

2 Corinthians 4

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[0 : 0 0] We see this. 2 Corinthians chapter 4. And I want us to look tonight at verse 16. 2 Corinthians 4, 16. We like to settle things, don't we?

! We like to settle things and arguments once and for all and forever. ! None of us find it easy to live with uncertainty and tension.

Whenever a decision is to be made, for example, however indecisive we might be by temperament, it is an enormous relief, isn't it, with some decisions to get them over and done with.

And so it is that some Christians seek and even claim that they've had some spiritual experience that relieves them of the necessity of growing further or further dependence on daily grace.

And my theme over this August has been that God calls us to live day by day by day. That is in Old Testament times.

[1 : 1 0] Do you remember? God provided a fresh supply of manna every day in the desert. And the manna had to be gathered every day. And none of it was to be kept overnight until tomorrow.

Because it bred worms and it stank. That's all in Exodus 16. And God made these rites go out day by day by day. They had to live day by day. And so God offers us fresh experiences of grace every day that you and I have to gather and receive.

And I think our failure to recognize that kind of elementary truth about biblical Christianity is a major cause of problems in the Christian church. Of complacency and therefore of spiritual slackness.

And even spiritual stagnation. And so for example isn't it? We often say to each other I don't know how I'd handle that. Sometimes people come to see me and they say well I don't feel ready to die. What's the answer to that? Well you're not dying yet here. Because God gives us grace day by day by day. And when you come to that moment, when you come to that day when you have great need, God will give you grace at that point.

[2 : 3 0] Now I don't want to be misunderstood. There are certain things that God has done once and for all and forever, wonderfully. Christ died for our sins, didn't he? Once and for all. He rose from the dead once and for all.

He's ascended into heaven and he has sent the Holy Spirit once and for all. God has established his covenant with us once and for all. And he's sealed it in our baptism.

Once and for all. God has adopted us into his family through Christ. He's made us his children. He's put his Holy Spirit within us once and for all.

But now he calls us to live as his children from day to day. Looking to him expectantly for the grace that we need.

We've seen, haven't we, that God daily bears us up. We've seen that God gives us daily mercies. We've seen that God daily provides for us.

[3 : 2 7] We've seen that God wants us to encourage each other every day to keep going. We've seen that God calls for daily repentance. We saw this morning that we are to worship God every day, day by day.

And so 2 Corinthians 4 verse 16. We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

I'm back in Wales tonight. I'm away next Sunday. I think we've got one more if I come back that we'll do the following week of the daily series. But just notice how the apostle begins this verse.

Look at verse 16. We do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. The old King James Version, it says, And we faint not.

We do not lose heart. And we know this is a real danger. The danger of discouragement. The danger of losing heart. Of opposition from enemies of the gospel.

[4 : 31] Opposition that may be cruel and fierce. We prayed about North Nigeria, don't we? Where that opposition takes a physical form. Where people are tortured and they are even killed for the faith.

That doesn't happen in our country. But there is opposition. There is widespread apathy. But more than that now, there is scorn, isn't there? Where Christians are dismissed and marginalized. Where the Christian faith is smeared. Or maybe the issue is the church. Which appears to be half-hearted and apathetic.

And blind even to the truth. The problem that Paul is referring to here. He speaks of the blindness of unbelievers. In the previous chapter.

The veil that is over their minds. And that is hugely discouraging, isn't it? Greatly discouraging. To those who are trying to teach them the gospel.

[5 : 30] And yet people cannot see. And there is a loneliness to the Christian life very often. And it is tiring. And it is very easy to become disheartened.

And we are tempted to throw in the towel in Christian ministry and give it all up. And so twice in this chapter. In verse 1. And then in verse 16. Paul repeats the same sentence.

He says, We refuse to become disheartened. We are of good heart. We refuse to throw in the towel. We refuse to lose heart.

And on the contrary. Although outwardly. Our outward nature is wasting away. We have a secret. And our secret in verse 16. Is that our inner self.

Our inward being. Is daily being renewed. You'll have noticed, won't you? That there is a contrast. Between the outward man or the outward being.

[6 : 31] And the inward man, the inward being. If you like. The physical part of us. And the spiritual part of us. Roughly speaking.

Between our body and our soul. There is the outward and physical part of us. Which is decaying. And we might find it difficult. Some of us to come to terms with that reality.

But it is a reality that we better come to terms with. It is built in, isn't it? In the human body and brain. That we are decaying. But the inward and the spiritual part of us.

