**TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY**

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

Key Verse 7

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”

**Introduction**



In this passage, Paul calls the gospel as the treasure in the jars of clay. Apostle Paul tells us that nothing should hinder the gospel ministry because we received God’s calling by the mercy of God. I pray that we have a victorious and fruitful life by fixing our eyes on the glory of the gospel. Let’s think about God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ through this passage.

1. Read verses 1-6. What attitude did Paul have as he carried out the ministry of the new covenant? (1-2) Why is the gospel veiled to unbelievers? (3-4) Who was the focus of Paul's message? (5) How does God’s light shine in the hearts of believers? (6)

1-1, Read verses 1-6.

Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. **2** Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. **3** And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. **4** The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. **5** For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. **6** For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,”[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+4&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28866a)] made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.

1-2, What attitude did Paul have as he carried out the ministry of the new covenant? (1-2)

***Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.***

* Here “this ministry” refers to the ministry of the Spirit in chapter 3:8. The covenant of law represented by Moses brought death and condemnation and the covenant of grace represented by Jesus brought life.
* This ministry brought justification and forgiveness and eternal life by the Holy Spirit. We have this ministry not by Bible teachers’ demand. Rather, we received this ministry of the gospel through God’s mercy.
* Apostle Paul used to persecute those who believed Jesus. But by the mercy of Jesus he became a fruitful and powerful missionary for the Gentiles.
* So he did not lose heart though he faced hardship and trials of many kinds. Jesus strengthened him to serve the gospel work whenever he was tired and exhausted.
* We have no reason or time to lose heart when we remember God’s mercy given to us. We lose heart when we look at our situation(no sheep).
* We do not lose heart as long as we remember our first love because we never repay God’s love we received.

***2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.***

* The gospel ministry is not like the worldly business or political campaign. It is a non-profit ministry. There should be no shameful secret agenda, no distortion, and no deception.
* Honesty, transparency, purity, and straight talk are the backbone of the gospel ministry. Most of all, the gospel workers must serve sheep with clear conscience before God.
* We must serve the gospel ministry with humility and love. No one should seek personal profit through the gospel. We received freely and we should serve freely.
* Apostle Paul set a good example. “Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.” 2 Corinthians 2:17.

1-3, Why is the gospel veiled to unbelievers? (3-4)

***And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.***

* There are two kinds of people in the gospel ministry-those who are perishing and those who are being saved.
* Jesus predicted that only good soil like people will accept the gospel in Mark 4. Three other soils will fail to do so.
* It is because the god of this age blinds the minds of unbelievers. Like birds, Satan keeps eating the word of God whenever opportunity comes.
* *What can be the god of this age or this word?* They can be money, pleasures, drinking, drugs, idols, and so on.
* *What does Satan blind them from seeing?* It is the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ. This is an exact description of the gospel. Christ is the image and the very nature of God. (Hebrews 1:3)
* We cannot go to God due to our sins. So God came to us to display his glory through Jesus Christ. Seeing Jesus is seeing the glory of God.
* The gospel sets us free from the power of sin and death. So Satan blinded unbelievers to see only the visible glory of the world, like wealth, fame and power.
* To the perishing people, the gospel is foolishness and non-sense. So they reject it and remain in darkness.
* But it is the power of God and salvation for those who are saved. (1Co 1:18,24) We do not lose heart because our gospel ministry transforms people from cursed life into a blessed life. Praise God!

1-4, Who was the focus of Paul's message? (5)

***5 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.***

* Paul preached Jesus Christ as Lord. Why is it important to accept Jesus Christ as Lord? The Jews called God “Lord.” Therefore what we accept Jesus as Lord means that we accept him as God.
* Jesus is the visible revelation of the invisible God. He said in Jn 14:9: “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” In order to know God, we must look to Jesus.
* Also Jesus is Christ. Christ means the promised Messiah, the One anointed of God to be our Savior. He is not just one of many ways of salvation.
* We are gospel workers and God’s servants to reveal who Jesus truly is. The focus of our message should be Jesus Christ. When we preach this message, God shines his light into people's hearts.

