

2 Corinthians

“Winning Through Weakness”

III. Main Teaching: 1:15-13:10

B. 2:12-6:18 Dying To Live

2 Corinth. 4:7-12

“*The Great Exchange*”

I. Intro.

II. Vs. 7-9 Common containers

III. Vs. 10-12 Blooms in the desert

I. Intro.

Paul has been describing his ministry of warfare against the “*god of this age*”, who has, “*blinded the minds of the unbelievers*”, (2 Cor. 4:4b). This comes as no surprise to most of us as we are surrounded by evidences of this seen in the decay in society. But how does that stack up next to Matthew 5:13-14 where Jesus said to His disciples, “*You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.*” Salt in Jesus’ time was a very important commodity; in fact it was so valuable that Roman soldiers were often paid with salt that is where we got the phrase, “*he is worth his salt*”. There was no way to preserve food except by use of salt; used on dead things it kept them from spoiling. But salt does not change decay; it cannot change corruption into incorruption. All it does is prevent it from spreading. Jesus was saying that His Church is called to; *be the preservative to impede corruption*. Salt was also used in wounds as an antiseptic providing healing to those that were sick stopping the spread of decay so that healing can take place. The

purpose of light is to illuminate. This is a positive principal in contrast with salt. Salt prevents the spread of decay, but light reveals what is present. Yes, it exposes what is hidden, but more than that it reveals what might be. It is clear what the Church's problem is "*we have lost our flavor*" "*we are not a city set upon a hill*". **Jesus is saying that if we lose or preservation then the world will use us to be able to continue on in the paths they are still on.** We cannot merely put on a front of being salty; we have to be salty! That is what Paul is writing about here as verses 7-12 are a detailed description of how to exercise the power of the Holy Spirit.

It reminds me of the plaque that is at the base of the great Hoover Dam dedicated to the 112 people that died during its 5 year construction; it reads in part; "***These died that the desert might bloom.***" George Muller was once asked what his secret was as provider for 1000's of orphans he responded by saying, "*There was a day when I died*" then he hung his head to explain what he meant "*Died to George Muller.*" That is Paul's topic in this section as he explains the mystery of our weakness and God's power that produces "***blooms in the desert***".

II. Vs. 7-9 Common containers

Vs. 7 Clay jars were like plastic or paper bags today! They were used to transport goods and hide family treasures but they had a short life span. Every archaeological dig contains their fragments even though no one in their day considered them valuable. There are two things that Paul's analogy tells us:

1. It was no big deal when one of them broke as they were cheap and easy to replace. Paul uses this as a metaphor for humanity and the followers of Jesus.

Some clay is more refined than others but be it fine china or adobe it's still just dirt!

2. The other thing that is very descriptive to me is that these pots are by design made to contain something. That is what all of humanity is by nature "*common containers*". We are not "*super star entertainers*" but **common containers**! We are by design meant to hold someone and as such we will either be full of Christ or full of ourselves! God's purpose in for our life is that we so live that people will look at us and say, "*I don't get it. I know that person they are ordinary yet when they go through life they live so remarkably, I just don't understand it.*"

The treasure he speaks of in verse 7 was described for us in verse 6 as "*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*" To many it is ***an utter mystery why God would commit the hope for fallen humanity in the gospel to insignificant fragile followers.*** But Paul tells us that the reason: We Christians were **never** designed to be powerful in ourselves we are only vessels in which God's power is to be exhibited. It is important that we don't misunderstand what Paul is saying: He is **not saying** that we need to embrace our weakness as a means to enhancing "***OUR POWER***". The equation is NOT: My weakness + God's power = My Power! It is about His power being manifested through our weakness! It is in our frailty and weakness that God's power is most visible as we are designed to leak, as our weakness is essential and necessary for the display of Gods power.

Vs. 8-9 To illustrate this Paul gives **four paradoxes of his own personal experiences** and we know that they are his because he prefaces each of the four with the words “**WE ARE**”. And in each of these four personal experiences he contrasts his weakness with God’s power pulsating through his life by using the words “**BUT NOT**”. William Barclay translates these 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.*” **Here we are told of the things that bring out the weakness of our clay pots, these stresses cause us to realize that we are ordinary but they also cause us to realize that what we contain in Christ is extraordinary.** Nothing ever changes that weakness but in that weakness **we realize that we are a picture frame of God’s power!**

