

2 Corinthians 4:7-18 “The Resurrection: Jesus, the Preacher, and You” March 27, 2016
Isaiah 40
Psalm 77

How can you run and not grow weary?
How can you walk and not faint?

When your eyes are focused on your situation, it can appear hopeless.

Certainly for the disciples as they arose on that first day of the week,
the situation appeared hopeless.

They had thought that Jesus of Nazareth was the one who would redeem Israel.

But on Friday, they had watched the Romans crucify their Lord.

But the LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth!
And those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength.

Our Psalm of response, Psalm 77, echoes the confidence of Isaiah 40 –
in a very real way, Psalm 77 is the song of our Lord Jesus
on that first day of the week – in the moment before the resurrection!

Sing Psalm 77
Read 2 Corinthians 4

Introduction: The Glory of the Gospel of Jesus

What are you looking at?

Are you focused on outward appearances? On the things you can see?
Or the unseen things? The things that are permanent and eternal?

Let me start by saying that *everyone* focuses on unseen things.

After all, everyone I know focuses on *love*.

But have you ever seen ‘love’?

Of course, everyone has seen someone do something loving.

But have you ever seen ‘love’ itself?

Love is just a word – a concept – an idea –
love is something *unseen*.

And yet *everyone* is pursuing ‘love.’

I once had a long talk with a young couple who were both atheists.

They were both scientists – and as we talked,

they explained their view that what we call “love”

is simply a chemical process in the brain.

I asked them if they were satisfied with the idea that *their* relationship

was just a bio-chemical reaction in their brains –

The young lady said that her own view left her feeling empty –

and that if she ever would believe in God,
it would be because she believes in love.

What we call “love” is embodied by the one who is Love himself
coming in the flesh and dying for his people.
And that what we see in the biochemistry of the brain
is part of how Love himself has made us to reflect him.

What are you looking at?
What are you looking to?
In the middle of your trials and afflictions and suffering –
what are you relying on for strength, for wisdom, and for power?

Are you trusting too much on what you can see?
Because what you can see is a bunch of clay jars.

1. The Messenger and the Message: Treasure in Jars of Clay (v7-12)

a. The Point: “The Surpassing Power Belongs to God and Not to Us” (v7)

⁷ *But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.*

What does Paul mean “we have this treasure”?
Remember verse 6 – “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’
has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God
in the face of Jesus Christ.”
The *treasure* – the thing that we prize above all else –
is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!

In the OT, Moses got to see the glory of God on the mountain.
And the Israelites got to see the reflected glory on Moses’ face.
But that glory was fading – it was only a passing gleam that could not endure.

But we, by faith, see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!
We have this treasure!
We have a treasure that is unfading – that never grows dim –
a treasure that rust cannot destroy – that thieves cannot steal!

But we have this treasure in jars of clay.
In the ancient world, clay pots are cheap, mass-produced, disposable containers.
And particularly, they are fragile and easily broken.
One does not generally store precious treasures in clay jars.

In the light of Paul’s reference to creation “let light shine out of darkness”
we should think of how the man of dust was formed from the ground.
We were taken from the clay!
Job often refers to himself as a “piece of clay” (Job 10:9, 33:6)

And yet, as we saw last time,
“let light shine out of darkness” also echoed Isaiah’s theme of new creation,
and so the clay pot also reminds us of Isaiah and Jeremiah
both speak of Israel as clay in the potter’s hands.

The jars of clay in verse 7 refer back to what Paul has been saying about preachers.

Verse 5 is very much in the background for our passage:
“What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord,
with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.”

The messenger is *not* the message.
The message is *not* Paul, Silas, and Timothy.
The message is Jesus Christ as Lord.
Christ is risen from the dead and seated at the right hand of the Father.
Death has been overthrown by life!

We have this treasure!
We have the resurrection life of Jesus in our mortal bodies!

But that means that the messenger is *connected* to the message.
What we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord,
with ourselves *as your servants for Jesus’ sake*.

What you have seen in Jon and Joel and Blair and me –
is directly relevant to the message!

How do we endure suffering?
How do we *bear the cross*?

We are clay.
We are fragile – and yes, we are disposable!
If your pot breaks, what will you do?
Go out and get another one!

The *message of the gospel* is the *treasure* –
the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ –
that is what is valuable and precious.

But that does not make the clay pots irrelevant!
Indeed, it is precisely the fact that the treasure is found
in such fragile, disposable containers that reveals the *power* of the gospel!
“to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”

As Paul had said in 1 Corinthians 1-2,

God uses the weak and foolish things – the things that are not –
to put to shame the wise and powerful of this age.