1-5, How does God’s light shine in the hearts of believers? (6)

***For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.***

* God recreates people through the gospel. When God created the universe, the earth was dark and empty and chaotic. God said, “Let there be light.”(Ge 1:3)
* Light then drove out darkness and revealed the beauty of God’s creation and sustained life. (Jn 1:4)
* Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.” (John 8:12) When we accept Jesus as the light of the world, we can see the glory of God with our spiritual eyes.
* Jesus also healed a man born blind in Jn 9. The blind man confessed, “Once I was blind, but now I see.” Jesus opened his eyes to see the glory of God.
* The word of God came to each of us like Californian sunshine and helped us to see the glorious kingdom of God. God called us to serve the gospel ministry.

***the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.***

* Apostle John testified, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (Jn 1:14)
* The face of Christ does not mean the physical face of Jesus. Rather, it refers to the character of Jesus and his ministry.
* Though Jesus suffered to save sinners from their sins, he is God himself. He is holy, eternal, humble, loving, righteous, serving, sacrificial, and pure in his character.
* He came into this world to serve sinners by giving his life as a ransom for many. He died on the cross to demonstrate God’s love for all fallen men.
* When Jesus offered His high priest prayer in John 17, God pointed out that Jesus’ sacrificial life glorified God.

1. Read verses 7-12. Why did God put this treasure (light) in jars of clay? (7) How was God’s surpassing power revealed in Paul's practical life? (8-9) Why did Paul always carry, in his body, the death of Jesus? (10-12)

2-1, Read verses 7-12.

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. **8** We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;**9** persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. **10** We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. **11** For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. **12** So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

2-2, Why did God put this treasure (light) in jars of clay? (7)

***But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.***

* Here “the jars of clay’ refers to our weak body. Our body is weak like clay pots. It is not reliable.
* This treasure refers to the gospel or this ministry of the gospel. Usually people have treasure in a fancy treasure box as we see in the jewelry store. But God chose the jars of clay to display the gospel of Jesus.
* God chose humble, weak people to convey His glorious gospel to the world. God did this so that His all-surpassing power may be manifested through our weakness.
* So we shouldn’t lose heart because of our weaknesses. We can do God’s work not by our ability, but by God’s surpassing power.
* Apostle Paul had a thorn in flesh. So he prayed to God to remove the thorn. But God answered no.

2 Co 12:9 reads,

“But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me”

* Jesus chose humble fishermen of Galilee as his jars of clay to have the gospel treasure. Peter, John, and James became Jesus’ top disciples. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.
* This is God’s ultimate wisdom to use the weak vessel to proclaim the treasure the gospel of Jesus Christ.
* When Saint Augustine found treasure in the gospel of Jesus, he gave up his professor job, his pleasure-seeking life, and his property. Then he served God for his entire life defending Christianity from false teachers.
* In the same way God chose the lump clay like us to carry the treasure of the gospel missionary in the 21st century in the metropolitan city Los Angeles.
* Praise God who using us to carry the glorious gospel of Jesus to students in LBCC and CSULB and other campuses surrounding us. Praise God who chose us to serve Africa and the world campus mission. Amen!

2-3, How was God’s surpassing power revealed in Paul's practical life? (8-9)

***We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.***

* As Apostle Paul carried out the glorious message of the gospel, his life was not that easy because he confronted many hardships and sufferings.
* This is a true picture of God’s servants when they serve the gospel ministry. God will not allow us to be crushed. “Perplexed”, “but not in despair.”
* Sometimes we do not understand why some things are happening in our life. But God does not allow us to despair. He give us strength to carry out his mission.
* Paul was imprisoned, flogged, and was exposed to death again and again. He was in danger of bandits, persecutors and natural disasters.
* But God did not allow him to be destroyed. God is Almighty eternal God and did not allow his servants to be destroyed. If God called us for his gospel ministry, he also provides means to carry out the gospel mission.
* We do not worry about life but seek his kingdom and righteous with faith in God. Then God will provide everything we need so that we may display the glory of the gospel of Jesus.

2-4, Why did Paul always carry, in his body, the death of Jesus? (10-12)

***10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.***

* Paul always carried around in his body “the death of Jesus.” Here “death of Jesus” means Jesus’ self-denial and suffering to fulfill God’s will for world salvation.
* He is saying that not only was the death of Jesus a historical fact, but it was also a spiritual reality in his life.
* We know how painful it was for Jesus to endure the cross shedding all his blood. It was unbearable pain and shame and suffering to our dear Jesus.
* Paul saw that through Jesus’ self-denial and sufferings, Christ’s life and His glory were displayed.
* God made Paul more effective in ministry through his suffering. Paul himself really wanted to know Christ and His glory by participating in His sufferings.

