

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

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God's Word to a Hesitating Church

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (7:1)

*“Jars of Clay – Strength in
Weakness”*

Sept 14, 2014

Sermon Text: 2 Cor 4

Scripture Reading: Job 1

Introduction-

We come once more to 2 Corinthians chapter 4 this morning. We are going to talk about power and what kind of people God uses to work out His power in this world. To a greater or lesser degree, your concept of power is

skewed. My concept of greatness needs to be corrected. Follow as I read through this chapter once again:

2 Corinthians 4:1-18 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. (2) 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.

(3) And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. (4) 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.

(5) For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. (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.

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

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

(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.

(16) So we do not lose heart.

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

There is a principle truth that we MUST get a firm grip on, or we will be in bondage not only to false teachers, but we will be enslaved to discouragement and despair about ourselves. This principle concerns power and strength – what these things really are and how they work themselves out in God's kingdom.

In this life, the Christian is going to experience the things Paul lists here: affliction, being perplexed (confused), persecution, and even martyrdom. Paul counters each of these evils by telling us that in all of this trouble, he is not destroyed. He says in vs 16 – “so we do not lose heart.”

Now, we will plan to look in more detail next time at vss 8-18, but for

now realize that what Paul is telling us here is that a proper understanding of how the Lord is at work in us and through us will sustain us and keep us from despair and hopelessness.

We must have a true understanding of how the Lord works His power in this world if we are to be encouraged and not driven to despair. Namely, we must understand that the Lord chooses to work through jars of clay, not through costly, ornate vases. He chooses to effect His power through our weakness.

The Lord always works through our weakness, so that it is said ‘when I am weak, then I am strong.’ And He does this because He will have it be known that it is His power and not ours. To His glory, not to ours.

What is Your Concept of Power and Greatness (Success)?

These Corinthians were in trouble and being misled by false teachers because they had a worldly concept of power and greatness. [NOTE: wrong thinking on this subject will enslave you]. They were distancing themselves from Paul because they saw that he suffered. He was persecuted. He was weak. He did not use fancy oratory. This was not God, in their thinking.

So what is YOUR concept of power and greatness and success? That is to say, what does GOD look like to you? What kind of place or people do you think He resides in? Our Scripture here tells us that God resides in and works through *jars of clay*. Styrofoam cups, not golden goblets. Because He works in such a way that people will be driven to say – “this is the power of God. No way Paul could have done this.” God does not use shining, glorious angels to preach the gospel. No, He has chosen to take this “treasure” (the gospel of Jesus Christ) into the world through jars of clay. That is to say, people of dust. People whom the world does not value.

Let me suggest to you how our wrong thinking on all of this twists God’s truth:

We are

afflicted in every way,
and just absolutely crushed
because of it,

perplexed, and driven to despair
because surely God does not work
this way,

(9) persecuted, and thus feeling
forsaken;

struck down, and conclude that the
enemy has destroyed us

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

How much of the world's concept of power and greatness has crept into the church's thinking? Into your thinking?

God works through the weak things of this world. Listen to it –

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. (27) **But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; (28) God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, (29) so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.** (30) And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, (31) so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

See it? This is the same thing Paul had written to them before about, and they still didn't get it. We need to get it!

Someone wrote this great observation to me this week:

There are two kinds of men in this world. Men who love Christ, and men who love power.

God will not work through people who love power and greatness for themselves. He will not work through ornate, golden vases valued and praised by the world. He works through jars of clay – Styrofoam cups.

So, let me ask you these questions again:

- What does a true church look like – a church where Jesus really is present in and among His people?
- What does a true saint of God look like?
- How will the world evaluate a genuine church and a real Christian?
- If indeed God chooses to work through jars of clay [and He does], entrusting His priceless gospel to them so that no one can boast and claim that the "power" is of them, then how can Christ

be present in and working through people and structures and organizations that the world considers to be “great”?

When Paul came to Corinth, consider what happened through his preaching of the gospel –

and in fear and much trembling, (4) and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, (10) nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (11) **And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.**

The power of God – that was the ONLY explanation for what happened among them. Because Paul was a jar of clay. He wasn't some Pope marching into town with pageantry. He wasn't some slick orator who wowed everyone with his style. Weakness and fear and trembling because he had what was the power of God, the gospel.

And how did Paul come to them? He tells us-

Weakness and Power Throughout Scripture

1 Corinthians 2:1-5 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. (2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness

This is how God does things. People think that power and greatness are to be found in organizations and people who LOOK powerful and great. They may have the world's power, but not the power of God which is the ONLY power that can raise people dead in sin to life. Faith must be in Christ, not in any human being.

This means that God's servants through whom He works do not look like the world's notion of power and greatness would have them look.

And it means that we do not need to achieve the power and greatness of the world in order to be powerfully used by Christ! In fact, the sooner we stop striving for man's power and greatness, the sooner we will be free!

Think about all this very carefully. In what ways are YOU still enslaved to a desire to be powerful and great, stemming from the false thinking that power and greatness in us is what God uses? The thing, we note again, is enslaving.

- Big = great
- Expensive = powerful
- Coming in first
- Men are superior to women
- The largest following
- Best career with biggest salary = greater and more powerful than the guy working in fast food
- Strong, handsome, beautiful

But God doesn't work this way. Do you see that? Christ does not take the smartest, brightest, most beautiful people and entrust them with the glory of the gospel to build His kingdom. No, he uses Styrofoam cups. Jars of clay. ***So if we are trying to become golden vases so that people will be quite impressed with US and "get saved," then we are not working in accordance with the Lord's way of working.***

Consider the pattern in Scripture:

2 Corinthians 12:8-10 Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. (9) But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for 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. (10) 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.

