

"Cast Down But Not Destroyed" - 2 Corinthians 3 and 4

Tonight we want to take a look at 2 Corinthians chapter 3 and 4 as we take a look at, once again, the Apostle Paul. I think that this is fast becoming one of my favorite books. I say that all the time, but it's interesting how God takes you into places where you've never been that He might be able to encourage you, that you might be able to encourage others with the comfort that God has comforted you. The book has always been fascinating because of suffering. Paul was one who suffered immensely. They often times look at Paul and they think that he is such a strong witness, which he was, but to be that witness that he was, there was a tremendous price that he had to pay. Paul was not one to speak about himself but when he's forced to speak up because he's being pressed by Judaism and the Judaizers and they are beginning to challenge his authority and his apostleship, then he declares, *"I have no reason to boast but since you are pushing me to boast then I'm going to boast"*. So he nails them there in chapter 6 and then again in chapter 11, speaking to them of how much he had suffered for the name of Christ but most of all for their sake. So we find a man willing to deny himself that others might be able to grow in the gospel of Christ. This is the man that said, *"I wish that I could go and be with the Lord but for your sake it might be better that I stay behind"*. If I gave you that choice tonight, if I said to Pastor Rob, "Rob, you know the body here needs you and the rapture is coming and I just want to know if you'll stick around and kind of go through the tribulation and help everybody." Well, I think that Rob would look at me and say, "You know something, I love you Pastor Steve, but I'm out of here in Jesus' name." And I think I'd be with him. But here Paul said that he was willing to miss everything that he might help the brethren. And the reason why God used him was because he understood the agony of people's lives.

So whenever you find that real thing, there's always going to be that counterfeit. So when Christianity began to grow, Judaism began to explode again and there was always the legalism of, once again, the circumcising, hoping that that would be a work

of the flesh. So in chapter 3, there is a contrast, a beautiful contrast between the law and the grace of God. We contrast that with Moses and Christ. Paul uses it in a very profound way. The truth, once again, is speaking concerning Jesus Christ. And so Paul reveals his own personal problems he has and kind of makes us feel a little bit better that he went through some difficult times.

He goes on to say in 2 Corinthians 3:1 **“Do we begin to again to commend ourselves? Or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you?”** or simply recommendations. In the New Testament, they would have letters of recommendation when certain people went out. You remember when Paul was a Judaizer, he was seeking to destroy the church of Jesus Christ, he had a letter, you remember and he was on his way to Damascus, that he might do damage. That letter came from the Sanhedrin. So it was a very common thing in those days that speakers would have letters saying that they were sent out by a certain group of people. Often times, the Sanhedrin would send the Scribes and Pharisees. But Paul is saying, “What do you need? Do you need a letter that I am the one who started the church of Corinth? Are you not the witness that I was the one who led you to Christ? Don’t you understand that by your life, being saved, that is the fruit and that is the witness because our letter came in your heart and not in any other way?” And so, **“Do we begin again to commend ourselves?”** In other words, they were boasting of their letters of recommendation but once again, they were simply letters of recommendation. God was now working through Paul. We can endorse and we can lay our hands on people but they are empty hands. God must lift a person and begin to use that person in a very phenomenal way. So the fruit of your life, the witness that you have is the testimony of your commitment to Christ. We can talk and we can boast and we can tell people what God is doing in our lives but it’s in the very way I live my life, the way I’m willing to forgive and, most important, the way I’m able to love. So if the love of God is upon my life and people can say, “Hey, he is a beloved brother. He’s gentle and easy to be entreated, full of mercy,” then that is the witness and the testimony that God is working in and through my life.

You remember in the Old Testament, Korah came to Moses one day and said, "Hey, who put you in charge?" Moses said, "I think the Lord did." And Korah said, "I don't think so." So 250 friends of Korah got together and came against Moses. So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What should I do?" And God answered. He opened the earth, swallowed Korah and then closed the earth and that was the end of the division. So God just took care of the problem but the people, being a little dense, not real bright, probably under the sun, still didn't get it. Even though God just eliminated over 250 people, instantly (you would think that God would be with Moses) but they still doubted.

So Moses said, "Bring a rod from each of the twelve tribes and stick it here over night and we'll see which one the Lord blesses." In the morning, when they came back, it was Aaron's rod, once again, that budded. So because of the fruit, it was the evidence of God's anointing. It's not what I say, it's the evidence of my life. And so: **"Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men, (all over.)"** (2 Corinthians 3:2) So men will read your life and, once again, we have written our lives in your heart and so you are a letter of the witness.

"Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; (underline that -the Spirit of the living God) not in tablets of stone, but in fleshly tablets of the heart." (2 Corinthians 3:3) So this is that work that God desired. Moses, you remember, coming down Mount Sinai with the two tablets: four of the commandments being on one side, six on the other; the one side dealing with our relationship with God, the other side dealing with our relationship with man. There, God placed His writing in the tablets of that stone. So you remember Jeremiah said that I have come and I have written my word in your heart. And so it is the spirit of the message not just the letter of the ink, but it's more of the Spirit of the living God.

“And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to think anything of ourselves;” (2 Corinthians 3:4-5) I think that is one of the great scriptures we ought to memorize as business men and men and women of the body –that we’re not sufficient; that we don’t have all the answers for marriage or for our business but our sufficiency is of Christ; that in my weakness, His strength is made perfect, and God will glorify Himself through your weakness. We find there in 1 Corinthians, chapter 1, that God speaks about He chooses the weak and the beguiled elements that He would be able to glorify those instruments in His hand.

Often times, He gets an instrument that is unwilling to bend because they believe they have a greater answer but Paul was saying that we don’t have what it takes. Christ is the answer in our life. So our sufficiency is not in ourselves. You remember, he said that we had this sentence of death in ourselves that we would not trust in ourselves. That is a great verse. Why did we have this sentence of death? To bring us to the point that we would not trust in ourselves. Why were we pressed out beyond measure, pressed down to the point of dying? So we would come to the end of ourselves. In one sense, you could say about Paul, he was a stubborn man. He wouldn’t give up. And I would agree with that –he had an iron will. God oftentimes had to get him sick so he wouldn’t go out and do something God didn’t want him to do. But he was a man that was determined to serve God. If he was for Judaism he was going to kill Christians, if he was for Christianity he was going to stand up against all the things in the world and say that Jesus Christ was the answer. So his sufficiency was not in himself **“...but our sufficiency is of God.”** (2 Corinthians 3:5) So it’s not anything that we have done but it’s everything that God has done. The work he did, in establishing the church at Corinth, was God doing the work. Though He used our lives, it was really God doing it. Legalism will take the flatter. They enjoy the ego, but, once again, humility will put the honor back on the Lord.

“Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament;” (2 Corinthians 3:6) I like that. In other words, God has to make you an able minister. In myself I have that sin nature. So I find that God has put me into the ministry and He has called me to be faithful. Now He’s saying that He will make me an able minister. It’s interesting when I read the Bible; I always see “grace” and “peace”, as you go through the New Testament. But I’ve always thought about Timothy and Titus always have another one –“mercy.” Grace, peace and mercy. I’ve always wondered why. Then I realized that Titus and Timothy were written to pastors. So God is saying to the pastors, you need grace, you need peace and because of all the mistakes, you need a lot of mercy and I’ll give you that too. So our sufficiency is not in ourselves but in the Lord Jesus Christ.

“Who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.” (2 Corinthians 3:6) And all he’s saying is that the old covenant (Judaism) is done away with and the new covenant (Christ) is the answer. The old covenant would be the writing of ink. The New Testament, or Christ, would be the writing of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer. The old covenant: if you do this and that, you’ll be saved. In the new covenant, it’s Jesus Christ and Him crucified. It’s not about you doing, it’s about you believing. So legalism says you have to do. Christianity says you have to be. God is more concerned about the “be”attitudes than anything else in your life. God desires that you would love the Lord with all your heart. Don’t worry about the doing. The doing will come because the love of God will constrain me to do the work of God. But if I’m doing things for the church, and doing things to get elevated in my life, then it’s legalism, it’s a standard that’s not pleasing to God. You’re beginning to say, this is what you have to do to be saved. The only thing you have to do to be saved is what? Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Period. So nothing of the law can save you. The only thing the law can do is to condemn you. It can point you to Christ but it cannot save you. It can show you the guilt but only Christ can forgive you and only Christ can save you. So the contrast between the old type of system of Judaism, of the sacrificing of

the animals, of that covering and then the New Testament, would be Christ, the taking away. One was covering; the other one was taking away. John said, "**Behold, the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.**" (John 1:29) God will take it right out of your heart. He'll bury it as deep as the ocean. He'll take it as far as the east is from the west. And so the Spirit working –the grace, the mercy; and Moses, once again, throwing the law down and breaking it.