Those who were opposing Paul in Corinth
seem to have been using Paul's afflictions
as a way of challenging the authenticity of his ministry:

If you serve a resurrected Lord – then how come you are suffering so much?
Come on, Paul, where is “your best life now”?!

But Paul reminds them that if you serve a crucified Lord,
then the cross is the normative pattern for the Christian life!

b. How the Messenger Embodies the Message of the Cross (v8-11)

⁸ *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;*
⁹ *persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed;* ¹⁰ *always carrying in the body the*
death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ *For we who live*
are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be
manifested in our mortal flesh.

Many have pointed out that Paul is using a very familiar set of images to a Roman audience.
The philosophers of Paul's day would often talk about their trials and afflictions.
But whereas Epictetus emphasizes how hardship demonstrates fortitude,
and Seneca boasts of the wise man's indestructibility in the face of affliction,
Paul emphasizes how human weakness demonstrates *God's* power.

Paul, Silas and Timothy are *not* the message.
Jesus is the message.
But Paul, Silas, and Timothy must *embody* the message.
Even as Blair, Joel, Mark, Jay, and I must *embody* the message.

Notice how important the *body* is to Paul.
We carry in the body the death of Jesus,
so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”

How do we do this?
Well, pay attention to the differences between what we *are* and what we are *not*!

We are afflicted in every way – but not crushed (probably better translated “restricted”)
In other words, our afflictions do not prevent us from doing what God calls us to do.
On the contrary, our afflictions are precisely the place where God wants us!
as we share in the sufferings of Christ –
as we take up our cross and follow Jesus.

We are perplexed – but not to the point of despair
Paul and his fellow-ministers were plainly perplexed (baffled)

by the Corinthian situation.
What are we going to do about this?
But they did not despair.
When you are living with the resurrection of Jesus in view
you do not despair over these light momentary afflictions!

We are persecuted – but not forsaken (not abandoned)
And yes, the word used here is precisely the word used by Jesus on the cross.
“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
As we share in the sufferings of Christ,
we have the confidence that we will never be forsaken by the Father.
Yes, we share in the sufferings of Christ – we bear the cross with him –
but never to the point that we are utterly forsaken by God!

We are persecuted – but not forsaken.

We are struck down – but not destroyed
The image is of the wrestling match (or the battlefield) –
where one is first thrown down and then eliminated
(either by getting pinned – or by getting killed!).
Paul is like Rocky Balboa – who was continually knocked down,
but never knocked out!
Or, perhaps better in this context, like Monty Python’s black knight:
“It’s only a flesh wound!”

And, if you think about it, that is *precisely* how Paul sees it:
persecution and hardship is *only a flesh wound!*

And just as our Lord Jesus Christ passed through suffering and death – bodily –
so also we must pass through suffering and death – bodily –
so that we might be raised up together with him – bodily!

¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Do you see how important the body is for Paul?
We carry about in the body the death of Jesus (literally the “deadness” of Jesus –
the word is “nekrosis” – a different word than is used in the rest of the passage),
so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

This is at the heart of Paul’s gospel.
God came in the flesh.
Jesus is the eternal Son of God who took upon himself our humanity.
Therefore, Jesus took our mortal flesh – our deadness and dying – upon himself,
so that he might triumph *over* death in his resurrection.

Now that Jesus is raised from the dead,
how does he communicate to us his resurrection life?

Through the preaching of the gospel.

But *not* the disembodied proclamation of mere ideas!
Christian preachers are not philosophers or ethicists
setting forth eternal principles or timeless moral codes!
Those who would preach the message of Jesus
must embody the message themselves!

“carrying in the body the dying – the deadness – of Jesus,
so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”

There *is no way* to glory except by the way of the cross.
Do you want the life of Jesus to be manifested in *your mortal flesh*?
Then you must be given over to death for Jesus’ sake.

We should not think of affliction and trial as something unusual or strange.

Paul uses the present participle to convey the idea
that these are common, ongoing experiences for himself and those who minister with him.

Many of you have recently been nominated for deacon or elder.
This is what you have to look forward to!
I often say that ordination is martyrdom –
that when you are ordained, you are set apart to suffer with Christ!
Now it’s true that all Christians are called to suffer with Christ,
but it is especially true for those who minister –
because those who minister are the *messengers* of the gospel.

And what we preach is *not* ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord,
with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.

