

The Supremacy Of Christ In Preaching

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Infinite Treasure in Jars of Clay 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Introduction: (I begin this message by holding up a crushed plastic water bottle) You can find these in every town and village in Africa. It seems that you can find used water bottles littering the ground around the world. Last year (2011) the US alone used over 39 billion bottles of water, that is enough to stretch around the earth over 190 times.” They are thrown away because they are plentiful, cheap and disposable. They are like the clay jars of antiquity that are found at almost every archeological dig site.

Therefore when the Apostle Paul begins the defense of his apostolic ministry of the Gospel that in Corinth it is shocks our sensibilities that he would describe himself and ministers of the gospel literally as nothing but baked clay.

As a minister of the Gospel I don't really like hearing my calling to be described as fragile, inferior and expendable even as I am used of God to carry the Gospel message, which is His invaluable treasure.

Yet Paul does not try to cover up his tribulations but instead chooses to exult in them as He explains why the Divine glory must be contained in the earthen vessel of his frail, pummeled body which points to Christ's ministry of the cross and the power of God in His resurrection. **2 Corinthians 4:7-18**

Prayer:

I. The Power Of Gospel Ministry Belongs To God!

A. 2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

1. In using the pronoun “**we**”, Paul is not just speaking about himself as an Apostle but also Timothy and therefore all future ministers of the Gospel and ultimately I believe all Christians as we proclaim the gospel.
 - a. This teaching is not just from long ago and far away but it is for each of you pastors whom are here this evening.
2. The Apostle has been talking about “**this treasure**” we have as believers as the good news of the Gospel of grace through Jesus Christ in the New Covenant.
 - a. Remember how Paul has already described it in **2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**

3. God could have chosen to bring His treasure Gospel message through His heavenly creations such as angels, cherubim or seraphim but instead He has chosen to use men like you and me which He calls **“jars of clay!”**
 - a. The American Commentary describes why God’s method seems so foolish:
 - i. First:
 - ✓ An earthen vessel is “quintessentially fragile.”
 - ✓ It is prone to breakage, easily chipped and cracked.
 - ✓ A breakable vessel offers no protection for the treasure (except from dust and water).
 - ✓ The image serves to emphasize the contrast between Paul’s own pitiful weakness and the great power of God.
 - ii. Second:
 - ✓ The image highlights Paul’s lowliness.
 - ✓ He does not depict himself as an object of art such as an exquisitely crafted Grecian urn, or bronze vessel, or delicate goblet with gold inlay.
 - ✓ He has in mind earthenware jars or perhaps, the small, cheap pottery lamps. Neither were things of beauty.
 - ✓ They lacked any outward luster in contrast to the treasure, and their cheapness would disguise the fact that they contained anything valuable at all.
 - ✓ The contrast would emphasize the priceless value of the treasure compared to Paul’s relative worthlessness. What the earthen vessel contains is the only thing that gives it importance.
 - iii. Third:
 - ✓ The image highlights Paul’s expendability.
 - ✓ Earthen vessels had no enduring value and were so cheap that when they were broken no one attempted to mend them.
 - ✓ They simply discarded them. Broken glass was melted down to make new glass; an earthenware vessel, once hardened in a kiln, was nonrecyclable.
 - ✓ Easily broken, they were also easily replaced and not worth repairing.
 - d. Brothers, remember how God created man in Genesis **“from the dust of the ground”** to be His **“jars of clay,”** so that He will get the glory.
 - i. Because the truth is when you die they will dig a hole, throw you in the ground, kick dirt in your face and then go back with your family and eat "Posho or Ugali."

4. God purpose in using human “**jars of clay**” to preach His glorious Gospel is “**to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.**”
 - a. God’s message is to be highlighted not you who are His messengers
 - i. **1 Corinthians 1:26-31 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”**
 - b. Listen to Pastor John Piper explain this truth to his congregation:
 - i. So what’s the point of being a clay pot?
 - ii. God’s aim is that his own power through the gospel be honored, not us.
 - iii. Which means that if you feel average or less than average in your sense of fitness to tell the gospel, you are the person God is looking for—a clay pot, who simply shares the treasure of the gospel.
 - iv. Then God will do his work through the gospel, and show that the surpassing power will belong to him and not to us.
 - v. Be encouraged ... Christian. You are appointed, precisely in your ordinariness, for the greatest work in the world: showing the Treasure of Christ.
 - ✓ **Here I held up a full plastic water bottle and explained that though the bottle was not worth much it’s content’s of water were life giving to men as the gospel we proclaim.**

II. God Sustains His Cracked Pots In Gospel Ministry!

- A. **2 Corinthians 4:8-12 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you.**