"But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious," (2 Corinthians 3:7) Now this is cool, because sometimes I hear people say, "Then the law is really bad." No, it is glorious. The Old Testament and the law of God are good. It is man that is sinful. It is a glorious thing what God did but what he's saying here, **"...if the ministration of death (the law) written and engraven (in the ten commandments) in stones was glorious (if that was the finger of God, was so glorious) so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which the glory was to be done away:"** (2 Corinthians 3:7) Now that's the key –when he went up to the mountain, he began to glow. All of a sudden, as he came down, the people saw him glowing. He had seen God face to face. But he had to put on a veil because the glory was beginning to fade. That is the message: The old covenant was going to fade. Judaism was going to pass away. There was something coming that was going to be brighter and better than even the law of God and that would be Jesus Christ. And so we stand steadfastly. So it's the covenant of death. And that's important. The law is the covenant of death. Jesus Christ is the covenant of life. And in the life or in this area of death it was glorious because it was wonderful –the law. But the law could not justify. It could not forgive. It could only condemn. So how much better would be the New Testament –Jesus Christ.

"How shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious?" (2 Corinthians 3:8) In other words, this would be even better because we find that it is written inside of our hearts. **"For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more**

doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.” (2 Corinthians 3:9) So when you compare the two, when you take the law and Christ and when you take Judaism and Christianity, when you take the life of Moses verses the life of Joshua, you begin to realize that there is a difference. So if I seek to live under the law, then I need to obey the whole law. If I offend in any area, I’m history. Jesus Christ came to fulfill the whole law. He fulfilled the law knowing that I couldn’t. Now that I’ve accepted Christ, I am now accepted because God has accepted Jesus Christ. My salvation is tucked away in Christ and Christ is tucked away in God and I am secure not because of who I am but because of the finished work that He has done upon the cross. So that Spirit of life, God is removing that ministry.

“For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excellesh.” (2 Corinthians 3:10) In nother words, it’s going to explode. **“For if that which is done away was glorious,** (that would be the law) **much more that which remaineth is glorious.”** (2 Corinthians 3:11) So he’s into this “glorious” word. I think that’s probably where Pastor Chuck got this word, “glorious,” in this chapter. **“Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:”** (2 Corinthians 3:12) In other words, we understand; we’re able to speak it with plainness of speech. **“And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not steadfastly look to the end.”** (2 Corinthians 3:13) Now the words “to the end” means to the finish. In other words, it was not going to last. He understood that. And so it was going to be abolished. So Paul picks up this teaching in the New Testament and he begins to talk about the face being unveiled. We find that Jesus Christ has unveiled the face of God and now I can find God in Christ. So if I want to find out how God is, I just need to find out what Jesus does. So the face of God is unveiled through Jesus Christ, my Lord.

Then we find, **“But their minds** (speaking of the Jews) **were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same, the veil untaken away, in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away with in Christ.”** (2 Corinthians 3:14) If you

go to Israel today, and you begin to speak to them, which I have done, concerning their Messiah, they will not believe that He has come. For they believe, their Messiah is going to come and rebuild the temple. We know that Satan said, **"Jesus I came in my Father's name and you did not receive me. But there's another one coming in his own name, him will you receive."** We know the children of Israel are going to make a covenant, according to Daniel, a covenant of death. They're going to sign a covenant for seven years with the antichrist because they are blinded. Even though, there are over 300 prophecies fulfilled, they cannot see it. To you, it is so simple. Isaiah 53 tells us about Christ's coming. They can't see it. Their eyes are covered. And so when a Jew is saved, it is a wonderful miracle and we ought to continue to pray that God would open their eyes and do a wonderful work. Zechariah tells us that there's going to come a day that God takes away and they're going to see Him whom they have pierced (Zechariah 12:10) and God is going to save all of Israel. So their life is going to explode in Romans 9-11, during that time of the tribulation, where God is going to open their eyes and unveil their eyes once again. But their minds were blinded. For until this remainth the same veil, the same one that was around Moses, taken away. And the reading of the Old Testament, which veil was done away, blindness has happened in part to Israel. When a Jew once again comes to Christ, the veil has been taken away. **"But even to this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart."** (2 Corinthians 3:15) So it's upon their minds, it's upon their hearts; it's upon their eyes. And God is going to remove it in that day of Zechariah.

"Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (2 Corinthians 3:16-17) So oftentimes, pastors use this to do certain things. I think that this is where they get the authority to begin to create certain doctrines. "Hey, where the Spirit is there is liberty -we can kind of do what we want to do." So we ask them, "Show me where it says in the Bible you can do what you're doing." "Well, where the Spirit is, there's liberty." It's dangerous because you remember Joel tells us,

That that which you see, this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel. Peter said, the speaking in tongues is what you understand to see what God has done in the Old Testament. So you're just seeing what God has already prophesied. Until you are able to stay faithful to the Word, you ought not to take the liberty to say the Spirit lets me do this. So I think you need to match up because once again, the heart can be deceitfully wicked and you need to match the Word.

"Nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Corinthians 3:16-18) So "open face, beholding", not reflecting but a transformation. As I begin to look into the mirror, which is the word of God according to James 1:22, that when I look into the mirror, I begin to see who I am but if I walk away and I'm not looking then I'll forget what manner of a man I really am. What he's saying here, very simply, is that I need to behold until we are transformed. I need to keep looking because that's how I'm going to change. So people say, "Well, Steve, why am I not changing?" Well, I would say you have lost your gaze. When a man or a woman loses the gazing power: It says Peter ran in and looked around but when John ran into the tomb, he understood. Now the word 'understand,' there in the Greek, is to gaze. In other words, to look and understand that what happened really happened. So when you are just running here and running there, you see what God is doing, it's neat and exciting. But when you stop, and it gets into your life and it begins to come from inside out and you're gazing into heaven, then you will be changed from moment to moment. And so the glorious thing of God's Word, that incredible one day metamorphosis that's going to happen in our lives. It says in John 3:2, **"Beloved, now are we the sons of God and it does not yet appear what we shall be but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is."** So that wonderful day, God's going to take us out.

Now in chapter 4, we get a little bit easier, not the contrasting back and forth. I hope that makes some sense to you. The danger of legalism verses the grace of God. The danger of reformation theology verses just the theology of Jesus Christ. The theology of you-have-to-become-holy rather than God is the One who has to bring the holiness into your life. In yourself, in you, you don't have the power to change. Only by the Spirit of the living God, can He conquer that will and that stubbornness of our lives. Our nature is bent. Paul said, "*That which I want to do, that I don't and that which I don't want to do, that I do. Oh, wretched man that I am.*" (Romans 7:20, 24) So if I'm going to have victory in this flesh, Paul says I need to yield my body, I need to surrender my life and I need to reckon the old man dead. I need to give my body to the Holy Spirit, for Him to do the work. Constantly, it will always come to a place of me dying to who I am.

But in Chapter 4, "**Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received, [we faint not].**" So, what ministry? Well, in chapter 3, 'therefore' points you back. So everything I've said. This is the ministry. Guess what? I get to teach. This is the thing that I'm talking to you about. That it's not the law; it's the grace of God. It's not Judaism, its Christianity. It's not doing; it's being what God wants you to be. Because I've received this ministry, I ought not to ever faint. We hear people saying, "Well, I'm burned out and overwhelmed and I need some time and I need to quit." Well, it's because they have lived under the law. They have sought to live a certain standard and they have not been obedient to the Lord in their devotional life. Because it is the joy of the Lord, that God wants you to minister. He said come to me, because His yoke is easy. (Matthew 11:29-30) One time, God came to Jeremiah and He said, "Jeremiah, you go tell those prophets they better not say the burden of the Lord one more time because if I hear one more time, I'm going to deal with all the prophets." (Jeremiah 23:34-40) What he was saying, "Oh wow, so difficult it is to serve God; oh, the burden of the Lord; oh, the burden of my life." Listen, it's not a burden, it's a privilege. And if it's become a burden, it's because your eyes are upon the ministry rather than upon the Master. If your eyes are upon the Master, then He'll give

you the mercy, He'll give you the strength to be able to maintain. He'll make you an able minister to do the work of God. So "therefore", because of everything that we have said, seeing that we have received this ministry of Jesus Christ. As we have received mercy, we faint not. We do not faint. You remember, in 2 Corinthians 3:6, **"Who also has made us able ministers of the New Testament, not of the letter but of the Spirit."** You remember, He has made us able ministers and now He has made us of the ministry. We faint not. In other words, though we face death, though we're constantly being beaten, though the ministry is going to cost us our life, we are not going to faint.

