

Jars of Clay

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[0 : 00] Lord God of mercy we pray, speak to us and our hearts clearly and truthfully from your word tonight so that we may rely upon it and to rely upon you Lord God, the God who brings life from death so that we may bring you glory for Jesus sake. Amen.

Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[2 : 06] Amen. I have felt a sentence of death against me. Not, I think, that he was sentenced to death in some court in Ephesus or somewhere, but rather that he was almost despairing of life itself, it seems, in the opening section of chapter 1 in particular.

And we'll come back to, later on in 2 Corinthians, a further detail about some of the difficulties, struggles, and afflictions and distress that Paul has gone through. And coupled with that and the problems that he's been facing, it seems in Ephesus at least, there are the problems that he's responding to in Corinth.

So here is a church that he's planted, but part of his anguish and affliction is that there are now those in that church who it seems are trying to lead people astray. And that's a double distress for Paul, in effect, as he's trying to correct that and protect and guard and strengthen the Corinthian church from such false teachers or so-called super-apostles, as we'll see more fully in the last chapters of this letter.

And of course, as he's responded not only to the Corinthians, but to other churches, as we read in the New Testament, we recognize the pain for him as he responds to intransigent sinners, people who keep on sinning or priding themselves in their sin or rejecting Paul in different ways and the gospel and his ministry.

Back in chapter 1, verse 8, he says, I don't want you, brothers and sisters, to be unaware of the affliction that we experienced in Asia, that is, around Ephesus in Turkey today, for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself.

[3 : 47] It's very strong words. And for many Christian ministers, they would give up and walk out at that point if they'd not done so already. And at a superficial reading, it looks as though Paul has virtually lost heart there.

But of course he hasn't, and he doesn't walk out of it. And in this passage, we gain a bit better understanding of why he hasn't. Why, in a sense, all these obstacles and distresses and anguishes have not overcome him.

Why haven't they? He begins chapter 4 by saying, therefore, reflecting back to chapter 3, to the glorious ministry of the gospel of Jesus, therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we're engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart.

And in verse 16, at the end of tonight's passage, in effect the beginning of the next, he reiterates, so we do not lose heart. So here is a dominant theme that in a sense envelopes tonight's passage, we do not lose heart.

And the grounding for that in verse 1 is that it is by God's mercy that we're engaged in this ministry. This ministry, by contrast to perhaps that ministry, which is the ministry of Moses, or the Jewish, or those people who've come to Corinth, who are propagating what seems to be a back-to-Moses type program, which is, in a sense, alluded to in the previous chapter 3.

[5 : 23] And we'll see that later in the letter as well. Those who are trying to draw people back to the Jewish law and back to Moses' law and bring them back under that law and diminish thereby the glory of Jesus, Paul has put that in a proper perspective in chapter 3.

And this ministry, his ministry, which is a ministry of the greater glory, a ministry of life, not death, of justification, not condemnation, of a permanent glory, not a temporary glory, those three contrasts come in chapter 3, because it's this ministry that Paul is engaged with, he doesn't lose heart.

And notice that it's also because it is by God's mercy that we're engaged in this ministry. It's not Paul's ambition. He doesn't see it as his right, or even at one level, even his choice.

It is simply God's mercy that not only is a mercy of the gospel to save people, but it's actually a mercy to engage people in the ministry of the gospel.

And sometimes, as I have known people who want to or aspire to Christian ministry, sometimes as I've interviewed people as what's called an examining chaplain in the Anglican Church, for example, sometimes people think it's almost their right to be a Christian minister, rather than being a mercy of God, a privilege that God extends by his mercy to be a minister of the gospel.

[6 : 49] Of course, for Paul, he recognized that very personally. He was the greatest of sinners, he called himself. He recognized that he was a persecutor of the church, and therefore, for him in particular, to be a minister now of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ is indeed an extraordinary mercy of God.

And I think not only here, but indeed in the language of these verses tonight, there are echoes of Paul's Damascus Road experience and his initial commissioning and call to be a minister of the gospel.

And I'll mention a couple of those later on as we go through the passage. Now, maybe some people are accusing Paul of losing heart. Maybe they're saying, this Paul is always suffering.

He always seems to be in anguish. He doesn't seem to be always triumphant. Well, he echoed the right triumphalism in chapter 3. Maybe now he's responding to this accusation.

