

2 Cor 4.7-18 – You have the treasure of Jesus so don't give up

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Main point – In our weakness & suffering Jesus is our treasure and life, so don't give up serving him

Nearly 24 years ago I headed to the jewelry store and purchased a sparkling diamond ring(**SLIDE**)

I planned to hold it out, as I asked Kirsti to marry me.

The single diamond set in gold was sparkly, beautiful and precious.

Except for my car it was the most expensive thing I'd ever bought.

Though it wasn't that big 😊

The diamond ring was put in a beautiful little box, that showed off it's brilliance..

But what did I walk out of the shop with? A disposable paper or plastic bag.

The ordinary cheap disposable bag carried something precious and expensive - a treasure.--

It was what was inside the bag that mattered.-----

And today God's word describes us as plastic bags – fragile, breakable, ordinary.

But if we have Jesus, we have a precious treasure inside of us.-----

And when we have Jesus it changes everything.

Our attitude to suffering, to serving, to death; to eternity.----

And when we remember we have Jesus and all he gives, we won't give up.-----

Here's an outline(**SLIDE**) of where we're heading today, and we begin in **v7**, thinking about the treasure.

'Now we have this **treasure in clay jars**'.

The apostle Paul had just said in **v6**, that God shone into our hearts, the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ'.

God has given us a knowledge of Jesus and God's glory in him.

To put it simply, the treasure we have in us is Christ.

We have the Spirit of Jesus, by faith and trust in him.

And we are described as 'clay jars'.-----(**SLIDE**)

Clay jars were and are fragile, weak and breakable.

They were used to hold ordinary things.

It's what's inside that matters.----

We are like terracotta pots, or old plastic bags, breaking in more places than I can count.

I'm told that when Andy preached this passage years back he described the treasure as(**SLIDE**) Penfolds Grange wine in a disposable cup.

What a perfect illustration.

A \$1000 bottle of wine - who'd keep it in, or drink it from a paper cup?

We're only the paper cup, (**SLIDE**) the pot, the plastic bag.-----

But according to Paul, that's the point. Our weakness is actually part of God's strategy.

It's not that God didn't realise we'd be so hopeless.

It's not that God didn't have a choice.

He deliberately decided to set things up in such a way that he works in our weakness.

God does this, so that we and everyone knows, the power to not give up living for n' serving Jesus, comes from God and not us.-----

Last week we heard chapter 4 start with Paul saying, because of God's mercy, we don't give up in ministry.

We'll come back to the idea of not giving up in **v16**.

But as Andy said, the ministry Paul's talking about is, speaking the truth and spreading the good news of Jesus.

It's praying and proclaiming Christ, opening the Bible n' pointing people to him.-----

Paul is saying, God chooses to use weak people, to show that the power to give life to the dead is from him and not us.

God puts us in situations where we struggle with things: with sin, with our bodies, minds or emotions, struggle in relationships, in ministry, or with missing out; so that everyone sees the power is from God.

When you might be at the end of your resources, God is not at the end of his.-----

Our weakness is part of God's strategy to display the treasure of Jesus, to a watching world.-----

I'd like to **apply this to parents** particularly.

[And many of you, won't have kids but it might apply to you then, or even to you now as a single person]

Parents as we teach, disciple and speak with our children we need to communicate this, and live this.

Jesus needs to be our greatest treasure, and want our kids to treasure him too.

Our goal should not be to raise nice, obedient children.

Our goal should not be to keep our kids in church.

Our goal is to help them see and know the treasure of Jesus.

And that he's worth giving their hearts and trust and lives to.-----

Parents let's not model that life is not all about my happiness, nor that our child is the centre of the universe. Jesus is! And he's worth serving.-----

And parents let's not model that we've got it all-together.

We're weak people, who struggle, and our lives can be messy and chaotic.

Let's not put on a show at church that suggests we've got it all together.