So exciting, if you skip ahead to verse 16, **"For which cause, we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."**

So there is the possibility of fainting because I'm not waiting on God. And when I don't wait on God, then my spirit is not renewed. And when my spirit is not renewed, then I'm going to make bad decisions and I'm going to get in the flesh and I'm going to have to maintain a certain level of madness. But if I would learn to wait upon God, then I would mount up on the wings of eagles, and I would fly. I would run and never fall and I would walk and never faint. In other words, the mundane things of life would not destroy me. Jesus, you remember in Isaiah 30 God said, *"listen in quietness and in confidence is your strength. But you said no, we will trust in horses"*. God wanted them to trust in Him. So there is that place of quietness and there is that place of waiting. In that place, I need to understand the mercy of the Lord. In 1 Timothy 1:12, **"And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has enabled me, for He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry."** So God is the one who put me here. God is the one who will enable me. God is the one who will help me. God's mercy will work in and through my life. So all I need to do, and this is so cool, all I'm responsible for doing is standing up here, reading the Bible and telling you how great Jesus Christ is. And that's really what life is all about.

So it's the ministry of God's word. **"But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but the manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."** (2 Corinthians 4:2) This is a mouthful. I'd like to teach this at a pastors' conference. "But renouncing the hidden things of dishonesty," -this is talking about the conscience. It's talking about the inner man. It's talking about you in your darkest moment of life, when no one is around. Is there deceitfulness or is there honesty? He says that we have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty. We're not walking in craftiness, trying to use the ministry to get certain things. Nor are we handling the word of God deceitfully. In other words, we fear the Lord. **"But by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience."** (2 Corinthians 4:2) In other words, you live in a glass bowl, you ought to accept that and you ought to live there for the glory of God. And so I hear pastors saying, "Well, I don't like living there." Well, then you ought to get out because we need to commend our conscience to you. We need to stand before you and be honest, so handling the word of God.

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world (now, check this out, the god of this world –a better translation, the god of this age) hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." (2 Corinthians 4:3-4) Now, I believe this is one of the great verses that you need to remember because I believe that we make a major mistake in our evangelism: that if we go and begin to evangelize, often times, there's not a lot of fruit. We think that through our ability and through our wisdom and through what we have come to understand, that we can bring a person out of darkness and bring them into the glorious light of Jesus Christ. This verse teaches me that Satan has their minds and Satan has blinded their hearts. Satan has blinded their eyes. Jesus teaches me that if I'm going to go into a house, I need to bind, what? The strong man. And when the strong man is bound, then I can go in and take the spoil. So I believe if we would

spend more time praying for our relatives and asking God to bind the works of Satan; if we would pray this prayer: God, they don't have a chance to accept You because the god of this world has blinded their eyes. I'm asking that You would open their eyes and open their ears and open their hearts that they would be able to hear a message I want to bring to them. If God would do that, then their hearts would be open and they would make a logical decision. That logical decision would be –of course, I want to go to heaven. Of course, I want my sins forgiven. But because their minds are blocked and because their minds are blinded, they want to hear nothing about it. So year after year, we try to change them. Even husbands, we try to change. I don't believe you can because the god of this age, the power of Satan, has gotten into that unnatural man and has blinded him from that glorious gospel.

There was a sign on a blind man in New York and it read: "The sun is out and I am blind." I thought, that's an interesting thought –the Son is out (Jesus Christ) and boy, people are blinded. Why can't they see it? We get so angry. Why doesn't the city see it? Why can't the politicians see it? Why can't the world see it? Because Satan has blinded their eyes and it is a warfare. Until I'm willing to get intense praying about a situation and asking God through the power of the Holy Spirit, that He would personally destroy that stronghold in that person's life, I don't believe we're going to see a lot of fruit. I think when children begin to go out there and they hit sixteen, seventeen and they begin to go way out and you begin to lay down rules and you begin to put down restrictions, which you have to, but you don't understand. You ought to be laying those restrictions and then fasting and praying that God would bind the hold that he has on your kid, so He can bring that kid back for the glory of God. So Satan is seeking to hold onto your children. I need to get my kids back. How do we get them back? Well, we can say, "Well, I have to change." Of course, you have to change but Satan is still holding their lives. So God, take the hand off of them because we have claimed these kids for Your glory. You will find that if you will pray together and begin to intercede for your loved ones and for your children, God will do tremendous things together, unbelievable in the realm of the Spirit, because it's a supernatural thing that is taking

