

## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

October 15, 2023

Pastor James Enderle

20<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [2 Kings 21:1-15](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 118 CWS

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [2 Corinthians 6:1-13](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 21:33-43](#)

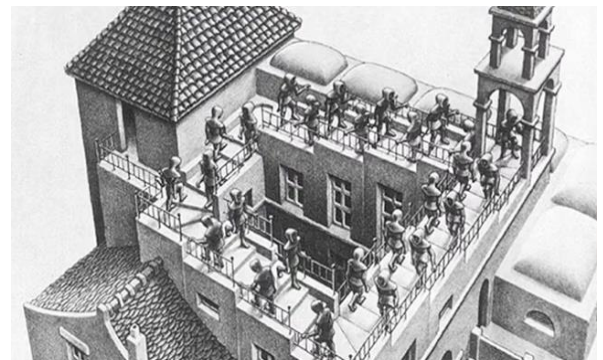
### Our God...Patiently Seeks Fruits Paradoxes of the Gospel

1. \_\_\_\_\_ with urgency
2. Suffering yet \_\_\_\_\_
3. A gift but \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_ yet \_\_\_\_\_ on the Lord

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from Jesus Christ, our Lord:

There are some things in this world that often seem to contradict each other and don't seem to fit together, but they do. They are paradoxes. We see that in Scripture. We see that in the world. An example of illusions or of paradoxes is this famous drawing by M. C. Escher, the stairs, where it works. How can you be going up and down and still continually be able to go on there? It's kind of an optical illusion, but you look at it and think that shouldn't work, but it does. It's one of the crazy paradox, optical illusions where you wonder how it fits together.



In Scripture, God speaks of a lot of things that are hard for us to put together. I was talking recently with some Christians that said "Jesus didn't die for everyone. He only died for believers." But Scripture clearly says **God so loved the world,** [\(John 3:16\)](#) and **"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"** [\(John 1:29\)](#) Jesus died for all. But then they said, "How can this be because some aren't saved?" There is a paradox that we can explain. Yes, Jesus died for all but some reject that gift. Others struggle with that and say that can't fit together. They judge things by a human

standard and say "If it's this way, then that can't be true." That's what Paul is talking about in our section and in a lot of [2 Corinthians](#). He is talking about **paradoxes of the Gospel**. A lot of things in his ministry look one way but, in fact, were the other. It was hard for people to understand.

Last week when we looked at [2 Corinthians](#), we talked a little bit about the situation Paul was in. He had written to them, but before that he had preached to them and spent a lot of time in Corinth. So later he writes [1 Corinthians](#) and talks about different things. He talks about the life of the church. He talks about one major sexual sin that the people were even proud of and he said "Get rid of that! That should not be a part of your Christian life." He talks about communion and idol worship and different things like that. Then in between this letter and [1 Corinthians](#), something happens.

There is a group of people that starts opposing Paul and saying "Look at him. He writes and condemns sin strongly in his letters, but when he is in person, he is pretty weak. His letters don't match his speech. We didn't pay him. He didn't ask for pay, but he probably took some of the money that was given for Jerusalem." Finally they said, "Look at his ministry. He suffers all the time. Is God really working in him? Is that really a God-blessed ministry when he has reached and had all these difficulties in his life?" So Paul discusses those things. As he is discussing those things and he is talking against these super apostles (as he calls them), he speaks about some of these paradoxes in the Gospel. Things aren't what they really seem.

In [Chapter 4](#), there is a famous one where he talks about how we are jars of clay, our bodies are jars of clay, but we contain a precious treasure. Even though our bodies will fade away, we have an eternal, priceless message to share with others. It's something that won't go away and lasts into eternity. He says we are wasting away but inwardly we are being renewed day by day. So he speaks of this and then he speaks about a ministry of reconciliation in [Chapter 5](#) that really leads into this section. I'll read those last verses so we get the context of where Paul is in our section. In [2 Corinthians 5:16-21](#), he says this: ***So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*** He is saying "Don't look at things the way the world does." That struggle of old and new: we have that old Adam but also a new self. We see him speaking and pouring out this message of reconciliation. He is God's ambassador.

