

What did God do?

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Brian R. Wipf

If someone were to ask you for some proof of God's existence, his power, his love and grace, what would you show them? What would you say? Do you know what I mean by that? I can imagine that question. Here we are just mere days away from entering into a new facility, but more importantly, mere days away from getting the keys to a brand new ministry tool; a tool we think, we hope and pray opens up new doors of opportunity for us in this county. And it's a big, bright, shiny new tool... it almost feels like a new toy.

With so, so much more carpet in the new facility to keep clean and to vacuum, we've talked about getting a new vacuum cleaner. But not just any vacuum cleaner. A heavy duty, industrial strength, hot rod, V8 vacuum cleaner with straight stack exhaust pipes and a kickin sound system. Here are several I found that I'm going to keep my eye on if they go on clearance (PIC). Vacuuming just became cool, am I right?

I don't want to oversell it, but our new building is a new, shiny tool for ministry, kind of like a new vacuum cleaner. The building is supposed to serve a ministry function; more opportunities to minister to more people. We're not building it for us; we're building it for those who will come. So, we're answering people's questions; we're inviting them to come and visit. We're asking them to come and join us. I'm hoping we're ready for some follow up questions, like, "How do you know God will help me?" "What good is all the Bible stuff anyway?" And "What does Jesus have to do with my life?"

What would you say? How would you answer them? The Apostle Paul says something to the Corinthian church that I think is helpful for us as we think about that question. It's helpful to us in two ways. First of all, what he tells them should encourage and strengthen our own hearts as we are reminded what God has done for us. But it's also helpful to us in that it reminds us of the good God can do for others. Let me show you what I mean; turn with me to 2 Cor. 3.

Now, let me quickly explain what we are about to read. Paul had a confusing relationship with the Corinthian Church. On the one hand, Paul planted this church. He stopped in Corinth on one of his journey's, taught about Jesus and people believed. A church was formed. And Paul stayed there over 18 months helping this church get off the ground. 18 months; you can get to know someone pretty well in 18 months. Pastor George and Melissa have been here a little more than 18 months and I bet a lot of you feel like you've gotten to know them pretty well. Paul knew this church really well and they knew him.

But, there was some bad blood between them, too. They had some pretty sharp points of disagreement that really blew up while he was away. And the portion of the letter we are about to read is Paul explaining to them why he doesn't need to prove himself to them like some anonymous person. They knew him and he knew them. Notice what he say in vs. 1-3 (READ).

You can hear Paul ask, “Letters of recommendation! Why would we need those with you? You know me; I know you.” And then he says, “You are our letter of recommendation!” Who needs references or letters of recommendation? Someone who doesn’t know you; they want to hear someone vouch for you. And Paul is saying, “I don’t need that because I have you. You know and follow Jesus. You’ve had your sins forgiven by God. You have a new heart and a new life in God. And you have that from God because I came with his message! You’re my resume; you’re my letter of reference. If people want to know if we are true church planters, true workers of God, all they have to do is look at you.”

Look at vs. 3 again, “And you show that you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

A few minutes ago I told you that this message should help us in two ways. The first way is this: it should encourage and strengthen our hearts as we remember what God has done for us. Vs 3 says that the church is a letter from Christ, meaning, because of Christ’s work, you are who you are.

Friends, we can say the same thing. We are who we are because of what Christ has done for us. We are a letter, a resume, of the power of God. Sure, maybe a Sunday school teacher, a Titus 2 mentor, a pastor, a friend delivered the message; but it was the power of Christ that brought the life-change. That’s why our theme is “What did God do?” What you and I just put on the cross were testimonies of his grace, his power, his mercy. Can we read some of them now?....

You, my friends, are a testimony of God’s power. You have experienced his grace. And this church family, even this current facilities, have been tools in the hands of your Creator, your Savior and Lord for the wonders of God in your life. Testify to them; tell others what God has done. And then tell them how it can happen for them; a life dedicated and aligned with Jesus in faith ushers in forgiveness of sin and opens up a path for our inclusion into God’s family and sons and daughters of God. Let’s keep telling that to others.

That’s the second angle I want to highlight for you. God’s work in our life opens up hope and opportunity that God will work in the lives of others, too. And he will use us and our sacrifices to spread an fresh aroma of grace. That’s how Paul puts it just a few verses above the one we read; look at vs. 15 of chapter 2 (READ).

I hear the word *aroma* and I think of sweet, pleasant smells. Fresh baked bread. For a guy like me, smoked meat is also pleasant. And these smells are an invitation; “Hey, come on in and have a taste!” That’s what God has made us to be, FBC. God has made us to be an inviting aroma to others that they might taste and see that the Lord is good.

I don't want to be a *stench*. Do you know what I mean? While a sweet aroma is an invitation, a stench is a "Do not enter" sign. Every Sunday morning I throw some of these mints into my pocket; before services and after services I will pop one in just in case my breath hits you all like a ton of bricks. My boys have told me, "Dad, your breath stinks!"

We can be a stench to others regarding faith, too, right? We can be proud, self-righteous, hypocritical, insensitive, and self-centered. Obviously, when we hurt others by being selfish, by being dishonest, we become a stench in their nostrils. And it doesn't take much, does it? This past week Billy Graham passed away; that's a pretty significant loss to our tradition. Billy Graham shaped the gospel ministry in America in a very significant way; most of those things were good. But he made a few mistakes and, sadly, there were some who used his death as platform to highlight those mistakes and criticize him.

Now, none of us are going to be perfect; we're all going to make mistakes. But what's the pattern of our lives like? What are we known for? The easy answer is to say, "our love for Jesus," but that's too intangible and abstract? What does that look like? What does it look like to love Jesus? It looks like loving one another. It looks like obeying his commands. It looks like overcoming the world's temptations and struggles. Do you see what I'm getting at? Devotion and love for Jesus works itself out in the practical and tangible ways outlined in Scriptures. That's how we display our love for Christ. And maybe most of all, our faith gets translated these two ways: humbly admitting the mistakes and failures we make and turning from them AND being gracious to others when they make mistakes. Friends, those two things make a huge difference.

This is what God has done and this is what we pray he keeps doing. Don't stop looking to him as the founder and perfecter of our faith and let's keep watching him do his amazing work.