

Jars of Clay

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Given by Mark Brown, WordExplain.com, June 3, 2012

Introduction

Accident, much more amazed by God's sovereign power than my own will power.

Show them my mug.

2 Cor. 4:7-18

I don't have a problem with God being shown as powerful but I don't like the idea of being personally weak, simple or fragile.

1. Jars of Clay

A. Jars of clay

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

Jars of Clay – Common metaphor in the ancient world for human weakness.

Prone to break, earthen wear. (Molded by God, Rom. 9:20)

We are made of clay, dust,, and to dust we shall return.

This mug is pottery, many of the things Brenda paints and fires are chipped on the edges from the dishwasher, in contrast to Porcelain mugs. But they are cheaper!

How are we weak?

- We are weak in comparison to the power of God
- We are weak in sin, powerless to change our nature or redeem our situation
- We are weak in the Law
- We are unable to add to our lives, inches of height, hairs on our head, days are numbered.
- Weak in knowledge, even with Google, we don't even know where there will be a tornado or rain!
- We can't make someone like us, or another person to act reasonably.

It is just the truth isn't it, we are weak.

Paul set an example of this weakness (Corinthians had a problem with it at times) (look back) **2 Cor. 3:5** Not that we are sufficient in ourselves to claim anything as coming from us, but our sufficiency is from God

Paul himself,

1 Cor. 2:3 "And I was with you in weakness 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 so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God."

B. Treasure

- Look back at 4:4 and 4:6 said two ways,
- 4 The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God... 6 has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
- Piper said, “Seeing and Savoring the Glory of God in the face of Christ”
- It is the unveiled glory that transforms us in the previous chapter,
- We have seen it and it is glorious indeed. It is the pearl of great price, it is the treasure hidden in a field.
- **He is my great treasure... When big, important things get removed... like (health, mobility, finances, maybe an important relationship) Though it is tough, it can be a good thing. When may have the privilege of having an Idol exposed. It is made plain to us and we can reassess and put our hope in Christ.**

C. Why this clay & treasure arrangement? The So That Clause,

- We have this so that the surpassing power will be a great contrast.
- So now, who would be talking about the cookie jar, it is the cookies that are important.
- **Have you seen the YouTube clips of, Kyle Maynard, the guy without arms and legs, he climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro. ESPN special**
 - **Why do we marvel at that? The power of the human will is all the more remarkable in the context of his limitations.**
 - **When people see the power of God in us that might equally say, “Look what God is able to do through him or her.**
- “the glorious gospel is borne about by those who are comparatively inferior, the powerful gospel by those who are weak.” Timothy Savage, commentary
- The contrast of the weight and glory of the message and the weakness of the deliverer is stunning.
- Do you believe this? This truth challenges our own desire for personal greatness.

2. Look,, How does this treasure transform the Jar?

- The contents change the vessel. Strengthen, verse 8-9.

the dying of Jesus

the life of Jesus

hard pressed

but not crushed

perplexed

but not in despair

persecuted

but not abandoned

- We might ask, what kind of suffering? Was it:

- Suffering for them, Affliction
- Suffering as a direct result of ministering to others
- Suffering because of a Thorn in the flesh
- Suffering because of my own sin

Paul's particular example is the suffering associated with a life of an apostle, one called to the gospel message.

Yet the greater issue and is jars of clay and displaying God's power in our weakness and that can be done whatever the circumstance, it is hardly limited in application.

- Caring around the death of Jesus. So that.... **10-11** (a life focused on those we minister to) We need to explain this a bit.

¹⁰ always carrying in the body the **death** (dying) 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.

The Greek for the first death in verse 10 death connotes dying, not death. He carries around "the dying of *Jesus*" (4:10) as he is given over to "death" (4:11).

The process of giving himself over, laying his life down, being a living sacrifice

The important thing is **not** that **we** are as happy and healthy as possible but that Christ is most glorified by the ongoing level of "death" my life mediates to others.

