

Treasure in Clay Pots

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Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Well, we're going to begin our worship, and now we're singing, first of all, from Psalm 34. Psalm 34 on page 40. The tune is Jackson. We're singing verses 1 to 10.

At all times I will bless the Lord, I'll praise him with my voice. Because I glory in the Lord, let troubled souls rejoice. Together let us praise the Lord, exalt his name with me.

I sought the Lord, his answer came, from fears he set me free. And so on, down as far as verse 10. At all times I will bless the Lord. And if you're able to stand, please stand for the singing.

At all times I will bless the Lord, I'll praise him with my voice.

In God's glory in the Lord, let troubled souls rejoice.

[1 : 09] Together let us praise the Lord, exalt his name with me.

I sought the Lord, his answer came, from fears he set me free.

Say, look to him and shine with joy, they are not good to share.

This suffering man cried to the Lord, from him deliverance came.

Angel of the Lord, his name is God. Angel of the Lord, his name is God. And our God's mountain valley, All those who fear and honor him, He sets his people free.

[2 : 41] Come, taste and see the Lord, his good, Who trusted him, his friends.

O fear the Lord, his saints with me, You will not be oppressed.

Young lions, they grow weak and faint, And have kept for their food.

But those who wait upon the Lord, will not have any good.

Let's unite together in heaven prayer. Let's call upon the Lord in prayer. Our gracious and eternal God, We thank you for the privilege of drawing near to you in worship.

[4 : 00] We give thanks for your word, your word that guides us and illumines our mind as we come to worship the living God.

And we thank you for the Lord. Thank you for the Lord, your name is God. It's what you have chosen to reveal to us. Revealing to us not only about ourselves, but about you as our God.

about the knowledge that you have of yourself and of the creation that you have formed so that we ourselves, Lord, can apply our minds and seek to have your Spirit give us an understanding of those things.

And we thank you that as you speak to us from your Word so we join so many people in ages past down through the years of history to whom the Lord has spoken in his grace and mercy.

We thank you that you continue to speak to us through your Word. We bless you that your Word is reliable in all aspects of it. We praise you, Lord, that you have combined in your Word the commandments that we need, the encouragement we need, the promises we need, the facts of redemption as they are laid out before us, those great truths that form such a foundation for your people on which their lives are built.

[5 : 22] And we thank you tonight, O Lord, that as we look to your Word and look to your Word being blessed, that the reality of your Holy Spirit is made known to your people.

And we pray that your Holy Spirit, Lord, will take your Word tonight and make it effective in our own experience. We thank you that your Word instructs us about our own limitations.

Indeed, O Lord, about our inability to come and make that use of your Word that would be towards our salvation. But we thank you that you have done all things for us already that require to be accomplished in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that through his work, the Holy Spirit has come to inhabit your people. And we bless you, Lord, for the teaching that we receive from your Spirit. We pray that you would tonight, Lord, apply your Word savingly again to our hearts.

Increase, we pray, our knowledge and help us in the exercise of our mind, indeed in the whole expanse of our souls, O Lord, that we may grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 33] Speak to us, we pray, when we need that encouragement. Speak to us as we need to be taken down from that level of pride that we so often find characterizing ourselves.

From that sense of our own worth, that sense of our own ability and self-sufficiency. Lord, deliver us, we pray, from these things.

And give us that we may gladly rest upon you, even as John long ago rested upon your breast when you lived in this world. Help us, Lord, we come to rest ourselves upon you, to find our rest in you.

For we confess, O Lord, we cannot find a satisfactory rest anywhere else. We have tried the things of this world, and many of us have come now to testify that they have been so disappointing for us.

But we give thanks that you never disappoint, and that your provision for us in the Lord Jesus Christ is always sufficient for us, always conditioned to our need as sinners.

[7 : 44] And we bless you, O Lord, that tonight we can draw from you all that we require. We thank you for these words that we have sung in your praise, reminding us, O Lord, that you hear the cry of your people, that you take note of their distresses, that your providence has incorporated these things that cause them anxiety and hurt and pain and stress, not so that they would actually have these and nothing else besides.

