

Enduring Hardship For Jesus

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[0 : 00] Let's pray together. Father, truly blessed is your name. And we ask, no matter if we are in the midst of really, really hard things right now, or if life is going really, really well, we ask that blessed be your name would be on our lips.

Is your worthy? Father, today I pray that you would help us through your word learn how to go through hardships in a way that pleases you.

Looking to Jesus with our eyes fixed on eternity, longing to see your face. Help us to trust you in the midst of all of this life, knowing that it's momentary and you're glorious forever.

God, would you use this time for your purposes, we pray. In Jesus' name, amen. You may be seated, children. Head on to your classes.

What I mean is, my name is Matt, and I have the... Hey, Donald.

[1 : 17] I have the privilege of serving along with Pastor Mike as one of the associate pastors here. And I was thinking a little bit earlier that I've reached a little bit of a milestone this morning.

My wife and I is one month old. This is the first sermon that she'll hear me preach. And there's a high likelihood one of two things will happen. She will either fall asleep or start crying.

But we'll get through it together, Grace. For the rest of us, we're in the middle of a discipleship series right now. And we've sort of titled this as how we live intentionally for Jesus.

Well, any talk about discipleship requires that we spend some time considering hardship, considering affliction and suffering. Because we know from the lips of our Lord Jesus, he tells us that in this world, you will have tribulation.

It's at the end of John chapter 16, he says that. And none of us, right, none of us sort of rolls out of bed hardwired to please God in how we respond to hard things in life.

[2 : 29] It's not our default kind of means of answering in the midst of hardship. No, we're a people, we love safety and comfort and ease.

And we tend to avoid hardship at all costs. And then when the inevitable hits and hardship comes, some kind of trial, some sort of suffering, a conflict perhaps, when these things arise, we're prone to then seek escape.

We're tempted to compromise who we are, maybe even grumble and complain, thinking that we deserve better. Well, we need help facing hard things.

We need help to think rightly about hard things and endure hard things in such a way that we can honor Jesus and glorify God. What we need this morning is God's word to instruct us, for God's spirit to guide us as we contemplate these things.

In our discipleship, in our purpose to live intentionally for Jesus, how are we going to endure hardship for him? Well, fortunately for us, 2 Corinthians chapter 4 has a lot to help us with regarding hardship.

[3 : 51] So I'd invite you, if you haven't already, to turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians. As you're turning there, as we get started, let me just help us kind of see God's main idea, what he really wants us to consider and take away this morning from this text.

It's this. God intends for each and every hardship that you experience to demonstrate his power for his glory and for your good.

So your response in the midst of hardship matters a lot to him. It matters to Jesus how we face and respond to the hard things of life.

We all know the dangers that accompany hardships and afflictions and suffering and medical issues. We tend to personalize it and dwell on it and lose perspective on the rest of life.

We can become so self-focused that we miss God's intention behind these hard things. We're tempted to escape, to throw in the towel and surrender, to become bitter, maybe even to shake our

fist at God.

[5 : 08] But God calls us to endure, to be strengthened in the midst of hard things, to trust in him and his promises, to flee to Christ who is our refuge, to renew our hope of heaven and redemption and restoration of all things.

Because we serve a God who has said just a few chapters later in this same letter, my power is made perfect in weakness.

So friends, we must believe this morning that God intends to use each and every hardship to demonstrate his power for his glory and for our good.

So let's read God's word together as we get started here. Hopefully you'll see this just come out right away in the text. God is intending for us to receive hardship in such a way that he would be glorified, that the world would see his power and his goodness in the life of Jesus in and through us in our affliction.

Hear God's word this morning, church. 2 Corinthians 4, starting in verse 7. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

[6 : 30] We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus.

So that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 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.

So death is at work in us, but life in you. 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, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence, 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. So we do not lose heart.

Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

[7 : 50] 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, temporary. The things that are unseen are eternal.

Well, a little bit of background as we get started in this chapter. We've kind of just dropped into the middle of a letter. So why is Paul writing? What's going on in the midst of the Corinthian church? And essentially, Paul, one of the first things we know about him when we think of his life, right, is this is a man who endured a lot of suffering. Right? He was beaten and lashed and imprisoned. He was bludgeoned by rocks, lowered out of windows and baskets. The guy just had a rough life. And some people were looking at all of his suffering and all of this affliction, and they were saying, see, that weakness there, that means this guy, he's not legit.