Let's be real, and open about our paper-cup weakness.-----

Next Paul tells us how the clay-jar situation works.(**SLIDE**)

God puts us in situations where we struggle with many things.

The treasure is in Weak, afflicted & dying bodies, Next point.

He's saying that life and ministry is not easy.-----

In **v8** Paul says we are '**afflicted**' – it's the word pressed, that he used back in ch 1, v3,v6, v8.

That affliction could come as you proclaim Christ or serve him.

Yet life in this fallen world also makes us experience this:

Pain and illness (short-term or chronic), a long struggle with your mental health, or with that relationship, or in grief over something you've lost, or never yet had.-----

And Paul says, we're pressed hard, but not crushed.

Even if it can feel like it sometimes, God doesn't want that to crush you, or destroy you.[1 Cor 10.13; Heb 12.3-13]

Then v8, 'we are **perplexed**' – we can find ourselves in situations where we don't have the resources, don't know where to turn, what to do, or what God is doing.

That can be distressing.

But we're not in 'despair'. That's being totally without hope.

Because of God's mercy, and salvation and Spirit we don't need to go there.-----

In **v9**, 'we are persecuted' or harassed, but not forsaken or abandoned.

And struck down, can mean depressed.

But we're not destroyed.

Paul's not been killed yet.(1.10)

But even death does not destroy the believer.-----

All such suffering provides the platform to display God's power.

God will display his glory through us, and it will in the context of pain, struggle, difficulties, discouragement and suffering – that is how it is for plastic bags.-----

If that wasn't enough, Paul hammers it home in **v10**.

The Christian life means carrying around in our bodies the 'death of Jesus'.

The Greek word here is an unusual one, which speaks of 'dying'.

Not just the moment of Jesus' death, but the whole journey of suffering up to and including the cross.

Only Jesus died in the place of sinners for our forgiveness.
But carrying Jesus' death in us includes the physical & emotional pain of costly ministry. (Mark 8.34)

It's suffering as we sacrificially serve God, serve Jesus. (2Cor7.5; Rom12.1)

And it's hard.

When you're rejected for sharing or standing up-for Christ.

When you invite your friend to church and they say No thanks, or even, Why would you hang with such hypocrites?

Or when they hear you're a Christian and hammer you on sexual ethics.

It's hard.-----

When you're exhausted after sitting with, or many texts to a sister or brother stuck in sin, depression or grief.

When you're weary from prep'ing for growth group, or from serving in your ministry team and you'd rather stay on the couch or sleep in.

When you've made another meal for someone, packed up from PlayGroup again, or have your non-Christian friend over.

When you have to work late because you took a longer lunch break to read the bible with someone.

Or you care for your kids so your spouse can serve Christ with their time and gifts.

In all these things and more, it's giving yourself over to death for Jesus' sake.-----

This is all saying, suffering & weakness are essential characteristics of ministry.

If we're going to live for Jesus, serve him, we've gotta to accept this.

But it's worth it.

For Next point is, Jesus is working life in us, and others.

In weakness and suffering we serve others and show the treasure n' glory of Jesus.

But, But... **v10**, this is 'so that the life of Jesus may also be displayed in our body'.

Same in v11.

The power and glory of Jesus can then be displayed through us.

The character of Jesus be revealed in us.-----

It's the same in **v16**, 'Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.-----

9 years ago my family found out our 15 yo nephew was homeless & on the street.

Long story short, he came to live with us. It wasn't easy. But we wanted to love, protect and serve him. And he was treated as a brother and a son.

Yet after 3 months he left us for a homeless situation. It was extremely hard.

But through the emotional pain and exhaustion I saw God grow my reliance on him, and my prayerfulness. And it brought Kirsti and I closer.

Jesus' life was at work in us.-----

Yet through suffering God also works life in others, **v12**.

Death is at work in us, but life in you.-----

Paul's saying the life of Jesus is displayed in him, so life can be at work in the Cor too.