1. Vs. 8a “**Squeezed but not squashed**”: As much pressure that was exhibited upon Paul’s life he proclaimed that such squeezing was ever met with a filling of God’s Power that even with all of the pressure of the world pressed upon his fragile earthen life it was never able to crush him. Have you found that to be true dear saint? **The Holy Spirit fills our clay pots with more strength than the world has stress, more power than the world has problems!**
2. Vs. 8b “**Bewildered but not befuddled**”: As weak as Paul’s life was at loss because of the work of the Holy Spirit he was never “**at a loss**”. He may have been driven to the place of confusion but he was never confounded! It was said of Napoleon that he had a magic for victory but no technique for defeat. But no so of Paul as defeat and weakness only meant that the surpassing power would be of God and not of himself! In 2 Tim. 4:5 Paul would

encourage his young friend by saying, “**keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.**” Friend this is only possible in our weakness as God’s strength is perfected.

3. Vs. 9a “**Hounded by the world but hugged by God**”: Paul new literally what it was like to be persecuted as this word literally means to be “hunted down” but he had also found out what King David knew so well that God would never forsake him. Nothing and no one could ever convince Paul otherwise because God’s abiding presence was always with him.
4. Vs. 9b “**Knocked down but not knocked out**”: The word “*struck down*” means to be hit by a weapon but Paul said that he may have been **put down** but he was not **put out!** In Acts 14:19-20 Paul experienced having people pick up rocks and strike him till he was unconscious where they drug him outside the city thinking he was dead only to get back up and go back into that same city.

You can catch the intensity of Paul’s statements when you put them altogether:

“**Squeezed, Bewildered, Hounded by the world, and Knocked down**”. That describes the weakness in the flesh doesn’t it? But look at God’s surpassing power on display through that weakness as we compile these words together: “**not squashed, not befuddled, hugged by God and not knocked out.**” These words describe God’s power not Paul reaching down and pulling himself by his strength. Paul’s weakness became the occasion for God’s power. Theodore Steinway who came to fame building the Pianos that bear his name once said, “**In one of our concert pianos, 243 taut strings exerting a pull of 40,000 pounds on an iron frame. This is proof that out of great tension comes great**

harmony.” I believe that this truth about pianos carries over to people as well. It is only as we go through extreme pressures that we gain the right tone in our hearts that God can play His tune of grace through us. There is a great principle in reaching others for Christ: *“It is through the breaking of the earthen vessel that light shines forth onto the pathway for others.”*

III. Vs. 10-12 Blooms in the desert

Vs. 10-11 I know personally many times as a Christian I’ve felt afflicted and crushed; I’ve had the perplexities that have driven me to despair. I’ve felt abandoned and knocked out for weeks and months at a time. What has made the difference for me in those times so that I can walk in victory instead of defeat? It is to be found in these two verses here:

The death that Paul speaks of is the **process of dying** rather than the final state. Notice that the *“life of Jesus”* always rests upon the *“death of Jesus.”* We must have, in our experience, the *“death of Jesus”* in order to have the *“life of Jesus.”* In Col. 1:9-11 Paul prays for the believers in Colossae saying that he prayed that they may be ***“strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power”***. But what was God’s power to be used for? Was it so they could do incredible miracles? Was it so they could exhibit a supernatural ability to proclaim the gospel? **NO**, Paul tells us that it was so that we could live with **“all patience and longsuffering with joy”**! That is where the real witness takes place, God’s power is made the most visible where the world sees us cracked pots living in all patience and longsuffering with joy! **We want to be free from anxiety but only if we can have the pleasure of worrying!** **We want the kingdom of God but only if we can maintain our own personal rights as well.** But you cannot have both.

That is where the new covenant brings us, “*always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus, in order that the life of Jesus may be manifest in our mortal flesh.*”

Vs. 12 The “*cross*” says that we have to die; come to the end of our dependence on ourselves and rest upon the willingness of God to be at work in us, without any flash.

That’s where we struggle, as our flesh wants the power of God, but we want to get credit for it too. “*So death is at work in us, but life in you.*” This then is the New Covenant as

seen in the Cross of Christ: **Jesus died that we might live we die to self that He might**

live through us! That is **the great exchange: Jesus’ life for ours and our life for His!**

God’s power in our lives does not come from our pursuit of power: My weakness +

God’s power = God’s power! The principal of the world is “*self-glorification*” the

principal of the Christian is “*self-crucifixion*”. **What a word for the Church: With all our**

propensity to human idolatry and self exaltation we must be reminded that the power of

the gospel comes in our weakness, not our strength or greatness. The fact is we are clay

pots and cracked ones at that.