But we know, O Lord, that all things do work together for good to your people. And we pray that tonight we may avail ourselves further of that teaching, lest we be carried away with the thought that there is nothing good at all in the sufferings of your people, no benefit at all, no end in view.

We thank you that your comfort reaches us too in this world. Lord, we pray tonight for those whose hearts are broken, for those here, O Lord, who can look back upon in recent times or times gone by, times of struggle, times of bereavement and sorrow and stress and partings.

We pray for them and we pray for each and all tonight in our troubled world, O Lord, for whom this is a present reality. We pray for the families in Ireland who have lost loved ones in these past days in this tragedy in Donegal.

Lord, our God, we pray that you would bring them your comfort and they would look to you as the man of sorrows who is acquainted with our grief. That you would bind up their broken hearts, we pray, and help them as they mourn their loss individually and as families and together as a community.

[9 : 31] that, Lord, you would visit them from on high with your comfort and give them the guidance of your truth and your spirit at this difficult time for them.

Remember all who have troubles in other parts of the world beyond what we ourselves can see in our own lives. We continue to pray for those beset with war, with terrorism.

Remember your people in Ukraine. Remember those who have had to flee from that country. We pray that the hand of the oppressor might be stayed, that you would give to your people and to that nation of Ukraine that they may make advancements, Lord, against those who have invaded them.

We pray that the oppressor, the invader, might more and more be overcome and pushed back in their efforts to overtake that country. We pray for all other nations in the world where warfare is real, where from day to day people live in terror of their lives.

And we pray too for these nations of the world where the plight of hunger is all too obvious, those beset with poverty and all the distress associated with it.

[10 : 45] And so remember, Lord, places like Yemen, places like Pakistan. Remember them in the aftermath of the great disasters and floods that have recently affected them.

Lord, our God, we pray for them. And we pray that they may look to you as God, that you would deliver them from all the false gods and idols that beset so many of these lives in these parts of the world.

Lord, we pray that you would deliver them through the power of the gospel. And remember your people in these situations also. We pray for ourselves as a nation at this time.

We ask, O Lord, that you would bring to us stability and government. And we ask that you would bless us in times, these times of anxiety, times when the cost of living has risen so dramatically.

Remember those, Lord, who have to deal with the issues of poverty, who depend on food banks from day to day. Remember them in our own locality as well as elsewhere.

[11 : 52] And bless us, Lord, we pray, and deliver us from the circumstances in which we find ourselves. For we know that all of these things are traceable back to our spiritual condition.

Have mercy upon us, Lord, we pray. Visit us from on high with your blessed spirit. Come, Lord, we pray, and give to us the power, the breath of your spirit so that we may be turned to yourself and to wisdom and to those things that your Bible, our Bible commends to us, your word, those things that are wholesome and clean and God-honoring.

Remember our schools, our young people, our children, our teachers, those, Lord, who give up their time and of their effort to instruct our young folks. We pray for them and ask that you would be pleased, O Lord, to help them in these difficult times for them too.

O Lord, our God, we pray that those who seek to introduce materials to our schools that are contrary to your will and contrary to the well-being of our young people morally and spiritually, bless them, we pray, who are seeking to work amongst such conditions at this time.

Grant you blessing to our council, to our councillors, to the officers of the council. we pray for them too, O Lord, when they themselves wrestle with such difficulties as we find in these days.

[13 : 20] We pray for our government in Scotland who seek to introduce these issues forcibly and seek to have them imposed upon us.

O Lord, help us, we pray, as we pray to you that we may know your own guidance, your own strength, your own blessing, so that in the power of the gospel we may find ourselves advanced as a people and being uplifted in righteousness for our sin is indeed a reproach to us.

And help us, Lord, we pray, as a congregation and as you people to seek daily that we may know the strength of your grace and of your spirit working in us, that we may be living examples to those around us so that we may, in following the ways of the Lord, so shine as bright lights in the world to shine in the darkness for you.

Hear us, we pray now, and pardon our sins and cleanse us for Jesus' sake. Amen. Let's now continue to praise God this time in Psalm 86, Psalm number 86 and verses 12 to 17.