You don't want to listen to him. His apostleship is not something you want to identify with because the real people, they're the strapping ones. They're the strong ones.

[8 : 56] Paul, in his weakness, is not somebody you want to pay attention to. And these folks, their way of thinking and their way of speaking about Paul was kind of infiltrating the church of Corinth.

They were harming this church that Paul had labored so hard for. Paul writes this letter to the Corinthians to kind of say, of course, suffering is real, and I've done more than my fair share.

But he argues something completely different than those opposition, those opposers. He says, actually, the suffering I'm going through, the affliction, the hardship, are God's means of showcasing his power that's unsurpassed.

Paul says that his afflictions provide the arena for God's power to be seen and displayed. That's where we pick up in chapter 4 here.

And we're going to see from our text that there's three sections. And in these three sections, Paul's going to share about the reality of his affliction, his motivations to endure in the midst of affliction, and finally, his perspective regarding hardship and affliction.

[10 : 11] So the first section we see in verses 7 to 12, Paul's the reality of affliction in his life. Hardship and Paul are like peanut butter and jelly. They just go together, it seems.

His life is so full of affliction as an apostle, it's a reality that there's just no sense denying. He's the poster boy of hardship. In this section, verse 7 is the main idea.

Verses 8 to 12 really just kind of expand on and elaborate on verse 7. So we're going to take a close look at this first verse, verse 7. Paul writes, But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

Maybe you're asking right up front, what's this treasure that Paul is speaking about here? And if you look back just to verse 5, we see that Paul writes, For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord.

The treasure is this message of salvation that God has entrusted to Paul, and now Paul is going on these missionary journeys, bringing much hardship, so he can get this treasure to more and more people.

[11 : 25] The gospel of Jesus Christ is the treasure. Just so we're on the same page about what this message is that Paul carries in a jar of clay.

The eternal God, the Son, second person of the Trinity, existing from eternity past forever and ever and ever, became a man.

He took on flesh and dwelled among us. And throughout his 33 years on earth, he lived a perfect life. If he was a baseball player, he batted a thousand, he struck out every batter.

As human being, he did not sin one iota against God or fellow man. He was perfect. And after 33 years, he went to the cross where he hung in our place for our sin.

And he died for us. He really died. He was put in a tomb. And three days later, God raised him from the dead in victory. And now he is still alive, and he's in heaven.

[12 : 33] And he's reigning and ruling at the right hand of majesty on high. That's the treasure that Paul has been entrusted with. And he says, it's really, really good. Christ died for our sins.

Notice, the vessel is a little curious. Jars of clay. Essentially, Paul is saying that average Joes and afflicted apostles are God's chosen vessels to carry this great treasure.

You don't have to think much to realize why God does this, right? Because this message of good news is not about self-sufficiency. It's not about human ingenuity and power. It's about a God who in his mercy saves helpless sinners by dying in our place.

It's a message of grace. So if we were so self-sufficient, God wouldn't get the glory. It's so wise and good and kind of God to put priceless treasure in such weak and breakable and ordinary vessels like us.

Paul's jars of clay talk here reveals a man of great humility who sees himself rightly before a holy God. A man who understands grace and how powerless he is in his own strength and might.

[13 : 56] Paul actually elevates here not personal strength and power but weakness. Notice, not just the container. This treasure in clay pots is part of God's purpose.

Second half of verse 7, to show. God intends this treasure in clay pots to demonstrate something, to showcase something, and it's his unsurpassed power so that it is obvious who the mighty one is. And this is just like God, right? Throughout history, throughout history, this is how God operates. Israel is outnumbered in the Exodus and Pharaoh's armies are close at hand with chariots and weapons of war and God parts the sea and lets them go through on dry ground and then drowns Pharaoh's army behind them.

Women who are barren and desire children all over the Bible, God makes it happen time and time again so that his purposes would be fulfilled for the nations.

the Virgin Mary who birthed our Emmanuel. Weakness does not thwart God's power. It actually magnifies it.

[15 : 17] And so Paul is speaking this way with great purpose and intention. He says, there is God-given purpose behind our weakness so that the power may be seen to be God's and not ours.

verses 8 to 11, Paul just keeps kind of expanding upon these afflictions. Afflicted in every way but not crushed.

