

Treasuring Jesus
2 Corinthians 4:7-12
(SLIDE #1)

(Slide #2) What do you treasure?

“Treasure” as a verb means: *To hold or keep as precious; prize; cherish*

What is the thing you can't imagine life without? What is the thing, if taken away would cause you the most grief and heartache?

[PRAY]

The Culture of Corinth **(SLIDE #3)**

Our passage today is 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 but before we look at the text, I want to set the stage by painting a picture of the culture of Corinth in Paul's day. I think in it, you'll get a picture of what the people of this city treasured. I'm curious if any of it will sound familiar.

Scott Hafemann in his commentary on 2 Corinthians describes Corinth and its culture in the following ways:

- In Paul's day, it was probably the wealthiest city in Greece along with being a major, multicultural urban center
 - It was a free-wheeling 'boom town,' filled with the materialism, pride, and self-confidence that come with having made it in a new place and with a new social identity.
 - The obsession of the middle class was a drive toward upward mobility by advancing economically.
 - The city had an ever present entertainment and sports culture, with a love of public rhetoric and human achievement.
 - In regards to religion, the motivation for participating in organized religion was the promise it held for health, wealth, and social standing. In turn, the value of a religion was measured by the amount of 'power' displayed by the deity, as seen through the consequent cultural, physical, and economic power of its followers.
- As a group, first century worshipers, regardless of their religious affiliation, wanted health wealth protection and sustenance, not moral transformation.

Another commentator Timothy Savage says: In Paul's day, Greco Roman society stressed:

- A rugged individualism that valued self-sufficiency
- Wealth as the key to status within society
- A self-display of one's accomplishments and possessions in order to win praise from others
- A competition for honor that viewed boasting as its natural corollary
- A pride in one's neighborhood as a reflection of one's social location.

Hafemann says, "These values combined to create a populace for which self-appreciation became the goal and self-gratification the reward."

Does any of this sound familiar?

This incoming tide 🌊 of culture was battering against the approximately 5 year old community of Christ followers that Paul established there and is the context in which Paul writes today's passage.

(SLIDE #4) Within the Church of Corinth, as described in this letter from Paul to the Corinthians, we find Paul's authority being held in question by 'super apostles' (false apostles/false teachers) who were influencing his spiritual offspring against him and leading them away from the Gospel they first heard from Paul. To defend his ministry was to defend the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Either what He said was the truth about Jesus or he had deceived them. His defense wasn't self-gratifying or ultimately about him. It was about the Gospel and protecting his spiritual offspring from those whose teaching would lead them away from Christ.

These 'super apostles' looked at Paul's weakness and suffering and consequently questioned his authority and message as being from God. As I mentioned previously, in the culture of religion in Corinth, the strength of your God was evidenced by your wealth and power. In their minds, "Paul's God can't be powerful. Just look at HIM." As you might expect, they preached a health, wealth and prosperity Gospel. 💎🏠💰

With both the cultural context and the situational awareness of what was internally facing the young Corinth church, listen to Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12:

(SLIDE #5-6)⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. ¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

These clay jars 🏠 Paul references are liken to our household Tupperware, you use it until it the plastic cracks or you can't find a lid to match the container you're wanting to put leftovers in. These clay jars were for everyday use for transporting wine, oil, grain, family treasures, etc. They were cheap to make and once they broke, you just went and got another one.

This metaphor speaks to both Paul's humanity and to ours. We were formed from the dust of the earth. We are weak, fragile, temporal beings passing through this life. This container we've been given magnifies the glorious treasure within that Paul references.

But before we talk about this treasure and what that treasure is, I want to follow this line of thought that Paul has going emphasizing his (and consequently our) humanity. 🧑🧑🧑

(SLIDE #7) He goes on to say, **“Though we experience every kind of pressure, we’re not crushed. At times we don’t know what to do, but quitting is not an option. ⁹We are persecuted by others, but God has not forsaken us. We may be knocked down, but not out.”**

As Kent Hughes put it, Paul was “squeezed, bewildered, pursued, and knocked down.” Anyone relate to any of those words?

Paul describes what he’s suffered more fully in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 where he addresses these “super apostles”:

I have worked much harder for God, taken more beatings, and been dragged to more prisons than they. I’ve been flogged excessively, multiple times, even to the point of death.

²⁴ Five times I’ve received thirty-nine lashes from the Jewish leaders. ²⁵ Three times I experienced being beaten with rods. Once they stoned me. Three times I’ve been shipwrecked; for an entire night and a day I was adrift in the open sea. ²⁶ In my difficult travels I’ve faced many dangerous situations: perilous rivers, robbers, foreigners, and even my own people. I’ve survived deadly peril in the city, in the wilderness, with storms at sea, and with spies posing as believers. ²⁷ I’ve toiled to the point of exhaustion and gone through many sleepless nights. I’ve frequently been deprived of food and water, left hungry and shivering out in the cold, lacking proper clothing.

²⁸ And besides these painful circumstances, I have the daily pressure of my responsibility for all the churches, with a deep concern weighing heavily on my heart for their welfare.

(SLIDE #8) This staggering description of Paul’s suffering unpacks what Paul is inferring for himself when he says, **“We continually share in the death of Jesus in our own bodies...”** in 4:10.

