

2 Corinthians 4:7-16

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[0 : 00] We're looking at the book of 2 Corinthians, a letter that the apostle wrote to the church in Corinth. We're going through it Sunday night by Sunday night. Let me recap. Paul taught us four things last week.

Why is it that people aren't Christians? Why is it that people aren't believers? What actually is the problem? Why don't people receive this good news? Is it that the gospel is too simple or too difficult? What is the problem?

Well the problem is spelled out for us in verse 4. Verse 4 are the little numbers. You'll see the big numbers are the chapters. Little numbers are verse 4. Verse 4 in the right hand paragraph. In their case the God of this world, that is the devil, has blinded the minds of the unbelievers.

So there's a spiritual person at work and he is working in people's minds and he is corrupting and perverting people's thought processes.

And that is why they don't believe. That's why they don't believe. How is it then that there are some people here tonight and they do believe? How do you believe? How are people delivered from unbelief? How do they come to faith?

[1 : 12] Is it by being mentally convinced by philosophy? By clever persuasion? Is it by pressure? Is that how people become Christians? Well, no, look at verse 2. Verse 2, it talks about, you can see it in the middle of the verse, but by the open statement of the truth, he'll hear the truth of God.

We commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. God spoke into the darkness and he said, let there be light. And God speaks through this open statement of the truth.

And he brings light into the polluted minds, into these twisted minds of ours. So people are brought to faith in Christ by the open statement of the message. So what's the message? Look at verse 5. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. So the Christian message tonight is not primarily about you.

It's not primarily about me. It's not primarily about man and his need. No, it is about that. The message is first of all about the glories of Jesus Christ. Of his person and his word.

[2 : 27] It is a proclamation. It is a statement that Jesus is Lord and what are you going to do about it? It's an announcement. It's a heralding. It is the message of Christ, that plain announcement, that enlightens the mind and brings people to become Christians, to know God.

But how is the message proclaimed? Start of verse 1. We, we, we do not lose heart. Do you see that in the middle? Verse 5. For what we proclaim.

We do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord. This message, this gospel is proclaimed by human beings. By human instruments. And that brings us to our passage tonight.

What sort of instruments? What sort of people does God use to take the good news of the Lord Jesus to the world? Super people?

That's what the super apostles were saying. These people who have infiltrated the church. You've got to be somebody special to be a Christian. You've got to have special gifts. You've got to have a particular sort of personality.

[3 : 34] You've got to be dynamic. You've got to be compelling. But that is the exact opposite of what the apostle Paul tells us. And that's still the mindset today, isn't it? Can you speak up to the Lord Jesus?

Well, no, of course I could never do that. I'm nobody special. And people think, well, I could never be a preacher of the gospel. I could never tell people about the Lord Jesus. Because to be one of those, you've got to be very special indeed.

And that mentality runs through many churches. And it is the exact opposite of what the apostle Paul is saying. So what sort of instrument does God use? Some people liked the outline last week.

So I've done an outline for you on the sheet. Can you see it there? It helps you use it. If it doesn't, I'll put it away. But you'll see there, there are five things. What kind of people does God use? Number one, ordinary people. Verse seven.

Verse seven. Ordinary people. But we have this treasure in jars of clay. To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

[4 : 33] What do you have, Paul? What has Paul got in verse seven? What has he got? Anybody want to show those? He's got treasure, hasn't he? He's got treasure. That is what he's got. What have you got?

He's got treasure. We've got in our hands a wonderful diamond, the apostle Paul. Look at the value of it. Look at the wonder of it. Look at the beauty of it. What is this treasure? Verse six. The treasure is the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

That's our message. Our message is treasure as a church. Our message is a precious jewel. It is beyond all value. It is knowing the Godness of God through Jesus Christ.

We have that treasure. But what contains that treasure? Look at verse seven. Is it a beautiful box? Is it a lovely casket? You know you buy a ring and you get a lovely little leather box?

Maybe it's not as flashy as that. It's a cardboard box with beautiful ribbings and wrapping. What holds the treasure? God's jewel is not in a nice box.

[5 : 37] It's in a play jar. Now the equivalent of a play jar would be this. A plastic bag. It would be a plastic bag. You've got co-op. You've got propage of bags in Wales and Scotland and Northern Ireland.

