

## II Corinthians 4:1-16 - Treasures in Jars of Clay

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[ 0 : 00 ] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

If you have a Bible with you in some form, you'd open to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. We're stepping out just for this Sunday of our journey through the Gospel of Luke, which we will return to next week.

But I want us to look at this section of 2 Corinthians in some way as a follow-up on a sermon that I preached here several weeks back from Psalm 67.

But let me read now for us from Paul's letter, second letter to the Corinthians, beginning of verse 1 of chapter 4.

We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways.

[ 1 : 09 ] We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's Word, but by the open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience and sight of God.

And even if our Gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. 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.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed. Perplexed, but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken.

[ 2 : 31 ] 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 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.

Look, we also believe, and 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.

[ 3 : 36 ] So, we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

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.

Let me pray for us as we approach this portion of God's word. Father, we need you.

We need what your word says. We need to understand what your word says. But we need what your word says to penetrate down into the depth of our hearts, not just our minds.

[ 4 : 45 ] So, would you come? As we study your word, would you give us that gift, that working of your Holy Spirit to move away the things that would distract us?

Would you clarify the things that we need to focus on? Would you make our hearts receptive to what you would say?

And then lead us to glory. Lead us to your glory. Lead us to a deeper knowledge of your glory. So that we will value it above all things. So come, do your work in us, we pray in the great name of Jesus.

Amen. Now, a few weeks ago when we were, when I was here, we were talking about Psalm 67, and we really, that sermon was all about what I would call the flow of grace.

[ 6 : 00 ] And it's how that the more we enter into the knowledge of all that God is and what God has done for us and this grace that He has poured out for us, the more we experience this relationship that He has now given and restored for us in Christ, the more it's going to naturally flow from us into the rest of the world around us.

You know, the Father, in His effusive joy, because of this joy, sends His Son into the world to share this joy with those He has created, and then the Son then calls us to go do the same.

So as we experience that joy, it flows from us, and we fulfill the calling that He has given to us by sharing that joy with those around us.

And really, and since that's what this passage also is talking about, but when we look at this passage, there's this phrase that kind of gives us pause.

And it's a critical phrase. One of the lessons that we need to learn when we study the Scriptures is that when you read sections of Scripture, you look for those repeated phrases.

[ 7 : 41 ] And there's a repeated phrase here that kind of sandwiches in this whole chapter. And that is the phrase, we do not lose heart.

You see it in verse 1, and you see it down again towards the end. And if the gospel is such good news, and if it's such a glorious thing to experience, and if it should be flowing freely from us, why would we lose heart?

Well, proclaiming the gospel when we've experienced it deeply is a natural thing. It is also a costly thing.

And losing heart is very, very easy to do. When the cost becomes and begins to seem heavy to bear, we lose heart and we wonder whether it's worth continuing to proclaim and to communicate to this world that is lost in their blindness.

We wonder if it's worth keeping going. You know, Will spoke of this last week, I think, the last two weeks.

[ 9 : 10 ] Spoke very well of this. When we come to Christ, it is glorious. It's also costly. So we particularly in the Western church really find this concept difficult.

You know, we sometimes, you know, we talk about and even those of us in our circles, we ridicule preachers who proclaim what is known as the prosperity gospel.

And I'm not going to mention names. You know who some of these people are. But it is a gospel that simply says that, you know, when we come to Jesus, if we're faithful, then we're going to, we should expect to enjoy all the good and the pleasures, the wealth and the benefits and health that this life has to offer.

And we know in our heads that's not true. That's not what the Bible teaches. We sort of know that. but I think even in our own circles, we live by the principle, I mean, our very country was founded on the principle of life, liberty, and what?

[ 10 : 35 ] The pursuit of happiness. And unfortunately, we expect that out of our religion as well. we make, you know, we love sermons that are uplifting and positive.

We like music that makes our toes tap and that are, it's uplifting and encouraging. And it's when the pain and the hardship and of just life or that pain and hardship which comes because of our involvement in the ministry, when that begins to encroach on our lives, we can be shaken and begin to ask questions like, wait a minute, does God really love me?

If He loved me, would He be doing this to me? And, you know, our level of suffering really doesn't have to be that great.