That's on page 341. 86 at verse 12. The tune this time is Evan. O Lord my God, with all my heart, to thee I will give praise and I the glory will ascribe unto thy name always because thy mercy toward me in greatness doth excel and thou delivered hast my soul out from the lowest hell.

[14 : 59] Psalm 86 from verse 12 again we'll stand to sing. O Lord my God, with all thine heart, to thee I will give praise, and thy glory will ascribe come to thy name always.

Because thy mercy toward thee in greatness doth excel and thou delivered and thou delivered as my soul out from the lowest hell.

O God, the fire against thee rise and thy land and thy land and thy land have led and for my soul have sought and thee before them have not said.

but thou art full of pity, O Lord, and God most gracious and suffering and enlightened and mercy and mercy and mercy plentiful O turn to me thy congenus and mercy on behalf thy servant and stead thy promet nut and mercy and mercy andoke of thy abundance that time

Spirit and mercy and mercy And mercy be a sign for good that-day Let's read now from the New Testament Scriptures.

[18 : 22] Tonight we're reading from 2 Corinthians chapter 4. The second letter of Paul to the Corinthians and chapter 4, we'll read through the whole chapter.

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways.

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 in the 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 shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

[19 : 42] 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. 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 also 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 speak. Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

[20 : 44] 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 nature is wasting away, our 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.

And may God follow with this blessing again, a reading of his word. Before we turn to some verses in this passage, let's sing again to his praise in Psalm 119.

Psalm 119 in the Scottish Psalter, page 414. And from verse 161. Singing that section down to 168.

[21 : 53] Princes have persecuted me. Although no cause they saw. But still of thy most holy word, my heart does stand in awe.

I at thy word rejoice. As one of spoil that finds great store. Thy law I love. But lying all I hate. And do abhor.

We're singing to the tune, Talis. The whole of that section at verse 161. Princes have persecuted me. Princes have persecuted me.

Although no cause they saw. But still of thy most holy word, my heart does stand in awe.

I at thy word rejoice. I at thy word rejoice as one. Of spoiled love, thy grace get store.

[23 : 05] Thy law I love. But lying all I hate.

And do abhor. And do abhor. And do abhor. And do abhor. Ten times that it is my care.

To give true praise to thee. Because of all thy judgments, Lord.

Which I just never be. Great peace of God. Great peace of they who love thy law.

O offense they shall have none. I hope for thy salvation, Lord.

[24 : 07] And thy commands have done. My soul, my soul, my testimony's pure.

Observe it carefully. Observe it carefully. On them my heart is set, and then I love exceed in thee.

Thy tested bodies and thy laws, thy care with special care.

For all my works and ways each one, before thee open I.

Amen. Now please turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. 2 Corinthians chapter 4, we're reading again at verse 7.

[25 : 25] But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

Well, you'll find throughout Paul's letters frequently an emphasis on the visibility of the Christian life. That the life that God creates in the soul of his people is something that is visible to the world as well as to themselves.

And that, of course, is in keeping with what you find in the Bible elsewhere. And we ourselves build on that so that we make every effort ourselves to use every means of showing the world the life of Jesus, the life that Jesus has given to us.

Just as Jesus himself in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, you remember he emphasized that. You are the light of the world. You are a city set on a hill.

People don't light a candle to put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick so it gives light to the world. Let your life therefore so shine before men, before people, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

[26 : 40] The visibility of the Christian life is something that comes indeed as a burden to us. When God comes into our lives to change our lives, when God brings us the salvation that we require, and when that is something that we are brought into by the mercy of God, by the grace and the power of Christ, it becomes then a burden to us to make that visible as much as we can to the world around us to show the world that Christ indeed is our Savior and that he is able to save others as well.

And in line with that, you'll find in the Bible, you'll find in Paul also, especially in Paul in times and places, that Christian suffering, Christian affliction, the difficulties, the trials of living as a Christian, are themselves a vehicle for exhibiting Jesus.

They become a means by which Jesus is shown forth, is revealed, is manifested to ourselves and to others beside ourselves.

