

“Connected in Glory”

2 Corinthians 4:5-15

September 17, 2017

Last week we saw in chapter 3 that the Lord has given us, his people, incredible gifts: new hearts that are alive toward him, new power at work within us, a transformed life to begin to be shaped into family resemblance with him. Amazing gifts have been offered.

But how those new gifts appear may not match our expectations. With all this divine life and light within us, this Spirit producing change in us, how is life supposed to look now? What can I expect from my new life in Christ?

⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. ⁶ 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.

⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹ 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. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.

¹⁶ So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

Is it worth it? Do you ever ask that question? I mean living as a Christian is difficult. Saying I’m a Christian is easy; having my life conformed to be like Jesus is an entirely different matter. All the self-denial Jesus call us to, living a life of love in the face of hostility, becoming a person for the truth in a world that often longs for the comfort of half-truths: this is hard. Might it not be easier simply to live a comfortable life planning for an easy retirement as a capstone of blessing. Keeping my head down, laboring to be comfortable seems like that may be worth it. But actively pursuing a life for Christ is much harder. Is it worth it?

It depends. Depends on what? What we count as glory. Glory is hard to define, but let’s try this. We all live in such a way that *something* is counted as the most important, weighty, or radiant thing in all the world.¹ That thing becomes what gives our lives substance, or gravity and becomes that which we live for or pursue. Having or the possibility of having that thing gives us the sense of life being “worth it.”

So, does the Christian life seem worth it? Is the **glory** enough?

It is not wrong to enjoy the glory of created things. But, if either having or pursuing a thing becomes your glory, if it begins to give your life meaning and purpose, if some thing lends to you a sense of satisfaction such that if I have _____, my life is worth living, then that glory has become your god. And the glory of created gods will never ultimately satisfy. Not the glory of a respectable job or place in the community. Not the glory of many friends. Not the glory of comfortable house. Not the glory of being the smart person in the class. No created thing will lend honor and weight, glory, to your life.

By way of tremendous contrast, Paul in our text spoke of a different glory. He wrote of it in chapter 3 and again in 4, where we see in v. 6, *God has shone in our hearts to give the light and knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*. Using creation language from Genesis, “Let light shine out of darkness”, the Lord has shone his light into our dark and dead hearts. What did shine light to do? Give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, *in the face of Jesus Christ*.

Into dead and dark hearts, like ours, God shines light of his glory—, weight, splendor, honor; he, by his Spirit, puts that in our hearts. But it is the glory in the face of Jesus Christ. He used Jesus’s name AND his role, Christ, anointed one

¹ Thaddeus J. Williams, *Relflect* (Wooster, OH: Weaver Books, 2017), p. 9.

who was sacrificed on the cross for sinners like us. Begin to put the ideas together, the glory—weight, honor, splendor—of the God who was crucified. Wait. That doesn't fit. Glory conquers; glory wins; glory is supposed to make everything work out just right. But the glory God shares with us is the glory we see in the cross and resurrection! Glory we experience come in a package and in a form we may not expect to look. The glory of a crucified God!

With that upside down glory of Jesus in his mind, he turns to us in v. 7, we have this treasure (glory of God) in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. Again, this is incongruous! Treasure in jars of clay—no one does this! Jars of clay were earthen pots that were common and disposable. They were disposable not because they were worthless, but instead fragile, shattered easily. When they broke, you just got a new one. But you DIDN'T put your treasure, most prized possessions, in a jar of clay because they weren't strong enough to protect it. You don't put your glory in a fragile vessel.

In our world, we put treasure in steel boxes, in vaults, something solid. But God, places his treasure, his glory and weight of relationship with him, in fragile, likely to shatter vessels. Why? So people aren't enamored with the power of the vessel, but by the power of the treasure inside: God gives us the gift of himself within us, and that is the glory, the significance, that gives our lives meaning.

He places his gift of his glory within so that his life shines forth in our lives, even when we begin to crack and struggle, so that through us the world experiences his power and life! When we can't figure it out, when we are afraid, when we feel overwhelmed, the presence of the Lord by his Spirit within us becomes the weight, the glory, of our lives.

Is it worth it? Yes, and we see that yes in a few places. It is worth it because we see God's

1. Glory when we struggle

What did Paul experience?

Afflicted in every way, but not crushed, v. 8. The word afflicted has the sense of being squeezed. So he's saying they are squeezed, but not shattered. That's hard to do with a fragile clay pot. They are perplexed but not driven to despair. How honest—perplexed means despondent, or maybe bewildered. Maybe you've felt that recently. Broken and despondent, Lord how could this be happening to me? But not driven to despair of lost in hopelessness. V. 9, persecuted but not forsaken, that is pursued, even hunted down, but not abandoned. Christ was forsaken on the cross so that we NEVER experience that. . . even when we feel hunted down, God never abandons us. Struck down, but not destroyed. Struck down is a word used for when someone uses weapons against you, as Paul experienced. We'll see in chapters 6 and 11. He was stoned, he was whipped just shy of death five times, he was left for dead to rot outside the city, we see in Acts 14. All these things, struck down, but not knocked out.

I love Rocky, don't you. No matter what you did to Rocky, he always got up. Beat to a pulp by Appolo Creed or Clubber Lang, he always got up. Then, the Russian guy when he said, "I must break you!" we knew it just wasn't gonna happen. Rocky could get up from anything. And now he's in his 70s and still going! He always gets up. And we love him for it. Struck down but not knocked out. As I was studying this passage I thought a lot about Rocky.

Rocky trained and worked hard. I always wanted abs like Rocky to take the body blows. He ran and ran. He beat up sides of beef, I guess to make his hands tough. . . I never was sure what the purpose of those scenes were. But Rocky trained so he could handle it; he strengthened his body to make it better able to withstand the fight. But thinking of Rocky is exactly missing the point!

