

1 Corinthians 4:9-13 The Scum Games Falls Ch. PM 2/25/2024

Chapter 4 is about Christian leaders.

V. 1-5, Christian leaders are faithful servants who have authority.

v. 6-8, Christian leaders who fit the Scriptural standard of leaders are examples who deserve to be followed, but not to be placed on a pedestal.

Now we study v. 9-13, which shows us that Christian leaders who suffer mistreatment, respond like Jesus responded.

The chapter is one of contrasts. Paul showed how Christian leaders are viewed by the world, in contrast to how they are viewed by God.

In the train of the crucified Christ, here is how Christian leaders are viewed by the world:

1. Like a public show that is repulsive, yet somehow riveting. (v.9)

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.”*

Paul had just got finished writing verse 8 to the Christians in Corinth. How did the Corinthians see themselves? Rich. Filled. Ruling.

Now in contrast, here in verse 9, Paul saw himself as the opposite. Poor. Emptied. Last of all. Powerless. On display for the world, for angels, and men to watch him be humiliated.

Verse 9 was Paul’s creative way to show what apostles are like. Apostles are like men sentenced to die while spectators watch for entertainment.

In the ancient Roman world, they had stadiums, but they were not for calm, subdued sports. The Romans had theaters, but they were not for harmless plays. The Romans’ giant coliseums were for brutality.

First, the Romans would make a big show of bringing in professional gladiators. Then, they would bring in Rome’s criminals and prisoners. All would

go to the center of the arena, the ring of death. One gladiator against one criminal – those two must fight until one of them was dead. What does this have to do with Paul? The last to enter the coliseum were the people who were about to be killed. Today's victims. Today's scum. Who is it today? Look, says Paul, look. It's me!

Paul says that God was showing Paul and all the apostles their place as *a spectacle to the world*, which means an event for the world to watch. In addition, the event also had the attention of the angels of God. Angels were watching in horror, and humans were gazing in glee.

Paul wrote this because Paul was revealing something about how Christian leaders were treated. Since we already know how Christ Himself was treated, it ought not to be a surprise to us. They beat Jesus. After they had beat Jesus as much as was legally allowable, then they started the whole process of nailing Jesus to a cruel Roman cross, and hoisting him up on it, until He was dead. Lastly, they buried Jesus. What would they do to the apostles of Jesus? Answer - not much different.

With all of that in mind, Paul made a significant point about Christian leaders. It seems to Paul, that God has put Paul on display – like men sentenced to death in an arena, while the world watches.

What was it like to be an apostle in a place like the city of Corinth? It was like the savage arena. After the apostles preached Christ crucified, they themselves re-lived Christ's cross that they preach. In prior days, the Greeks had put on plays and performed stories and theater about conflicts and deaths with meaning. But the Greek plays gave way to the Roman coliseum, in which theater was not pretend theater with actors. Those Roman conflicts were real fights resulting in actual deaths. Men literally fought to the death for an audience.

What was it like for an apostle? If he was found faithfully preaching Christ, it was gruesomely difficult.

empowering us and guiding us. Grace means that God gives us salvation, and gives us the gifts of loving God and loving others.

Affliction. How Christian leaders deal with suffering is very revealing. Too often Christians fail to grasp that suffering and affliction are a normal part of the Christian life. Forgetful Christians get reminded by watching the suffering in the everyday walk of their leaders. Suffering is inevitable and essential. In fact, we learn many of the most significant lessons of our lives through suffering. Jesus had to suffer. The Apostles had to suffer. So, let's get used to the idea of all of us suffering. Suffering precedes glory. We are not yet in heaven.

Persecution. How reluctant are we to accept that another indispensable part of the walk of Christians is that we receive open criticism and severe forms of pushback from the world for what we believe? We are called to stand boldly and wisely for God's truth, and then accept whatever consequences result. We live in a society that speaks out very strongly against discrimination directed to certain groups. People stand up for women, for African-Americans, for immigrants, for children, for people of Jewish descent, and for LGBTQ. But discrimination against Christians, Christian leaders, and the railing against the ethical views of Christian churches seems to be acceptable within our society. So, what is our response?