As believers. Is being renewed. If you look there. You'll notice that the outer decay. And the inward renewal. Are both in the present continuous tense.

They are ongoing. Continuously. The former. Is unavoidable. It is a fact. That is built into us.

[7 : 26] It is the inner renewal. That is not inevitable. It has to be sought. It has to be cultivated. And indeed. That inner renewal.

Becomes all the more necessary. And all the more obvious. Because the outward. Physical decay. And so there is this theme. Isn't there? The contrast between the outward.

And the inward. Between inner renewal. And outer decay. And it is a common theme. In the Corinthian letters. As you read it through. In both his first letter.

And in his second letter. To the Corinthians. In this very chapter. 2 Corinthians 4. He gives three examples of it. So that's what I want us to see tonight. The first one. I'm going to call. Power through weakness.

Power through weakness. Look at verse 7. With me. It says. But we have this treasure. In jars of clay. To show that the surpassing power of God.

[8 : 24] Surpassing power belongs to God. And not to us. And Paul there. He draws a clear distinction. Between his body. In its frailty.

And the gospel. Which is shone into his heart. And being committed to him. He himself. He says. Is like a clay pot. Or in our language. A plastic bag.

It's nothing much to look at. Nothing much to write home about. It's cheap. It's brittle. It's fragile. It's a clay pot. But the clay pot.

Is the bearer. Of the light. Of the gospel. So you think of the old five pound note. If you remember. There was Florence Nightingale. Do you know who Florence Nightingale is?

She was a nurse. Wasn't she? And. On the old five pound note. She was carrying a lamp. And the lamp. Was basically. A kind of clay pot. The pot is a lamp.

[9 : 23] And so you could. Drop the pot. And it would smash into smithereens. But the light. Would be there. Inside. The light was what matters. The clay pot. Carried the light.

And so what Paul is saying. Is that it's not necessarily. The talented. And the self confident people. That God blesses. It's often the weak.

And the shy. And the diffident. And the ordinary. In fact. God says. Paul says. God deliberately. Puts. His light.

Into. Clay pot. Lamps. In order. To show. Clearly. That the power belongs. To God. And not to us. God. And Paul knew that.

In his physical life. His life. Apart from the physical persecutions. And the beatings. And the stonings. Apart from the. The hardship. Like arduous journeys. Shipwrecks.

[10:19] He. Suffered. Didn't he. Some kind of physical infirmity. We don't know what it was. There's all sorts of guesses. It doesn't really matter. But if you go to chapter 12.

In this letter. He says. This physical infirmity. Was like a thorn. In the flesh. It was like a stake. In the flesh. And it caused him.

A great deal of discomfort. It caused him. Continuous pain. And so. Paul tells us. In chapter 12. That three times. He begged the Lord. Please. Take this pain away. And whatever it was. Instead of. Ridding him. Of that physical pain. And infirmity. Jesus said to him. My grace is sufficient. For you. And my strength.

Paul. Will be made perfect. In your weakness. And so. When Jesus said that. To Paul. Paul commented. So actually. I will glory. In my weaknesses.

[11:18] In order that the power of God. May rest upon me. Because it's when I'm weak. Then that is when I'm strong. And I wonder if we've learned that lesson.

That God's power is better displayed. In our weaknesses. Than in our strengths. And many times. Don't we? We cry to him.

To take away. Some psychological. Or. Physical issue. That we're dealing with. And he says to us. As he says to Paul. No. My strength. Is perfected.

In your weaknesses. And my grace. Is enough. My grace. Is sufficient for you. And we need to learn. To glory. In our weakness. That his strength.

May rest upon us. And that's the first principle. Of daily being renewed. It is power through weakness. The second is the same thing.

[12:19] Though in different terms. It is life through death. Look at verses 10 and 11. Verse 10 and 11. And Paul is. Not referring to what we think of.

As life after death. That's not what he's talking about. He's not thinking of physical death. As the gateway to new life. He's not even. Mainly referring to. Escapes from death.

Though he does refer to them. In this matter. His first journey. In Lystra. When he was stoned. And they thought he was. A goner. They drag him out of the city. And they leave him for dead. But. But he's referring to something else here.

It's. It's a continuous. Experience. That he can only. Really describe. As. As the dying of Jesus. A continual experience.

Of pain. And suffering. And rejection. And self-denial. So look at verse 10. Verse 10. We are always.

[13:17] Carrying. In the body. The death of Jesus. It's interesting. It doesn't say. We are sometimes.

Carrying. In the body. But we are always. Not sometimes. All the time. Carrying. In our bodies. The death. Or the dying of Jesus. And then look at.

