

To The Glory of God

2 Corinthians 4:6-18

“¹⁵ For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. ¹⁶ For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;”

In this series, we have defined “glorifying God” as “magnifying His unique excellence.” The text before you today helps you to see how God’s glory can change your story. As Paul stated in verse 15, **“For all things are for your sakes . . .”** But that phrase ought to make us pause. If something is done for the Lord’s sake, then how can it be for our sake? Paul went on to show the transforming nature of God’s glory. He explained that when God’s grace labors in His servants, then others will express their gratitude to God to glorify Him. As verse 15 puts **“the thanksgiving of many ‘redounds’ [or “abounds”] to the glory of God.”** Today, let’s give glory to the God who transforms sinners into servants who keep serving, even in the midst of their suffering.

Glorify God for His Grace in Your Salvation

⁶ For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷ But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Which of God’s servants proclaimed the Word of God to you when you “saw the Light?” Most of us don’t remember their names, and it is not important that we should. It is important that we should thank God abundantly for His transforming Gospel light. In the beginning of creation, God said, “Let there be light” and there was light. In the beginning of every new creation – each new believer (2 Corinthians 5:17) – God also commanded the light to shine out of darkness. His life-altering light shined in our hearts, into the deep void of our darkness. And that light is the **“knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”** He lived on earth so that you could be righteous; He died for your wickedness; He rose from the dead to justify you in His sight. When did you come out of your old, sinful darkness into this glorious light of the Lord Jesus? For Paul, it was on the Damascus Road. When did you turn from your sin to the Savior? Each one who has truly trusted Christ knows the treasure within himself. Don’t you thank God for the treasure of knowing Him! Thank Him abundantly!

For now, we are at home in these “earthen vessels” that we call our bodies. 2 Corinthians 5:1 tells us that when these earthen vessels are dissolved (see Ecclesiastes 12), we have an eternal home in the heavens! But right now, we still have treasure in these earthen pots. This treasure is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This power is of God, not of us.

Verses 8-15 are similar to 2 Corinthians 12:1-10. There Paul prayed three times that Satan’s thorn in the flesh would be taken away. But God reminded him that His grace was sufficient and His strength is made perfect in weakness. “Treasure in earthen vessels” illustrates “strength made perfect in weakness.” The picture magnifies the principle. Let’s give glory to the God who transforms sinners into servants who keep serving, even in the midst of their suffering.

Glorify God for His Grace in Your Suffering

⁸ We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. ¹¹ For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. ¹² So then death worketh in us, but life in you.

Why would God choose to demonstrate the surpassing power of His Spirit in a lowly clay pot?!ⁱ Does the Lord want the world to think that His people are cracked pots? Why would He lead Paul to describe his troubles so plainly in verses 8-15ⁱⁱ? Wouldn't that run the risk of discouraging God's people? No, Paul's transparency about his troubles is a window through which we can behold God's wonders. He described his apostolic ministry including what happened to him as he preached the Gospel. But this description is full of paradoxes (a seemingly contradictory statement). Why? Paul's purpose was to show the surpassing power of God, not boast in himself: **"that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."** "Paul therefore contends that he is most powerful when he is least reliant on his own resources and power."ⁱⁱⁱ

Paul wrote, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak"

- ▣ We are hard pressed, but we are not crushed.
- ▣ We are puzzled and perplexed, but we are not in despair.
- ▣ We are persecuted, but we have not been abandoned.
- ▣ We are cast down, but we are not destroyed.
- ▣ We placed ourselves in perilous situations that the life of Jesus might be made manifest.
- ▣ Death works in us, but life works in you.

Notice how each negative statement is connected to a more positive statement. The second part of each statement either places a limit on the first, or shows the positive effect of the first. The power of Christ's resurrection changed everything. Even at his lowest point, Paul knew that the Lord would resurrect him. In John 16:33, Jesus reminded us, **". . . In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."** In 2 Corinthians, the noun and verb for "affliction" and "afflicted" occurs twelve times, and this theme dominates the letter.^{iv} Let's give glory to the God who transforms sinners into servants who keep serving even in the midst of their suffering. What Paul described here fits under what we might call "the tea bag principle." When God places you in hot water, the "real you" will come out. Were you thinking that the Christian life would always be rosy and pleasant? Think again. Jesus said, **"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."**^v Paul told us transparently what it was like to serve the Lord. He gave even more explicit descriptions in 6:4-10, and

11:23-27. You must keep pressing on through this puzzling paradox of ministry. Some things won't make sense until you get to heaven. You will not understand the responses of some people until all is unveiled before the Judgment Seat. For the time being, we recognize how the Lord met Paul at the intersections of "Paul's story" and "God's glory." God's glorious deeds met Paul's greatest needs. Even in his deepest trials, he did not despair.