It's hard to be sure exactly. But Paul here is making the point about ministry in today's passage, similar to what he said again back in chapter 1, verse 8.

[7 : 59] The, sorry, chapter 1, verse 9. There as he reflected on his anguish and distress, he said, we felt that we'd received a sentence of death so that, that is God's purpose behind the affliction, so that we would rely not on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.

Tonight, in effect, we see a bit more of an elaboration of that simple statement. Paul is echoing here an utter reliance on God's word or the ministry that God has given him by his mercy, relying on the God who raises people from the dead.

Now, what we've already seen in the first three chapters in 2 Corinthians is that Paul, it seems, with maybe some subtlety at times, contrasts himself with the claims of those who are trying to mislead the Corinthian church by saying about different styles of ministry and different gospel.

So when Paul says in verse 2 of chapter 4, we have renounced the shameful things that one hides and then elaborates on that, it could be that he's, in a sense, contrasting himself with some of those other ministers.

We refuse to practice cunning. Maybe others are cunning. We refuse to falsify God's word. Maybe he's implicitly saying that that's what others do.

[9 : 34] but rather we, by the open statement of the truth, commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God.

He's saying, firstly, no cunning. My ministry is not a deceptive ministry. I'm not trying to beguile you. I'm not trying to mislead you. I'm not trying to trick you.

That certainly seems to be an accusation levelled against Paul because later in this same letter, in chapter 12, he rather tongue-in-cheek, I think, responds to that sort of thing.

He has made it clear that he's not placed a financial burden on the Corinthian church and in chapter 12, verse 16, he says, let it be assumed that I did not burden you.

Nevertheless, you say, since I was crafty, I took you in by deceit. As though somehow the whole generosity of Paul in not placing a financial burden on the Corinthian church is being twisted against him and saying, he's just being deceitful.

[10 : 36] He's just being cunning. He says he's not making a financial burden, but maybe actually what he's trying to do is get more money out of you by pleading a sort of innocence and generosity.

Maybe that's the sort of point that's being levelled back at Paul. He's saying here, no cunning, also no falsifying God's word. Back in chapter 2, verse 17, he accused the others of being peddlers.

The word is for those who dilute wine. So you sell somebody wine but it's actually being diluted with water. Or as I use the illustration if you go to Bangkok or somewhere like that, genuine fake Rolex.

That is, it's not the real deal. Paul says the other people, they're peddlers basically, they're in it for gain and they're tampering, they're diluting what's going on.

Paul's accusing these other preachers in effect of what are going to be ruled out on a ball tampering, as though somehow they're trying to twist what's true to gain a wicket or something like that.

[11 : 40] Paul's saying I'm not distorting or falsifying or tampering with the gospel. Now in saying this, it's very clear that one of the battles Paul is fighting is not really just over himself as a minister compared to others.

The real battle is a battle of the truth, a battle of the gospel. And Paul is saying what I teach is the plain open truth. That's in effect what he goes on to say in verse 2. I'm not falsifying God's word. It is clear, plain, open in my explanation of it. And that's a key and essential fundamental for gospel ministry.

Not to falsify God's word, not to tweak it a little bit to make it sound more plausible or more flattering, but rather to be open, plain with the truth.

Paul finishes verse 2, speaking about making an open statement of the truth, commending ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. That is ultimately, it is God's approval he sees and seeks.

[12 : 45] Not actually Corinthians' approval. Yes, he's commending himself to them, to their conscience, but it's in the sight of God that ultimately matters the most. Now in chapter 3, which we looked at here on Sunday morning and many of you are not here for, Paul contrasts the ministry of the Old Testament with the New in effect.

And he made the very strong point that the Old Testament is not bad, it is actually full of glory. But the New Testament ministry of the gospel is more glorious.

In effect, he argued that the Old Testament ministry is veiled in a sense. It's as though you've got cataracts in your eyes. You can only see dimly some of the glory.

The fullness of glory comes in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It seems that he's attacking or responding to those who are trying to draw people back to the Old Testament, to Moses, to the Mosaic law, and a works righteousness of some sort, a legalism perhaps, rather than to the gospel, the glorious gospel, of Jesus Christ.

Paul maybe is being attacked for not having a great response. Why aren't there hundreds and hundreds of people responding to the gospel? Why is it that Paul's gospel meets such staunch opposition in every town that he goes to?

