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SECOND CORINTHIANS 4:1-15

As we look at today's lesson, I hope we can remember some of what we saw last...

As we said last week...chapter breaks are not divinely inspired and we see a prime example of that in this chapter. Paul begins chapter 4 with the word, "therefore", and "therefore" is a word of conclusion. When we see this word, we must see what the "therefore" is there for.

Verse 1...

What kind of ministry is Paul talking about? Well, we must conclude that Paul is talking about the kind of ministry he's been telling us about in chapter 3...**a glorious ministry that brings men to life, to salvation, and to righteousness...a ministry that is able to transform men's lives...a ministry that we received from God by His mercy and love!!**

Let me ask you...what is ministry? "*diakones*"...service...to wait upon others...to be an attendant.

Let me ask you this...do you have a ministry?

Even though this word is used primarily in connection with a **Christian leader**...we're going to see that it does not apply **exclusively** to our so-called "full-time Christian" workers.

So, today, I want us to think of ministry *first*, as it applies to the pastor or leaders of a congregation *secondly*, as it applies to you and me...

Let's look first at

1) THE GLORIOUS MINISTRY

Verses 1-6...

Now, I want us to remember that folks had come into the church at Corinth who were teaching false doctrine and they were also undermining or attempting to undermine **the authority of Paul...**

the message of Paul...
and the effectiveness of Paul.

Now, if this had happened to you, if your character and reputation were being threatened by false teachers, how would you feel and what would be your response?

Think about it...

you have gone into the city of Corinth

you have **risked your very life** in order to present the the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

you have **prayed** for these folks,

you have **cared** for these folks,

you have done all you could to **establish them** in the Word of God...

But...**you can't stay there.** There are other cities and regions to which you must go. You must carry the message of the saving power of the blood of Jesus Christ to another area and then another area and then another...

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Then, after you're away from Corinth, false teachers have come in and they have questioned your motives, and your authority, your credentials, your message and your sincerity. In fact, later on in this book, we're going to see that these false teachers were preaching another Jesus and some of these Corinthians had accepted this teaching!

Given all that, let me ask you...

What would be **your** response? Would you be upset? Would you fire off a letter to these folks full of self-defense and self-explanation? Would you be tempted to throw in the towel...or at least write **these** people off?

Or, would you do what Paul did?

Paul wrote them a letter that did not even focus upon himself at all...it emphasized instead the power of the gospel of Christ Jesus.

it emphasized good, sound Bible doctrine...

it emphasized the fact that he had a ministry from God...

a ministry that had been given to him in mercy...

And because of all this Paul says...

"we do not lose heart..."

I believe one of the reasons that Paul was one of the most if not the most effective ministers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ who ever lived, is that he did not lose heart...I mean...if anyone ever had reason to lose heart and be discouraged, it was Paul...

God had called Paul to a task and Paul was determined to be faithful to God and do what God had called him to do. Paul knew he had a glorious ministry and this knowledge...

a) kept him from being a quitter

How could Paul lose heart, when he was involved in such a ministry as this?

Would God have entrusted this ministry to Paul so that Paul might fail? No, Paul knew that no matter what obstacles were thrown up in his path, his calling was from God and his power and strength also came from God!! He knew God would see him through all things. Paul said, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me..."

This glorious ministry also

b) kept him from being a deceiver

In Paul's day, the false teachers were Judaizers...

folks, who as we saw last week, would come and

say, "Oh, following Christ is okay...but Christ

alone won't save you...you must also follow

the law of Moses."

The Judaizers were deceivers!!!

But, Paul deceived no one!! Paul preached the simple Gospel of Jesus:

...that Jesus died for our sins,

...that Jesus was buried,

...and that Jesus was raised again...

In our day, we have folks who also add to Jesus. They add to the Word of God, or they take away from the Word and anytime this happens, the Word is adulterated.

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We have teachers today who would tell us that the blood of Jesus was good as far as it went...but it's actually **baptism that saves us**.

We have teachers today who would tell us that God wants everyone **healthy and wealthy** and if we're not in good health or we don't have much money then, we must surely be **out of the will of God**.

We have teachers today who would tell us that we must be **slain in the spirit**, or **speak in tongues**, or **writhe on the floor** or **bark like dogs** or **laugh like idiots** in order to show forth the infilling of the Holy Spirit.

And we have others who get on their **bicycles** and go from house to house and they teach heresy and others who will **knock on your door** and tell you that Jesus never claimed to be God and there isn't really a hell, etc.

And those are just the major folks we need to be concerned about here in America. Around the world there are many many more false religions and cults that attempt to make a person believe their false way is the only true way.

Examples: Stan Telchin – **Abandoned** & Indian doctor at hospital...

Verse 4...

The god of this world just comes up with more and more and more ways to blind the minds of the unbelieving!!

Paul says,

"He veils the gospel to those who refuse this great salvation and so they will perish!"

How blessed we are to have a church that focuses upon the **unadulterated, unchanging, unalterable** Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ!!

Let me tell you the difference between Christianity, the Gospel of the grace of God, and the "religions" and cults of this world. It is very simple...

All the "religions" and cults of this world can be expressed this way: **"Do...do...do..."** The Gospel says: **"DONE!!"**

Think about this...No other religion claims to do anything about your past sins. Now they might say, "Come to us and we'll enable you to live a 'better' life from now on..."

But, they don't do anything about all your **old, ugly past sins!**

For example...

