a believer be encouraged today and make it your aim today to reflect the suffering servanthood of Christ let's pray together

God only don't know you and say this that Lord Jesus you are worth it all that you are more precious than silver or gold that you are more to be desired than anything that this world has to offer Lord we believe that with all our hearts help us more and more to live with that reality so that we can be faithful representations of you the suffering servant and we pray Lord that you if there's anyone here that doesn't know you yet that you would save that you would bring true conviction of sin that you would exalt your son in our sight so that we pursue him at all costs do that in our midst today in Jesus name we pray amen