Then he goes on in [Chapter 6](#): ***As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. For he says, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.*** How would you describe the emotions of Paul's writing? He certainly has urgency: be reconciled. He is saying now is the day of salvation. But he is also not cutting them off and saying you have no hope. He is patient. He shows *patience with urgency*. Is that an easy thing to do—to stress how important something is but yet be patient?

Usually we go to the two extremes. We are usually really patient with someone, so we get lax. We might share something and tell them about that but then "It's not that big of a deal." Time goes on and time goes on and we forget about it and we're patient and more patient, but maybe there is the other side where we are too urgent and too heavy-handed and too demanding, so how do you do both? How can you be patient and urgent? I think Paul does a good job here. He emphasizes what it's all about. It's about the Gospel. It's about Jesus. It's about being reconciled to God. He makes it about Jesus and being saved. This is something we want for you. You can't force people to do anything. Maybe this is a feeling you've had as you shared the Gospel with others. "How do I share with family members, friends, relatives without being too heavy-handed and feeling like I'm telling them all the time. There is this pressure. They get annoyed by me. They are going to tell me to go away sometime." Or you're so patient that maybe you never say anything anymore. But there is this urgency to it...***now is the day of salvation.***

We know that when you're in God's Word, when you know of His love and forgiveness, it makes a difference. The most important thing is that it's an eternal thing. The day of salvation is for your salvation and your peace and your forgiveness. And that helps so much in other parts of life: in marriage, in being a single person, how to live your life and how to work. Being in God's Word and knowing of His love and forgiveness makes a difference.

But it doesn't always appear to others that it makes a difference. Sometimes as Christians, we might even look worse off. That's kind of what Paul talks about here. He says in Verse 3, ***We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger...*** Then in Verse 8, ***...through glory and dishonor, bad report and good report; genuine, yet regarded as imposters; known, yet regarded as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.*** There are many Christians who will hold to a different Gospel that wants nothing to do with this. They

hold to a prosperity Gospel. (If you believe enough, if you try hard enough, if you have a strong enough prayer life or just believe more, then God will bless you. God will give you that pay raise. God will give you that opportunity. He will help your business. He will make sure that thing you've been worried about forever is fine. If you're sick, just pray harder and that will be fixed. God will bring healing. The problem is that you just need to pray harder.)

God never promises that as a Christian everything is going to go well in this world. In fact, we are going to have suffering. Yet that doesn't make us losers or mean that the Gospel and His salvation have failed. Paul is saying that even though there is *suffering* he is *yet successful*. He is successful not in the eyes of the world, yet if you look at his ministry, he was very successful. How many churches he started and how the Word had gone out. But to the rest of the world, this is what it looked like—beatings, imprisonment, riots, hardship and distress, sleepless nights, hunger, being sorrowful, being poor, and possessing nothing. But that's not the end of it. Even though life might not always go our way because we live in a sinful world, that sinful world will not want to hear that Gospel message and will reject it and cause persecution. Because we live in a sinful world, hardships come. Disaster and pain come.

Just last week I saw on the news there was the first anniversary of a pretty well-known news story in Milwaukee where a WELS pastor on a regular day was driving to work at Grace Milwaukee, a downtown church. Another car was driving 70mph and it went through red stoplights and hit him, and the pastor died. That was a year ago. They interviewed the wife as she shared about the struggles that were going on in their lives. It's certainly not easy. She shared how hard it was for her children not to have their father around. There is certainly pain and difficulty. But she also has seen how God has worked through difficulty. She has been able to help get laws passed to make the punishment for these things more difficult and to maybe make it less possible for these things to happen. But I know for her, her comfort isn't in just that but in knowing that there is an eternal purpose and an eternal good; that Christ loves her and her husband and her children; that God is with them and is with her husband now, and that in the midst of all of this, we have so much. We have so much to rejoice in even though the world would say "How can you ever have joy or peace in a situation like that? There is so much suffering."