[14 : 09] It could be that some of those people in Corinth are saying, well, that's a sign that Paul's ministry is not of God, that somehow it's got such strong opposition. Well, Paul uses the language that he'd used in verse chapter three of being veiled.

Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. Now here Paul is using the same language as chapter three, but in a slightly different way.

There, the Old Testament ministry is in effect veiled because it doesn't show up the full glory of the gospel of Jesus. Now Paul says, in response perhaps to an accusation, if you say my ministry is veiled, it's only veiled to those who are perishing.

Now that's a bit of a sting because if you're saying to Paul, well, I reckon your preaching is veiled, that is, I don't understand it or I disagree with it, and then Paul says, well, if it's veiled, it's veiled to those who are perishing, what does it say of you who's made such an accusation?

Quite a sting in the tail in a way. You're the one who's perishing if you're making that accusation. That is in effect the implication of what Paul's saying. But here we need to understand what he's driving at because it's quite a significant and important point.

[15 : 29] He elaborates on it in verse 4. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Paul, when he speaks of those who are perishing and those for whom there is a veil, are clearly not referring now simply to the Jews, as was the case in chapter 3.

Rather, it seems to be anybody, Jew or Gentile, who is not responding to the gospel of Jesus Christ. And the reason for that is not because Paul's ministry or preaching is deficient or deceptive or cunning or beguiling, but rather because the God of this world has blinded them to the truth.

Now, this is a significant statement. Who is the God of this world? It's astonishing language, actually. And most, and I think I would fall in this camp, would say that really Paul is alluding to Satan here.

But the word for world is the word for eon or era or age, and probably better translated that way, so it's a God of this era being, in a sense, the old earth or something like that, not just of this creation, as though somehow there's a God of this world that is Satan.

[16:56] It's a God of this era. But it's actually, I think, even though the Bible uses and Jesus sort of uses expressions that denote Satan's sort of rule to some extent over people on this earth and so on, here I think uniquely is that the God of this world, which is very bold language, if indeed Paul is referring here to Satan.

Some would say that actually he must therefore be referring to God, and it's God who's blinded them, and of course that theological argument we can find in a sense along the lines of God hardening the heart of Pharaoh, and an argument that Paul elaborates on again in Romans 9 to 11 as well.

So maybe he's not directly saying Satan, but actually attributing it ultimately to God. Either way, it's the mind that is the key response, and the mind is darkened or blinded.

In fact, of course, that ties in with other statements in the New Testament, and indeed the old, where sin and evil blinds us to what is true and right. That's in effect Paul's argument for part of Romans 1, that the truths about God are plain for everybody to see, but sin has blinded people, or evil has blinded people.

In Romans 1, 19 to 21, for example. It's quite a statement also about intellectual pride. It's the mind that is at the issue. When you think of the arrogance of the minds of people like Richard Dawkins and others, you wonder who's going to get the last laugh when Richard Dawkins stands before Almighty God.

[18:28] Whose mind is greater? Who knows the truth? Paul is arguing that the reason that not all respond to the gospel is not because he himself is not an apostle, or that he's not preaching the gospel, but rather in the end because they're blinded to the truth by the God of this world.

I think that's an encouragement to Christian ministers in a way. It's encouragement at the level of it doesn't all depend on us. It's an encouragement to any one of us who is a Christian as we seek to share the Christian faith and maybe find some frustration when friends or family members don't become Christians.

I think, well, what have I done? How have I failed? Well, it's a good question to ask because it may indeed be areas that we need to change and correct. But in the end and ultimately, God is the one who lifts the veil.

And unless he does, no one, not even us, respond to the gospel. You see, we're not Christians because our minds are better than others. We're not Christians because somehow we were clever enough to see through the veil and appreciate the glory of the gospel.

We're not Christians because somehow we've worked it all out like a puzzle. We're Christians because of the mercy of God in lifting the veil from our minds and hearts so that we respond with faith and repentance as well.

[19:54] It undercuts human pride, doesn't it? We've got nothing to boast in for being a Christian. And indeed, those who boast that they know some other gospel or boast that there's an atheistic way are fools in the end.

Notice too that Paul, in reflecting this, summarizes the gospel. It's good to see, dotted through the New Testament, these little summary statements of what it is that he actually preached.