I could go into a hotel room with lousy pillows and complain at the wazoo. He says, how am I supposed to live with a pillow this flat?

What did I do to deserve this? You know, when we were overseas doing mission work, it was easy to have a mindset that life was not going to be comfortable, cushy, cozy, though in a lot of ways our lives were.

[ 12 : 16 ] But you have this mindset to, oh, I'm now in the mission field. I'm supposed to have a hard time and that's okay. But as soon as we came back, all of that ended.

I mean, I was very grateful to enter back into the good life of SUVs and Starbucks. The problem with the prosperity gospel is not just that it's not true.

It basically diminishes what the gospel is. because it makes the gospel just something that I can have the good life comfort here and now.

And that doesn't give us a whole lot of impetus to proclaim it. But what Paul is doing here in this text is he's doing a couple of things.

He's telling us about the reality of what it means to live in Christ and proclaim the gospel but he's also telling us about a gospel that is worth everything it'll cost us.

[ 13 : 34 ] And so I know in your bulletins you don't have a printed outline so we'll put it up here on the screen. I'm basically going to look at I want us to look at three things from this text.

And it's all about glory. First off, we're going to see the gospel of glory. And then we're going to look at the vessels of glory and then the pathway to glory.

First, let's look at the gospel of glory. You know, when you read these passages of scripture, again, the whole thing of repeated phrases and words and if you read this chapter, I don't know if you picked up on it, the word, the term glory shows up in here five times.

We see it up there in verse 4 where he's talking about the gospel of the glory of Christ. You see it in verse 6 where he talks about the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

You see it down there in verse 17. We're talking about the eternal weight of glory. The gospel is not just about freedom from the fear of hell.

[ 14 : 56 ] The gospel is not just about my ticket to a better place once I die. The gospel is about glory.

It is all about glory. The good news of the gospel is that we again can know glory.

Back in the fall when man sinned in the garden among the things the consequences that happened to that there were two major repercussions of our disobedience.

And the first was that the glory that man knew initially being created in the image of God was now brought down to shame.

What was the first thing that Adam and Eve did? They ate of the apple. They looked at each other. They saw that they were naked and they started covering up in their shame.

[ 16 : 05 ] They lost this sense of glory that they were created to know to experience to own and it was gone.

And we've been living in hiding in shame ever since. And you know this shame. You live in hiding. I live in hiding. I'm going to tell you something about myself that I'm going to pay for after this but I do not dance.

It's not because I can't. It's not because I don't have rhythm. Oh I do. It's just dancing is this self-expressive thing that you do out there in front of people that terrifies me.

The people are going to watch me. They're going to see me. See what I do. And then I'm going to get their attention and that's not where I want their attention.

[ 17 : 17 ] I'm going to do something dumb. I'm going to look silly, foolish, and so I would just as soon sit, tap my toes, and enjoy the music.

It's safety. Now, why, if I'm so self-conscious about how I am perceived, why would I stand in front of 400 people and talk for over half an hour?

That is the worst nightmare for many of you. Because, see, these situations expose us. They expose us in ways where we're not, we don't feel safe.

We don't want that kind of exposure. There is shame that is driving and controlling so much of what we do. I stand up here because this is something I feel confident in.

In fact, this is a way I hide my shame. But, see, some of us, we know that shame in a lot of different ways. Some of you would never leave the house if you were dressed out of style.

[ 18 : 31 ] I mean, some of you are terrified just by, again, speaking in public, some of us use humor in our words, again, to cloak and to hide from other people so that it won't get close.

We are all hiding from shame because we know that there's something deeply flawed. We are not right.

And I don't want you to see it. I've lost the glory. But there's something else that we've, consequence of that first obedience.

The second impact was that I couldn't know the real glory. sin. And that isn't from the face of God.

Because one of the first consequences of that sin is that Adam and Eve were driven out away. They were separated, in some ways excommunicated, where they were created to know God deeply and intimately and personally.

[ 19 : 48 ] There is now this chasm between them and him that they cannot overcome. And we were made for this.

There was this relationship and it's something we were constantly forever longing to restore. We want to know glory.

Glory is something that's remarkably beautiful. It's something we're so attracted to. It's something we so much want. It's like when you see this glorious sunset out there.