And you'll find that, of course, in different places. Not so long ago, we went through the letter to the Philippians. Remember there in chapter 1, verse 13, that Paul is saying he is there in prison.

He is actually held captive for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of Jesus. But it says it's become manifest, it's become obvious throughout all of the imperial palace that my chains are for Christ.

[28 : 20] People came to understand why this man was actually enchained, and one of the reasons they came to understand that was the kind of life they saw him live. The way that they actually saw how he dealt with sufferings, the spirit in which he dealt with his sufferings, the way in which he revealed Christ in his life, even through his sufferings.

And you'll find this in this chapter we're looking at tonight as well, because Paul emphasizes there that we actually have this treasure in jars of clay to show the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

And then he gives us a number of ways in which he himself experienced and continues to experience sufferings. And he has said earlier in the chapter that this is something that the light of Jesus is actually made manifest through him and through the sufferings that he entails.

In verse 11, we are given over to death for Jesus' sake so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So, the theme of our study this evening, based on this verse 7 and the surrounding or the following verses especially, is really to do with what he calls treasure in jars of clay, how the present life for the Christian is one even through the sufferings of that life, through that Jesus is actually being revealed to the world.

And there is therefore a very positive emphasis on the sufferings of the Christian in a way that you don't find anywhere else in any other writings, in any other philosophies, in any other religions.

[30 : 09] It is unique to the Christian life that the sufferings of God's people, sufferings of followers of Christ, whatever kind they may be, have a particular purpose in the mind of God, in the plan of God, and indeed in the development of the lives of his people.

And they also have, they also prove, as we say, to be a means by which the light of Christ is shown to the world. So, I want to deal first of all with the two things Paul mentions here, the treasure and the jars of clay.

We have this treasure. What is the treasure? What's he talking about? What does he mean by this treasure? And what does he mean that this treasure is actually in jars of clay, that it's been deposited in what he calls jars of clay?

And then we'll look at the purpose for that, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. And then we'll look at how that is expanded further in the verses down to verse 12 especially, where he speaks about the jars of clay and the life that is deposited in them, how it actually shows the life of Jesus through the ways in which Paul actually lives out his life as a suffering Christian.

So, tonight that's really the theme of our study. And if you, as you are undoubtedly to some extent as a Christian, all of those who are Christians here tonight know what it is to meet with some difficulty or trials or sometimes very perplexing things in your experience as you follow the Lord, as you experience difficulties in this life as a Christian, even from within yourself and also outside yourself, from the world, from the devil, from various experiences that you go through in this life.

[32 : 10] And here is one passage that really shows the very positive nature of those sufferings and afflictions in order to advance us as Christians in this world.

Well, here's the treasure and the jars. And what does he mean? We have this treasure in jars of clay. Well, you can see in verse 6, God's 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.

Of course, he is talking here about himself as an apostle and his fellow apostles, the sufferings that they endure for the sake of Jesus as they've carried the gospel into different parts of the world.

And although this is dealing with Paul as an apostle, it also follows that the principle of this is actually active in the life of every Christian. God has come into your life tonight, if you are a Christian, if you are in Christ, if you've come to know salvation.

How has that come about? God has come into your life and ignited this light, created this light. What is this light? It's the light of the knowledge of Jesus, the light of knowing Christ, the light of having such a relationship with Christ that forms a light in your soul.

[33 : 35] And it's the light not just of the knowledge of Jesus, it's the light of the glory of God, the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. You see, you cannot really separate the life that you have as a Christian from the knowledge that you have of Jesus, and the knowledge that you have of Jesus is also the knowledge of the glory of God in Him.

What a wonderful thing that is. As he puts it there, there are so many sermons you could take on that verse itself. And you can see how it's very much in parallel with the way in which God created light in the beginning.

This is what he's saying. What he's saying? God who said, let light shine out of darkness. Back to Genesis 1. God said, let there be light. There was no light. There was nothing but God Himself before He began the work of His creation.

God existed. Nothing else existed. The creation didn't exist on its own accord. It wasn't there from all eternity. God brought it into being.

He brought it into being by His creative word. He said, let there be light. And there was light in the creation that He had already begun to form before that.

