

## Treasure in Clay Pots

Let's read **2 Cor. 4:1,6-18**

<sup>6</sup>Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart... <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"<sup>Ⓜ</sup> made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

<sup>7</sup>But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup>We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup>persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. <sup>10</sup>We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. <sup>11</sup>For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. <sup>12</sup>So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

<sup>13</sup>It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken."<sup>Ⓜ</sup> Since we have that same spirit of<sup>Ⓜ</sup> faith, we also believe and therefore speak, <sup>14</sup>because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. <sup>15</sup>All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

<sup>16</sup>Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup>For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup>So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. (Pray)

This chapter opens and closes with Paul's declaration, "therefore we do not lose heart". There were plenty of reasons for Paul and his team to lose heart.

- He was constantly being slandered
- Mobs followed him from town to town to persecute him
- He had been beaten, whipped, stoned, and imprisoned
- People he had led to Christ turned against him and betrayed him
- Self-appointed apostles came behind him and compared their seemingly successful ministry with his externally unimpressive ministry.

So the question is, what kept Paul's heart in the game? What motivated Paul to soldier on in ministry when everything seemed to scream "give up!"

We looked at four heart-anchoring, heart-energizing truths last week. This morning we'll consider four more heart-strengthening truths.

Before we do though, I want to remind us of something we've talked about already: most of 2 Cor is really a defense of Paul's apostolic ministry in the face of attacks by false apostles. It's a blueprint for authentic Christian ministry vs inauthentic Christian ministry. You might think, "this really doesn't apply to me, I'm not planning to go into ministry."

But it applies to every Christian in two ways:

1. We are all ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We might be good ministers, we might be lousy ministers. We might be faithful ministers, we might be unfaithful ministers. But every Christian is a minister! This helps us discern what true, authentic Christian ministry is all about.
2. Also helps us discern what ministries we can align ourselves with and what ministries we shouldn't align ourselves with. Over the years I've seen Christians have their lives blessed and strengthened by the ministries they've chosen to be influenced by, and I've seen Christians devastated and shipwrecked by the ministries and teachings they've chosen to be influenced by.

2 Cor. gives us God's inspired perspective and a safety line for our souls!

1. **Don't lose heart - we are clay pots, Christ is the treasure!**

*<sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*

Clay pots were common. Plain. Used for everyday common tasks. Clay pots were something every home had and everyone used. No one said, "this is a special occasion, bring out the clay pots!"

What is precious is what's inside. *But we have this treasure in jars of clay.* What is the treasure? To answer that we need to go back to verse 6:

*<sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness,"<sup>(a)</sup> made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.*

The treasure is the light shining in our hearts, the sun rising in a darkened world, enabling us to see the glory of God displayed in the face of Christ. Our blind eyes have

been opened to see the glory of Christ rising like the sun and that has freed us from sin, reconciled us to God, and promised us eternal life. Could any treasure be greater than that?

The reason God did this is so that it would be obvious the power is coming from God, not the vessel. It's not about eloquence, or charisma, or earthly wisdom. Authentic ministry is about the power of God working through unimpressive, common vessels.

The story of Charles Spurgeon's salvation is a great example of this. He was 15 years old and a snow storm kept him from going to his usual church, so he went to a Primitive Methodist Church that was near his home. He walked in and there were only about 12 people there. The pastor couldn't make it because of the storm, so a lay person got up to preach, and he didn't have much to say. After ten minutes he had said pretty much all he knew to say, and he just kept on repeating the text, which was Isaiah 45:22: "*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth.*"

As he closed, he singled Spurgeon out and said, "Young man, you look very miserable. And you will always be miserable—miserable in life and miserable in death—if you don't obey my text. But if you obey now, this moment, you will be saved." Then raising his hands, he literally shouted: "Young man, look to Jesus Christ. Look! Look! Look! You have nothing to do but look and live!"

And Charles Spurgeon did. He said it was like the sun rose on his soul in that moment, and he left that small church a changed man. The vessel that led him to Christ was an unimpressive, untrained, ineloquent man. Clay pot. The power was from God.

God calls clay pots. He uses clay pots. That is what we are: common, clay pots. Ministry that is true doesn't focus on us, it focuses on Christ! It doesn't say, look at us, it says look at the treasure inside: *Christ!* When a ministry focuses on the vessel instead of the treasure, that ministry has lost its way. When a ministry makes much of the vessel instead of making much of the treasure, that ministry isn't authentic Christian ministry. That's the burden Paul has for the Corinthians who are being seduced by men who are flashy, but false, apostles who don't preach Christ, they preach themselves.