The suffering Paul is experiencing because he lives to serve, leads to life in others, as they hear the Gospel and experience spiritual life.-----[2.16]

Trusting, following and serving Jesus gives life.

To us, and through us, to others.-----

Should our goals in life be about avoiding suffering, and seeking our comfort?----

Our goals should not be all-about our experiences, our holidays, our achievement; our spouse, our family – but seeking the good of others for Jesus' sake.-----

Now we're all different. We have different personalities, capacities & circumstances.

But this is a call to all of us to push the boundaries of our service, for the good of others, whatever that looks like for you.

Serving with our time, our energy, money; love, listening; praying, speaking, teaching.

Even in your work.

Tim Keller writes, this death at work in us life in you, is not just true of people in paid Gospel ministry – I know of people, doctors and lawyers and the like, who, rather than stepping onto the ladder of professional and financial upward mobility, have decided to serve undeserved people. They've given their lives to working with the poor in places off the beaten path. And when a person does that, they fall out of the structure of their profession. They go off the radar and find they can't advance. But they also find their career death produces greater life, in them and others.

When we suffer for doing the right thing, when we choose to live unselfishly, we find that our "death" leads to greater life for those around us.

And not only them, but in me.-----

God wants us to be making decisions where we're willing to accept what is hard, and be sold out for Jesus.-----

Are you?-----

God uses weak suffering people – clay pots, plastic bags, to bring the light of Christ's glory to others.-----

That's why Paul doesn't stop speaking about Jesus.

In **v13** he quotes **Psalm 116 v10**, from the Greek translation - 'I believed therefore I spoke', and we believe therefore we speak.

Like Paul the psalmist knew real suffering. **(SLIDE)** He also speaks about being greatly afflicted with people speaking lies about him (v11). He's even felt the ropes of death were wrapped around him (v3), experiencing trouble and sorrow (v4), and feeling pressed (v10). **(SLIDE)**

But he knows the Lord has saved him from death, so he will 'call on the name of the Lord, in the presence of others (v13-14, 17-18), the hearing of everyone.

And back in 2 Cor 4, when God has given us life through Jesus we also want to speak about it.

If we believe the Great News about Jesus we'll want others to know it too.-----

And therefore speak.----- **(SLIDE)**

Then what does Paul speak in **v14**?

Words of hope – the one who raised Jesus will also raise us and you – all believers.

God's Spirit works new life in us now, but being raised to life in a new creation is the great hope for suffering Christians.

Resurrection life and hope through Jesus is what Paul believes and what he speaks.

So the next time your friend or colleague loses a loved one or goes to a funeral, be prepared to say something.

Could that be your opportunity to speak of the resurrection life you'll have because of Jesus?-----

Sticking with Jesus, serving & speaking about him can be really tough.

But it brings life to us, and life & blessing to others.

So it's worth it.

Therefore, Final point, we Don't give up, v16. (SLIDE)

Wanting to give-up in face of pain and discouragement is understandable.

We can lose heart.-----

But in **v15** Paul and Timothy don't give up for the sake of others.

So that grace extends through more and more people.

Paul hopes the Corinthians will catch this Gospel vision, and serve even suffer to proclaim Christ as Lord, so that even more people will be saved.

And what's the end result of that?

That it may cause thanksgiving to increase **to the glory of God**.-----

Just as we have the treasure in weak clay jars to show the power comes from God.

Now Paul returns to that theme, and says serving Jesus and more people being saved by believing in Jesus, results in more glory to God.

For more people saved, means more people thanking God for their salvation.

More people living for God's glory.[cf. Rom 1.21]
 When people are saved and God gets the glory, it's worth it.
 That's why we don't give up. -----

Last Sunday Andy said from v1, that We don't give up praying for people and proclaiming Christ, because Jesus is merciful.

God was merciful and saved me.