But in England, it's quite such a wonderful place to live. You get three plastic bags. So you've got to co-op. They say, do you want a bag with that? Is it precious?

No, it's not. And that's the equivalent of the jar of clay. But we have this treasure in plastic bags. It's something that is easily broken.

It is very fragile. It's very, very fragile, isn't it? You all fill a plastic bag when you're walking home and it rips, doesn't it? Why does God put this glorious jewel in a plastic bag?

In verse 7. To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. So ordinary. Ordinary people speak the gospel. Ordinary people proclaim the truth.

[6 : 38] Ordinary women talk about Jesus Christ. Ordinary people become preachers of the gospel. Ordinary people. So that the power can be seen in the message. So that the power can be seen to be, can you see it?

Of God. In the sheer force of the truth. Not about the instrument. And that way, God gets all the glory and the credit all the time.

The surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. I love this truth. I was talking to a man this week who walked into a church in 1987 in South Wales.

And they were not a Christian. Adamantly not a Christian. And they walked out of the church that night. A truly born again converted Christian. I know the preacher. I've heard the preacher many, many times.

He is very, very, very ordinary. The power is in the message. The power is in the message. And that is why there's hope.

[7 : 41] You don't need to be a super apostle. You don't need to be somebody with great gifts. And a compelling personality. And startling, dazzling, attractive ministries.

No, it's just ordinary men and women speaking the truth. Ordinary people. Now let's look. What kind of people does God use? Look at verses 8 and 9. Suffering people. Verse 8. We are afflicted.

In every way. The word that sums that up is pressure, really. We're under pressure. And we know that, don't we? You know that. You know physical pressure. You know mental pressure.

We know all about pressure. Pressure at work. Verse 8. Look at what we are. We're perplexed. Sometimes we just don't know what to do. We haven't got big solutions.

We don't always know what the right thing is to do in a certain situation. In fact, very often, we are very muddled up. We are completely puzzled. We're perplexed.

[8 : 40] Verse 9. We are persecuted. God does not deliver us from being hounded by people who aren't Christians. People are out there all the time.

We've not had miraculous deliverance from persecution. Verse 9. It says, struck down. I think we would probably say depressed today. Suffering people.

Under pressure. Puzzlement. Physical danger. Depression. We are physical and emotional. Plastic bags. Jars of clay.

There's nothing macho about us. Physically or mentally. We don't have that super resistance that people sometimes have. We are not bouncing triumphantly through life as Christians. We are ordinary suffering people.

Verse 8. We are afflicted in every way. But we're not crushed. We don't get to that point where life is completely squeezed out of us.

[9 : 44] We are perplexed. We often just don't know what to do. But we don't throw in the towel. And say that's it. And the reason for that is because there's something supernatural sustaining and holding us.

And the whole Christian life is supernatural. That is what Paul is saying of course. Isn't he? Verse 9. We are persecuted but not abandoned. We have this sense of the presence of God in our lives.

We are cast down. Struck down. Depressed. But not destroyed. We come to an end of ourselves. But when we come to an end of ourselves. We find that we haven't come to an end of ourselves. We find that there's something still there. That stops us going under completely. It is the power of God to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

Verse 7. There's something supernatural. Something inexplicable. Beyond the human definition. Some spiritual resource.

[10 : 46] Which doesn't make us mighty. Or dynamic. Or super. But it stops you from caving in. And that is what the Apostle Paul is saying.

We're ordinary people. We're suffering people. And the type of people God uses are dying people. Look at verses 10 to 12. Look at verse 10.

Always carrying in the body. In our body. The death of Jesus. Paul is going to come back to this later on. We'll see it again. He's going to list the things that he suffers.

And he'll talk about his dying every day. And there are things that happen to us. Which aren't mentioned. Aren't they? Back in verses 8 and 9. And there are all sorts of things that happen to us as believers.

That would not happen to us if we weren't Christians. So. You're at work. And you refuse to bend the rules. They think it's a little thing.

[11 : 47] But actually. In your Christian conscience. You refuse to bend the rules. And you say. No that isn't right. And then you come up for promotion. And you're passed over. And it would not have happened to you.

If you had not been united to Christ. There's a girl in work. And she's interested in you. And she likes you. She's funny. She's very attractive.

