

**NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- Sunday 12th January 2025 am**  
**TITLE: "God's power in human weakness" TEXT: 2 Corinthians 3:17-4:12**  
**Scripture references from the ESV**

*2 Corinthians 3:17-4:12 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

*4 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. <sup>2</sup> But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practise cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. <sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. <sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. <sup>8</sup> We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; <sup>10</sup> always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> So death is at work in us, but life in you.*

Every day we are confronted with our weakness as human beings. We imagine we are strong, but then something happens that shows us to be weak. There might be a bully in our social circle, an unexpected bill, an illness or just a job around the house that is too big for us.

Why do we have to find ourselves exposed to situations that expose our weaknesses?

- Human weakness, including our own, is necessary to show that the only power in the universe belongs to God and not to us (v7 above)

Depending on whether or not we know God, this verse and the implication of it will either be devastating for our human pride or full of comfort for our human weakness.

To see this, we need to consider three things.

1. **Our weakness.** Paul uses a metaphor when he says we have **this treasure in jars of clay**. These jars were commonplace items, used for storing food and drink.

They were easily broken, and easily replaced, in the same way that we would use cheap expendable containers like take away containers or plastic bottles.

**This metaphor describes our human weakness.**

In Genesis, God tells Adam: **By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.**" (Gen 3:19). Just as the clay jars came up from the ground and then were broken up and buried in the ground, so we, as humans, come from the ground and will return to the ground at the end of a life of sweat and toil. The metaphor humbles us, reminding us of our human weakness, in:

- The aging process that results in the decay of our mind and bodies
- The sickness we have to battle on a daily basis
- The afflictions that hit us and deplete us of energy
- The problems we face that leave us bewildered
- The hostility from people around us that leave us feeling forsaken
- The times we are knocked down by circumstances

We do not like to think of ourselves like this. we prefer to think we are invincible, but then affliction comes in some form and we realise that we are not invincible, but rather we are very weak.

- Affliction exposes our weakness

However, if we are believers in Christ, we do not despair. We might be frail, weak transitory mortals, but we hold within us a **treasure** of infinite worth (v7).

**That treasure is not diminished by human weakness but gives meaning and significance to us in our weakness.**

2. **Our treasure (vv6-7).** The treasure within us is **the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.** This is not the knowledge of factual information about Jesus. Many people know the facts of the gospel intellectually, and can tell you all about Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The gospel message has been proclaimed to them with clarity, and they have an intellectual understanding of what Jesus' death has accomplished. Yet a terrible satanic blindness still lies over their heart. There is a veil that stops them from seeing (vv3-4). It does not stop them from seeing the facts, but what they cannot see is:

## **The glory of God as it is revealed in the gospel of Christ.**

To see that means looking beyond the facts to see the person the facts point to:

- To see Jesus in all his glory as the eternal God
- To see Jesus as desirable above everything else
- To see Jesus as more beautiful than anything else
- To see Jesus as the greatest treasure in the world

In this, we experience the ultimate reason for which we were created. Knowing God in the person of his Son is the very essence of eternal life. It is the reason Jesus came to sacrifice his own life on the cross.

If God has shone the light of this glory into your heart, then

**Although you are a clay jar, what you contain is treasure**

**You have Christ dwelling in you**

**3. Our strength (v7).** God puts treasure in jars of clay to show that **the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.** The theme of this letter is:

**God's power at work through human weakness**

When Paul asked God to remove a painful affliction that was exposing his human weakness, God's response was **"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."** (2 Cor 12:9).

**God triumphs amid human weakness**

We do not become powerful. We remain weak, and in fact, the deeper we go with Christ, the weaker we will feel. We are, and will always remain, clay jars. However,

**God works in and through our weakness**

**to accomplish his purposes for his glory and our good.**

This power is God's surpassing power – a power that surpasses our human weakness.

- It is the greatness of his creative power (v6).

The power of God to speak light into existence is the same power that shines the glory of Christ into our hearts. The God who spoke the stars into being is at work with the same creative power in our lives.

- It is the greatness of his resurrection power (v14).

None of us can bring a dead person back to life, but God can. He has proved this by raising Jesus to life in a resurrection body.

In our human weakness, Paul wants us to know that God's power is at work to strengthen us. His surpassing power is able to overcome all our human weakness to accomplish his purposes.