George Muller wrote, "There was a day when I died; died to self, my opinions, preferences, tastes and will; died to the world, its approval or censure; died to the approval or blame even of my brethren or friends; and since then I have studied only to show myself approved unto God."^{vi}

Part of Paul's suffering was connected to his preaching. Any man of God who will truly proclaim the Scriptures understands that he will suffer for it. He will be criticized, slandered, mocked and falsely accused. But saints throughout the Scripture suffer. So how did Paul and others keep serving the Lord and others in such circumstances?

Glorify God for His Grace in Your Service

¹³ We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; ¹⁴ Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. ¹⁵ For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. ¹⁶ For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; ¹⁸ While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

■ Knowing and Using the Scriptures, 13

In verse 13, Paul quoted from Psalm 116:10. The author of this Old Testament song said that the sorrows of death had surrounded him (v. 3). The Lord delivered the psalmist from death and wiped the tears from his eyes (v. 8). So the psalmist wrote, "I believed, therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted:" (v. 10). Do you see what Paul was doing when he faced real trouble? He took comfort and direction from the psalms! He used the Scripture to remind himself of God's glorious deeds. He kept speaking up for the Lord, because God comforted him in his affliction. You and I can use the Scripture – especially the psalms – in the same way! Let the Word of grace labor in you to help you keep serving and speaking up for the Lord.

■ Knowing the God of the Resurrection, 14

¹⁴ Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.

How could Paul face the deadly consequences of serving the Lord? Didn't he count his life to be dear? (No! See Acts 20:24). How could he face his sufferings with such courage? According to verse 14, Paul knew the God who raised up his Lord Jesus would raise him up too. He was certain that he would be presented before God's heavenly throne with those whom he had served. When you live in the power of Christ's resurrection, others will see the great grace of God (Acts 4:33).

■ **Knowing that your service will bring glory to God. 15-18**

¹⁵ For all things *are* for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. ¹⁶ For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward *man* is renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory; ¹⁸ While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen *are* temporal; but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.

Each new generation has to make a choice about how they will serve their own generation and the generations that follow. Look at the way that Paul explains God's grace laboring in His servants. Ask the Lord to do this same work in you, even when you are suffering. Here are some reasons to keep going.

- ***Others will recognize the abundant grace of God and glorify Him with thanksgiving. 15***

Give others a reason to thank God because you are a gracious servant of God and others.

- ***This glorious grace renews you day by day, even when your body is falling apart. 16***

As we have been singing: "Glory to glory, from glory to glory, now we are becoming like Jesus our Lord."^{vii} Don't grow old in the wicked ways of this world; ask God to renew your heart and mind day by day.

- ***Recognizing that our affliction is only temporary, but it is bringing about this result^{viii}: an eternal weight of glory that is beyond compare. 17***

- ***As we keep our eyes on the eternal things (invisible to most) instead of the temporal things that everybody sees. 18***

In this selection from Scripture, we started out with the Light of God. And now look at the result. As we keep looking for the Lord, we see with eyes of faith. We see what is invisible to others, for we see that which is eternal. Give glory to the God who transforms sinners into servants who keep serving even in the midst of their suffering.

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ⁱ This is consistent with the way God portrays His work in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29. He uses the foolish things to confound the wise. He chooses weak things to shame the mighty. This explains why God would cause His Son to be born in a stable in Bethlehem and placed in a lowly manger. So our weakness magnifies the wonders of God's strength. What Paul writes here is also consistent with what he wrote in 1 Corinthians 4:1-13.

ⁱⁱ As Paul does in 2 Corinthians 12:10 – bodily weakness and disease, insults, hardship, persecution and calamities

ⁱⁱⁱ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 223.

^{iv} 1:4 [2x], 8; 2:4; 4:17; 6:4; 7:4; 8:2, 13; 1:6; 4:8; 7:5).

^v Matthew 16:24

^{vi} <https://www.georgemuller.org/quotes/dead-to-self>

^{vii} Glory to Glory : <https://www.cbfindlay.org/from-glory-to-glory/>

^{viii} "Works" translated [katergomi] meaning "to bring about a result," "to cause a state or condition. William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 531.