We have this treasure in a weak vessel so that the power of god might be magnified and shown.

12, This death, or sacrifice in us is giving life to those we minister to.

Conclusion. We don't minister to others out of displaying how we have it all together, how we are strong and capable and they should be like us. We minister as earthen vessels that live a life of sacrifice to others; this is the ministry of Christ.

Personal Example:

This was profoundly shown as the Lord allowed me to minister to the people that would come by my house to visit me when I was in a hospital bed in my dining room. They came to see me but soon were talking about their problems, the Lord allowed me to minister to them in my weakened state.

3. What good is produced by our suffering and weakness?

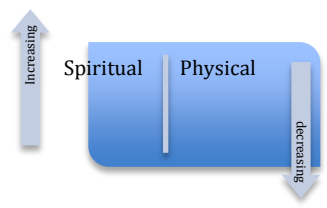
- Suffering with faith points to a greater power
- Endurance shows more glory.

- Being **raised with Christ** in this life does not refer to the ability to **escape** suffering, but to the **power to endure** it for the sake of Christ and his church.
- “The contrasts of 4:8–9 underscore that during this evil age it is endurance in the midst of adversity, not immediate, miraculous deliverance from it, that reveals most profoundly the power of God.”
- Health and Wealth
Between the writing of 1 and 2 Corinthians, the Corinthians’ propensity to boast, fueled by their culture’s esteem for the status associated with health and wealth, had led them to accept Paul’s opponents and their false gospel.
True today as well.
Anything less than peace (at least within the nuclear family), prosperity (at least a middle-class lifestyle), and health (at least most of the time) becomes a disappointment with God. Within this context, it is imperative that we constantly remind ourselves that **endurance with praise**, not avoidance of pain, is the evidence that the kingdom of God is here (4:8–9).

A FAVORITE PASSAGE

Ps 37:25 I have been young, and now am old,
yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken
or his children begging for bread.

- **VERSE 16** So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.
- Decaying body but growth of grace, also the gets bigger the older we get. Big LESSON FOR ME WITH ACCIDENT



- More and more people may increase thanksgiving to the glory of god, 15
- 2 cor. 1 Comfort passage. Ripple effect

4. How does Paul keep this perspective? Eternity,, hope

I am a glory seeking person, how do I live a life of sacrifice and glory deflection? I want the praise, I want to be noticed.

How am I supposed to be content with simply being a reflection?

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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.”

- 17, light and momentary, etc. Wonderful play on words
 - Lightness – Weight
 - Momentary - Eternal
 - Affliction – Glory

Eternity;

It is only in the face of another life does this present suffering make sense.

Only hope of another realm....

-Romans 8:18 ¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

We are a culture that is obsessed with being the most happy and healthy for the longest time possible. In that context, living for another value can seem quite counter to what we find natural.

- Confidence in the future grace, 14
- ¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

It is the things that are unseen that are eternal, vs. 18

Weakness and suffering takes a long-view!

Enduring Suffering means His kingdom has come and is coming again.

It is a clarion call, Jesus has been here and is coming back!!!!

His suffering (weakness) embodies the cross as a revelation.

If Paul’s suffering is a sign that the kingdom of God has *not yet* been consummated, his endurance is evidence that it *has been* inaugurated.

Closing

What is it about my weakness,/frailty that help bring glory to God?

1. They look at us and are impressed with God'
2. Our weakness is simply the truth. If we accept it we are freed from self-delusion and self-promotion, we see ourselves more accurately and are free to promote the truth about God. His glory no longer a threat to my constant self-promotion.
3. It reminds me I am not in charge, He is, and that is a good thing.
4. Other people can relate to you because they are weak too.
5. When I am weak I am more excited about heaven and less motivated to get only what I want now.

BUT WE HAVE THIS TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY, TO SHOW THAT THE SURPASSING POWER BELONGS TO GOD AND NOT TO US