place. Satan is seeking to hold things back and we can say, "Listen, God we need to open their eyes." What happened when Elisha went down and he was sleeping and the servant got up and he said, "Hey, Master, man, these Assyrians are all around us." Elisha rode over and said, "Oh God, open his eyes." The servant looked again and there were angels all the way around the Assyrians. All of a sudden, he said, "Wow, that's cool." Well, what was the difference? Did anything change? No. His eyes were opened and he was able to see the supernatural power of God. So the god of this world has blinded their eyes from the light of glorious gospel.

Then he [Paul] says, "**For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**" (2 Corinthians 4:5-6) So that is a great verse –that He is shining; that the radiant light is now anew. The Old Testament was a reflection but Jesus Christ is that radiant light. It will never fade.

Then he declares, once again in verse 7, "**But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.**" Now, what treasure is he talking about? He is talking about the treasure of Jesus Christ –the power of God. Where did God put it? He put it in cracked pots. He put it in earthly vessels, clay objects. It's the last place I would invest my treasure. But God desired to place His glory within your life. We magnify the vessel but we ought to be magnifying the treasure. Now in my house, I have many vessels. I think of one right now –the cat box. It's not an edible thing to think about. It's a smelly, dirty thing that the animals hang out in once in awhile. I don't really put it on the kitchen sink. We hide it. We get rid of it. We put it somewhere so it doesn't cause a lot of problems. It's necessary. It's a cat box but it's a vessel inside my home. I have another vessel –garbage disposal and a trash compacter. We realize we put the trash in there and it's a wonderful thing but I don't want to show you my trash compacter. Can you imagine coming to my

house and [me] saying, "Hey, let me show you the cat box or let me show you the trash compacter." Also, in my house, my wife has some wonderful china. That china is set up all the time on our table and she displays that china. That is something that she wants to magnify and to show. Now in my life, I have a choice. What type of life do I want to live? What type of vessel do I want to be for the glory of God? If I just desire to be a cat box and that's it, then, so be it. But in my life, I would like to be on a table, so finely tuned that people would not look at the vessel but they would look at the masterwork that He has done. So it's a decision: That I am to yield my life as a vessel to the glory of God, but for God to put the glory in these clay pots.

You remember when Gideon was out fighting, he had the torch, he put the vessel over the torch and when he yelled, he broke the vessel, he held the torch up and it was the light. What is the story? That when you break the vessel the light will begin shine. When the box is broken, the fragrance will begin to smell the room up. So in a life that is being broken, in a life that is being cracked apart, it is that light that God is going to shine forth. It's all about the treasure that He has placed inside of our insecurities and our failures.

So he said in verse 8, "**We are troubled on every side** (these cracked pots, we're troubled on every side) **yet not distressed; we are perplexed** (we have no idea about the future), **but not in despair** (we're not overwhelmed; we're not going to be overwhelmed about anything); **Persecuted** (beaten down), **but not forsaken** (God has always been by our side); **cast down, but not destroyed.**" (2 Corinthians 4:8-9) So here are the four major points of a man and a woman's life: We are troubled but we are not distressed; we are perplexed but we're not in despair; we are persecuted but not forsaken; we are cast down but not destroyed. **"Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."** (2 Corinthians 4:10-11) Paul said these are the marks of the Lord. You

remember when the boys were witnessing, I think it was John and Peter, and they told them not to preach in this man's [Jesus'] name. Peter said, "*We must obey God, rather than man.*" So they took Peter and they took John and they beat them. Then they let them go. It says that they went out and they showed everyone their whippings: "Hey, look at this, man. We were worthy to be beaten by the Romans." The marks of our Lord, the scars of a consecrated life: going through pain, relationships, devastating times but you've come through. You've made it. God has seasoned you and God is working. You see that crucified life and it's a wonderful thing. When I think of the crucified life, we think oh man, that guy is dead but no, a crucified life means the resurrected life. You're alive because you died. And now it's Christ living in you; not the life that you're living but it's now Christ living in you and it's the hope of glory. **"For we, which live are always delivered unto death..."** (2 Corinthians 4:11) What a statement. As long as you are alive in this body, you are going to go through difficult times. Amen? Oh, no, no, no, no. I don't receive that. I'm into prosperity doctrine. Well, okay, then you have the stock market and everything else. Listen, as long as you are alive, you are going to be delivered unto death. There are going to be things that come up that just devastate you but its how you handle them and who God is in your life. If you are sufficient in yourself, you're going to fall apart. If your sufficiency is in Jesus Christ, you're going to be fine.