[34 : 56] The heavens and the earth. In the beginning, God created. And this is what he's saying. In a parallel way, spiritually, just as God said, let there be light and there was light, God says in a human soul that He has chosen for Himself to be a lamp, to be a saved human being, He says in the darkness of that soul, let there be light.

Let there be life. And this is not just saying that light has come, like it were, from the gospel, although the gospel is not detached from it. Not so much the light of the gospel shining into our hearts that He has in mind here, but the light of life that God creates in our darkness, in the darkness of our lostness.

God said, let there be life. That's what you owe your Christian salvation, your Christian life to.

And that's where the life comes from. The personal salvation of knowing Jesus, of the knowledge of Jesus.

We have this treasure, he says. This is our treasure. This is what God has deposited in us. We'll see in a minute that in us means in our human frame, in our human persons, as we are jars of clay.

[36 : 29] But it's there that this light has been created by God. This treasure we have in jars of clay. Is that the light of your own life tonight?

What is it that's guiding your thoughts? What is it that's guiding your life onwards? On what are you relying from day to day to advance your life, to bring you forwards?

On what are you relying to advance in your understanding of yourself and of God? On what are you relying in order that your life and my life might be the kind of lives they should be in this dark, wicked world?

Is it your own knowledge, your own understanding, your own ability? Hopefully not. Surely you're relying on God's creative power to create in you this light of the knowledge of the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

This is what it boils down to. Do I know Jesus for myself? Do I know him personally? Is he really my best friend? Do I share with him every day the things of my life?

[37 : 48] Do I roll over my life to him each day? Do I pray to him? Do I commune with him? Do I value his word? Do I listen out for his word? See, these are the things of a personal relationship with Jesus and a relationship that begins the moment God creates this life in your soul.

Well, there's the treasure. There's knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But he says we have this treasure in jars of clay. What does he mean by jars of clay?

Well, in Corinth, in Paul's time, you could actually buy some fairly small clay pots. They were very cheap to buy and very common.

People could buy them and just have them, but they were very fragile. They were very easily broken. And, of course, you then had to replace them. But this may have been in Paul's mind. We can't be sure as he's given us this description.

We have this treasure in jars of clay. What he really means is that he himself, along with every other Christian, as human beings in this world, but our lives are fragile.

[38 : 54] We face difficulties. We face perplexing situations. We face persecutions. We face all sorts of things. We'll see a list of them in a moment as we come later through our study.

But this is what he says of himself. Paul, in his present state, yes, he knows the Lord. He's so thankful. It's a thrill to him to know the Lord.

Nothing's going to change that. But the life he presently lives is a life that's subjected to all kinds of pressures, all kinds of influences, all kinds of evil doings on the part of his enemies.

He's very much a jar of clay. And he doesn't have the resources in himself any more than you and I have to cope with these, to surmount these, to take advantage of these, to use these things for our improvement.

He relies on God. He has to rely on the power of God within him. He has this treasure, this knowledge of Christ, this salvation, this Savior, in his heart and in his life as a jar of clay.

[40 : 02] That's an image of the followers of Jesus. And you know it's good for you, and it's good for me, to see that you're not naturally a vessel of gold.

That you're not spectacular in your human being. That you are a jar of clay. That you live in dependence on God.

That without God you'd fall to pieces. Your fragility would lead to your destruction. That is what God is saying. This is what our humanity is like.

This is why we cannot cope and surmount the things of life by ourselves or in our own strength. But he says this is our treasure. We know Jesus. We have salvation.

But presently it's deposited, it's situated in jars of clay. That's what we are. But why is that? Well, he goes on. The second point is the purpose of that to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

[41 : 05] I ask the question, where is the most exquisite treasure best displayed? You might say and be tempted to say, and I might be tempted to say in answer to that question, surely the most exquisite treasure requires and deserves the most exquisite box, the most exquisite tray or setting in which to display it.

Well, not so. The most exquisite treasure is best displayed in the most ordinary box, in the most ordinary settings. You don't want your eyes to go and start admiring the box rather than the treasure.