Philippians 3:10-11 reads,

“I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.”

* When Paul shared the gospel with people by imitating Jesus, the Lord manifested His life in them also. Here we learn that the work of giving life requires life-giving sacrifice.

1. Read verses 13-18. Why was Paul confident about living a victorious life? (13-14) What were the outcomes of Paul's believing life? (15) What perspective should we have despite our momentary troubles in serving the gospel? (16-18)

3-1, Read verses 13-18.

**13** It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+4&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28873b)] Since we have that same spirit of[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+4&version=NIV#fen-NIV-28873c)] faith, we also believe and therefore speak, **14** because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. **15** All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

**16** Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. **17** For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. **18** So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

3-2, Why was Paul confident about living a victorious life? (13-14)

***It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself.***

* As Abel still speaks after being killed by Cain, faith creates the testimony in eternity! Now Paul wasn't hesitant to speak about it!
* We speak because we believed Jesus. Without believing we cannot speak. Also we speak because we have resurrection faith in Jesus.
* Since Christ conquered death and He will also raise us in His glory, we have nothing to fear.
* Again Paul’s secrets as to how to live a victorious life were from his faith in the word of God and from his faith in the resurrection of Christ.
* We learn that even though we are hard pressed on every side and confront harsh difficulties every day, we must believe in God and speak the word of God boldly.
* Also we must believe in the Risen Christ. Then we can find power to preach the gospel boldly and to raise disciples of Jesus in any situation.

3-3, What were the outcomes of Paul's believing life? (15)

***15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.***

* This was the immediate goal of Paul's ministry. His heart was to serve the Corinthian Christians and the Christians in other cities.
* But his ministry also had an ultimate goal, that it may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God. Ultimately, Paul was motivated by the glory of God.

3-4, What perspective should we have despite our momentary troubles in serving the gospel? (16-18)

***Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.***

* Outwardly we are wasting away. We are getting old. This is a reality to all of us. But inwardly we are being renewed day by day. There is no greater joy for us than being renewed in Christ’s character.
* Our relationship with Jesus is getting sweeter and sweeter as the years go by. Our outward man is breaking away(wear and tear) here and there, but our inward man is getting closer to the image of Christ.
* We are becoming mature Christians as we grow older. This happens as we follow Jesus’ footsteps as the Apostle Paul did.

2 Corinthians 3:18 reads,

“And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

* As we reflect the glory of Jesus as a mirror day and night, we will see the beauties of Christ and we will become like him. As we know Christ’s glory more and more, we are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory.
* Because even the worst of it, by the measure(perspective) of eternity, is but for a moment. In fact, most of our troubles come and go.
* Furthermore we do not lose heart although troubles come and go. All our trouble will be gone when we see Christ, the glory of God. Our present suffering cannot be compared the eternal glory we will see in the kingdom of God.
* The things of this world are all temporal and will wither like the flowers in the fields. But Jesus is eternal and lives forever.
* Therefore we have to fix our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Our eyes are very sensitive. We observe all things through our eyes.
* Today, we live in the materialistic, pleasure-seeking generation. Many things attract our eyes. So it is easy for us to fix our eyes on the glittering things of this world which seem to make us to be wise and proud.
* But we must fix our eyes on unseen spiritual blessings. We must fix our eyes on Jesus who completed the gospel ministry overcoming scorn and shame and suffering and now sat down at the right hand of God.
* Paul was saying this especially about his own life and ministry. In the world's eyes, Paul's life was an incredible failure. At the height of a career as a successful missionary for the Gentiles, he left it all for a life of hardship, suffering and persecution, with eventual martyrdom. But Paul recognized that the world only sees the outward, not the unseen eternal things.
* When we look at the things which are seen, all we see is our light affliction, and it doesn't look very light then! But when we look at the things which are not seen, then we see and appreciate the eternal weight of glory.

**Conclusion**

“Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.” May the Lord help us to see His glory daily so that we may bring His glorious light to many as His gospel workers. Amen.

**One word: Treasure in jars of clay**