But as Christians, we can go to people when the rest of the world wants to flee because they have no answer. For us as Christians, when there is difficulty and suffering, we have hope. We know that God is working for our eternal good, not just for a temporary good but success for eternity. So we hold onto Him and hold Him to His promises; to know that even in difficulty, even if I don't rejoice, even if it takes years, even if I struggle, I know that God is still with me. God gives us a hope and a peace that nothing else can really give. That really comes to what this message is all about.

As Paul talks, he said, ***We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.*** Before that, in the first verses he says ***we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain.*** Paul is saying "We have poured out our hearts to you, but what are you doing? You are not doing the same thing. You aren't opening your hearts." I don't think Paul is as concerned about himself but what they are receiving in vain—the Gospel.

This is a free gift. It's *a gift* of peace and joy and salvation, your sins forgiven, *but* what do many do? They *reject* it. This gift of everything, possessing everything—many people say "I want nothing to do with it." Much of the world wants nothing to do with Jesus and they say whatever excuse they can to not be a part of Jesus. We can do the same thing when we start to say that Jesus or the Gospel isn't enough. When we make it like "Yes, I'm here and I hear about Jesus, but what really makes me saved or what makes me a good person is that I'm here. I'm better than those people who do those sins. I couldn't imagine doing that." For those who want to reject Jesus, we tend to also make ourselves like that when we are rejecting Him as our Savior and think that we can do it on our own, that we can earn anything before Him. God is pleading with us, pleading with everyone to not receive His grace in vain, to know that salvation comes through Him and through faith and through the work of Christ. He shows how much He loves us and how patient He is.

That's really what the parable is about that Jesus tells; this vineyard that he makes and provides everything for and that he is rightfully collecting his fruit. He sends his servants. One is beaten. One is killed. Another is stoned. He sends more. He is patient. This is often how parables work—everything seems pretty normal. That makes sense. That makes sense. And then something is kind of off. That's what really stands out. That's the real message. You'd expect now that they've beaten and killed these servants, what is he going to do? Take them out, take the land away and be done with it. But what does he do? He is even more patient and he sends his son? Who would do that? But that's what God does for us! He is so patient with us, so patient with the world, He sent His Son to die for us. The people rejected Him and He died for them. This is the love that God has for us. We want to plead with others not to reject Him and our hearts to remember to not reject Him either. So what part do we play, or what does this mean for us going forward?

As Paul is working, we see his passion as he urges people to hear the Gospel. As he is in the middle of that section when he is talking about his hardships, he says these things: ***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...*** Who does it depend on? Paul here is working hard. He is speaking passionately to the Corinthians, but he also knows it's all about God and

His Word. So a reminder to us is a paradox that we should be working—*working yet totally relying on the Lord*. It's not like God doesn't use us. That is the fruits He is asking for from that harvest. He wants to see our fruits and for us to go out and share that message.

When we pray for help for people, who is often the answer? When we pray for someone to share the Gospel with a loved one, often we are the one that God wants to send out. God wants us to know that we can continue to work and share His Gospel but know that He works through it. It's all up to Him and the Gospel and through the Word the Holy Spirit works. We can't say "It's up to God, so I'm not going to do anything." God uses us and wants us to be passionate about it; to speak with joy; to know that He will use our words and work in us.

One of my favorite quotes on that is "to work in the daytime like it all depends on you but to rest knowing it's all up to God." To know that we can work hard but also to know that God will bless our work and we don't have to stress and worry about it. As you do that, be patient with people, stress to them that God is coming back, that day of salvation is coming. And don't struggle when success seems far away or that we have failed. Know that God works through even suffering. And continue to put that gift out, that gift of grace, the gift that means everything to us all, because today is the day of salvation. Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.