"So then death worketh in us, but life in you." (2 Corinthians 4:12) So we're going to die but because of our death, you're going to live. Paul said in the book of Philippians that he was bound. Then he said, yet many of the brethren have waxed much more confident seeing these bonds in Christ. Once again, the gospel went through Cesar Nero's palace and many came to Christ. And they were beginning to preach against Paul. Paul said some preach Christ from envy and strife and some preach Christ with contention, notwithstanding, Christ is being preached and I therein rejoice. Paul, in prison, hearing people preach, he said, "Man, they're doing it wrong but His name is going out." Let me give you an example. Someone is talking about you. That's a wonderful thing because they're talking to God about you. Hey get my

name up to heaven one way or the other, just get me there. It's the attitude that you look at. They're going to talk behind your back but you need to once again look to the glory of God.

"So then death worketh in us, but life in you. We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak. Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you." (2 Corinthians 4:12-14) So there's the power. Paul is saying, "Hey, we are persecuted but He rose from the dead. We are distressed; He rose from the dead. Abraham, he believed that God was able to raise Isaac from the dead. In other words, the faith in your life is that you believe in the resurrection of Christ. **"For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God."** (2 Corinthians 4:15) So everything is for you. **"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish** (though we are being beaten and destroyed), yet **the inward man is renewed day by day."** (2 Corinthians 4:16) Do not feel sorry for us because in this life, even though there is pain and agony, I am in love with the Lord all the same and Jesus is being sweet to me.

Then in verses 16-17, **"For which cause we faint not.... For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us...** (and I like that). We said this morning, "our light afflictions" and when you think about it, the most horrific things you've been through, the most devastating time in your life, if you think about it, are just light compared to the glory of God. It's all going to be over. It might last another ten years. The Lord might come today or He might wait ten years. The question is, can you last ten more years for the kingdom of God and the answer is absolutely. What happens if things don't get any better? I'm fine. Jesus is coming, right? Yes. I'm going to be with Him, right? Yes. I'm going to heaven not hell? Yes. I can make it. And that's the attitude he had. No matter when He comes, I am committed to Jesus Christ. **"For which cause we faint not ... For our light affliction, which is but**

for a moment..." (2 Corinthians 4:16-17) And then underline **"worketh for us."**
The patience, the difficulties, the agony, it all works in your life for **"an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. While we look not at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."** (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

You know Moses was able to see God. It said that he was able to see through the situation and see and, it says right there, the invisible God. It was Daniel who was in the lion's den, about ready to be eaten. And Darius said, "Are you alive?" And Daniel said, "Oh king live forever, the God whom I serve has sent His angels to stop the mouth of the lions."

We find, all the way through the Bible, that it is that spiritual vision. Without a vision, the people perish. In the Hebrew, it's kind of interesting: Without a vision, my people fall apart. They go to pieces they scatter. Without a vision, my people die. Jesus talks about a vision. The vision I have is Christ but with that vision, it gives me eternal life. So you're going to heaven. It's a wonderful thing. It might be difficult this month. You might have great victory next month. It might be a difficult time in a few days, but you know these are light afflictions because God has saved you and God loves you.

Closing Prayer: Father, we thank You for these times that we can look into Paul's life and listen to a man who went through incredible pain –pain that we would never want to force upon anyone; things that we don't even like to hear about. And yet these are so valuable within our lives. How do we handle situations? How do we view things that happen in our lives? I pray that we would see that invisible God. When Nehemiah said to Judah, "What do you see? And Judah said, "I see rubbish." And Nehemiah said, "But I see the walls built in troublous times." And it was the vision that you gave to Nehemiah that he was able to rally a whole city together and build the walls in 52 days. Lord, without a vision we're not going to make it. So open our eyes to the kingdom of God. Show us that these are light afflictions that work in us for that eternal glory. And we will thank You and we will praise You, in Jesus' name. Amen.