Verse 8, perplexed but not driven to despair and on and on and on. We need to know that Paul is documenting a certain kind of affliction here. He's talking about the hardship that has come upon him because he's a Christian.

Because he is determined to live his life for Jesus. It's his allegiance to the Lord Christ that has brought this hardship. This is not unique to the Apostle Paul, is it?

Just a brief stroll through church history, he sees countless people time and time again who suffer for the gospel. Just in the last hundred years or so, there's countless examples but we could name three right now that Jim Elliott and Nate Saint who were killed by the tribes people who they were

trying to reach with the gospel.

[16:35] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the famous theologian who was killed in opposing Adolf Hitler during World War II. Even Martin Luther King Jr. for his biblical stance on justice.

was assassinated in the streets. In many places today around the world, as we've already discussed a little bit, there's secret church gatherings where Christians are in danger even for gathering to worship the Lord.

There's people losing their heads, literally. There's bombings and shootings all because of their identification with Jesus. In this world, you will have tribulation, Jesus says.

It's the reality of things, right? We both suffer hardship because we live in a fallen world. It's just things are broken. They're out of whack. They don't work the way they should. And we also, as Christians, suffer unique hardships because the world hates God and His people.

The apostle knows this better than most. Paul knows it. His summary of suffering in verse 10 really tells it all. Paul, you look there, he says, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus.

[17:51] This is a man who's heard Jesus' call and has followed Him at great cost to his own well-being. He's heard Jesus say, whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

And Paul's intent on losing his own life for the sake of others. Second half of verse 10, we see this. It's essentially a repetition of the second half of seven. In seven, we see that the treasure in jars of clay is to show the power of God and here in verse 10, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

It's essentially the same thing. Jars of clay showcasing God's power, mortal body displaying the resurrection life of Jesus, raised in the power of God.

the reality and presence of great affliction in the Apostle Paul's life has not altered his aim. He still wants Jesus to be seen and known.

In verse 12, we see the length to which Paul is willing to go to make that happen. He's willing to die so that others might live. He writes, so death is at work in us, but life in you.

[19:09] Even if I'm dying and you're living, I'm going to be happy and satisfied because that's what his life is about. Well, for us today, friends, I just have a quick question for you to take home and consider.

I've been asking myself this this week. Do I live with an eager desire to showcase God's power through my weakness?

Is that what I'm about? When hardship comes along, am I eager for God to be glorified through it? To display the life of Jesus. God intends for our hardship to produce that desire in us.

He's working in hardship to demonstrate power. The reality is hardship is coming.

Some of us are facing a lot of it right now. Others, it might just be around the corner. We don't know. But it is of great purpose in God's world.

[20:19] But we keep moving in the passage and we see in verses 13 to 15 that Paul issues a few different motivations that help him endure in the midst of hardship.

Verse 13, it starts a little weird here. So let's look at it together and see what Paul's getting at. He quotes Psalm 116.

It's a psalm that, it's anonymous as far as we can tell. There's no name attached to it. It seems a bit random, but then when we start looking at the content of the psalm, we see why Paul would reference it.

So if you want to flip back to Psalm 116, I'm going to point something out in this psalm. Just as a general rule, whenever the New Testament kind of quotes a little sliver of the Old Testament, it's always good to go back and read the context because the context is going to fill in what that New Testament writer was thinking about as he's quoting.

This passage. So Psalm 116, we're going to read from 8 to 14. Verse 10 is what Paul is quoting. So verse 8, He's saying this in the midst He's saying this in the midst of affliction.

[21:59] I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of his people. Paul is motivated here by who God is.

He's saying this in the midst of faith. saying, I too am afflicted and I too believe in this God. So I too will speak of his goodness. Paul is motivated here by who God is.

His person, his character, his work on his behalf. It's an intimacy with God that motivates Paul to continue enduring in the midst of hardship.

None of us needs to wait until hardship strikes to cultivate this kind of intimacy. In fact, we ought to be nurturing it day by day because when hardship comes, we want to know who God is. We don't want to be floundering in that moment. But not just, Paul's not just motivated by who God is. Look with me at verse 14.

[23 : 17] Paul's also motivated by resurrection, hope. He says, we're speaking of this goodness of God knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus.

He's motivated because he knows a living God, not one buried in a tomb. And he knows that the promise remains for him that one day he will be raised to glory.

