



TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY

This week's text – 2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Sermon ideas

God's eternal glory in us is revealed through life's momentary afflictions.

1. This light momentary affliction reveals the weakness of our humanity

Additional Text: Job 10:9 & Isaiah 64:8

Paul compares the weakness of our humanity to being like jars of clay. Clay vessels only take on the form that the potter fashions. Clay is weak in itself but can be made into something useful and beautiful for the potter's own use. In the same way, we are made by God, to be used by him for his purposes. We do not get to choose our shape or form. We are his, and our entire purpose and identity are wrapped up in him as our creator, and we are entirely dependent on him for everything. When we feel as though we have control, we are only being deceived, forgetting who we are.

Our sin has added to our weakness, but it is not the root of it. We were designed for dependence. In the Garden, Adam and Eve were created by God, in his image to reflect him. But they were not made to be "gods" themselves. Their position, as the pinnacle of creation, was to rule and reign on the earth, under God's rule and reign. They were to live under his instruction, which would have brought about their flourishing. They were never designed to live independently from their creator. They were designed to be dependent on him. Their human limits were by God's design, and for their good.

For us to be "fully human", we need to rest in our human weakness by depending fully on God. Paul genuinely understood this, which is why, in suffering, he was even more aware of his need to depend on God. Suffering reminded him of how weak his humanity was, and that it was God alone who would sustain him. This didn't shrink his faith in God, it illuminated it. His human weakness made God's power and ability that much clearer in his eyes. This is why he could honestly say that God's glory/power is made evident through our suffering.

2. This light momentary affliction reveals the life of Jesus in us

Paul suffered in every possible way. He was physically assaulted, at times desperately hungry, he was bitten by a deadly snake and had been shipwrecked. But in addition to his physical suffering, he suffered emotionally too by being betrayed deeply by people he loved. They gossiped about him, slandered his name, distrusted him and looked down on him. He was often alone and hurt, and at times he almost despaired from the chaos he was subjected to. There are few of us who will ever taste even a fraction of the pain he suffered. Yet he never once stopped following Jesus or carrying out his mission.



Igniting our missional impulse

A study in the book of 2 Corinthians



Our response to Paul's endurance is to believe that somehow, he was "super-human" or that he had a special ability that we do not have. But this is not true. What he had, was a deep revelation of who Jesus Christ was. Jesus walked a path of pain, rejection, suffering and persecution, and Paul was willing to do the same. In Paul's absolute trust and obedience in suffering, God was able to do the most remarkable work in Paul's heart and life.

Suffering then, in a sense, deletes/erodes our human desires and independence, allowing God to fill those spaces, and in so doing, he gives us life like we have never tasted or seen before (Psalm 34:8). The problem is, that instead of trusting the process and yielding to it, so that we can be filled with the life of God, we run away from suffering, and hide in any place of comfort that is offered to us. As we do that, we stop the very life that God is wanting to gift to us. The way to yield to God is by giving our lives fully over to him. In our suffering, we surrender to him. Surrender is one of the most powerful and liberating acts of obedience, in the midst of suffering. It allows us to acknowledge and live in the reality, that we are the clay and he is the potter.

3. This light momentary affliction gives way to God's eternal glory

Our future inheritance is to be in the presence of God for the rest of eternity. Every element of human suffering, along with Satan's evil plans for us, will be eradicated once and for all. As Christians, our future is glorious: we will be restored, healed and whole, changed and new. We will experience joy every moment of every day and never fear again. If we really grasped hold of this as a reality, we would be able to endure suffering differently. Our perspective on it would change, and we would endure hardship without it ripping apart our faith and joy.

As we hold fast to our eternal glory, and surrender to God in our suffering, trusting and obeying him, he will use us to speak of his goodness and grace to others, which will give him glory.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think God made human beings in such a way that they would always be dependent on him for life, breath and everything else? (Acts 17:25).
2. Why does Paul say that our human weakness shows the power of God? (2 Corinthians 12:9).
3. In your own life, what area of human weakness has God used to show his power and glory? Explain how.
4. How does suffering create space for God's life and light to grow in us?
5. What response to suffering is needed in order to allow God to do this work in us?
6. What area of suffering is God asking you to surrender to him, so that he can fill you with himself more? What is holding you back from doing so, and what truth do you need to hold on to, so that you can fully trust and obey him in this area of your life?