Now Paul is adding, we don't give up serving when it's hard cos God is working life in us and through us.-----

In v16-18 Paul says a bit more about our hope in suffering, so we'd not give up.

V16 – the outer person is being destroyed - a different word to that in v9, which here can mean withering.

After 25, our bodies are getting older, slower, wrinklier, weaker; more frail, more breakable, often with more suffering and nearer to physical death.

But, inwardly, our spirit is being renewed in increasing ways.

As **ch3 v18** said,(**SLIDE**) transformed into growing Christlikeness, greater glory.

Paul is saying that while his body falls apart, the light of Christ's glory increases in him.-----

And there's older believers at Bundy, with Christlike servant hearts, from whom the glory of Jesus shines.-----

Is the light of Christ growing bigger in your life this year?-----

Then in **v17** Paul compares(**SLIDE**) our **momentary light affliction** with an absolutely incomparable eternal weight of glory.

Light and momentary troubles (weakness, suffering, aging).

Compared with absolutely, beyond-excellent, weighty, and never-ending glory.

Light vs weighty

Short-term vs forever.----

Short-term suffering but eternal glory, with God in the age to come.-----

When we'll get to enjoy God's brightness, beauty and blessedness, in endlessly satisfying life.-----

We'll think more about that next Sunday.-----

But just as the path for Jesus was suffering then glory, so it will be for us.

And we're told the suffering produces or achieves that glory. [cf Rom 8.28f]

As John **Piper** says in **Future Grace**,(**SLIDE**)

This means that the decaying of our body is not meaningless.

The pain and pressure and frustration is not happening in vain.

Not vanishing into a black hole of pointless suffering.

Instead, suffering was producing for Paul, and it does for us, an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.

When we are hurting we must fix our eyes not on how heavy the hurt is, but on how heavy the glory will be because of the hurt. [cf. Rom 8.18ff]

Our light troubles seem heavy, and can feel they go on forever & be overwhelming. But when we've been in heaven a thousand years, our suffering will look like a moment.-----

As Philip **Yancey** says, Who would complain if God allowed one hour of suffering in an entire lifetime of comfort?

Yet we bitterly complain about a lifetime that includes suffering, when that lifetime is a mere hour of eternity.-----

Stoics say people should accept suffering, hedonists say avoid suffering, masochists say, embrace suffering.

But the Gospel engulfs it.

God uses it for his glory, and the eternal good of all who trust Jesus.-----

And **v18** then helps by telling us to stay focused on the unseen and eternal.

We need to focus on what God's done for us in Christ, what he will do, & will give.

Then we won't give up. Then we'll persevere in serving and speaking.

Sometimes we must mentally fight to not be consumed by our feelings or present circumstances, but keep the unseen future in view.

Our sufferings won't last forever. Nor will our physical bodies.

In fact the signs of age on our bodies tell us it's only a matter of time. ☺

So we keep filling our minds with the truths of God's promises.

We fix our focus on what matters, what will last.-----

In your weakness, let the word of God be your oxygen.-----

And serve Christ for the rest of your life.

Because second of it will be worth it.

We need not lose heart because we are being changed, and because we are storing up an eternal tonnage of glory. We are spending our lives on the one thing that really matters – people knowing the treasure of Jesus.-----

This week I watched a video about **Elinor Young,(SLIDE)** who was afflicted with polio as a child, and struggled to walk at all. But she felt God call her to Irian Jaya, Papua, Indonesia. And despite her disability and many people in the US telling her she was too weak, she went.

And she told people about Jesus, and translated God's word, even while being carried around.

And she returned years later for a bible translation celebration, and this woman called 'Bad legs', was told that there were locals with bad legs who never left the valley. But the fact that she came all the way to them with bad legs, meant that God had sent her, and they listened. Her weakness and failing body shone out the power and glory of Jesus.

So brothers and sisters – do not lose heart!

Keep serving Jesus, keep speaking about him, the treasure in our clay jars.

Let's pray