

Earthen Vessels and the Life of Jesus Manifest

I. INTRODUCTION

1 Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. (2 Cor 4:1)

6 For it is the God who commanded light to 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. 7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

A. *We do not lose heart:* In chapter 4, we see the truths and principles at work that will empower the weak earthen vessel to not lose heart. The chapter is bookended with the phrase “we do not lose heart”. Much like the “let not your heart be troubled” found in John 14, this Corinthians passage uses eternity as a motivator to stay steady in the face of hardship.

“1 Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in me. 2 In My Father’s house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” (John 14:1-2)

B. Within this chapter we discover foundational truths that will equip the believer to endure and to resist the temptation of giving up or losing heart.

1. *Truth #1:* The Genesis 1 God is in control and has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (vs 6)

2. *Truth #2:* There is a redemptive purpose within the pressures of life. These purposes are 4 fold.

a. First, it keeps us humble and leaning on him reminding us that the power to endure and overcome is not of us. (vs 7)

b. Second, the pressure provides opportunity and context to experience the increase of the manifest presence of God in our life. (vs 11)

c. Third, others are edified by our response to the pressures we face. (vs 12)

d. Fourth, the pressure of life provide opportunity for the believer to respond now so that they may experience an increase of God’s glory in the age to come.) (vs 17)

3. *Truth #3:* As believers we are called to look at the eternal unseen things. (vs 18)

- C. **As we have received mercy:** the demonstrations of mercy and lavish generosity of the Lord is throughout the word of God. His mercy is our past, present, and the future of our walk with Him. We have received a far better standing with God than we could ever deserve. We receive a banner of Love and mercy over our lives instead of the flames of hell that we deserved as enemies of God.
- D. **We do not loose heart:** in Chapter 4, we see the truths and principles at work that will empower the weak earthen vessel to not lose heart. The chapter is bookended with the phrase “we do not lose heart”. Much like the “let not your hearts be troubled” found in John 14, this Corinthians passage uses eternity as a motivator to stay steady in the face of hardship.

II. THE PURPOSE OF THE PRESSURE - THE DELIMA AND THE DESIGN (vs 7)

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. (2 Cor 4:7)

- A. **This Treasure:** - The very light of the knowledge of the Glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ is shining upon our hearts. We have the Word spoken of in John 1. This Word that was in the beginning, this Word that was God, the Word in whom was life, and the life was the light of men. This very life and light is now within us.

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. (John 1:1-4)

16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:16-18)

26 But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. (John 15:26)

- B. The Spirit lives in us to empower our hearts in love, meekness, revelation, and our ministries to impact others with the life of Jesus as we fellowship with the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). Paul had just given an overview of the new covenant (2 Cor. 2:14-4:6) emphasizing the ministry of the indwelling Spirit (3:3-18) that was shining in the hearts of believers (4:4-6)
- C. **Earthen vessel:** humanity with our weak mind, body, and soul, with wrong ideas and desires. In Gen 2:7 we read, “*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became living being.*” To be an earthen vessel is to be of the earth and the earth is of the Maker.

- D. ***The dilemma:*** The very breakthrough of God’s power in our circumstances and ministry often awakens pride in us that hinders God’s blessing in our life. Many become easily preoccupied with the increase of God’s power and blessing so that their relationship with Jesus diminishes (Rev. 2:4). It is pride to have confidence to continue in this way without being troubled by it.
- ⁷ Lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted... (2 Cor. 12:7)***
- E. ***The design:*** God protects His people who experience His power, with problems. Pressure causes us to connect and dialogue more earnestly with Jesus, which leads to greater humility and thus to increased blessing. We should always contend for the fullness of God’s blessings and trust God to administrate the measure and timing of its release.
- F. The story of Israel is a story of a Master potter molding and shaping a stiff necked stubborn people into a vessel for His Glory. (Rom 9) It is the Lord’s way to mend and bend, press and fold the lump of clay into a vessel for His bidding and glory. It is Israel’s story, as well as the nations of the earth, it is your story and it is mine.

8 But now, O Lord, You are our Father; We are the clay, and You our potter; And all we are the work of Your hand. (Is 64:8)

9 Woe to him who strives with him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to him who forms it, “What are you making? Or “Your work has no handles?” (Is 45:9)

20 But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, “Why have you made me like this?” (Rom 9:20)

- G. ***That the... power may be of God not of Us:*** Why, in the design of God, did he choose to put this treasure in the earthen vessel? Why not a safe or vault, a cathedral, fortress, etc... The Lord wants to display His power, the Life of Jesus manifest, in mortal flesh... what better way to showcase His power than in a frail frame. Make no mistake about where the power comes from... it is not “of the vessel” but “of God”
- H. The Lord chose Gideon who was “the least” in his fathers house and who led the weakest clan in Manasseh. The Lord began to reduced the “weakest clan” to make them even weaker. The Lord reduces a clan of 32,000 and brings them to 300. He wants the stage set where the power manifest and the imminent victory may be “of God” and not “of Gideon”

15 So he said to Him, “ O my Lord, how can I save Israel? Indeed my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house.” (Judges 6:15)

2 And the Lord said to Gideon, “The people who are with you are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against Me, saying ‘My own hand has saved me.’” (Judges 7:2)

III. THE SOURCE OF THE PRESSURE

- A. **The Father’s Doing:** The **Father will chasten** or train us by resisting all that hinders love and all that prevents us from being prepared for our assignment in the age to come (Heb. 12:6-12). The **Father prunes** us after season of blessing and fruit bearing. (John 15) The **Father restrains** bringing the breakthrough waiting for the perfect time in His perfect wisdom and knowledge.
- B. **Satan’s attack:** He rages against us as he seeks to devour us (1 Pet. 5:8).
- C. **Man’s sin:** Sinful actions bring many unnecessary pressures on our life and on others.
- D. **Creation’s groan:** We work in the midst of resistance to restore the environment (Rom. 8:22).