And actually. You like her. But you know that she's not a Christian. And so. You will not go out with her. And you feel terribly lonely.

And it grieves you. And that would not have happened to you. If you had not been united to Christ. Think of another example.

You lose out professionally. And it wouldn't have happened to you. If you didn't have a love for Christ. And other people. Or you're going. Maybe you're thinking about going into Christian work. And you put your whole security. On the line.

[12 : 44] Not just for a year or two. But forever afterwards. And it would not have happened to you. If you weren't motivated. By love for the Lord Jesus. There are countless examples. There are Christian children.

Who are in schools. And they feel like they've got no friends. There are Christian single people. Without husband and wives. There are families. Who are ostracised. By some of their neighbours. There's all sorts of dying. Going on all the time. In the Christian life. Things that would never happen to us. If we had not been united to Christ. But the Bible teaches in verses 10.

And 11. And 12. That life comes out of death. And that is the glory of the gospel. My saviour dies. So I can live.

My saviour goes into the tomb. But he comes out. A corn of wheat. Falls into the ground. And dies. And therefore it bears a great harvest. Out of death comes life.

[13 : 47] And where there has been no death. There is no life. And that is the gospel. That is the message of 2 Corinthians. Isn't it? Now let's look at verse 10.

Verse 10. Always carrying in the body. The death of Jesus. So that the life of Jesus. May also be manifest in our bodies. Paul is this Christian.

Who has been under pressure. But he never quite. Has all the life squeezed out of him. Verse 10. That is the life of Jesus. In your body.

Verse 8. It says that you are perplexed. But you're never completely done for. That is the life of Jesus. In your emotions. In your body.

You are hounded. But you're never completely abandoned. What is this? You've always got that sense. That somebody else is with you. It is the life of Jesus.

[14 : 46] In your body. You are depressed. But you are not destroyed. It is the love of Jesus. In your body. From verse 10.

Look at verse 11. For we who live. Are always being given over to death. For Jesus sake. Every day. Is a dying day. That's what Christianity is all about.

Every day is a dying day. The second half of verse 11. So that the life of Jesus. Also may be manifested.

In our mortal flesh. We are living testimonies. To the life of Christ. In a human life. That Christ is alive.

That he has died and risen again. We are living testimonies of that. So then verse 12. Death is a working. That's a bit like in you. But of course. There would be no spiritual life.

[15 : 46] In Corinth. If it hadn't been. For the death of Paul. Dying daily. Suffering. Shipwreck. Travel. Hunger.

Nakedness. Prison. Sword. Persecution. Beatings. And so much more. But at last. The gospel came to Corinth. Through a thousand deaths. He eventually got to the city. And a dying man. Preached the gospel. And spiritual life. Came to Corinth. So then death is working. In us. But life in you. What kind of people.

Does God use? Ordinary people. Suffering people. Dying people. Convinced people. Look at verses 13 to 15. So you may be sitting there tonight.

If the Christian life. Brings all that. Why bother? Isn't that the question? Why bother? If Christian life is a suffering life.

[16 : 42] If Christian life is a dying life. Why bother? If speaking up for the Lord Jesus. And being true to your principles. Brings all this on you.

Why bother? Well the answer is there in verse 13. Since we have the same spirit of faith. According to what has been written. I believed and so I spoke. We also believe.

And so we also speak. Because if you have been truly born again. Born from above. Then you have got a fire lit inside you.

Sometimes it is very very low. I know that. But you can't put it out. And you cannot keep quiet forever. If you are a Christian. It cannot be done.

Because we are convinced people. And that is why we can't shut up. We are convinced of the glory of God. We see it in the face of Jesus Christ.

[17 : 42] We are convinced of the truth of the Bible. We are convinced of the integrity of the gospel. We are convinced of the wonder of the Christian life. We are convinced of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we are convinced of the certainty of heaven. We are convinced about it. It is burned into us. And so if we are the only one in our school class.

Who believes it. We cannot stop believing it. And if we are the only one in a family who believes it. We cannot stop believing it because of them.

Because we are convinced people. And that is why we speak. Besides verse 14. This life isn't the real life. Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus.

Will raise us also with Jesus. And bring us with you into his presence. We know that Christ rose from the dead. Again we saw this last week. You can talk about God.