(KEEP SLIDE #8 UP) Note, when Jesus says that we must “pick up our cross and follow Him,” the cross  was not a picture of mere suffering. It was a symbol of execution, a picture of death. And when Paul refers to death here, as Kent Hughes points out, he’s not speaking of the final state of death but the process of dying. Our souls need to die. Everything of us not rooted in Him has to die.

Why is Paul placing such emphasis on his/our humanity and suffering when that’s the very thing he’s being invalidated and undermined for by the super apostles? The picture he’s painting to defend his apostleship and ministry is honestly awful and not necessarily one you want to emulate or that you would find impressive.

Let's go back to 4:7: **"We are like common clay jars that carry this glorious treasure within, so that this immeasurable power will be seen as God's, not ours."**

What is this immeasurable power of which Paul speaks? There's nothing obviously powerful being demonstrated by Paul's life that we can see. *Or is there?*

Catch this, the evidence of God's power in Paul's life is not tied to him being physically strong, financially prosperous, wealthy in possessions, or highly esteemed by society's elite as the super apostles alleged. Rather this power is evidenced by the perseverance that has been produced in his life. Who could endure such trials and not be crushed, despairing, forsaken, or destroyed BUT for God. Suffering created in Paul a deep dependence on God that brought him through the darkest of night when he thought his life was over (1:8). Utter dependence on God evidenced through resiliency in trials is the demonstration of a power that points to God.

As you can see, "power" in God's kingdom looks very different than the world's idea of power.

As Kent Hughes observes, our equation that we put together from this passage or others like it ("I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength") is:

My weakness + God's power = My power

That is not Paul's equation that he's using here.

(SLIDE #9) Rather the equation is: **My weakness + God's power = God's power** (more of Him)

This isn't about us. We are clay pots! Cracked ones at that!

But how is this kingdom power accessed, you might ask? Well, we've already kind of answered that but let's take a look again.

Let's go back to verse 7 where Paul says, **"We are like common clay jars that carry this glorious treasure within..."**

First, what is this treasure of which Paul speaks? Well, we have to answer that before we can answer how we access kingdom power.

The treasure is described in the verse before, verse 6. Paul says, **"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 Paul speaks of is our experiential knowledge of God's glory through the person of Jesus. I love his wording here: "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

(SLIDE #10) Knowing God through encountering His Son face-to-face, meaning unfiltered, unhindered, without barrier, IS THE TREASURE.

Take that in for a moment. **(SLIDE #11)** Do you know Jesus in that way?

[PAUSE]

Back to the question, “How do we access this immeasurable power Paul speaks of?” As we already said in that equation, we have to first remember, IT’S NOT OUR POWER. The power is tied to the treasure within us.

We experience the power of the treasure within us, namely the person of Jesus Christ, when every other treasure that our heart would attach itself to gets removed.

(SLIDE #12) Any treasure that competes for our affection other than Jesus is an idol and it’s the idolatry in our hearts that render us powerLESS as followers of Jesus.

This is where suffering comes in. Suffering keeps earthly treasures from becoming the main thing so that Christ can remain the main thing. The suffering shows us and the world around us that it’s Him and only Him.

What is suffering? Disappointment, pain, rejection, illness, need, lack, loss, etc.

Have people raise hand if they’ve suffered in certain ways:

1. Lost loved one
2. Physical pain
3. Breaking of relationship
4. Loss of job

Suffering has a purifying effect on us. Like it says in James 1, “It’s the testing of our faith that produces endurance.” The word testing is the word used for gold being purified in the fire. The impurities rise to the surface as the gold is put over high heat.

(SLIDE #13) Suffering surfaces anything our hearts treasure that is rooted in something other than Him. Those things need to get removed. We have to die to those parts of us that treasure anything else above Him.

He will purify our hearts when we:

Make our “calling” the main thing

Exalt our “family” looking a certain way

Receive a promise from the Lord or a vision for a future state and develop ideas around what that will look like.

Hold to a belief that isn’t aligned to His righteousness.

Attach your heart to the Lord and where He’s moving. Don’t get attached to any earthbound treasure whether that be a vision, a promise, a person, a possession, wealth, a job, an

experience, or anything else. He might use any number of those things to draw us to Himself but He might call us to lay down the very thing He was once using to draw us to Himself.

Beholding Him and becoming like Him is what He's called us to. That is the treasure.

Is there anything you're not willing to release? That's the thing that needs to go. He will have no rivals. **(SLIDE #14)** Does Jesus have any rivals in your heart? He wants exclusive claims to your heart. Anything you're not willing to release to Him is a rival. Only those who see the face of the Son are those who have no idols in the way. For anyone else, those idols cast a shadow on His face.

(SLIDE #15) BIG IDEA: *Treasure Jesus above everything.*

It's interesting because in verse 12, Paul ends this section by saying, "**So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.**" **(SLIDE #16)** Another translation says, "**So, then, death is at work in us but it releases life in you.**" As we participate in the suffering of Jesus and we experience the process of dying to ourselves, Paul tells us that God uses it to plant seeds of life in others around us. The witness of a life sharing in the suffering and death of Jesus actually deposits something of His life in those in others who are seeing the Lord through our lives as we treasure Him. I love how Kent Hughes says it, "How heartening to know that when you live this way, death is at work in us but life is at work in those who God has called us to serve."