

STRENGTH THROUGH WEAKNESS

2 CORINTHIANS 4:7-12

LIFE THROUGH DEATH



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

DAVID MURRAY
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INTRODUCTION

It's easy to lose heart in the Christian life. We get discouraged by ourselves. We see so much unbelief, sin, weakness, inconsistency. We see so little holiness or fruitfulness. We see a lot pain but not a lot of pleasure. We lose heart at the lack of spiritual progress for all the effort we put in.

We get discouraged by others: Christians and non-Christians. We get discouraged by lack of spiritual interest in our families, and by the amount of spiritual opposition in our workplace, media, politics, etc. We lose heart at the power of spiritual opposition in the face of our weakness.

How can we gain heart rather than lose heart? That's what Paul helps us with in 2 Corinthians 4 (see verses 1 & 16).

BACKGROUND

We do not lose heart, first, because of the light-giving transformative power of the Gospel (1-6).

Second, we do not lose heart because our weakness is the platform for Christ's power (7-12).

Third, we do not lose heart because powerful resurrection is ahead for us (13-15).

Fourth, we do not lose heart because God is renewing us spiritually even while we are dying physically (16).

Fifth, we do not lose heart because God is preparing incomparable eternal compensation for us (17).



How does God's power increase as our weakness increases?



1. WE HAVE GOSPEL TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY (7)

We are jars of clay. "But we have this treasure in jars of clay..." (7). Jars of clay were that culture's equivalent of water bottles, styrofoam, plastic bags. They were disposable, throwaways, expendable. They were weak, fragile, cheap, replaceable. They were used to store and transport cheap food and drink. It's the last container you would ever use to transport something valuable.

We carry Gospel treasure. Paul has been spotlighting the beauty and value of the Gospel, especially its power to save and sanctify. Its worth is measured by its divine source and its power to create and re-create. There is a vast chasm and a stark contrast between the container and what's in it. The jar could not be cheaper or weaker. The treasure could not be worth more or do more.

2. WE HAVE POWER FROM GOD NOT OURSELVES (7-9)

To show the power is not from us. "...to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. (7)." This weak fragile jar is attacked and assailed on every side and yet it survives and endures (8-9). As one commentator put it: squeezed but not squashed; bewildered but not befuddled; pursued but not abandoned; knocked down but not knocked out. Onlookers see the fragility of the jar and the ferocity of the assault and can only observe: "It's not the strength of the jar. It's not the jar."

To show the power is from God. The only conclusion people can reach is that the jar is being sustained by divine power. The weaker the jar the more it shows God's power in its effects.

3. WE SHOW JESUS' LIFE IN OUR DYING (10-12)

We are dying to show Jesus' life. "Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies" (10). We are being treated like Jesus was (hated, attacked, despised, mistreated, falsely accused, mocked, etc.) and therefore we are dying like Jesus did. But, by suffering and dying like this, our bodies are a screen for the passion of Christ.

We embody Jesus' death to show Jesus's life. "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" (11).

Death works in us so that Jesus' life works in you. "So death is at work in us, but life in you" (12). Although we are suffering and dying like Jesus, its effect is bringing Jesus' life to others.



CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Embrace your clay. We're often tempted to hide our weakness and fragility. We cover our cracks and chips. We fill our holes and paint over our blemishes. We put on a good face and hide our real face. But we're faced with reality here. We are clay pots at best. So let's just admit it. Let's be open about our weakness. The church should be of all places the place where clay pots can simply be clay pots.

WEAKNESS IS NOT A WASTE OF LIFE
BUT A WAY OF LIFE.

Exhibit the treasure. The more of our clay people see, the more of Christ's treasure they will see. Presenting a good face hides Christ's face. Our pretended perfection hides Christ's perfect perfection. Let our whole lives be about showing the transformative treasure of the Gospel to as many as possible. Our main question should not be "What will people think of me?" but "How can I get people to think about Christ." It's not "How can I show my power/success/wealth/wisdom?" But how can I show Christ's power/success/wealth/ wisdom?" As John MacArthur put it, "The weakness of the preacher is not fatal to Gospel preaching; it is essential to it."

EMBRACE YOUR CLAY
TO EXHIBIT THE TREASURE

Never confuse the clay with the treasure. Never ascribe to the clay (your clay or others' clay) what belongs only to the treasure. As soon as we do that, we lose the treasure and the power. Never ascribe power to a pastor, a church, a program, etc. That's one guaranteed way to smear the treasure with clay or have the clay taken away altogether. When it becomes about the clay, the clay has outlived its purpose.

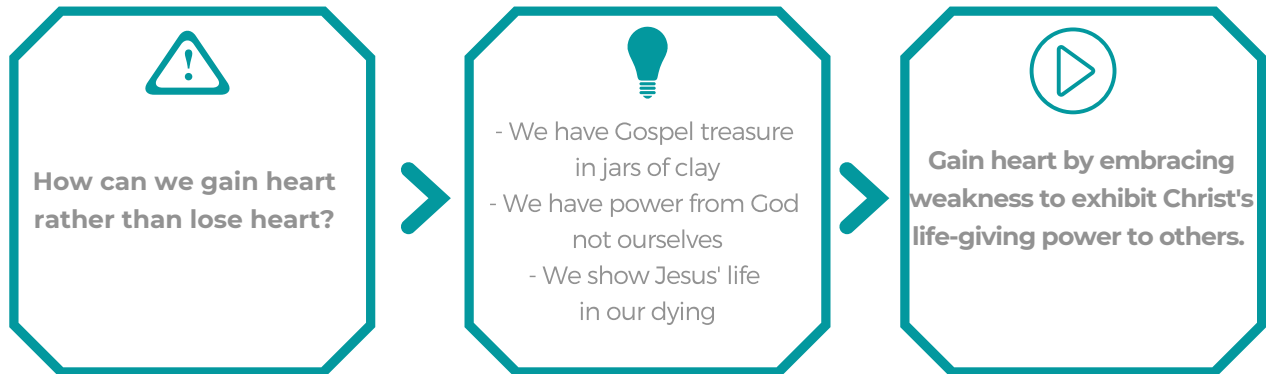
MIX UP CLAY WITH TREASURE AND
YOU'LL MISS THE TREASURE AND THE CLAY.

Encourage your heart. When disheartened by losses we're tempted to give in and give up, and conclude God has given up on us too. But here the Apostle gives us a new frame with which to view our losses in a much more encouraging way. "This is agonizing, this is indescribably painful, this is the weakest I've ever felt, but I am being used of God in a way that I never could have been when strong and painless." I'm not only learning about Christ's suffering for my salvation, I'm showing his suffering for others' salvation. Therefore I do not lose heart.

WE NEED NOT LOSE HEART
EVEN IF WE LOSE EVERYTHING ELSE



SUMMARY



PRAYER: My Comforter, encourage my heart by using my weak clay to show your treasure in life-giving ways.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What makes you lose heart?
2. How can you show your clay more?
3. What's your favorite jewel in the Gospel's treasure?
4. What area of loss can you transform with this passage?
5. How can you stop clay getting attention and affection that belongs only to treasure?
6. Who has God used as a clay jar to bring his life-giving Gospel to you?

First Byron Christian Reformed Church
8541 Byron Center Ave SW, Byron Center, MI 49315
Phone: (616) 878-9768
www.firstbyroncrc.org

Pastor David Murray
www.HeadHeartHand.org
www.livingthebible.net