You cannot take your eyes off of it. It just draws you in to stare and to linger because it's just beautiful. And we long for it, attracted to beauty.

We are drawn towards beauty. But the ultimate beauty in all of the world is now off limits because of our own sin.

[ 20 : 57 ] But this is where the gospel comes in. The gospel restores glory. thing. The gospel covers my shame.

Yes, in and of myself, there's something deeply flawed, but I am now clothed with beauty, the righteousness of Christ, with Christ himself.

And the one who is the most beautiful and glorious looks at me and sees it all and does this. That's my boy.

The creator declares me beautiful. And then the creator invites me in.

Invites me to himself to where I can now see and behold the face of glory.

[ 22 : 16 ] I love these verses from the previous chapter up in the end of chapter three where he says, and we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord.

That's the gospel. That's what Christ has come to do to restore glory. And that is good news. So much better news than what we so often hear. glory. But now we come to really the vessels of glory.

And this is where Paul begins to get a little bit dicey. And this is the part that we really wish he wouldn't have put in here.

Because how does God show his glory to the rest of the world? well I mean that is his intent. His intent is to he has shown in us the light of the glory of himself you know in the face of Christ and we reflect that glory.

[ 23 : 40 ] But what now is the means of of him projecting that glory to the world? Well he does it very differently than we do.

You know on August 20th the people of Hungary are going to celebrate one of their great national holidays.

It's kind of like our fourth of July but it's called St. Stephen's Day. And what they do is kind of the high point of St.

Stephen's Day. They have this big parade and procession through the streets of Budapest from Ishwan's Cathedral. I don't remember if it goes from there to there but what they do they bring out their most holy of relics and parade it through the streets and that relic is a hand.

It is supposedly St. Stephen's right hand. How they know it's his right hand I'm not sure but it's just it's a hand.

[ 24 : 53 ] It's in this beautiful box that it's golden it's got glass sides there's really gorgeous red velvet inside and it's a really really beautiful box and it's a good thing because that hand is over a thousand years old and it's not looking good.

It's just kind of curled up you know like this but that is the hand of their very first king you know a saint now to the people of Hungary and so they parade this through but it's got to have this beautiful box and so really the beauty of this relic they had to create and put around it to take something that really was pretty ugly to make it beautiful.

well that's kind of the way we do it. That's the way we work. We are very cognizant of the fact that when we look in the mirror we don't see beauty.

You know we look in our hearts we don't see beauty. It's that whole shame thing again. It's our brokenness. So we are very hard in the work of beautification.

And we do that through exercise through fashion through makeup through performance through all these other things that we do to decorate to make what we see as ugly into something that's quite

attractive that's glorious.

[ 26 : 43 ] glorious. But this is you know it's just like God he does things just the opposite of the way we do it.

His way is first his glory is beautiful in itself.

And so it doesn't need a beautiful box. it needs the box to get out of the way. And so that's exactly what he does.

He says basically we need to remove your pitiful attempts at glory so that my glory is on display alone.

this is what he says in verse 7 of our chapter he says but we have this treasure in jars of clay.

[ 27 : 49 ] Why? To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

Life is not about me. And it's not about you. Ministry is not about me. It is not about you.

It is about the gospel and the gospel in and of itself is glorious. glorious. And I have been given the glory of God to dwell in me in the way the world sees it is when I become nothing.

Just a common old clay jar. And that's what God does. He takes those of us who thinks we're beautiful and replaces our pitiful attempts at glory with the real thing.

Because the gospel of His glory is far better than ours. Which leads us to the last point the whole pathway to glory.

[ 29 : 22 ] glory is going to be a hard one.

Because see, we like glory. We like our own. We are not convinced that we can come out and be exposed and be okay.

glory is today. But God says, no, it's my glory.

And so what He does is He gives us over to death. Paul says in verse 11, these are some pretty sobering words.

So we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh. God's not the most encouraging words.

[ 30 : 32 ] But this is God's process. That we would be given over to death. That we, our glory, our significance, our position of being front and center dies.

so that the real glory of the Savior might be put on display. Look also at verse 17.

He speaks of this momentary slight affliction. We need to put that in context. Because the way He talks about momentary slight affliction is not the way I talk about it.

