Strength for the Struggle
2 Corinthians 4

INTRODUCTION

Ministry is exhilarating and exhausting. Serving Christ and His church is delightful and devastating but well worth it. In **2 Corinthians** we meet someone who provides us with a great example of relying in Christ as we serve His people.

Paul wrote **2 Corinthians** at a vulnerable time in his life. He had learned that the church at Corinth was struggling, and he sought to take action to preserve the unity of that local body of believers. The church at Corinth had recently been struggling with divisions and quarrels. But for a majority of the believers, the problem had been solved by the time Paul wrote **2 Corinthians**. Many had repented of their sinful ways and had come back into unity with one another and with the leadership of Paul.

However, Paul still felt the need to articulate a defense of his apostleship and his message. Some in the church had apparently taken his meekness among them to be a sign of moral weakness or lack of authority (**2 Corinthians 10:1–2**). These accusations led Paul to defend himself by arguing that he was on the same level of importance as the other apostles, that he had deep knowledge of the Christian faith, that he had suffered profound physical punishment in the name of Christ, and that he had received visions and revelations from God (**11:1–12:13**).

With this in mind, please turn in your Bible to **2 Cor 4**. The key theme of this section is repeated in **verses 1 and 16**: *"We do not lose heart!"* The verb translated *"lose heart"* means *to be exhausted, spiritless, or weary.* Picture a laborer in the field who becomes so exhausted that he quits his work or a soldier in a battle who becomes so discouraged that he retreats from the fight. **Figuratively, the term means to grow fainthearted to the point of giving up.** There were certainly plenty of reasons for discouragement in Paul's situation, yet the great apostle did not quit. What was it that kept him from fainting in the conflicts of life? **He knew what he possessed in Jesus Christ! Instead of complaining about what he did not have, Paul rejoiced in** what he did have; and you and I can do the same thing. What should we focus on? Good question!

Let's dig in…

I. We have been _____ with a _____ ministry (4:1–6)

His positive attitude toward the ministry had some practical consequences in his life.

A. It kept him from _____ (4:1)

B. It kept him from _____ (4:2−4)

C. It kept him from _____ (4:5−6)

We have been entrusted with a glorious ministry. Secondly,

II. We are _____ of a _____ treasure (4:7–12)

The image of the vessel is a recurring one in Scripture, and from it we can learn many lessons.

To begin with, God has made us the way we are so that we can do the work He wants us to do.

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The important thing about a vessel is that it be clean, empty, and available for service.

We must focus on the treasure and not on the vessel.

Not only must we focus on the treasure and not on the vessel, but we must also focus on the Master and not on the servant.

Lastly,

III. We _____ a _____ faith (4:13–18)

Of what was Paul so confident? That he had nothing to fear from life or death! He had just listed some of the trials that were a part of his life and ministry, and now he was affirming that his faith gave him victory over all of them.

Note the assurances that he had because of his faith.

A. He was sure of ultimate _____ (4:14)

B. He was sure God would be _____ (4:15)

C. He was sure his _____ were working for him, not against him (4:16–17)

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D. He was sure the_____ world was <u>real</u> (4:18)

CONCLUSION

What can we take with us this morning? Please let me share with you some thoughts:

1. The _____ of inward renewal is a _____

- **The outer self is _____ away.**

- **The inner self is being _____**

2. Our _____ for future glory includes

_____

- **Affliction is _____.**

- **Affliction is _____.**

- **Affliction is _____.**

- **Affliction is _____.**

3. Our _____ on eternal realities

_____

Here's the idea: focus on _____ realities and focus on _____ realties.

If you only look at what you can see, you will inevitably lose heart. **Strength to endure** comes to those who look to the things that are unseen. **1 Peter 1:8-9** says, *"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."*