IV. FOUR PARADOXES THAT ARE COMMON TO EVERY BELIEVER (VS 8-9)

⁸ We are **hard pressed** on every side, yet not crushed; we are **perplexed**, but not in despair; ⁹ **persecuted**, but not forsaken; **struck down**, but not destroyed... (2 Cor. 4:8-9)

What we are:	What we are NOT:
<u>Hard pressed:</u> This speaks of circumstances that <u>pressure our emotions</u> . Pressure comes from every direction including finances, sickness, broken relationships, accidents, failures in sin, etc	<u>Crushed:</u> To give up in our resolve to pursue Jesus and His kingdom.
<u>Perplexed:</u> This speaks of circumstances that confuse us, causing us <u>pressure in our understanding</u> . Often leading to the question, “Why God?” It is an attack on our understanding.	<u>In Despair:</u> Losing confidence in God’s goodness becoming hopeless and aimless unable to connect the struggle with the good that is being produced.
<u>Persecuted:</u> Pressure from people. Instead of being appreciated by others as we serve and stand for truth, they resist us and influence others to join them.	<u>Forsaken:</u> to be abandoned or neglected in the time of need. The enemy lies to us, saying that because some people have forsaken us, God also has forsaken us, and He has overlooked us and neglected us in the hour of need.
<u>Struck Down:</u> speaks of major setbacks in life that threaten to destroy our primary <u>life purpose</u> . Over an entire life, there are usually only a few major setback that are life-altering enough to make one feel struck down.	<u>Destroyed:</u> The enemy lies, telling us that such calamities have the power to destroy our primary life purpose in God.

V. THE PROMISE OF THE POWER: THE LIFE OF JESUS MANIFEST (VS 10-12)

10 Carrying out in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body...¹¹ Delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh... ¹² death is working in us, but life in you. (2 Cor. 4:10-12)

- A. ***The dying of Jesus***: We embrace Jesus' teaching and example to die to our own interests.
²⁴ If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me...²⁵ Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (Mt. 16:24-25)
- B. We are to imitate a life poured out for the benefit of our neighbor. Loving our neighbor and embracing the cross are forever intertwined. ***“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13)*** Jesus says that the pinnacle display of love is the laying down of your life. Love and the way of the cross are inseparable.
- C. ***The life of Jesus manifest***: We find abundant life as we “carry out in the body the dying of our Lord Jesus.” Death first then resurrection. The power of the resurrection is seen in *the life of Jesus manifest* by His presence touching our heart and flowing through our ministry. When the life of Jesus is manifest in us our inward life is satisfied, Christ is glorified, and others are edified. It is the life of Jesus, manifest in us, that keeps us from being crushed, being given over to despair, from being forsaken, and being destroyed.
- D. ***Excellence of the power (vs 7)***: sometimes we don't recognized the power manifest as excellent. Sometime we don't recognize it at all. The excellence of the power is both seemingly small and at times very great. The grace of God on the human heart and mind to make right choices is an example of the life of Jesus manifest. His life also flows through our ministry in subtle and not so subtle ways. We want to acknowledge and express gratitude for both the subtle and overt demonstrations of power.

VI. HAVING AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE: SEEING THE UNSEEN (2 COR. 4:16-18)

- A. Foundational to understanding God's purpose for pressure in our life is the revelation of eternity and the continuity of our life choices in this age to the measure of glory we experience in the age to come. Every believer will experience a different measure of glory in the age to come.

¹⁴ Knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus...¹⁶ We do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory... (2 Cor. 4:14-17)

- B. ***Weight of glory:*** Involves Paul’s nearness to Jesus, the glory in his resurrected body, and his ministry assignment in reigning with Jesus on earth. The size our heart (inner man) is more important than the size of our circumstantial blessing and ministry impact (outer man).
- C. As we experience death, both in our body and our soul (death to self) the Life of Jesus is manifest in our earthen vessel. The very power that raised Jesus from the grave operates in us as we respond in faith declaring truths of who he is, what he says, and how he feels. We go from death to life because the power of the resurrection. We experience the power of the resurrection today in our mortal flesh when his life is manifest through us (His presence touching our hearts and flowing through our ministry) and we will experience the power of the resurrection on the day of His glorious appearing when corruption puts on incorruption *and as we have borne the image of the man of the dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly man.* (1 Cor 15:49)
- D. 1 Corinthians 15 is one of the most in depth passages regarding the resurrection. Paul concludes this chapter with “*therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.*”

3 ...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen...

20 But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. 21 For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead...

23 But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. 24 Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. 27 For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. 28 Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

55 “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”

56 The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor 15:3-5,20-21,23-28,51-58)