So he says, for example, at the end of verse 4, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who's the image of God.

Well, there's a summary of the gospel, the glory of Christ who is the image of God. In the next verse, we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. He'd already said in his first letter to the Corinthians, or at least what is in the Bible, 1 Corinthians, we proclaim Christ crucified.

None of these are contradictory statements. They're different ways of summarizing what the Christian gospel is about. And it's very clear that Jesus Christ is at the very center of the gospel as Lord.

[21:03] He is the glory. It's his glory that's the image of Christ, image of God, and him crucified as some of the summary statements of the gospel. And notice too that Paul's key activity, it seems, is to proclaim.

There's lots of ministry activities, but for Paul it was to proclaim. He's a herald, a proclaimer of this glorious gospel of the glory of Christ in the image of God.

Notice too that Paul says in verse 5, we do not proclaim ourselves. That is, he's not boasting, he's not putting forward himself and saying, you know, listen to me because I'm good, I'm important, or whatever.

Not at all. Maybe again, he's implicitly contrasting himself to other preachers. Rather, we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves.

Not that they become his master, God is his master, but rather Paul's whole ministry is for their service, out of love for them, for the Corinthian church, and ultimately not for their sake, although it is for their sake in part, penultimately, it is for Jesus' sake that he serves them with the gospel of the glory of Christ.

[22 : 19] So Paul, in outlining about himself in ministry, again, does not boast. It's what we saw last Sunday morning as well. He speaks there about his competence, but all competence comes from God.

So Paul can acknowledge that he has some competence in ministry, but it is God who's given that competence, so he doesn't boast in it. And here, the same sort of thing, he can in a sense say, yes, I speak the truth boldly and clearly.

I'm not full of cunning and deceit, but it's by the mercy of God that I engage in this ministry. It's not my boast that I do this ministry, but it is from God.

In particular, the emphasis here is on the power of God through the gospel. So in verse 6, he says, for, that is because, this reason, it is the God who said, let light shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. In effect, a summary of the gospel and its fruit. It's a powerful statement and a significant one.

Firstly, notice that it is God himself who shines in our hearts.

[23 : 41] Not that God shines something else into our hearts, but actually that it's God who shines in our hearts. And notice the, and that means then, that it's not just simply about a body of knowledge that we accumulate, but that it's about a personal relationship with God that is at the center of this.

But more than that, Paul quotes, let light shine out of darkness. And most of us, if we hear those words, probably if we think of anything in the Old Testament, we'll think of the very first page.

Genesis 1 verse 3, God said, let there be light and there was light. It's a powerful creation that God should speak and light should come into existence.

And I think that's most likely what Paul is referring to here. The same God who spoke and brought light out of darkness is the same God who shines himself the light of the gospel and the glory of Christ in our hearts.

The link, I think, Paul will pick up later in chapter 5 verse 17. That is God who speaks, let light shine out of darkness and we have the creation.

[25 : 00] creation. The same God shines himself in our hearts and we have then a new creation. To use the language of chapter 5 verse 17.

It's possibly possible the other place that Paul may be quoting is from Isaiah 9. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. In effect, the same sort of point is being made. But I suspect most likely the language is alluding back to Genesis chapter 1.

Again, notice the Jesus centeredness of it. And again, notice the emphasis on glory. That is the manifestation of the presence of God.

And we saw in chapter 3 that emphasis on, yes, there's glory in the Old Testament ministry of Moses at Mount Sinai, for example. But the greater glory is the glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so this glory thing continues on in chapter 4 as well. The language of glory, shining, light, Jesus as Lord, whilst at one level it's relatively common, at another level it probably alludes back to Paul's own conversion experience with the blinding light and the glory of Christ the Lord on the road to Damascus.

[26 : 12] It's probably not coincidental that Paul was physically blinded on that road. But at the same time, spiritually for the first time, saw the glory of the risen Christ and responded with faith and repentance.

Well, there are many in our day and age who say and claim that the age of proclamation and preaching is over. It's been superseded by post-modernity, by television, by the visual age, by the

internet and all this sort of stuff.

We have to be very careful, I think, of letting sociological arguments overtake theological ones. Paul is thoroughly theological in his argument here.