[18 : 39] And the existence of God to people. And they are okay with it. They are open for discussion on it. Aren't they? But you talk to them about the existence of Jesus Christ. After he rose from the dead.

Everybody can have an idea about God. Or just believe in one. But when you talk about a God. Who acted in history. Who brought out of a Jerusalem grave. A real human being.

Jesus of Nazareth. It is a different issue altogether. And we believe that God moved. And raised the crucified body.

Body of the Lord Jesus. Out of the tomb. By the spirit of God. And he was publicly paraded. As the son of God. He's always been the son of God. Of course. But now he was publicly paraded.

As such. And we are convinced of that. But we are also convinced of the meaning of that event.

That when he came out of the grave. We as his people came out with him.

[19 : 38] That is why we have spiritual life now. And that is why we will have physical life. After the end of the world. When we are raised from the dead. In the likeness of his glorious body.

And the real world. Therefore is that way. Not this way. This is a real world. Isn't it? Very real. But it's passing. We'll come to that in a minute.

It is temporary. All your ambitions. What are your ambitions? All your ambitions are. They're for a few decades aren't they? The world will be gone.

Every trace will be gone. The sun won't shine anymore. There will be no more moon. And no more planets. And no more galaxies. It will all be melted down. And remade. And the real world is that world. And because we are convinced.

That that is the real world. We are not going to keep quiet in this way. We're convinced people.

Verse 15. For it is all for your sake.

[20 : 36] So that as grace extends to more and more people. It may increase thanksgiving. To the glory of God. We keep going. We keep going. Proclaiming the truth.

Telling the truth. Because that is how you Corinthians got saved. And that is how other people. Join on to Christ. As God's grace spreads through this life. And that life.

And her life. And his life. And that life. The number of people. Who are saved by God's grace. Is being built up all the time. He's thanking God. She's thanking God.

We're thanking God. They're thanking God. And the grace of God. Is being built up all the time. And the praise goes up to God. And as the gospel is proclaimed. The swell of praise increases.

Verse 15. In number and in volume. And he gets all the glory. We are convinced people. We are ordinary people. We are suffering people.

[21 : 33] We are dying people. And lastly. We are heaven bound people. Verses 16 to 18. Look at the middle of verse 16. Though our outer self.

Is wasting away. When he talks about. About this outer self. And inner self. He's not just thinking. About fingers and toes. On the outwards. Is the inner man.

Is the thoughts. And emotions. He's not thinking. About that here. The outer self. Is the finger and toes. And thoughts. And emotions. All that makes me a mortal man. Everything that makes me.

Me. And it is perishing. You are perishing. So the older people. Who are here. Are not as strong.

As they used to be. And there are wrinkles. And blemishes. On your skin. That weren't there. A few years ago. And the outward man. Is perishing. And so is the inward man.

[22 : 30] We don't remember. Like we used to. Do we? We get names mixed up. We think certain things happen. Which didn't happen. We mix up dreams.

And realities. I got a text message yesterday. I couldn't remember. Whether I deleted it. I couldn't remember. Whether I dreamt it. Or somebody had texted it. To me today. We become senile. Even 38. It's perishing. But we walk by faith.

And not by sight. So what's this picture here? It's the picture of a building site. I think. It's the best illustration. That I can come up with.

It's like scaffolding. It's like scaffolding. On a building. Which God takes down. Why would God take the scaffolding down? Why do you take the scaffolding down?

On a building? Because he's got something better. Behind the structure. So. On a. On scaffolding isn't it? The plastic.

[23 : 25] Kind of fades. And the scaffolding. Gets a bit old. And a bit rusty. And he takes it down. And when he comes. When it comes down. You see the real building behind it. And that's the picture in verse 16.

Though our outward self is wasting away. Our inner self is being renewed day by day. So behind all the scaffolding. And all the barriers. There's. Well. There's brick layers working away. Aren't there?

And there's cement. Cement mixers. And there's architects. And surveyors. And there's electricians. And there's plumbers. And a glorious building is going up. Unseen to the human eye. And that is exactly what is happening to us.

So we do not lose heart. And the poor people of this world. Maybe you tonight. You think that this life is the only one. And yet your conscience tells you that it isn't.

