

2 Corinthians 4

Introduction: The Christian life as an obstacle course with many things to overcome on the way to the finish line: various logs across the road, ditches, water, holes and walls, even traps along the way.

- I. Let the light of the gospel, the image of God, shine through you. 4:1-6
- II. Even when life gets difficult, continue to glorify Jesus. 4:7-15
- III. Rather than focus on the difficulties, continue to look toward Jesus 4:16-18

God places his treasure in us, his earthen vessels; don't underestimate the value of that treasure.

- I. Let the light of the gospel, the image of God, shine through you. 4:1-6
 - A. 4:1 **We do not lose heart.** You can underline that statement. We will see it again later.
 - B. A sincere Christian faith requires honesty.
 - i. It requires honesty about who we are. We are nobody special; we don't have all the answers in every situation, yet, as it happens, we really do know Jesus.
 - ii. It requires honesty about who Christ is. We can't change Jesus to meet other people's expectation. We need to present Him as He is, keeping in balance His love and justice or righteousness, His holiness and truth, His deity and humanity.
 - 1. Paul was a bondservant (slave) whose job was to represent Jesus.
 - iii. We can't expect everyone to accept the truth about Jesus and this passage tells us why: See **4:3-4**. Still, it is a true knowledge of the glory of God that we have within us. This should not be denied, hidden or dealt with in any deceitful or fraudulent way. This means we have to

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- II. Even when life gets difficult, continue to glorify Jesus. 4:7-15
 - A. 4:7 Several points on this verse:
 - i. **Treasure** the light of the knowledge of God's glory described in **v.6**.
 - ii. **Earthen vessels** "jars of clay" (NIV) "fragile clay jars" (NLT)
 - iii. **excellence** *hyperbolē* literally, "a throwing beyond," meaning an extravagant exaggeration. (The Complete Word Study Dictionary)

- iv. The idea of light in earthen vessels can be illustrated in the story of the lamps and pitchers of Gideon, Judges 7:16. In the very breaking of the vessel the light is revealed.
- B. 4:12 Paul contrasts the trials that he and his team were enduring with many of the Corinthians, who did not experience the same difficulties. It is as if he is saying to them:

“You live as the effect of our being constantly exposed to death. You reap the advantage of all our exposure to trials, and of all our sufferings. You are comparatively safe; are freed from this exposure to death; and will receive eternal life as the fruit of our toils, and exposures.” (Barnes)

- C. 4:13 Paul is quoting from Psalm 116, a wonderful psalm of comfort in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Psa 116 NKJV¹ *I love the LORD, because He has heard My voice and my supplications.
² Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live.
³ The pains of death surrounded me, And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me;
I found trouble and sorrow.
⁴ Then I called upon the name of the LORD: “O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!”
⁵ Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful.
⁶ The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me.
⁷ Return to your rest, O my soul, For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.
⁸ For You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears, And my feet from falling.
⁹ I will walk before the LORD In the land of the living.
¹⁰ I believed, therefore I spoke, “I am greatly afflicted.”
¹¹ I said in my haste, “All men are liars.”
¹² What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me?
¹³ I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the LORD.
¹⁴ I will pay my vows to the LORD Now in the presence of all His people.
¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His saints.
¹⁶ O LORD, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant;
You have loosed my bonds.
¹⁷ I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, And will call upon the name of the LORD.
¹⁸ I will pay my vows to the LORD Now in the presence of all His people,
¹⁹ In the courts of the LORD’S house, In the midst of you, O Jerusalem. Praise the LORD!*

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III. Rather than focus on the difficulties, continue to look toward Jesus 4:16-18

- A. 4:16 **We do not lose heart.** Do you remember that from v.1? Consider the contrast between the outward and the inward man. How about this from Charles Hodge, the old Princeton theologian:

“That is, because we are sure of a glorious resurrection, and are satisfied that our present sufferings and labors will advance the glory of God. We faint not, we do not become discouraged and give up the conflict. On the contrary, though his outward man, his whole physical constitution, perish, ... be utterly worn out and wasted away by constant suffering and labor, yet the inward man, the spiritual nature, is renewed, i.e. receives new life and vigor, day by day. By ‘inward man’ is not meant simply the soul as distinguished from the body, but his higher nature—his soul as the subject of the divine life.

- i. See the following:

Rom 7:22 NKJV *For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man.*

Ephesians 3:14-16 NKJV ¹⁴*For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man,*

- B. 4:17 Think about what Paul is saying here. This is the guy who was repeatedly beaten, whipped, shipwrecked and stoned so that he was left for dead.
 - i. Our present affliction is “light”, or not really so severe, and “for a moment”, meaning it is only temporary.
 - ii. The glory to follow is “far more exceeding” and “eternal”.
 - iii. In other words, let’s say our present affliction, on a scale of 1 to 10 is a 10. The glory to follow would have to be measured in the 100s or 1000s on the same scale. We’ve got no category in which to put it, no scale by which we can measure it, because we simply have nothing in our experience to compare with the glory that is to come.
- C. 4:18 This is why we cannot be overly focused on this world. It is temporary, not matter how long it lasts. So we focus on those eternal things. We keep looking forward to Jesus.

Hebrews 12:1-3 NKJV ¹*Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.*

- D. The Christian life is less like a sprint, than a marathon. More than that, it’s a long, drawn out obstacle course. The important thing to remember is that God has supplied us with more strength, wisdom and spiritual stamina than we will ever need. Don’t neglect to use it.

Conclusions:

1. *Don't lose heart. The word ... means ... to turn out a coward; to lose one's courage; then to be fainthearted, to faint, to despond, in view of trial, difficulty, etc. ... By the mercy of God, [Paul] was not disheartened by the difficulties which he met; his faith and zeal did not flag; he was enabled to be faithful, ... and his courage always kept up, and his mind was filled with cheerfulness; ... He was deterred by no difficulties; embarrassed by no opposition; driven from his purpose by no persecution; and his strength did not fail under any trials. The consciousness of being entrusted with "such" a ministry animated him; and the mercy and grace of God sustained him. (Barnes)*
 - a. Let the light of the gospel, the image of God, shine through you.
 - b. Even when life gets difficult, continue to glorify Jesus.
 - c. Rather than focus on the difficulties, continue to look toward Jesus.
2. Don't be deceived and don't be distracted from the purposes and plans God has for you.
 - a. We mentioned earlier how the devil, "the god of this age" blinds people or deceives them so that they cannot grasp the reality of Jesus, the cross or the resurrection.
 - b. There is also an important way he can deceive believers, and Paul has touched on it today. He blinds them to the reality of the light, the power, the strength, the glory that God has revealed within them. We possess within us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. The world has nothing to offer that begins to compare with it. Do not let the enemy sideline you from your God-appointed ministry, from your responsibilities, from the way God desires to use you to be a blessing to others.
 - i. Consider, in the midst of difficulties, how God may want to use you to be a blessing despite the difficulties or, even, because of them.
 - ii. Adopt a "kick the devil in the face" mentality. When you feel you can't go on, do something to really upset the devil.
 1. Get on your knees and pray for the lost.
 2. Intentionally go out and share Christ with someone.
 3. Give some extra money to a missionary.
 4. Find some needy person to love on.
 5. Be like Paul and show the devil that there is no stopping you. Show him that you understand how awesome the power of God is that is working within you – and that you are not falling for his deceptions for even one minute.

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