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2 COR. 3:12-4:2
[mark 4:35-40]

Can you keep a secret? Well I'm not going to tell you, just in case! Secrets are mysterious things. Confidential pieces of news that could ruin someone if they leaked out to the wrong people; good news – the surprise birthday party kind of secret; secret society ways of doing things that the outside world is never meant to know, to keep the kind of sense of importance of being part of the club.

Secrets are about mysteries, unknown things.

The problem is that Christianity is in danger of becoming one of our country's best kept secrets. Christians have the most glorious, hope-giving, life-changing real news stories the world will ever know, about a man who burst free from the mysterious darkness of death and the changed lives that so many people talk about when they know Christ– and we are often so scared to tell people about it and about Jesus Christ, that it's as if we are living in a kind of secret society.

Alternatively, so desperate are some Christians to be liked and to have people join instead of leave, that they will try all means of entertainment, and ulterior motives to get people in. Says the apostle Paul, *We have renounce secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.* (2Cor. 4:2)

Christianity should be open and obvious to everyone, as we positively radiate the life of Christ from day to day. But it's a picture of a sickly looking Jesus with a pale face and a perfect halo which comes to mind for lots of people and he's a benign and harmless character without any punch or power at all. It's a picture of a dull and harsh church representing a fierce, hard God; it's a picture of a list of rules that restrict. So let's think again so we can feel confident enough not to keep God secret

WHAT'S THE BIG SECRET?

Paul says in 3:13, that he and his fellow Christians are '*not like Moses*'. Think back to Moses, taking his Israelites through the wilderness. God summoned him to meet on Mount Sinai. There Moses had the unbelievable experience of being face to face with God, but so brilliant was God's physical glory, even from the back, that Moses had to cover his face.

(Remember the eclipse of the sun? mostly cloudy but for weeks we were given warnings about not looking into the sun directly.) Moses couldn't cope with the

pure radiance of God's holy character. When he came back to the rest of the people, his face was shining with the reflection of God. Imagine it... But little by little, back with his feet on the ground, he would stop shining. To stop the effect being so great, Moses veiled his face, so there wasn't such a contrast.

The light faded. The veil covered the brightness. We've heard a lot about veils lately in the news of other countries. Veils that are sometimes seen as symbols of oppression for women who remain covered head to toe. Says Paul, the same thing happens today, as long as you try to get to God by following a rule book. The light fades.

Rules alone won't get you anywhere, because you'll never be good enough. They will be oppressive. Only Jesus, and his sheer grace and love will get you through life now and for ever. We can never be perfect enough to see God face to face on our own merits, but with Jesus, we can shine out, made perfect by him. THAT is the big secret that God now wants to be made known: that it's no longer about keeping the rules, getting up to the standard, feeling you have to compete and even outstrip others, feeling you're not good enough, sensing you have to earn everything good.

This is something so much better. It's like trying to compare the solid gold version of something with a cheap, throwaway plastic alternative.....this is so important...!The ministry which was about delivering rules and seeing if people could keep them, brought death: people were burdened and never managed to reach the standard. Even that came in a glorious way when Moses went up the mount to meet God. Yet rules you can't keep condemn you. Now, Says Paul, we've got a ministry that's even more glorious than that because it makes us alright with God in a way that we can't manage ourselves (V. 11)

Isn't that a secret worth sharing?

So Paul (v.12) says – we've got this big hope so we're very bold and we don't need a veil. We're going to shine! We've got unveiled faces and we're going to reflect the glory of the Lord (v. 18)

What does it mean to shine? We all use expressions related to light don't we? 'Beaming smile', character shines through, people who are 'radiant'. According to the manufacturers, everything from skin cream to the right bed can make you feel radiant, and if a bride doesn't look radiant on her wedding day, you get worried. But radiance isn't about outward appearance so much as character, is it?

Someone who ‘shines’ has qualities that we value above the physical look of a person. Have you known an elderly person who shows patience and contentment in bad health? Or a young person who is full of enthusiasm for life? Or a businessman who is straight and honest and encouraging when other people can’t be bothered? They shine. Their moral lives tell a story. They captivate, they attract.

Paul says that if we ‘*turn to the Lord*’ (v.16) it’s as if a veil is taken away and we really radiate, really reflect, a bit of God’s glory. ‘*We, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness, with ever increasing glory...*’ (v.18)

With all that light around, how come Christianity is one of the best kept secrets of our time?

I want to shine, don’t you? Maybe you don’t feel in a very shiny mood today! Maybe you feel there’s no point trying to be a Christian in today’s climate. But Paul says it’s God who has given people the ministry of telling others about Jesus and so ‘*We do not lose heart.*’ (4:1) it’s down to God, not you. Well, you may have to be willing to cooperate. It’s alright for Paul, you say, he wasn’t in my position. No, but he had at different times been criticized for being a coward, indecisive, having no inner strength, being corrupt, an imposter, weak in speech, a fool. He expressed his own personal struggles with a ‘thorn in the flesh’, he had suffered shipwrecks, beatings, imprisonment, injury and hunger, and he felt the pain of not being loved as much as he felt he loved the people he served.

But he knew God had let his light shine in his heart.

So he wouldn’t try any fancy tricks, to gather the crowds; he wouldn’t give in to consumer pressure to say what was popular rather than what was true; he wouldn’t try to get in with the in crowd at the expense of living a good moral life. ‘*On the contrary, by setting forth the truth, plainly, we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God*’ (4:2) then every man – and woman and child- can make up their own mind.

We have a hope, and it’s a great hope. It’s the hope that Christ is alive to change us and hold onto us and help us and guide us today and tomorrow. It’s the brightest light of hope you could ever have. Every time you turn to the face of Christ, something of his light reflects back, and beams out to the world.

So three things:

- 1. learn the secret – it’s about grace and forgiveness and faith, not rules**
- 2. live the secret – with the Spirit of God in our lives we will shine**

- 3. share the secret – have confidence in telling the message clearly, whatever the outcome**

Look at him again today; let his light shine; then be bold, and let his light shine in the rest of your world, in what you say, in what you do. Don’t be afraid. And let’s be sure we’re not the ones keeping Christ a secret.