And he notes that God chooses to work through the preaching of the gospel. That's why Paul doesn't lose heart. Because it's the glorious gospel that is a powerful gospel to bring about new creation in effect.

And God chooses to bring that power to bear through the simple preaching, a person like Paul and others, of the plain truth of the gospel.

[27 : 22] That's how he chooses to work. So therefore, the power doesn't revolve around the person. It doesn't need a person of great eloquence or rhetorical ability to bring it about.

Paul is, in a sense, in that case. But remember back to Moses and other Old Testament prophets. Moses kept saying, I can't do this. I'm not an eloquent person. And he ends up being one of the great heroes of preaching in the Old Testament.

Remember some of the great preachers of church history, people like Jonathan Edwards and others who weren't necessarily great and persuasive and great at rhetoric.

And yet God mightily used them. There's a great encouragement here, I think, for the Christian preacher. Paul is directing people away from the packaging to where the power lies.

Paul simply says, my job is to speak the open truth without any cunning, without any falsifying, to proclaim the truth. And the power comes from the gospel of God.

[28 : 36] And in fact, the weakness of the vessel of the proclamation, the weakness of the preacher, actually in a sense gives more attention back to the power of the gospel. And therefore to the power of God.

And that's what leads into his famous analogy in the verses that follow. He describes himself and Christian ministers, in effect, as clay pots.

Now in Asia, in some countries in Asia, clay pot cooking is quite a specialty. And that's when you have an unglazed pot. And apparently, I had to look this up, you soak it in water for a while.

And this is far beyond my culinary expertise, but I enjoy eating clay pot cooking. And you soak the clay pot in water for a while, so that it absorbs the water.

And then you cook whatever it is at a relatively high temperature. And the water within the pot becomes a steam that helps keep it all moist and cook it and so on. I'm sure some of you know much better than I, and some of you have probably even done it.

[29 : 37] But I just eat it. Well, in the ancient world, clay pots are nothing special. I suppose actually they're not even when they're used for cooking. Clay pots are just your, not disposable, but your basic utensil.

There's nothing fancy or glamorous about them. They're just basic, breakable, common, cheap utensils for food and for other things as well.

In fact, there would have been hundreds of them in people's houses and neighbourhoods and so on. One of the key and most common archaeological finds, whenever they dig up some city or whatever, are bits of clay pot.

When they broke, people would use them for writing on. And so there are clay pot pieces. When they're written on, they're called ostrakon or ostracar as the plural. And people have found all sorts of things written on ostracar.

Messages and shopping lists and bills and invoices and all that sort of stuff. They're very common. It is nothing fancy, nothing special, a clay pot.

[30 : 41] Paul says, we have this treasure in clay jars, clay pots basically, nothing special at all. Even though the emphasis is on the clay jars here, it's worth pausing to note, we have this treasure.

It's a high word, high value word. The gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ is treasure. It's not something we should treat lightly.

Certainly not something we should ever be cunning or deceitful or beguiling or tampering with or peddling with. It's treasure. It's a reminder to us about what value do we place on the gospel?

Do we treasure it as one of the most, if not the most, priceless possessions that we're given as a gift from God?

It's treasure. And Paul therefore doesn't dilute it and tamper it and falsify it. Why is it treasure? Well, the end of chapter three made that clear, I think.

[31 : 49] All of us with unveiled faces seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. It's treasure because only this gospel of the glory of Christ has the power to transform us into his image and be perfect in God's presence on the final day.

That's treasure. We probably won't realise the depth of significance that it is treasure until we stand before God on that day and realise the fullness of its effect in our lives.

That's an extraordinary power of the gospel. And that's what Paul is trying to highlight all through this section. That's why he reflected on it being the creation power back in verse six.

That the God who said, let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts. That's powerful.

That's changing our hearts so that on that final day we'll be transformed from one degree of glory to another.

It's so easy for people to be beguiled by preachers and speakers. So easy for people to flock after those who say what their itching ears want them to hear.

[33 : 02] But in the end a preacher is just a clay pot. Nothing more and nothing less. It's a special vehicle of the gospel but really just a clay pot.

And it's a reminder to each one of us that the power that we are to rely on is not based in a person, our pastor or any other preacher but is based on the gospel of the glory of Jesus Christ.