If Christ isn't at the center of our lives and our ministry, it's not authentic Christian living or ministry.

If Christ isn't at the center of a teaching, a ministry, an ideology, it isn't an authentic Christian teaching, ministry or ideology.

But when Christ is the treasure at the center, we don't need to lose heart: all is good, all is well. No matter what happens, no matter how hard life gets, no matter how roughed up our clay pot gets, the glory of our God is shining on us, the impact of our clay pot lives can't be stopped and the trials can't be compared with the good God is preparing for us. That's where Paul takes us.

## 2. **Don't lose heart - we may be knocked down, but we aren't knocked out!**

*<sup>8</sup>We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup>persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. <sup>10</sup>We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. <sup>11</sup>For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. <sup>12</sup>So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.*

Trials and hardships are on a leash. We are pressed by circumstances but not crushed. We are perplexed by what God allows in our lives, but we don't lose hope. We are persecuted by people but never abandoned by God. We are knocked down, but we are never knocked out!

There is an ongoing principle in the Christian's life: dying to sin, dying to self, dying to the world leads to life in Christ, life in the kingdom, life multiplying to others. We are dying and life is working.

There is a paradox in Christian life: death leads to life, and life leads to death. Jesus said, *whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* Matt. 16:25

When Christ is the treasure, when Christ is at the center, the road of suffering takes us into deeper fellowship with Christ. The road of comfort and ease makes us shallow. Andrew Murray writes, *Dear Christian, when you face affliction, abide in Christ! When you endure suffering, consider that you are more in Christ than in suffering, that He is closer to you than the suffering is.* We experience the presence of Christ in our suffering to a depth that we can't in times of ease.

But the key is this: *for my sake*. Jesus said whoever loses his life *for my sake*. Paul said we are being given over to death *for Jesus' sake*.

Suffering isn't what produces life. For Christ's sake is what produces life. Few things burn me more than a Christian minister caught doing something wrong and scandalous and

then says the consequences are them suffering for Jesus. That's so wrong!

If we suffer for doing wrong, that suffering isn't suffering for Jesus. If we suffer for doing something stupid, that suffering isn't producing life. If we displace Christ from the center and suffer, that suffering isn't producing life...unless these sufferings move us to make Christ the center again.

### 3. **Don't lose heart – keep the faith!**

*<sup>13</sup> It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken."<sup>13</sup> Since we have that same spirit of<sup>13</sup> faith, we also believe and therefore speak, <sup>14</sup> because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. <sup>15</sup> All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.*

*Therefore, we do not lose heart.*

What keeps Paul's heart in the game when so much is pounding on him to lose heart? Faith. With eyes of faith he sees and believes that God is at work through all the death and suffering and hardship and pressure going on in his life to bring about resurrection life not only for him and his team, but for all they are reaching with the gospel.

Faith sees the glory of God in the face of Christ, and we know that the same living God who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise us from the dead, and the goal of ministry, the purpose of our Christian ministry is that there will be others raised on that day because we shared the gospel and they believed in Jesus!

So that grace reaches more and more people, making people overflow with thanksgiving to our great God and great Savior Jesus Christ.

Paul sees this going on – grace reaching more and more people, thanksgiving for eternal life overflowing to the glory of God. That is the purpose and the mission of the church. May we aim for nothing less! '

### 4. **Don't lose heart – we may be wasting away outwardly but we are being renewed inwardly**

*<sup>16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on*

*what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Our clay pots are wasting away outwardly. There's no getting through this life without some bangs and bruises, some chips and cracks. No matter how young, strong, and vibrant you are, your clay pot is careening towards death and decay.

But God is renewing us inwardly day by day. Faith is giving us eyes to see that our earthly troubles are achieving an eternal glory that is heavier than our trials. The glory will be bigger and better and of greater significance than the temporary trial.

Paul helps us to point our eyes beyond the few short years we live on this earth to see the eternal glory awaiting us in Christ. We'll get there next week. Suffice it to say that the seen is the clay pot and the unseen is the treasure: Christ. We don't lose heart when we fix our eyes on what we can't see. Jesus our eternal treasure.

This Thanksgiving let's recommit ourselves to Christ as our treasure, and to a faith that speaks Christ to those around us. So that the treasure of Christ reaches more and more people overflowing to eternal thanksgiving to the glory of God.