- The Exodus. God chooses as His people, slaves. With nothing. Up against the most powerful empire of the day. They were delivered by His power, and could take no credit for themselves.

Exodus 6:6 Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8 "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God.

The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (7) It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, (8) but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

- Jeremiah

Jeremiah 1:4-10 Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, (5) "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." (6) Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth." (7) But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. (8) Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD." (9) Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, "Behold, I have put my

words in your mouth. (10) See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

- Daniel and his 3 friends set against the most powerful nation in the world.
- Gideon and the 300

Judges 7:1-8 Then Jerubbaal (that is, Gideon) and all the people who were with him rose early and encamped beside the spring of Harod. And the camp of Midian was north of them, by the hill of Moreh, in the valley. (2) The LORD said to Gideon, "The people with you are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hand, lest Israel boast over me, saying, 'My own hand has saved me.' (3) Now therefore proclaim in the ears of the people, saying, 'Whoever is fearful and trembling, let him return home and hurry away from Mount Gilead.'" Then 22,000 of the people returned, and 10,000 remained. (4) And the LORD said to Gideon, "The people are still too many. Take them down to the water, and I will test them for you there, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall go with you,'

shall go with you, and anyone of whom I say to you, 'This one shall not go with you,' shall not go." (5) So he brought the people down to the water. And the LORD said to Gideon, "Every one who laps the water with his tongue, as a dog laps, you shall set by himself. Likewise, every one who kneels down to drink." (6) And the number of those who lapped, putting their hands to their mouths, was 300 men, but all the rest of the people knelt down to drink water. (7) And the LORD said to Gideon, "With the 300 men who lapped I will save you and give the Midianites into your hand, and let all the others go every man to his home." (8) So the people took provisions in their hands, and their trumpets. And he sent all the rest of Israel every man to his tent, but retained the 300 men. And the camp of Midian was below him in the valley.

weaker than being put to death on a cross? And yet, in that death God's power broke out, raised Him from the dead, and effected our redemption, defeating Satan.

Psalms 8:2 Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger.

Conclusion

“When I am weak, then I am strong”

Now, none of this is to say that a Christian should not try to be the best at whatever God calls him to. But it is to say that we must never conclude that God's ability to effect His mighty power is in any way limited or enhanced by our achievements. It is also to say that we must never conclude that a person who is -

And then of course, the ultimate example of this principle, the Lord Jesus Christ. Here was true glory in a jar of clay. This was the most mighty work of God ever. How did He choose to do it? Through a Lamb. Through His Son who emptied Himself and took on the form of a lowling. Here is THE example of power perfected in weakness. I mean, what could be

- Physically limited
- Poor
- A C-grade student
- A lower rank in society or an outcast
- Uneducated
- Unknown
- A great sinner (prior to coming to Christ)
- Young
- Old

...can never be powerfully and greatly used by God.

And I would apply this to a local church as well. This church, this body of believers, does not meet in some impressive cathedral. We are not recognized as “one of the great” churches of the day. We don’t have a lot of resources. But if we look at ourselves with a skewed notion of how the Lord works, we will be given to despair and wrongly so.

In contrast, if we have a clear understanding of this principle – *when we are weak, then we are strong* – and *we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us* – well then, that becomes an entirely different matter, doesn’t it?

Hi Jeff and Barbara,

I have been following the posts from A Cry for Justice for a few weeks now. I want to tell you how immensely encouraging and affirming these have been for me. If only I had found them years ago sooner. But, God gets us to where we need to be in perfect timing I suppose, so I won’t waste time wondering “what if”. I just want to thank you though for this site, the blogs, and for providing so much hope

and truth through God’s Word to women who have been hurt for too long by abusive husbands.

And another:

May the ACFJ ministry bring healing and liberty to all the women who have found themselves imprisoned, not only by abusive men but also by controlling and hostile authoritarians who keep them in bondage of spirit in the church as well. I have finally left fundamentalism after 30 years...for the root of abuse is in the false Christ that they preach...the antidote is to really learn the Gospels and get to really know Jesus and his view of women...and the truth will set you free! May God help all you women who are in such suffering under men who disobey Christ by lording it over others and failing to love women as they love themselves, aided and abetted by misogynistic women who drive the sword in further by supporting abusive leadership and husbands...Come Holy Spirit and revive fundamentalism and cleanse it of its false christ who sees women as inferiors and takes from them their gifts and callings.

Still Another:

I want to begin by saying thank you for everything you do to support abuse

victims like myself. Your book was completely the exact story of my ex-husband and how he has used the church to further his abuse towards me. He was part of the ARMS program in which they asked him to leave after a year for various reasons and our church is the Portland area. I separated from him 2 1/2 years ago and have had pastors and counselors try to help him. We have now been divorced since April and have two young girls in which he gets visitation every other weekend. Unfortunately it does not let me distance myself because of the kids and he daily is still manipulating and harassing me. I don't know if it is at all possible, but would you be willing to meet with me to ask you questions and share a bit more of my story? I just am struggling a lot with how to navigate since we have to be in contact due to the kids. I know your church is by the coast, but I would be very willing to drive there to meet.

This is treasure in jars of clay. It is Christ's surpassing power working through nobodies like us! And not only through ACFJ, but in your individual lives as well. The result?

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. (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.

One of these days the glory in us is going to break out. In our inner man (the real us), Christ's glory is growing brighter and brighter as we become more and more like Him.

And that glory is not dependent upon us as individuals or as a church being "great" and "powerful" in this town or in this world. When you see things in this light, you begin to be very thankful that we are not great ones! Listen to it again -

1 Corinthians 1:26-29 For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. (27) But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; (28) God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that

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