**God is not limited by our weakness.**

**It is God's opportunity to display his great power.**

**What does God's power achieve in us?** Paul highlights four things.

- a) **God's power overcomes our spiritual blindness.** Paul wants to show us why he does not lose heart in ministry, even though many are not responding to the gospel. He and the other apostles have preached the gospel truthfully and accurately (v2), but not everyone could see the glory of Christ in it (vv3-6).
- Paul did not lose heart, even though there was not much to show for his ministry, because he had a healthy confidence in God's sovereign power to save.

Satan has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the glory of Christ, and that is the condition we are all born into. We heard the gospel preached, and we might have understood it intellectually, but we saw no beauty or glory in it and we could not see Jesus as being more desirable than anything in this world, whether good or bad. The fault was not in the preaching but lay with Satan.

Then, with a word of creative power, God shone into our hearts and everything made sense. We found our hearts being drawn to Christ, seeing a beauty in him so that we said yes to him and handed over our lives.

**This was God's surpassing power to overcome the weakness of our spiritual blindness**

- b) **God's power sustains us in our afflictions (vv8-9).** God's power continues to operate in our lives as we can see from how Paul speaks about his afflictions.

Why can we go through such hard times and not be crushed under the weight of it or lose heart, but instead experience God's presence and keep going?

**It is because God's creative and resurrecting power is at work in us to sustain us.**

We might feel that the current affliction is more than we can deal with **but** in our weakness, our uncertainty over whether we can survive, our feelings of abandonment and our sense of being knocked out

**We can know that it is almighty God who is strengthening us**

c) **God's power displays the beauty of Christ in us (vv10-11).** We carry the death of Jesus in the body so that the beauty of Christ's life might be seen in us.

**The affliction we face not only reveals our human weakness but also makes known the beauty of Christ in our lives.**

God's purpose is to form Christ in us and affliction is the main way he does it. Why is it this way?

**Christ's life is a life of beauty in the midst of the worst possible affliction.**

The gospel message is a message of Christ suffering on our behalf. He suffered separation from his Father, a separation that will be yours for eternity if you are not trusting in Christ. After suffering, glory came.

There needs to be a visible demonstration on earth of the suffering of Christ, and that is seen in us but only as we look to Jesus Christ. The people who most display the beauty of Christ are those who have not only experienced affliction but have also looked to Christ to sustain them.

- They have submitted to the affliction, and trusted God in it, standing on his promises
- They have been sustained by God through it and shaped by God to become like Christ.

d) **God's power will raise us from the grave (vv13-15).** The next sermon will cover this.

Taking all this into account, there is a question to answer.

How do we know we have this treasure? How can we be sure that we have truly seen the glory of Christ and do not just have an intellectual knowledge?

**We will know because we will be glad and rejoice that Christ is being glorified in our affliction.**

Our weakness is being exposed through affliction, and at the same time:

- we experience Christ strengthening us and changing us. Thus **we receive good** from it.
- Christ is being exalted in our affliction as he sustains us. Thus **he receives glory**.

When we can rejoice in our weakness and affliction because Christ is being exalted, then we can have

confidence that we have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and we do have this treasure of Christ

in the clay jars of our mortal flesh.

- Is this possible for us? We can see that Paul achieved it. When he asked to have his affliction removed, God's response was to say: **My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9)**. Paul had to learn that God's power was displayed in his weakness, and that God was glorified in his suffering. He was able to respond: **Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me (12:9)**.
- Why could Paul say that? He had seen the glory of Christ. He could boast in his weakness because he knows that, not only is Christ sustaining him, but Christ is exalted in Paul's mortal life.

We are not Paul, but this is possible for us. It happens when:

- We have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and continue to seek his glory in the gospel every single day
- We embrace our human weakness, instead of trying to always be strong and sort things out ourselves
- We trust in Christ's strength to open our blind eyes to his glory and sustain us in our suffering, revealing himself through us.

**It is what happens when we daily place ourselves in the hands of Jesus  
and trust him with our lives.**

- Take time to consider something that is overwhelming you right now and lift it up to the Lord in prayer.

There is hope in every trial for I can trust the Lord  
He will turn my heart towards Him  
And help me bear the thorn  
So in faith I follow Jesus on the road not understood  
For I know that He is working  
For His glory and my good

To our God be the glory  
To our God be praise  
He alone, the name above all names  
I will boast ever only in the Lord my God  
For I know  
His glory is my good

His glory and my good: City Alight.

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