And so Paul says in verse 12:

c. From Us to You – How the Message Spreads (v12)

¹² *So death is at work in us, but life in you.*

Remember what we saw in chapter 1, verses 3-7?

Paul explained the pattern of affliction and comfort
from Jesus to us (the ministers of the gospel) to you (those who hear the gospel).

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,

who comforts us in all our affliction,
so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction,
with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.
For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings,
so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.
If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation;
and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort,
which you experience when you patiently endure
the same sufferings that we suffer."

Paul is using the same pattern here.

"As Paul and his associates proclaim the good news...they suffer for it,
sharing in the sufferings patterned by their Lord as their story is patterned after his.
So the sufferings play a key role in both manifesting and delivering the gospel."
(Guthrie, 261)

From Jesus to those who preach
and from those who preach to those who hear.
The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.
And now the Word is proclaimed among you.

Why do we endure these trials and afflictions?

For you.

So that through our affliction and suffering, *you* may have the resurrection life of Jesus.

And then, that resurrection life of Jesus will sustain and comfort you
when *you* go on to share in the sufferings of Christ!

Bearing the cross –

denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following Jesus –
is what the Christian life is all about!

John Calvin said it well:

"Now we see how many good things, interwoven, spring from the cross. For, overturning that good opinion which we falsely entertain concerning our own strength, and unmasking our hypocrisy, which affords us delight, the cross strikes at our perilous confidence in the flesh. It teaches us, thus humbled, to rest upon God alone, with the result that we do not faint or yield. Hope, moreover, follows victory in so far as the Lord, by performing what he has promised, establishes his truth for the time to come. Even if these were the only reasons, it plainly appears how much we need the practice of bearing the cross.

And it is of no slight importance for you to be cleansed of your blind love of self that you may be made more nearly aware of your incapacity; to feel your incapacity that you may learn to distrust yourself; to distrust yourself that you may transfer your trust to God; to rest with a trustful heart in God that, relying upon his help, you may persevere unconquered to the end; to take your stand in his grace that you may comprehend the truth of his promises; to have unquestioned certainty of his promises that your hope may thereby be strengthened." (III.viii.3)

But we do not bear the cross as Stoics!

We bear the cross because of the resurrection of Jesus!

And this is our central point:

2. The Heart of the Message: Jesus' Resurrection and Ours (v13-15)

¹³ 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 also speak, ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵ 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.

In verse 13, Paul quotes from Psalm 116 –

a Psalm that celebrates how God has delivered me from death!

In the resurrection of Jesus *we* have been delivered from death.

At the heart of Paul's message is the resurrection of Jesus.

Without the resurrection of Jesus, there is no gospel!

All the other religions of the world are essentially philosophical and ethical:

Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam –

all have their ideas and practices about the true and the good.

And yes, they all tell stories about their past –

but their ideas about the true and the good do not depend on the stories!

If their stories turned out to be myths,

it would not affect their ideas and practices at all!

But without the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the dead,

Paul's exhortations to us become a mockery.

Why should you live a life characterized by the cross?

Afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, struck down!

Why endure that?!

If Jesus is not raised from the dead –

if it is only for this life that we have hope –

then we are the most miserable of men!

Yes, it is very easy to turn Christianity into a religion like all the other religions!

Friedrich Schleiermacher sought to make Christianity acceptable

to its "cultured despisers" in the 19th century.

The result was Protestant Liberalism – that denied the bodily resurrection of Jesus,

in order to emphasize the "ethical" teachings of Jesus.

The prosperity preachers of today have done the same thing!

They tell you that you don't have to wait for the glory of the kingdom!

You can have your best life now!

Just believe and God will make everything right now!
(just send me your checks...)

It's so easy to get caught up in that mentality!

I know that I have a tendency to be a "Mr. Fix-It" –

If there is a problem, "I know how to fix that!"

Just do these three things, and everything will be fine!

But Paul says

¹³ *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 also speak,* ¹⁴ *knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.*

Just as Jesus was bodily raised from the dead,

so also *we* will be raised bodily with Jesus –

and he will bring us *with you* bodily into his presence.

All through the OT Moses and the prophets beheld the glory of God from earth.

The priests entered the holy of holies *on earth*

as a picture of the heavenly dwelling of God.

But in Revelation 4, the apostle John is told "Come up here."

What Moses had seen from the mountain,

John now sees in person!

The sacrifices had allowed the 70 elders to come halfway up the mountain –

but now, through the resurrection of Jesus,

we enter the presence of God –

now by faith – but *then* bodily, when we are raised up with Jesus!