Affliction has a period at the end of it. One day it will be over. The current situation doesn't crush Paul because he knows the risen Jesus and the promise of his own eventual resurrection and eternal life.

there's two more motivations here we see. They're both in verse 15. First is that Paul's motivated by the good of others. See that at the beginning of 15?

For it is all for your sake he tells the Corinthians. It's all for your sake so that his grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving. Paul's willing to give of himself for the good of other people.

[24 : 33] it so motivates him that he can suffer great affliction and harm. He wants more and more people to experience this treasure this good news the grace of God and he's willing to suffer much for that to happen.

And ultimately the last motivation that trumps all of the motivations in these three verses is that last phrase to the glory of God.

See when Paul is living so much for the glory of God so much to see the surpassing power belonging to God so much for seeing the life of Jesus made much of in his life it's the ultimate and lasting motivation that we all need so that God may be exalted.

Paul's living for glory not his own but that of God. He's motivated to endure. if we fast forward to today we see that we live in a world and in a culture in which hardship is deemed bad.

Something we are wise to avoid something that we need to reduce and eliminate as quickly as possible whenever it appears.

[25 : 59] We see this playing out in the medical field where people are actually helping other people die saying well you're suffering a lot so let's just let's kill you now so you don't have to suffer.

Image bearers being helped to kill themselves. It's something that tempts us to compromise our morals and sidestep this hardship that might result from being people of integrity doesn't it?

We might lie to a boss or a co-worker in order to save ourselves we might say okay I'll fudge those financial numbers or something like that. So some of us today we're kind of at this crossroads we have this option before us we have the means some of us to avoid much of the hardship of life.

Right? If we have financial stability and relational connectedness and a good education behind us we have this means of just avoiding much of the hardship of life.

We have to ask ourselves will we align with Jesus and suffer? Will we speak of God's grace because we've too believed and risk being hated by friends family neighbors?

[27 : 25] will we choose God glorifying integrity and risk losing our jobs? Risk having to pay more taxes?

Will we so be willing to seek the good of others that we might get scammed along the way? That sometimes our desire to do good for others and to show them Christ results in us having a lighter wallet and them having some drug money?

It's happened. Will we align with Jesus and suffer? But other times and for some in this room there's a different crossroads you're already on the path of hardship you know it oh so well.

Marriage or family difficulties health issues that have no cure relentless sorrow for your unsaved neighbors be mocked by co-workers for loving Jesus and there's a different question at that crossroads will we align ourselves with God's purposes in this hardship will we grab hold of the same motivations that Paul does the hope of resurrection the good of other people the glory of God will hardship get the better of us will it define our existence or will God define it and will we endure in order that Jesus might be glorified in and through our suffering for all of us it boils down to this question are we willing to endure hardship for Jesus to adopt his posture in the midst of our own suffering to sacrifice our well-being for the life of Jesus to be seen and known around the world

God intends for it it's his desire that his power might be displayed through our weakness for his glory and our good there's one last section in our text I want to make sure that we spend some time here this is probably my favorite part verses 16 to 18 it's Paul's perspective on affliction he starts so we do not lose heart right up front in these verses Paul rejects the idea of discouragement throwing in the towel in fact he doubles down and stands tall and fast he determines by God's grace to persevere I'm going to share a little story of a man named Sir

[30 : 29] Norman Anderson got this from a John Piper sermon that's really helped me along the way he writes of this man Sir Norman Anderson former professor and director of the Advanced Legal Institute at London University supported international fellowship of evangelical students for 60 years he had lost all three of his children in their early adulthood and his wife was so senile she could not recognize him at one of the last public events where he spoke he was asked when you look back over your life and reflect on the fact that you have lost all your three children and how your wife of 60 years no longer recognizes you do you ever ask the question why me no I've never asked the question why me but I have asked the question why not me

I am not promised as a Christian that I will escape the problems encountered by others we all live in a fallen world I am however promised that in the midst of difficulties God through Christ will be present with me and will give his grace to help me cope with the difficulties and bear witness to him Sir Norman Anderson had perspective on hardship and Paul gives us much perspective here if we keep looking at these verses he's already talked about jars of clay about mortal flesh and now he comes in verse 16 to talking about this outer self that's wasting away there's this real and agonizing decay and suffering being experienced by Paul but while in the midst of it he says in the second bit of 16 that day by day the inner being is being renewed friends as as a

