

"Suffering in the Will of God"

Part 1

2 Corinthians 4:8-18

Introduction: Last week in our study of 2 Corinthians 4 we looked at verses 6-7.

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:6

In verse 6 Paul pointed back to *Genesis 1* and the creation of the earth on Day 1. God created the globe and it was empty, cold, dark and lifeless. It was then that the Spirit of God began to move upon the face of the waters and He prepared the earth for the creation of life. This is a picture of how the Spirit of God worked in our lives before we were saved and He stirred our lives with many different experiences and in so doing He was preparing us for the creation of SPIRITUAL LIFE. Just as the LIGHT shined out of the darkness at creation so it also shined into the darkness of our hearts when we were saved.

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:7

Here in this verse we Paul presented a contrast which is between the TREASURE and the VESSEL. Last week I told you that the TREASURE is the message of Jesus Christ within us and that is true but this past week God allowed me to see this treasure in a different way. The treasure is the Gospel but it is also a LIGHT within us. Our hearts have been enlightened with the glory of God. So the treasure is a LIGHT within us and in contrast to the treasure we are simply EARTHEN VESSELS. The title EARTHEN VESSELS refers to CLAY POTS. There were cheap and inexpensive in Paul's day. The word is used only one other place in the New Testament.

2 Timothy 2:20

²⁰ *But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.*

The earthen vessels were viewed by the world in Paul's day as something of little value. The earthen vessels were used for things that were often dishonorable. But God has chosen to place within these EARTHEN VESSELS the greatest TREASURE of all.

Now as Paul leaves verse 7 he is going to move on to talk about his suffering but before we look at the next verses there is something in the Old Testament which we need to see.

Notice Judges 7:1-21

Here we see that Gideon and his 300 men went up against the Midianites with a sword and EARTHEN VESSELS with a LIGHT within the vessel. When it was time to attack they broken the EARTHEN VESSELS so that the LIGHT could shine out and when the enemy saw the LIGHT they fled out of fear.

Application:

The application for us combined with our study in 2 Corinthians tells us that while we have this TREASURE in EARTHEN VESSELS the vessel must be broken in order for LIGHT to shine out for the world to see. This brings us to our text tonight in 2 Corinthians 4.

"Broken Vessels"

Part 1

Paul will now explain to the Corinthians the purpose of his suffering. Let us keep in mind the enemies of the Apostle Paul believed that Paul suffered because God was punishing him. But that was not the reason. Paul was in the will of God and he was walking the path which God had ordained for him to walk.

Acts 9:10-16

¹⁰ And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

¹¹ And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth,

¹² And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

¹³ Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem:

¹⁴ And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

¹⁵ But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

*¹⁶ **For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.***

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:8

Paul makes 2 statements here:

I. He was "troubled" on every side yet not distressed.

The word "troubled" here means "to be brought under great pressure". Paul felt pressure every single day of his life as he served Jesus Christ. He was pursued by his enemies nonstop.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9

⁸ *For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life:*

⁹ *But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead:*

2 Corinthians 7:5

⁵ *For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.*

Paul was hated and there were many who desired to take his life. Every day he woke up he did not know if he would live to see the next day. His life reminds me of the words which David spoke to Jonathan.

1 Samuel 20:3

³ *And David sware moreover, and said, Thy father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly as the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me and death.*

But in 2 Corinthians 4:8 he tells us that while he was under great pressure as he served he was not "distressed". This means that he was never "hemmed in". This is a very important statement. Paul is stating here that no matter how great the pressure and no matter how great the concern he always for a way to glorify his Lord. The bottom line was that he was never without hope. Let me show you how he kept this positive attitude.

Philippians 1:21

²¹ *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*

This gives us a glimpse into the heart of Paul. He was determined to manifest Jesus Christ as he lived but if he died it would be a great gain for him. He was not afraid to die.

Let us now look at the next statement which Paul makes.

II. He was "perplexed" but not in despair.

The word "perplexed" means "to not know which way to turn". Paul found himself in many situations where the pressure was so great and as he looked around he did not know which way to turn. But he also tells us that he was not in "despair". Paul was never at the point where he desired to give up. He was often perplexed but as he continued to hold on to his faith God always opened a door for him to step through.

1 Corinthians 10:13

¹³ There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:9

Here are 2 more statements by Paul.

III. He was persecuted but not forsaken.

In all that Paul faced he was never alone. This connects with the previous statement. God was aware and in control of all which Paul was going through.

IV. He was cast down but not destroyed.

The words "cast down" literally mean "to be thrown to the ground". Paul would be "cast down", he was thrown into prison, he was placed in stocks but he could never be "knocked out". No matter what his enemies did they could not destroy him because God held his life in His hands.

Job 14:1, 5

Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble.

⁵ Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bounds that he cannot pass;

Let me show you how William Barclay words these 2 verses:

"We are sore pressed at every point, but not hemmed in; we are at our wit's end, but never at our hope's end; we are persecuted by men, but never abandoned by God; we are knocked down, but not knocked out. (2 Corinthians 4:8-9 Wm Barclay)"

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:10a

This verse gives to us some very detailed insight about suffering. Paul tells us here that his suffering was the result of bearing in his body the death of Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:7-10

⁷ *But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.*

⁸ *Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,*

⁹ *And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:*

¹⁰ *That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;*

Paul desired to know the fellowship of His sufferings and to be made conformable unto His death. WHY?

Notice 2 Corinthians 4:10b

Here is the result of suffering the death of Christ in Paul's body. The LIFE OF JESUS WAS THEN SEEN IN HIM.

Conclusion/application:

God allowed Paul to suffer in his ministry because Paul had a treasure in his earthen vessel. The suffering was for the reason of breaking the vessel so that the GLORIOUS LIGHT OF THE LIFE OF JESUS COULD BE SEEN. God allows us to suffer so that our vessel will also be broken and the Light can shine through. But how does this happen? When the pressures and the difficulties of life happen the LIFE of Jesus Christ is seen in us when we respond as Jesus would respond. This is not easy and it can only be done as we see ourselves crucified with Christ and this then allows the Holy Spirit to produce the LIFE of Jesus through us. Let me show you Paul's prayer for the Colossians:

Colossians 1:10-11

¹⁰ *That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God;*

¹¹ ***Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;***