And this message continues to go forth throughout all the earth:

¹⁵ *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.*

As grace extends – as grace *spreads* throughout the earth – to more and more people,

it also increases thanksgiving – more and more – to the glory of God –

so that thanksgiving might overflow or abound!

The story is told of the 100th anniversary celebration of the gospel coming to the Congo.

An old man spoke at the celebration of how his people had been suspicious

of the missionaries and their motives –

so they slowly poisoned them to death over a period of years.

The children of the missionaries were the first to die –

but the missionaries stayed and continued to proclaim the gospel –

even as they, too, died one-by-one.

The old man conclude, "It was as we watched how they died

that we decided we wanted to live as Christians." (quoted in Guthrie, 266)

How do you live like this?

In the modern world we are torn in so many directions!

So many different things – so many *good things* – call out for our attention.

I want to be a good husband – and a good father –

and I want to be good at my work –

and I have so many interests – how can I keep track of them all!

And as we pursue all these good things of this age –

we are disintegrating!

We can't possibly be *excellent* at everything we do!

If we try – we simply burn out – we are exhausted – worn out.

There is an *integrity* in what Paul says that *we need* to see and to practice.

3. The Eternal Weight of Glory: What Are You Looking Towards? (v16-18)

¹⁶ *So we do not lose heart.*

Remember verse 1?

Paul had said, “Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God,
we do not lose heart.”

We do not grow weary.

We do not give up!

We do not burn out.

What is Paul's secret?!

How does he keep going in the midst of all his troubles?

Though our outer self^d is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

When Paul talks about the “outer man” and the “inner man” –
he is not just talking about “body” and “soul.”

He's not saying “my body is falling apart, but my soul is doing well.”

Rather, when he says that “our outer self is wasting away”

he is talking about all that was corrupted and damaged by sin –
who we once were in Adam.

Likewise, when he says that “our inner self is being renewed day by day”

he is talking about our new identity in Christ.

After all, think about your own heart:

for me, at least, it is certainly *not* the case that my body is the only thing wrong with me!

But we'll come back to this next week – as Paul will go into more detail in chapter 5!

For now, we can conclude with Paul's glorious statement in verses 17-18.

Why does Paul not burn out?

What is Paul's secret?

¹⁷ *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,* ¹⁸ *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.*

The secret is *not* a philosophical principle – or an ethical practice.

The secret is the historical reality of the cross of Jesus and *his* resurrection!

We do not lose heart – we do not burn out –

because the cross and the resurrection are intimately bound together.

How often has it been said:

We can endure affliction and trial – because we are looking to the hope of glory!

This world isn't my home – I'm just passing through.

I can put up with this for now – because Jesus is preparing a mansion for me!

But that's not what Paul says!

All of those ways of saying it fundamentally *detach* the resurrection from the cross.

“Jesus gets the cross so that I get the resurrection!”?

NO!

That's *not* how it works!

What is the relationship between our afflictions and the coming glory?

Look at the sentence in verse 17

This light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory.

Why are you running away from the cross?

Now, I understand – suffering is hard!

And by all means, let's say so – let's talk about how hard it is!

Paul does!

Affliction is not fun.

Being perplexed and baffled is hard.

Nobody wants to be persecuted!

But Jesus said “My yoke is easy and my burden is light” –

Paul uses that same word to say that our afflictions are “light,”

compared with the astounding weight of glory!

Notice the contrast:
the afflictions are lightweight and momentary –
but the glory is immense and eternal!

There is no comparison – the contrast is breathtaking and immeasurable!

This little, itty-bitty affliction that we now endure
is producing – is accomplishing – is working everything together according to God’s plan
to engineer for us the eternal weight of glory!

Think about that the next time you are tempted to lose heart.
We do not pay special attention to the things that are seen –
but to the things that are unseen.
What you see with your eyes is only a small part of the picture.
Do not be deceived by outward appearances!

What are the eternal things – the unseen things – that we need to see?

Think about how Paul keeps pointing us to the glory of God in Jesus:
“we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,
are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (3:18)
“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”
(4:6)

As long as you are looking for earthly things –
as long as you are fixated on things that are seen –
you will find yourself losing heart – wearing down – burning out.

And I fully realize that to some people,
what I’m saying may sound like pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by –
but I can testify before you this day,
that whenever I have lived this way –
whenever I have focused on the unseen things –
on the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ –
then I can easily endure any suffering.
God’s promises *are* yes and amen in Jesus Christ!

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead and seated at God’s right hand.
And *by faith* we see his glory!