Paul is saying something just the opposite. He is not suggesting the vessel gets stronger with training. The earthen vessel, jar of clay *remains fragile*. The point is that v. 10, we are carrying in the body the death (ongoing sense, better deadness) of Jesus, so that the life (the living) of Jesus may also be manifested. He is not saying that if we acknowledge our weakness, we get more powerful. He is saying that the life of Christ, within us by the Spirit, is a new power that can be seen in the cracks and distresses of our lives.

That is so counter-cultural and antithetical to how we usually think. At times we believe that we submit to the Lord to get better: illnesses to go away, poverty and distress to go away; problems to go away. That's how we test to see if God is at work, by defeating our problems. That's the glory for life. I'll be satisfied when ____ problem is gone.

But the Christian hope is SO different. We are present tense, continually, carrying our lives the dying of Jesus, so that the living of Jesus may be seen and experienced in and through us. His light shines out through the cracks in our earthen vessel, fragile lives!

He calls us back to a cross-shaped life. Jesus suffered by taking our sin on himself. He stood in our place, was judged in our place, bore our sin. He died so that being united to him in death, we may be united to him in life, in his resurrection life. Jesus was raised from the dead and we are just several steps behind him.²

And that resurrection life is expressed in us right now that enables our lives to be kept afloat by his glory, his power in us EVEN when we are struggling and suffering. When the earthen vessel is pressured, showing its cracks is when the life of Jesus within us breaks through. **The light shines out through the cracks in our lives!**

This, I think, is what Paul means in v. 10 and v. 16. We carry the death of Jesus in our bodies so that the life of Jesus is made manifest, made visible, in our bodies. V. 16, We do not lose heart. Though the outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. Paul is not speaking here that the body is bad and goes away, and the spirit renewed. Instead, he intends for us to grasp that the inner man, the new man birthed by the Spirit and living in the power of the resurrection is what grows...even when the outer man is struggling. The jars, the earthen vessels, get squeezed, jostled, and cracked in this process of a fallen and broken world, and the life of Jesus is seen in the cracks, in how we suffer in hope.

One of the places I've witnessed this most in my life I think is in one of my heroes, my father-in-law Harvey. Three years ago he died after a battle with lung cancer. His earthen vessel was cracked, but wow, did we see the life of Christ in him. What I witnessed in his dying, was that the cancer was used by God to consume the old man, not his body per se, but the old man who sought to live without the Lord, who depended on himself, who worked hard to establish a glory, a reputation in his business. The cancer devoured that man. And in its place, the life of Christ shone, brilliantly. He was completely transformed by cancer, into a man whose faith in Christ was day by day becoming his glory.

The transformation shocked me one day on the telephone. Long story very short, two of his business partners were trying to steal his share of the business from him while he lay in the hospital. Horrible, callous, putrid. Ask me how I'm doing forgiving those men! But Harvey called me to talk with me about how as a Christian man he should respond to these knuckleheads. Cancer was trying to destroy his body, and these men were trying to destroy what he'd worked his entire adult life to produce and he wanted to know what Jesus would have him to do in LOVE for these two thieves. I could hardly believe my ears. Here was a man whose earthen vessel was shattering, and yet what came out was the glory of Christ! His faith was not a Rocky faith, pick myself up. His was a Holy Spirit faith that made him into what he was not before...and the suffering was the agent of transformation.

If you asked him, is the Christian faith worth it? He would answer "yes" not because of the business he built, but because when the business was crumbling, JESUS remained alive and at work. Sometimes it takes death to see life.

THAT friends is what we have to share with the world, a glory that will not fade when the things of this earth grow strangely dim.

When the Lord does something that doesn't make sense to you, leaves you in a circumstance or calls you into a new circumstance that makes no sense at all, leaving you feeling exposed and perplexed, ask the Spirit in you to remind you of his promise of life that has already begun today. And step in faith, knowing that IN your pressure, Jesus will shine in and through you.

Sometimes the blows in life keep on coming, and the life of the Spirit of God keeps on giving. When we want to give up, the Spirit in us doesn't quit! HE within us is our glory, and can be seen in the cracks.

Is it worth it? Yes. It is worth it not only because there is glory in the present struggle, but also in the future hope.

2. **Glory in future hope**

² Kent Hughes, *2 Corinthians*, Preach the Word Series, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), p. 97.

Look at v. 17, for this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. But to realize it we have to look at things we can't see, v. 18. We so easily set our eyes on the weight, the glory we can see: comfort, power, prestige, ease, upward mobility. But the Spirit's work is doing so much more. Don't believe the lie. Don't believe the lie that If I can't see it, it must not be.

Paul makes an incredible comparison here in v. 17. Looking at your life as a rope, on one end is now, and even when our suffering seems interminable, as Paul's 39 lashes five times, or being stoned, or shipwrecked, or beaten with rods—serious suffering—it is called light and momentary. Why? In light of the eternal weight of glory. If your life is the rope, the tiniest portion contains your suffering, compared to the eternal glory awaiting you...in part produced THROUGH your suffering, as God shapes us in his power through the suffering we endure. In comparison to the eternity awaiting us, my suffering today doesn't seem quite as dire. The math doesn't compute when trying to compare.

That future—that certainty of an eternal glory of face to face with Jesus--shapes how we respond to the present. Even in the wind and the storm the Spirit is alive and at work, moving, shaping you, never wasting a single thing. Is it worth feeling out of step with my friends today. In light of eternity...risking embarrassment with a neighbor, or even living on mission where you are or even overseas...in light of eternity? The deal seems like a fairly good one. Light and momentary vs an eternal weight of glory.

Is it worth it? It is if you Train your spiritual eyes on him, the bloody cross, the empty tomb and present Spirit.