Paul says, but we have this treasure in clay jars so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

And that's a biblical argument all the way through. God chooses weak things so that his power is unquestioned. You see, if God's preachers were only ever the eloquent, the sort of persuasive, the charismatic, the glamorous, the rich, the wealthy, whatever, then always the source of power would be compromised at least by way of identification.

God chooses what is weak so that there can be no doubt where the real power comes from, from God and from his gospel. That's why I think he chose Moses who is not eloquent and many others of the so-called heroes of the Bible.

[34 : 30] But preeminently, it's why our salvation comes through Jesus hanging weak, defenseless on a cross. so that it's clear that salvation comes from God, from the gospel of Jesus and from no other source or direction.

It's the same today and we who preach ought to be humbled by this reminder that we're just clay pots and those who listen to preaching as we all do should beware the trap of the sort of personality cults that sometimes preachers indulge in and often the pew sitters do as well.

It's the same point Paul made back in chapter 1 verse 9 that I mentioned before. The reason for all the affliction and distress and the anguish is so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

That is the apparent weakness of Paul, the sufferings and the objections and the ridicules and rejections that he faced are also that Paul would rely on God's power to raise the dead and in fact that's how God operates in general so that people's attention are being drawn to the power of the gospel and even away from those who would preach the gospel the clay pots.

Human weakness you see is no barrier to God working and that's a great encouragement to all of us whether preachers or not. It doesn't depend on me or you.

[36 : 08] Today I had to go to the Austin Hospital to visit a family that I visited a few times this week. Their son aged 26 broke his neck and back on New Year's Day jumping diving off St. Pooks and killed a pier.

You may have seen his story in today's Herald Sun. And today they switched the life support machine off and he died within a minute or two.

And he was very conscious and very clear that that was the decision that he wanted made. And as I've been in three times this week including this afternoon each time I've been thinking God give me the words to say but as I went in today I thought yes I can ask God to give me the words to say but actually more important and not that necessarily I say the right words but that God exercises his power in their minds and hearts.

I've been working on this talk as I drove in this afternoon and it made me in a sense encouraged to think and remember it doesn't actually depend on my words even if I pray that God gives me the right words it ultimately depends on the power of the gospel to bring life out of death and I may be a minister of that but no more than a clay pot and so that was I was encouraged by this reminder from

this passage that it doesn't in the end depend on me the power comes from God and we all ought always to remember that even if we're not in such a dramatic situation notice then that Paul is reflecting that the power of the resurrection is not just something that's in the future he's not just looking forward to the day when finally resurrection power will be ours and will be raised to heaven but rather he reflects that resurrection power begins now that's actually what he was relying on in Ephesus in the midst of all his strife back in chapter 1 so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead he who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us not just that one day at the end of my life God's going to raise me to heaven that's resurrection power that's dramatic and powerful true but it's already begun in a sense and that's what Paul is in effect reflecting here as well in verse 8 he says we are afflicted in every way but not crushed we are perplexed or distressed but not driven to despair we are persecuted but we're not forsaken or abandoned we're struck down but we're not destroyed always carrying in the body the death of Christ so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies why does Paul not give up hope why does he not despair in the face of all of this because of the promise and the power of the resurrection then and there not just as something to happen in the future but something that Paul is appropriating by faith in his ministry day by day for while we live verse 11 says yes verse 10 sorry always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of

[39 : 45] Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies for while we live we are always being given up to death for Jesus sake so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh so death is at work in us but life in you Paul is recognizing here theologically how the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ has an impact each day in his ministry and therefore he does not give up hope he does not lose hope or lose heart notice how Paul's reflection on this is theological he's not sort of psychologically trying to be optimistic about the future he's not trying to interpret everything sociologically or methodologically but rather he's recognizing what the power of the gospel is and relying on that power day by day in his life and in his ministry he recognizes that his suffering as a minister for the gospel is an identification in the sufferings and ultimately death of

Jesus that was reflected on earlier in this letter but at the same time the purpose of that suffering and death is to bring life from death and in Jesus case that was the resurrection from the dead and in Paul's case it's the in effect the life that comes from the gospel for otherwise we would be perishing so Paul in a sense doesn't give up hope because he sees the gospel perspective of suffering and distress and anguish and he knows that it is the power of the gospel to bring life and God is exercising that even through the midst of Paul's suffering and anguish the power of the gospel is resurrection power it's a linchpin of gospel glory it's why Jesus is so glorious because it's testified to by the resurrection and it's power that comes now and so what Paul proclaims the death and resurrection of Jesus in effect he's exemplifying in his life in perseverance in persecution and oppression because of his trust in the resurrection power of the gospel you see with the gospel hope of resurrection there is no such thing as hopelessness there's no such thing as impossibility because it's the power of the resurrection and in the midst of that