Christian in our affliction we must say that we're like a book and that you should not judge a Christian by his cover outwardly wasting away inwardly new new new day after day after day that's the power of God renewing the inner being of each and every Christian around the world in the midst of great and small afflictions alike it's the power of God for us Paul has such a great perspective of self but he also has in these same verses a great great great perspective on affliction we're wrapping up as we take a look at these look at verse 17 this light momentary affliction we need to be careful in this not to miss Paul's point hardship has the word hard in it for a reason and Paul is not here minimizing real affliction rather he is placing it side by side with a future reality Paul knows the tendency of our hearts when we start thinking about affliction and hardship we tend to be microscope people a conflict or a medical issue or a job concern arises and we take this issue and we put it under this microscope meant to magnify little things into really big things so we can see the details and so we put it under there and we start noticing every little detail of it we become expert hardship analysts and scientists putting all of our problems under these microscopes all the while losing perspective because we become so focused on this problem and Paul would have us think differently the problem with microscopes we know is they take relatively small things and they make them appear humongous Paul says affliction is actually tiny affliction is actually small not all by itself but when you set it next to glory light and momentary versus heavy and eternal

Paul could not choose words that more greatly contrast than he has and the thing about glory is we don't need a microscope to examine it we need a telescope of faith to look beyond what is seen into the supernatural into the unseen realities of God that he's declared to us in his word God has told us that glory that heaven that eternity is so good and huge and satisfying and yet to our eyes it can appear insignificant far away and unreachable we need to be like the star gazers at night in the midst of hardship by faith day after day examine eternity and the things of heaven not to magnify something small but to see it in its true size and its true value and its true weight Paul sets a grain of sand side by side with the galaxies of the universe and says which is more weighty and where should you spend your time how

[36 : 27] Paul how can I get this perspective verse 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen Paul says that's how not not not focusing our attention and our energies on our on our hardships but looking to the unseen realities of the kingdom of God this looking word is it's a little bit unhelpful in the ESV the NIV folks you might see it a little bit more helpfully fix our eyes what Paul is saying in verse 18 is that we we challenge glory to a staring contest and then purpose to win say alright you and me glory we're going to lock eyes and I ain't going to blink I'm going to focus on you so intently that nothing is going to distract me from you fix your gaze on glory that's the perspective that we need in the midst of hardship not a mere passing

glance and as we fix our gaze we refuse to pull out that microscope and start magnifying our problems that's the

God pleasing perspective on hardship we set our sights on glory and we persevere we have this mindset we know that God is using our hardship for good Romans 8 28 we know he intends to demonstrate his power through our weakness and we've resolved as followers of Jesus to live our lives for the glory of God and the good of others in a world that values so much human ingenuity and strength and prestige and influence we long for the life of Jesus to be seen and known through our clay pots as disciples who are living intentionally for Jesus we draw on Paul's example knowing that hardships are normal it's part of life and if we identify with Jesus we can expect more and we take hold of the same motivations that drove Paul to endure so much day after day we remember to the glory of God the good of others the resurrection hope and the character and person of God who never lies we keep this right perspective on affliction versus glory and we know that these afflictions are preparing glory for us

Paul says not just not just something we have to just kind of bear with for a while but we see what God's using them to do to demonstrate his power to refine us to bring us home forever with him I just want to close with three specific encouragements I realize that's been a lot if you're in the room today and you're experiencing hardship of any kind whether it's just you feel the weight of financial strain or you're suffering at work they're telling you to compromise your integrity whatever it may be friend know this that God has much grace for you much grace the one who did not spare his own son will along with Jesus give you everything you need to and do her well by faith he's promised you can go to him with all of it second don't be afraid to ask for help we're jars of clay after all we're weak in ourselves we need each other

God does not give the church as a gift so that we can suffer in silence all alone we're in it together so take courage and ask and finally for all of us let's remember Jesus he suffered so much hardship for us that he might bring us to God we all need him we all need his grace we all need his hardship for us to redeem our lives and let's remember how he lovingly took the hardship of other people and walked with them as we live for him let's follow his example let's pray father thank you for being so mighty and so powerful and so good that you would use even the hardest things of our lives to showcase your power and glory father

I pray that you would help us we don't think this way but we want to as your people help us think as you do about these things help us to suffer well knowing that it's temporary give us a glimpse of just how glorious and wonderful eternity with you is so that we might endure by faith we pray in Jesus name amen