You want the treasure to be shown in all its brilliance and all its worth, in all its preciousness. So, you place it in a setting where the setting will not take up your view, where the setting will not take up your mind and your thoughts.

You want your mind to be focused on that treasure. That's what Paul is really saying. God's treasure, the treasure he's given us, this life we have in Jesus. It's in jars of clay. Why?

To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. In other words, he's really saying what is displayed in my life through these sufferings that I need to endure and overcome is the power of God.

[42 : 26] It's to show the surpassing power, the power that overcomes, the power that's above all powers, the power of God. How is it shown in his life? It's through the life he lives as a suffering Christian, upheld by God, blessed by God, sanctified by God. It's so that this power of God will be seen through his life, that the power that sustains him, that enables him to go on, that enables him to persevere. You know, if you look at the verses there from verse 8 downwards, let's just read through them again. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed.

How come? How is it that all of these things, all of these sufferings, these afflictions, the perplexities, the persecutions, the striking down? How is it that they have not broken this man, that he still goes on living as a Christian, that he still wants to make Christ known, even though he's suffering these things for his sake? How has he not been deflected from the life he lives?

How can he still say, for me to live is Christ and to die is gain? Because he's persuaded that even through his sufferings, the beauty of Christ, the power of God shines through to be seen by others.

It's a greater power than any power that's against him. And this is the point that it actually is shown, this power of God is shown, it's displayed. You might say it's put on display for all to see through these very frailties of the apostle. If you take up the image again of his life being a jar of clay in which this treasure of knowing Christ and of God's salvation has been deposited, you might say there are many cracks in that jar. Look at the things he's suffering. Look at the heat of the persecutions, just like these little cheap jars crushed, these little jars in Corinth that were for sale. Here's a man who is actually in some ways afflicted, perplexed, despair as a jar of clay, causing many cracks to appear in his life. But he's not broken. He's not forsaken. He's not driven to despair. He's not crushed out of existence. He hasn't given up on following Jesus. He's all the more determined to follow him. Why? Because the power of God is the power that overcomes. And through his life as a jar of clay, through the cracks that have appeared, God's power is being displayed. You know, I'm sure there were many people that wondered about this man. There were many things about this man that would cause you to just stop and reflect. But one of the things that would actually be obvious and cause you, I'm sure, to stop and reflect if you came to know even a little bit about this man is, how does this man go on living the life he lives? How has he not been utterly crushed? How has he not been in despair? Why has he not given up? Let me just take you to chapter 11. If you flip over to chapter 11, and we'll read through some verses there from verse 23.

Here, what he's really doing is defending his apostleship against those who accused him frequently of being a false apostle. Well, he's saying, verse 23, are they servants of Christ?

[46 : 21] I am a better one. I am talking like a madman with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and offer near death. Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked for a night and a day. I was adrift at sea on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from the Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers, in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Wow, what a list.

And he is still saying, I'm not in despair. Yes, I'm afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, but I still live my life for Jesus. He still perseveres in his faith and his trust in Christ.

And you know, in chapter 12, you find something very similar, this thorn in the flesh that God gave him to keep him, he said, from being exalted above measure. There in chapter 12, verses 8 to 10, you'll find three times I pleaded with the Lord that this messenger of Satan to buffet me, three times I pleaded with the Lord that it should leave me. But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you. My power is made perfect in weakness.

Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. You'll find some people suggesting now in some types of theology that what you should do with your sufferings is ask God to take them away.

And God doesn't really intend you as a Christian to have sufferings in your life to that extent. That the best thing for you is to pray over them and ask God to take them away. That the best thing for you would be to see that you could serve God far better if you didn't have as much suffering in your life. Paul wouldn't agree with that at all. In fact, he says the opposite.

[49 : 06] None of us seek suffering deliberately from God. That would be foolish. But the suffering that he has placed in our lives as Christians, the difficulties, the trials that we meet with daily, whatever walk of life we're in, whatever work we have, whatever challenges we face in these, however much we sometimes and always confess that we struggle at times to live the Christian life in this world.