Verse 11. For we who live. Are always. Being given. Over to death. For. Jesus. Sake. Look at. Look at the repetition. Look at the second. Part of verse 10. And the second part. Of verse 11. Why is this. This carrying. In the death. In the body.

The death of Jesus. Well the end of verse 10. So that the life of Jesus. May also be manifested. In our bodies. Verse 11. Given over to death. For Jesus sake. Why? So that the life of Jesus.

[14:13] May also be manifested. In our mortal flesh. They're identical. Aren't they? That Paul. Gives us. The reason. Why God.

Permits us. To have this experience. I wonder. Whether you've learned that. Do you sometimes. Feel your. Mortality.

That. That you are just. Flesh. Come to terms with it. We sense. Don't we. Our natural forces. Are declining. Maybe your powers of mind. And body. Are no longer.

What they used to be. We feel our. Mortality. And there's a sense. In which we are. Carrying about. In the body. The dying. Of Jesus. But even in that.

Situation. The life. Of Jesus. Can be manifest. Can be shown. In our mortal bodies. We can have. An inward. Vigor. An inward.

[15:08] Vitality. That shines through. Even a frail. And. And moribund. Body. So God's power. Displayed.

In weakness. And the life. Of Jesus. In our mortality. In our dying. And the third illustration. That comes in our text. Is verse 16.

Can you see it? It is renewal. Through decay. Renewal. Through decay. Decay. We are not just weak.

So that the power of God. Can be seen in us. We are not just dying. So that the life of Jesus. Can be seen in us. We are decaying. Literally. As we are being destroyed.

The verb is. Is that of perishable goods. That get ruined. Of iron being corroded. Of clothes being spoiled. By moths. Of starving bodies. That are wasting away.

[16:02] Of a corpse. That corrupts. And decay. Is a characteristic. Of the whole. Created order. Nature.

Outside us. And our whole bodies. Paul writes about it. In Romans 8. 21. And he says. The whole of creation. Is in bondage. To decay. He says. That nature.

In creation. In bondage. To decay. It is groaning. It is groaning. In travail. It is in labor pains.

Because it is longing. For God. To bring in the new universe.

That God will create one day. That God will create. A new heavens. And a new earth. And as nature. Groans. In travail. So do we. We who have the first fruits.

Of the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit being. The kind of first fruits. The down payment. Of the new creation. And we know. As Christians. What it is to groan.

[16:58] We groan. Inwardly. Because of. Our struggles. And our infirmities. And we are waiting. For the redemption. Of our bodies. And one day.

We know. That creation. Will be liberated. From its bondage. To decay. And it is going to experience. The liberty. Of the children of God. And there will be. No more decay.

And no more pain. And no more suffering. And no more death. But even before. That final liberation. Paul says.

Amidst all the change. And decay. That is all around us. We experience. A daily inward renewal. Outward decay. And inward renewal. Can proceed simultaneously.

You have both these things. That go together. And they are really simple. And really plain. In the text. Aren't they? In 2 Corinthians 4. Power through weakness. Life through death.

[17:52] Renewal through decay. Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. The supreme. The greatest. Historical example. According to the New Testament. It's not Paul.

In his sufferings. But it is Jesus Christ. Resurrection from the dead. The resurrection. Was the most conspicuous. Act. Of God's.

Power. It is the obvious. Putting. Fourth of life. And of renewal. Out of decay. So.

So Paul could pray. He could need Ephesians 1. That. That our eyes. Would be open. To the exceeding greatness. Of God's power. And his incomparably. Great power.

That he worked. When he raised Jesus. From the dead. That was the great. Example of power. And weakness. Can you imagine. Anything weaker. Than a corpse. The body of Jesus.

[18:47] Lays lifeless. On the ledge. Of the tomb. Until. God's power. Raises it. From the dead. It is power. Through weakness.

It is life. Through death. It is renewal. Out of decay. And the supreme. Historical example. That resurrection. Of Jesus. Is now.

The great illustration. In our own experience. As followers of Christ. That same. Principle. Of resurrection. From the dead. And so. It is not surprising. Is it. That Paul writes. Of it here. He can't stop himself.

Look at verse 14. He says. Knowing. That he. Who raised. The Lord Jesus. Will raise us. Also with Jesus.

And bring us. Into his presence. He goes on. To write about it. In chapter 5. Here we are. Groaning. And sighing. In this present body.