3. Those who must be openly vilified, reviled, and mistreated. (v.11-13)

Verses 11-13, *"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."*

Here in verse 11, Paul lists in rapid succession what it has meant to be an apostle for 20 years: hungry, thirsty, poorly clothed, people beat him up, constantly on the move and nowhere to call home, and in verse 12, laboring and working a

side job with his own hands.

Paul's whole point was that in taking up the calling to bring the Word of God to the Gentiles, Paul had suffered. Paul had uncertainty and vulnerability. Paul often was made to feel like a fool, experienced weakness, and was dishonored often and publicly. And for Paul it was not over. Verse 11, "To the present hour..."

Paul had been consistent and faithful in the tasks. Here Paul was describing how much the calling had cost him. Over in the second letter to the Corinthians, in chapter six, Paul further wrote that he was beaten, imprisoned, endured riots, sleepless nights, hunger, afflictions, hardships, calamities, treated as an imposter, and treated as a person being punished, possessing nothing, and dying.

With the word "tent-maker missionary," we have glamorized Paul's job. Yes, Paul was a tent-maker, but tents were made from fresh animal hides, which is leather. It was stinky exhausting work. Paul did this work at night – basically he worked the night shift - so that Paul could offer the gospel free of charge. The people in that culture despised physical labor, but Paul had to make leather tents with his own hands. Paul underwent a catalog of sufferings!

Paul walked the path of suffering, the path of Christ. It is like a repeat of Christ's sufferings. Whenever Paul opened his mouth to preach, it was like a replay of suffering. Paul's preaching even received boos and heckling. Let's look at Paul as an example for Christians of how to respond to mistreatment. How did Paul respond to the boos and the heckling? In a Christ-like way! Which was what? Kindness. Verse 12 tells us that on the occasions when Paul and the other apostles were reviled by the crowds, Paul and the apostles responded with a blessing. When Paul and others were persecuted, their response was to put up with it – to endure it. And in any instance in which an apostle was slandered or vilified, he retorted in gentleness and peacemaking words.

The apostles of Christ had become followers Christ Himself! 1 Peter 2:21-

23, “...to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth.”

Apostles did no complaining. Apostles never lied to get out of being reviled. Apostles never shouted back at their persecutors. Rather the apostles patiently and silently submitting to the mistreatment, with a contented spirit. No threats. No expressions of rage and hatred. Who does that sound like?

When Christ Jesus was mistreated, what was His response?

Peter the apostle went on to write in 1 Peter 2:23, “When [Christ] was reviled, he did not revile in return; when He suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him who judges justly.”

In Luke 23:34, even from the cross, Jesus prayed, “Father, forgive them...”

Did Paul know the viewpoint of those who mistreated Paul? Our text today in verse 13, Paul answered, “...We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.”

If you scrape of the bottom of your barn boots, that is scum. The filth that is scraped off of something. If you sweep the barn floor, that is refuse.

What does it mean? It means that Paul was a missionary whose message was not welcome! If Paul preached to Jews, Paul was unwelcome. If Paul preached to Gentiles, Paul was unwelcome. If Paul preached to Romans, Paul was unwelcome.

In these last 2,000 years, the sufferings and rejection of pioneering missionaries was often like this. Missionaries often underwent personal losses and bypassed many comforts in order to bring the news of spiritual life to those spiritually dead. In the case of Corinth, Paul the missionary came to people who were already committed to this world’s wisdom, and already were comfortable living in Corinth. They thought that they had arrived. They thought that they were kings (verse 8). They believed that they had reached a good place without the

apostle Paul. They were on the top of the world. Paul was on the bottom of the world. Paul was the lowest, most afflicted of people.

Where are we? What are we willing to endure for Christ, when Paul the apostle suffered so much for Christ?

Paul considered his place as a Christian leader was the cause of him receiving ridicule, hatred, verbal abuse, and physical abuse with the possibility of death.

Conclusion: To be a Christian leader is to be humble like Christ.

To be considered a fool, for our service to Christ, is wisdom.

To recognize our weakness, and so to rely on Christ, is strength.

Countries that have persecution, hardships, poverty, corruption have an increase in church membership and involvement, but those countries where Christians are surrounded by financial ease and comfort, they forget the demands of Christ on their lives. Rich comfortable Christians tend to lose their love of Christ.

Christ Himself endured affliction and reproach.

The apostles of Christ endured affliction and reproach.

What must Christian leaders do? Endure affliction and reproach.