Paul is simply a clay jar trusting in a God of power to bring life from death in effect what Paul is saying here is exactly more or less what he said in Romans 8 at the end of Romans 8 in that famous passage who will separate us from the love of Christ will hardship distress persecution famine nakedness peril or sword as it's written for your sake we're being killed all day long we're accounted as sheep to be slaughtered knowing all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us from convinced that neither death nor life angels rulers things present things to come powers height depth and anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord and in effect there it's the same resurrection power that Paul is appealing to all the suffering does it overwhelm me no do I lose heart no am I hopeless no am I in total despair no because of the power of the resurrection the power of the gospel of the glory of Jesus and therefore

Paul says now back in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 he says in verse 13 he quotes from a psalm psalm 116 he says but just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture quoting then psalm 116 I believed and so I spoke we also believe and so we speak now psalm 116 I've more or less run out of time to read it in full but psalm 116 has these words the snares of death encompass me the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me I suffered distress and anguish and I called on the name of the Lord O Lord I pray save my life gracious is the Lord and righteous our God is merciful when I was brought low he saved me and then later in the psalm I walk before the Lord in

the land of the living I kept my faith even when

I said I am greatly afflicted Paul quotes that psalm not just the verse but alluding to the whole context in the midst of death as though I might even despair of life itself I trust in God who brings life from death and therefore I speak that's why I preach that's why I proclaim the gospel he says because of the power of God to bring life from death through the resurrection and glory of Jesus Christ you see gospel faith makes a difference day by day for Paul and he's not just giving an example for a Christian minister but an example for each one of us in our sufferings in our trials in our persecutions in our despair and so on that the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gospel of the glory of Christ ought mean always we never lose heart but we persevere as believers and as speakers of the gospel that's why

[45 : 18] Paul quotes Psalm 116 because verse 14 says we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will bring us with you into his presence Paul endures carrying the death of Jesus in his body as he said in verses 10 and 11 for two reasons really one is for the Corinthians sake so that on the final day they will be risen with him in the presence of God that's the end of verse 14 or at beginning of verse 15 everything is for your sake or as he said at the end of verse 12 death is at work in us but life in you that's why Paul has endured all this trusting in a God who brings life from death for the sake of the Corinthians so that they may experience life and may rise on the final day as well as Paul Paul's suffering is for their good for their life and if they are being taught to be critical of it by some other teachers

Paul is saying it's for your benefit that I'm suffering it's gospel suffering so the gospel life will follow indeed indeed as he said in the opening paragraph of the letter if we are being afflicted it is for your consolation and salvation if we are being consoled it is for your consolation it's for their benefit but secondly and ultimately Paul is suffering for the glory of God and so he finishes this section by saying it's for your sake penultimately so that grace as it extends to more and more people may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God that is as Paul suffers for the benefit of the Corinthians it beyond that it may be that more and more people will respond to grace with thanksgiving so that more glory is given back to God in praise and in honour for those who remember chapter 1 verse 11 he urged people to be praying for them so that many will give thanks on our behalf and he is in a sense the same sort of thing

I'm prepared to suffer and endure as a Christian carrying in me the death of Christ trusting in the resurrection so that you may join me in the resurrection and even many others will do so so that God himself will be even more greatly glorified on the final day Paul's not motivated ultimately by Corinthian approval but rather for the greater glory of God and since all the power of Christian ministry comes from God and not from a clay pot then all the glory goes ultimately to him in saying this of course Christian ministry is not inconsequential you still need the clay pots in effect it's a weighty responsibility glory Paul made that comment back in chapter 2 who is sufficient for these things for I'm the aroma of Christ which is to death for those who do not receive him and to life for those who do it's a weighty responsibility for a humble clay pot but mercifully all the power is God's and what power it is the power to bring light from darkness death the power to change us from one degree of glory to another so that on the final day we'll be perfected in the image of the Lord Jesus Christ therefore we do not lose heart Amen