1. The Corinthians wanted a pastor who was beaming and beautiful but what God gave them was one who was beaten and battered.
 - a. Paul unashamedly describes the difficulties that he faced:
 - i. He was afflicted:
 - ✓ Which means to be crushed under the pressures of life and ministry.
 - ii. He was perplexed:
 - ✓ Often in doubt not knowing which way to turn
 - iii. He was persecuted:
 - ✓ Pursued with hostility to destroy
 - iv. He was struck down:
 - ✓ Purposely Knocked down to cause pain and injury
 - b. Amidst these continuing difficulties Paul's testimony is of God's gracious preservation by Christ's resurrection power.
 - i. Pastor John MacArthur gives this helpful summary:
 - ✓ It can't be him. It must be God.
 - ✓ There's no human is going to take that kind of abuse on his own in his own strength, that kind onslaught in his own resources and still maintain his joy, maintain his peace, keep preaching the same message.
 - ✓ Viewed as a whole, then, the hardships that Paul lists in his catalog have, as it were, caused cracks in him as an earthen vessel, but the vessel itself remains intact.
 - ✓ The vessel is held together by the power of divine adhesive, and the light that shines through these cracks is none other than the light of the life of Jesus.
 - c. The Greek for "the dying" is literally, "continually being made a corpse," yet a corpse which now shares the life-giving power of Christ's resurrection which we hear Paul proclaim to the Church of Galatia.
 - i. **Galatians 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

III. Gospel Ministers, Like The Saints Who Have Gone Before Them Must Look To Their Risen Savior!

A. 2 Corinthians 4:13-15 Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, 14 knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. 15 For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

1. The Apostle Paul quotes **Psalm 116:10 I believed, and so I spoke** as a footnote for the whole Psalm where the Psalmist testifies of his trust in God who rescued him in his distress which is also Paul's experience.

- a. **Psalm 116:5-7 Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful. 6 The Lord preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. 7 Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.**
2. Paul goes on to speak of the hope of the resurrection where he says **so we also speak knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus.**
 - a. It is the hope of the resurrection that has encouraged the believers since the beginning amidst their afflictions because they can be free from the fear of death.
 - b. So compare these two who admittedly suffered much losing not only their who family but also all that they owned:
 - i. The unbelief of Mrs. Job
 - ✓ **Job 2:9 Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.”**
 - ii. The faith of Job
 - ✓ **Job 19:25-26 For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God**
 - ♥ As jars of clay in ministry you will be crushed and driven to despair unless like Job you continually look to God who has promised through Christ to raise you up and bring you into His presence.

Conclusion: Ministers Of The Gospel Need Not Lose Heart If They Will Set Their Hearts On That Which Eternal!

A. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

1. So we do not lose heart
 - a. You might remember that I had said earlier that to lose heart is more than dealing with the normal difficulties and depression associated with ministry but to actually to be overcome with fear and abandon yourself to cowardly surrender.
 - i. I would be have been tempted to lose heart if I faced just some of the thing Paul did in this a short list of his afflictions.
 - ✓ **1 Corinthians 4:11-13 To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, 12 and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; 13 when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.**

2. These momentary afflictions will be become beneficial to you as they cause you to look unto and believe the eternal benefits you are promised in Christ.
 - a. Not only is Paul saying that compared to our life with Christ in eternity that our early afflictions are momentary be he also states that ultimately they are light.
 - i. The word in the Greek means to be almost weightless as if nothing at all.
 - ii. The Gospel primer pictures this Heavenly point of view:
 - ✓ (The) hope of eternity with Christ in Heaven enables my heart to thrive during the most difficult and lengthy of trials here on earth.
 - ✓ When looking at the sheer weight of unseen glories to come, my troubles seem light by comparison and when looking at the staggering length of eternity my troubles seem fleeting by comparison.
 - ✓ It is only against the backdrop of a glorious eternity that my circumstances can be seen in such a manner; and the promise of this glorious eternity is part and parcel of the gospel itself.
 - b. Have any of you ever heard of Robert Claunch?
 - i. No? Let me tell you about him because it is seeing and knowing him that this scripture came alive for me!
 - ✓ Robert Claunch died and went home to with the Lord in January of 2011 but I met him while living in Texas in 2006.
 - ✓ Outwardly he was a broken shell of a man, having suffered the effects of a bitter divorce, years of drunkenness and then overcome with Muscular Dystrophy.
 - ✓ He spent his days lying in a bed unable to move on his own, hardly able to breath, needing constant care throughout the day.
 - ✓ But inwardly he was one of the most active and alive people that I have ever known and there never a time that I spoke with him that he did not turn our conversation to the joy of his salvation and looking forward to going home to be with the Lord.
 - ✓ Often when I would visit with Robert he would not let me leave without quoting these verses although to catch his breath to speak was always a chore.
 - ✓ **2 Corinthians 4:16-18 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.**

- c. But let us not end today without looking to another, our older brother Jesus who in His humanity was continually found strength even in going to the cross by looking to the promise of being raised from the dead and back with our God for eternity.

1. Hebrews 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.