If you move on over to chapter 6 He begins to list out what He means. He talks about this momentary light affliction.

Well, He says in verse 6 this includes being lost at sea. It includes being beaten multiple times. It includes being imprisoned.

[ 31 : 36 ] It includes being starved and on and on and on and He experienced that for His whole life.

So much for momentary or slight. This was the course. The hardship and suffering that Paul mentions.

His suffering was experienced because of His taking the gospel to places.

But it might also be the suffering that we experience just in normal life that God might use disease, it might use injury, He might use just experiences to bring us down and get us out of the way so that His glory would be put on display.

His suffering works in this way. And that suffering can come from two different sources. One, it does come to us involuntarily.

[ 32 : 58 ] It comes from just living our lives in this broken world, but it does come when we choose Christ above all things, and we experience the payment then that we have to pay because of that.

If I'm at school and there are other kids and I am encouraged to engage in, let's just say, sexual activity or other things, and I say no, that is going to bring on me a heap of pain and ridicule.

If I am in an employment and I am asked to do something contrary to the standards by which the kingdom calls me to live, I might lose my job.

If I go talk to my neighbors and tell them I love Jesus and they need to love him too, that may be the last party I'm ever invited to. Some parts of the world we start talking about Jesus and you lose your head, literally.

You lose your family. You become an outcast. And so part of it is that we choose to stand with Christ in the kingdom but we're going to pay for that.

[ 34 : 24 ] Some of it might be voluntary. we proclaim the glory of God not just when we accept the hardship for standing with him, we proclaim the glory of God when we voluntarily choose to enter into a harder life because the kingdom is so valuable to us.

that I would choose to live at a lower standard of living, that I would choose to live in a place that's not easy, that I would choose to live maybe in a neighborhood that is even dangerous, that I would, I mean I know missionaries who move their families into a city that was so polluted you fly into a cloud 50 miles out, this thick red cloud and they took their children there because they thought the kingdom was rivet.

So the suffering, the hardship can come either way but why is suffering, why is hardship so integral, so important and I say essential for the proclamation of God's glory.

It's this, when I choose to endure pain or hardship or deprivation or loss because I think Christ is more valuable than what I would gain otherwise.

I proclaim that Christ is my ultimate worth. I proclaim His ultimate value and that proclaims His glory.

[ 36 : 40 ] When I choose to do without, when I choose to give up what I could have because the kingdom of Christ is a more valuable to me, I proclaim boldly the value, the glory of that kingdom.

kingdom. And I think Paul would say that's the only way.

The way of the kingdom, the way of glory, the way of following Christ is going to take us through hard places.

Jesus. So how can we go there? How can we not lose heart? It is because, again, of what He has said here.

It is because we know that there's a resurrection from the dead. It is because we have tasted His grace and goodness.

[ 38 : 03 ] It is because we have seen His death that He would pay the ultimate price for us. That we have seen and tasted the kingdom.

And when we've tasted it, nothing else can compare. because we have found the ultimate.

The ultimate love, the ultimate beauty, the ultimate glory. And whatever it costs to gain that is no sacrifice.

It's a joy. It's a joy. joy. It's a joy. It's a joy. It's a joy. Because to give up this which I cannot keep, to gain something so glorious that I could never lose.

Duh. What choice is that? What choice is that? don't lose heart.

[ 39 : 28 ] Come, let us come to Christ who is the ultimate of light, ultimate in beauty, ultimate of value, the ultimate in glory.

Let us run to Christ in His grace. let us run to the one who has bought us and has made us His own and has given us His glory.

It's worth every cent. It'll cost you. Let's pray. Father, grant us grace to see all we see sometimes we're very short sighted and all we see is what's here in front of us.

Would you give us eyes to see Your glory? Would you give us eyes to see the realities of this world? Give us eyes to see clearly so that we would invest ourselves in that which is worthy.

Encourage us that we would not lose heart though the journey seems long and the cost heavy. Give us eyes to see the goal of the prize of the upward call of God in Christ.

[ 41 : 08 ] Give us eyes to see the glory that is found in His face in the hope that one day we will stand there and see it. We pray in His name.

Amen. Amen. For more information, visit us online at [southwood.org](http://southwood.org).