[19:40] We. We long. To be clothed. In a new body. When our body. Will be swallowed up. In life. And so. The supreme example. Is. Is going to be. Our resurrection.

But meanwhile. Between. Christ's resurrection. And our resurrection. We don't live. In a spiritual vacuum. And the interim period.

Between the two resurrections. That's. When the new creation. Began. Man. And when the new creation. Will be consummated. Do you know. What we ought to be experiencing.

We ought to be experiencing. The power. Of his resurrection. That's what the new testament.

Teaches. Again. And again. And again. The resurrection power. Of the Lord Jesus.

Has been let loose. In the world. And already. If tonight. We are in Christ. We've been raised. With him. And we've been made. To sit with him.

[20 : 37] In the heavenly places. And already. God's power. That has raised Christ. From the dead. Is available to us. Who believe. Ephesians 1. And we can.

With Paul. In Philippians chapter 3. That I may know him. And the power. Of his resurrection. And so. Already. We have.

The gospel treasure. In clay pots. In plastic bags. In order. That the transcendent.

Power. Of God. Might be seen. To be his. And not ours. And so. Already. The life. Of Jesus. Is being. Shown.

In our mortal bodies. Already. In the midst. Of outward. Decay. There is. Inward renewal. By the power. Of the resurrection. And it's so.

[21 : 33] Very important. To understand. That renewal. Is resurrection. Power. That daily. Inward. Renewal. That Christian people. Should be experiencing. It is. A fortist.

It is a down payment. Of the resurrection. That's still to come. Inward renewal. Is renewal. By the power. Of the resurrection. Let me.

Let me. Try. Apply this. I. Expect. That some of you. Um. Might. Have. Come. To church. Today. Deeply. Discouraged.

And. Um. You may feel. People are resistant. And. and appreciative. And maybe tonight you've got inferiority feelings, you've got low self-image, you've got feelings tonight of a real low sense of self-worth.

And maybe you think you lack any gifts or abilities. You think I'm just, I'm like a plastic bag. I'm like a clay pot. And thank God you are because you're just the kind of person God is looking for.

[22 : 41] Because what does God need? God needs old clay pots and plastic bags. Because it's in the old clay pots and the plastic bags that his power is to be set forth.

And so be really clear, the transcendent power is his and not yours. And I beg you, do not lose heart because you are just the person in whom his power can yet be displayed.

Maybe you're physically under the weather. Although if you are, you probably shouldn't have come because of all the testing. But anyway, that's another matter. Maybe you feel unwell.

Maybe you're overworked. You're not as young as you were, which is a great expression, isn't it?

As if anyone else is anything else. It means you're getting old. And you're aware of your mortality.

And I want to say to you, well, so am I. Do not lose heart. Because the life of Jesus can be made known in your flesh. Or again, there's somebody here, there's somebody watching, and you're just busy.

[23 : 53] That's all at home, work, in the hospital, around for school. It feels just the work is never done.

It's overwhelming. It's overwhelming. You kind of live to get to Friday, and when you get to Friday, it's still not done. And everything gets on top of you, and it may be beginning to affect your health.

And I want to say to you again, do not lose heart. Because you may feel this outward decay, but you can experience an inward renewal. And so I finish by asking, well, how can this happen?

How can it happen? And the clue is in the reading that we had from Isaiah chapter 40, where it says, those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength.

And they will mount up with wings like eagles, and they will run and not grow weary, and they will walk, and they won't grow faint.

[24 : 59] And waiting on God means expressing, doesn't it, our dependence upon Him. Especially in prayer. I'm slightly embarrassed that I bring to you tonight what is a traditional remedy for our ills, isn't it?

But all down through the ages, generation after generation, God's people have proved and experienced that there is no substitute for prayer.

Or scripture meditation that we talked about this morning. They go together. And without them, without prayer and scripture meditation, and without waiting on the Lord, we will never renew our strength.

And the great secret of inward renewal day by day is that we meet Him every day, and we wait upon Him. And we renew our strength.

That's why I'm such a great fan of church prayer meetings. They're not particularly popular in London. It's because it's a recognition that we have to humble ourselves as the Lord's people, and recognize that it is God's work, and only God can do it.

[26 : 24] And we need to humble ourselves before God daily. To admit our weakness, and our mortality, and our frailty, and our decay, and then, and only then, will His power be made perfect in our weakness.

And then, and only then, the life of Jesus will be shown in our mortal decaying flesh. And so, feeling tired, bruised, battered, ready to give up, our inward being is renewed day by day.

And may God grant it for all of us. Let's pray together. Amen. Amen.