Paul is saying, as a jar of clay, you're best placed to display the glory of Christ and the power of God. Not through getting rid of your sufferings, but through them to show what Christ means to you, what the Lord himself is in your life. And tonight, if you're suffering as a Christian or because of your faith. Remember that God is effectively, we might put it this way with reverence, God is effectively saying to you, as he's saying about Paul here in chapter 12 and 11 and here in chapter 4, God is saying about you as well as a Christian, I need you to be a jar of clay so that my power will be exhibited.

I don't need you to think he's saying that it would be better for you if there were no sufferings in your life at all. Sometimes, you know, we may think, well, I accept that, but why do there have to be so much of suffering? And why do my suffering seem to be so different to those of other people?

Well, God is saying, I have fashioned you as a jar of clay in your particular setting. And you're set there so that through this, the surpassing power that belongs to me, God, will be shown through your life, through the cracks in the jar, and the fact, the amazing fact, that the jar is not destroyed. This is what they would have been asking about the apostle.

How does he go on? How has he not given up? How has he not been destroyed? How is he still determined to serve this Jesus when all of these things come upon him for the sake of Jesus?

[51 : 31] Well, Paul is saying it's all about the surpassing power that belongs to God, that that will be displayed through my life. And that goes on, finally, it's the treasure and the jars.

It's to show the surpassing power of God, but it's also to exhibit the life of Jesus, as he says from verse 10, we are always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body.

So, the translation there in the ESV is perhaps not as good as the authorized version in that instance, always carrying in the body the dying of Jesus, because that's literally what it says.

Always bearing about or carrying in the body the dying of Jesus. And what Paul has in mind is that his life and lifestyle as a suffering Christian has a very close parallel in the way that Jesus himself suffered up to and prior to his death.

There was a process of suffering, a process of testing, through which Jesus went, culminating in his death on the cross. He was carrying, as it were, a dying in his own person daily, until finally death occurred on the cross.

[52 : 52] And Paul is saying, as he's joined to Jesus, this is what my life is like as well. We're carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus. Similar to the process Jesus himself went through.

Why? So that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. That the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh, he says in verse 11.

That's an amazing thing. It's a precious thing. That's why this is emphasizing for us that there are benefits for us in the Christian suffering.

There are benefits to the cause of Christ in our Christian suffering. And the Jesus that is revealed is the Jesus who now lives.

Do you see what he's saying? We're carrying about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus, the process that's similar to what Jesus went through prior to his death. But why is it?

[53 : 54] So that the life of Jesus, the resurrected Jesus, the risen Christ, the glorified Christ, the living Christ may be made manifest in our mortal bodies.

Where is it best to show Jesus to the world as well as to yourself?

What is the best context in which to show this life of Jesus to the world? Well, he's saying it's the context of suffering for him.

The context where you don't want the sufferings put aside as you would perhaps yourself prefer in one sense. But the context which follows this teaching and says, well, this is what God has chosen as the means by which the life of Jesus will be made manifest.

There are many people who are Christians today who began thinking about themselves positively in seeing other people as Christians actually living a life in suffering where the life of Jesus was made manifest.

[55 : 06] Where how they dealt with their sufferings was impressive enough to draw minds to that person and to asking questions, what is there in this life?

What is there in that person's life that causes this? How is this person going on and yet there's so much suffering in their life? The answer is this.

So that the life of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh. Through afflictions, by endurance, the cracked jar is not destroyed.

And people, by God's blessing, come to the conviction, there's something about that life that puzzles me and I've got to find out what it is.

And by God's blessing, they come to understand it's actually the power of God. It's the life of Jesus in that person. It's not how you and I want to be ourselves.

[56 : 11] It's not how we want to view our sufferings as well. The difficulties, the trials of following Jesus. Not meaningless things, not things that we would want to put aside and just have something of comfort in their place, but the vehicle by which Christ would be shown in our lives too.

The Japanese have a process of repair called kintsukuroi. I'm not sure if that's the way they pronounce it, but kintsukuroi is a description of the way that Japanese take usually ceramic that's been broken, especially if it's been precious, precious vase or something, and they fix it in this process of kintsukuroi.

They make a substance into which is blended gold dust. It's a substance, gluey type substance, but it has a gold dust added to it so that it becomes gold in its appearance.