Does it? And you believe that in a few years you'll be dead in the grave and forgotten. And yet your conscience will not let you live with that. Will it? Because you know in your heart of hearts.

[24 : 30] That there is a judgment. And there is a God. But you keep thinking of death as the end. You'd prefer not to think about it at all. But if you're going to think about it.

You want to think of it as just the end. But the Christian mind cannot think like that. We do not lose heart. This isn't the end.

Our outward man is perishing. But there's something else going on. So verse 17. Let's put it in the scales. Can you look with me at verse 17? It is a remarkable verse. What is on this side of the scales?

I wish I had a pair of scales. What is on this side of the scales? On this side is affliction. And it is real. Isn't it?

Depression. Distress. Difficulty. Pain. Illness. Old age.

[25 : 28] Persecution. Everything that makes life difficult. And painful. And tiresome. That is on this side. What is on this side of the scales?

Do you see it? Glory. The godness of God. Let's put them in the scales. Verse 17.

They go like that. This. This. Is very very light. Isn't it? Very very light. And this.

The glory of God. Is very very heavy. This. The glory of God. Outweighs that. This. Is of more infinite worth than that.

The scales don't even balance. Do they? They immediately go. Straight away. Our light. Affliction. Is but for a moment. Really. It is nothing.

[26 : 29] When you measure it. With all eternity. Is it? It's very very light. It's nothing compared with hell. And it's but for a moment. And it's preparing us.

For an eternal weight. Of glory. Beyond comparison. Do you see on the sheet. I just put the contrast there. Do you see how Paul writes it? He puts light contrasted with weight. He puts eternal.

Contrasted with momentary. He puts affliction contrasted with glory. That is why I said to you. This life is not the real life. That's the real life. And that is why we do not lose heart.

That is where we are going. That is where our destination is. Our destination is glory. And that is where we belong. So that is where we look.

Verse 18. Look verse 18. As we look. Not to the things that are seen. But to the things that are unseen. The things that are seen are transient.

[27 : 31] But the things that are unseen are eternal life. Are eternal. Let me say this. Every mistake. In the Christian life. Can be traced to forgetting.

2 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 18. Every mistake in the Christian life. Can be traced to forgetting this verse. Every mistake you have ever made as a Christian. Every fault.

Every fall. Which has ever happened in your Christian life. Can be traced to you or me. Forgetting this verse. We do not look at the things which are seen. And the moment you do.

Everything goes wrong. So if you are a school child tonight. If you are in school. And all you can see. Is the approval of your friends. And being popular. And being in the in crowd.

And getting good grades. Your Christian life. Will go very very wrong. Won't it? God intended that life be good. It's important that you study.

[28 : 29] I hope you get good grades. But if that is what you see. Then you are in real trouble. The Christian sees this day.

As preparing you for that destination. That your studies prepare you to glorify God. Before you go there. That diploma is something which will convince men and women.

That you've done what you've done. But the studies are for the glory of God. Who made you. And whose goodness you will one day behold.

You've got to look to the unseen. So we do not look at the things which are seen. But the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary.

Partners. Spouses. Children. Houses. Schools.

[29 : 33] Good grades. Pubs. Football teams. Church buildings. Temporary. But the things which are not seen.

Are eternal. God the Father. God the Son. In his divine nature. God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Angels.

The New Jerusalem. The eternal reward. The things which are not seen are eternal. Paul has taught us two things. First of all. The reality of the Christian life. So if you expect to go through the Christian life.

Without aging. Without illness. Without difficulty. Without bereavement. Without distress. Without problems. Without emotional trouble. Without depression. Without sadness. Without persecution. You are kidding yourself.

The reality of the Christian life is this. All these things. That come to ordinary people will come to you. And extra ones will come.

[30 : 28] There are things that happen to us. Which only happen to us because we are Christians. That's the reality of the Christian life. But there is also the excitement of the Christian life. That all of this over here.

All of those momentary troubles. Are leading to that. Leading to glory. This is light. This is light. Do you remember in those scales? That this is glorious.

This is temporary. But this is eternal. And that is what we see. And that is where our eyes should be fixed. And meanwhile the gospel goes on.

Being proclaimed in the world. By ordinary suffering. Dying. Convinced. Handbound people. Like you and me. Let's pray.

Let's pray.