

The Treasure and The Jar

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[0 : 00] Let's pray as we stand. Gracious Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word through the power of your Holy Spirit.

And in Jesus' name, amen. Please have a seat. Well, good morning, everyone. It's a great pleasure to be with you this morning.

Almost every single Sunday at this exact moment, I'm with you, but I'm underneath you. And I'm scurrying about right under your feet in the basement.

So know that I love hearing you guys working your way through the service, and I love hearing you sing the closing hymn at the end, too. I hear you every Sunday. It's great to be with you. Last year, I was at Synod, and I had dinner with some clergy friends one night, and we got to talking about the latest news and events and what we're up to.

And two of them said that they'd been going around North America interviewing for jobs, for ministry jobs. And so we asked them, what did the interviewers want to talk about?

[1 : 05] What did they ask you? What were the big questions on their minds? And these clergy friends told us that the interviewers wanted to talk about strategic plans and five-year plans and visions for church growth because these churches were looking for dynamic leaders with vision and charisma and a long-term plan.

So how did you answer the questions we asked? Well, I replied that I have no five-year plan for your church. My plan is to pray constantly, to preach faithfully, and to teach the Word of God week by week, and to expect God to transform lives and to grow His kingdom by the power of the gospel. My friend did not get the job. Here we are in 2 Corinthians 4, verses 1-12, and we've dropped right into the middle of Paul's long defense of his ministry, the ministry of the Spirit, the ministry of the new covenant through the blood of Jesus Christ.

And Paul's defending himself here against false teachers who've entered into the Corinthian church, and they've won over the Corinthians with this attractive, well-polished, well-packaged false gospel, which fits in effortlessly with the Corinthian culture, which is a culture of wealth and power and charisma and strength.

And it's a false gospel that's still very attractive to our hearts today because we're tempted to look at Paul's gospel, the gospel which proclaims Jesus as Lord over all, the crucified and risen Jesus as Lord over all.

[2 : 50] And we see this gospel as embarrassing and powerless and ineffective in 21st century Vancouver. Or, if you open your Bibles with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 4, page 965, or, to use Paul's words, we're tempted to lose heart.

Look with me at verse 1. Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. Paul's going to make an argument here in these next 12 verses for why we should not lose heart. Because we're all tempted to lose heart. We're tempted to grow discouraged. We're tempted to give up. And Paul warns us in these verses that there are two places that we look which cause us to lose heart.

It happens when we look at the world and it happens when we look at ourselves. Or if you prefer, you could say, it happens when we look out the window and it happens when we look in the mirror. Because what we see when we look at the world and we look at ourselves is we see weakness. We see a gospel that doesn't appear to be winning the nation. And we see ourselves as inadequate messengers of that gospel.

[4 : 11] But what 2 Corinthians is teaching us week by week is that it's precisely in the very weakness of the gospel that God's power is being displayed.

Yes, it's entirely upside down from what we expect. But no, it's not an accident. It's God's chosen method for transforming lives.

It's God's chosen method for transforming lives to work in this weakness. The power of the gospel is made perfect in weakness. So let's dig into that first temptation.

Because we look at our world and we lose heart. Verses 3 and 4. Would you look with me now? Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing, in their case, the God of this world, or better, maybe, the God of this age, the God of this age 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.

So Paul seems to admit it does appear as if the gospel is not getting through to very many people. It seems to be veiled or hidden from many who hear it.

[5 : 30] Yet, he says, there's a reason for this. Remember verse 4. The God of this age, and he's talking there about Satan. Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers.

And if you're a Christian, these are very sobering words. Because it means that the power of the gospel is under direct attack from an adversary who hates God and hates anyone who proclaims Jesus as Lord.

And this is spiritual warfare. And our temptation, I think, as modern people, is to dismiss Satan as imaginary. But we do so at great peril.

And friends, if you're not a Christian here this morning, these words are very sobering too. Because Paul is saying that your mind is blinded to the gospel.