And the vase, let's say it's a vase that's been broken. The vase is then repaired. It's put together again with this paste. And what happens then is they don't actually allow the veins of the substance that sticks it all together again to be wiped so you can't see the join.

That's how most of us maybe would prefer a joined-up broken vessel to be repaired. No, no, they'd actually leave this so that the veins of gold along what were the cracks in the vase are so plainly dismayed, usually very thickly, as thick veins of gold.

[57 : 48] It's called kintsukuroi. It really means golden repair. Now, there's a philosophy in that as well. It's not just a means of doing something with ceramic as an art form.

There is actually a philosophy in the Japanese mind in relation to kintsukuroi. It is itself a form of philosophy because the philosophy is this. You don't throw away what's been broken.

You embrace it. And you embrace it with a view to improving it. And you embrace it in a way that joins it together in a way that enhances it even over and above what it was before.

I know if you Google kintsukuroi, you'll find various types of ceramic, especially if you think of a black vase or vessel that's been broken and mended with this substance with the gold dust.

You'll find this wonderful contrast as the gold dust throughout all the joins shows itself in the outside of the vessel. And you have to reach the conclusion, you know, that actually looks better than it was before.

[59 : 00] And that's God's kintsukuroi in Christ. He takes what's broken. He takes out broken lives. He puts them together and changing the imagery a little bit from the jars of clay.

He puts them together with the gold dust of His grace into the paste in which He puts the parts of our lives that are broken back together again.

And you then reach the conclusion that's so much better than it ever was. So much better than its broken state. Maybe even so much better than it was even before that.

That is what Paul is saying. God's kintsukuroi work of grace exhibits the gold of Jesus, the gold of Christ, the surpassing power that belongs to God and not to us.

There's so much attached to how we regard our afflictions and what use we make of our afflictions, which is why Paul himself finishes the chapter the way he does.

[60 : 17] This slight, just imagine, just think of what we read about him in chapter 11, but here he is. This slight momentary affliction. How can he say it's slight and momentary?

Because he has in view the end that God has purposed for him. This slight momentary affliction is preparing for us or working 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, the things that are unseen are eternal.

God's people will praise God in eternity for his work of grace. They will admire what he's put together but that will also involve, I'm sure, praising God for the sufferings through which they came to be sanctified in this life where the gold of Christ was shown to the world.

Let's pray. Lord our God, we find it so difficult to understand the benefit of our sufferings. We find it so difficult to thank you for the way in which you use the sufferings of your people not only to show Jesus Christ through them but also for your people themselves to be put forward in their advancement in grace toward glory.

We thank you tonight for your own great work, O Lord, in your people that uses such afflictions as we find described by the Apostle. Help us, Lord, we pray, to learn from these things, to learn from your Word that we have suffering for a purpose and however difficult, Lord, we find it at times to struggle through them.

[62 : 18] Never let us, Lord, forget that we have suffering placed deliberately by the hand of God. Hear us, we pray, for your glory's sake.

Amen. Let's sing now in conclusion, singing in Psalm 34, Psalm 34 on page 41.

The tune this time is Saint David. And we'll sing verses 15 to the end of the psalm. Psalm 34, page 41. The Lord's eyes are upon the just.

He listens to their plea. The wicked he rejects and blots from earth their memory. The righteous cry, the Lord responds and frees them when distressed. The Lord draws near the broken heart and rescues the depressed.

And so on to the end of the psalm. The Lord's eyes are upon the just. The Lord's eyes are upon the just.

[63 : 27] He listens to their plea. The wicked he rejects and blots from earth and their memory.

The righteous guide, the Lord responds and frees them when distressed.

The Lord draws near the broken heart and rescues the deep airs.

From all the troubles of the just, the Lord will set him free.

The Lord the Lord protects his death be born and broken and will be.

[64 : 47] The wicked are condemned to death, all those who hate the just.

God saves his own they're not condemned for in the Lord they trust.

I'll go to the main door after the benediction. And now may grace and mercy and peace
from God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore.

Amen.

. . . .

[65 : 53]