And there's an enemy who wants to prevent you from understanding the gospel, the truth of the gospel. It may even sound offensive for you to hear Paul say this.

[6 : 34] And if the God of the age is capable of doing this to us, is it any wonder that we would lose heart? But, Paul's not finished in verse 5.

Look with me at verse 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.

Paul's quoting from Genesis 1, the story of creation. And he says, don't lose heart because the very same God who powerfully spoke a word that created the sun and the moon and the stars, he is powerfully shining the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ into our lives.

He's creating something new in us. In the very same way, he created the heavens and the earth out of nothing in the very beginning of time. And this is very good news.

It's what Christians call the doctrine of regeneration, a powerful work of new creation which unblinds us and transforms us into a new person in Christ Jesus.

[7 : 46] And while what we see with our eyes in the world all around us may not look hopeful or promising for the gospel, God is infinitely more powerful than the God of this age.

And he's speaking these words of new creation in men and women and children's hearts every single minute of every single day around our world. So friends, first we must not be tempted to lose heart when we look at the powerlessness of the gospel in the world or what appears like the powerlessness of the gospel in the world.

And second, we must address the temptation to lose heart when we look at ourselves. We see this in verse 7. If you look with me at the bottom of the page.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. This treasure that Paul's referring to is the gospel that he's just described in verses 5 and 6. And where does Paul say this treasure resides? Where does it live? Right inside you and I. because we're the jars of clay that Paul describes.

[9 : 00] It's a sobering way to hear someone describe our bodies because clay jars are fragile. They're cheap to make and they're cheap to break.

And they're weak and they don't seem to do justice to the value of the contents. It doesn't seem to make any sense to put a treasure inside of a cheap clay pot.

Yet God chooses to take his precious gospel and place it into you and I fragile and weak vessels though we are.

So why would God do this? Why would he ever think of doing this? Well it's right there in verse 7. To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

You see God's not interested in seeing his gospel proclaimed by super apostles and wonder evangelists. In his wisdom and mercy God has chosen you and I in the midst of all our weakness and powerlessness to proclaim a gospel that shines God's glory into transformed hearts and minds. [10:10] And so Paul encourages us we must not lose heart when we are afflicted when we are perplexed when we are persecuted when we are struck down. because it's precisely in our suffering in our suffering as Christ suffered that we share the grace of the gospel with those around us.

And I think this is a very hard message for us in 2015. Because like the Corinthians we are very quick to see adversity and suffering as a sign of failure and God's displeasure not as an effective means by which God shows his power.

You remember my clergy friend who didn't get the job. Listen to how one writer puts it. I doubt that a pastoral candidate who responded to the question how has God been at work in your ministry by quoting 1 Corinthians 4.11 and saying to this day I go hungry and thirsty I have nothing but rags to wear I have been brutally treated by the community in which I am ministering and I am currently homeless for Jesus' sake I doubt that they would be given further consideration for the job. And yet in Paul's opinion this is exactly the kind of life that authenticates the true gospel minister. I share this interview story I shared that story from Synod that interview story because it's an example of where the rubber hits the road.

How a church committee drafts a job description how you and I pray for our children or grandchildren how we present the gospel to a co-worker these are just a few instances where we're faced with whether we believe in the power of the upside down gospel that God uses to reveal his son Jesus.

[12:09] And friends you can I can't I can't I can't know what your temptation would be to lose heart but I would invite you to pray about this to really think about it where are you tempted to lose heart when you look at yourself or you look out at the world where are you tempted to see the power of the gospel as ineffective and what happens when you fall into that temptation what do you do to tamper with the word of God or to use cunning as Paul says rather than to speak the word of God clearly with a good conscience to speak the truth where are you tempted to do that because as we look at ourselves and as we look at the world let us not be tempted to lose heart in the power of the gospel for Paul tells us we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us

Amen to gather we have Rams the Instagram to be— to be the■ that we realize the of the about giving another answer whether that or