Suppose you had been doing business with a local "mom and pop" grocery store and you've been doing all that business on credit!! And suppose over a period of time, you've run up quite a bill.

I mean, **you owe these folks hundreds and hundreds of dollars**. You've been eating really well and you haven't paid a penny on your grocery bill in ages...

Suppose you go to the owner of that store one day and you say, "Have I got good news for you...I've turned over a new leaf!! I'm not gonna charge anymore groceries,from now on, I'm gonna pay cash for all my stuff!!"

You know what that grocery store owner would say? He'd say, "Well, that's all well and good...but what about that past debt? Who's going to pay that?"

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Beloved, we don't have to worry about our **past sin debt**. When Jesus hung on that Cross, He said, "tetelestai," - "it is finished" - and our sin debt was paid...**past sin...present sin...and future sin!**

Paul preached **JESUS ONLY** and I'm so glad our denomination knows it's Jesus only!
I'm so glad our preacher preaches **Jesus only!**
I'm so glad our Sunday School teachers teach **Jesus only!**
I'm so glad you believe **Jesus only** (and if you don't, you ought to get your "believer" fixed!!)

This glorious ministry kept Paul from being a quitter
and kept Paul from being a deceiver...but it also
c) kept him from being a self-promoter

What do you see when you turn on your television and you see some of these slick preachers running around all over the pulpit? **Do you see Jesus?** I don't...I see slick preachers running around all over the pulpit promoting themselves!!

Verses 5-6...

Paul says, "I didn't come to you with the gospel of Paul...

*I came to you and preached that **Jesus is Lord**, and that we are His bondservants."*

If we teach anything other than Jesus...darkness will still prevail, but

Where Jesus is **preached**

Where Jesus is **lifted up**

Where Jesus is **exalted**

Where the **simple gospel is proclaimed**

And where **we realize we are merely bondservants of the Lord Jesus...just sinners saved by His blood...**

Then, God, who made light to shine out of darkness will shine the wonderful light of salvation through Jesus, not only on us, but on those around us, as well.

Praise God for this glorious ministry!! Praise God that we belong to a church that has so many wonderful ministers...

We have a **Pastor** who preaches us the Word in season and out of season!

We have an **Associate Pastor** who takes up the slack and assists in all he can...

We have a **Minister of Education and Administration** whose heart is such a heart of service.

We have a **Minister of Music** who faithfully leads our choir and congregation in praise and worship.

We have a **Minister of Recreation** who keeps our extra-curricular activities going with a sweet spirit.

We have a **Minister to Students** who truly loves our youth and counsels them and seeks to lead them in paths of righteousness.

We have a **Minister of Congregational Care** who is the best that I've ever seen at caring for folks. He goes the second and third and fourth miles.

We have a **Minister of Missions** who has such a heart for taking the Gospel to a lost and dying world!

We have a **Women's Ministry Leader** who truly cares

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for our ladies and ministers to us, and does all she can to establish us in God's Word.

These folks have devoted their lives and careers to full time gospel ministry and we should **thank God for them** and **lift them up every day** for God's **protection** and **anointing**. But, I want us to spend the next few minutes thinking about ministry in a little bit different way...

We've thought of the glorious ministry, let's look at

2) THE GLORIOUS TREASURE

Verse 7...

Where do you keep your **valuables**? Do you have a **safe**? Do you have a **safety deposit box**? Do you have some sort of **secret hiding place**? Maybe a **drawer that locks**...someplace that you place your good jewelry or your special treasures when you're away on vacation?

Well, God has chosen to place His glorious treasure in **fragile, cheap and ordinary earthen vessels...in ordinary clay jars**.

In Paul's day, clay containers were common. Clay containers weren't really very attractive back then, were they? I remember the second time Bill and I went over to Israel. Ed Harris asked us to bring back a "betty lamp" for him. I was so excited to get to look for a "betty lamp"! I thought it must be something special!! Well, a "betty lamp" is a little oil burning lamp made from clay...not very pretty at all...and very fragile.

But, what is Paul talking about? What are these earthen vessels? What are these clay jars?

Well, they aren't "what's,"...they're "who's"!! They were Paul, and Peter and John and James...They are the pastor, and Dr. Rogers and Billy Graham, and Beth Moore, and Kay Arthur and Kay DeKalb Smith,

but they aren't just folks we consider as fulltime servants of God.

No, these clay jars, these earthenware vessels are also you and me!!

See, we're all just plain old earthen vessels...just plain clay pots...some of us are just plain old cracked clay pots!!

The **psalmist** said, "God knows our frame and He knows we're just dust..."

Jeremiah said, "We're all just clay in the Potter's hands."

Paul wrote Timothy and said, "Timothy, there are vessels of silver and vessels of gold, but there are also vessels of wood and earthenware and there are some to honor and some to dishonor."?

Paul went on to tell Timothy, "if a man is clean, he will be a vessel of honor and he will be sanctified and he will be useful to the Master and he is prepared for the work God wants him to do."

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Paul said in 1 Corinthians that God has chosen the foolish things of this world to confound the wise and the weak things of this world to shame the things which are strong.

WHY? Why has God chosen to use the foolish and the weak? Why has God chosen clay jars? Why has God placed His priceless treasure in earthen vessels? And, by the way, what IS this treasure? (the Gospel) Why has God entrusted His glorious gospel to sinful and weak men?

Verse 7b...

God could have chosen to use a mighty army of angels to proclaim His glorious Gospel over all the earth...But He chose weak and feeble man!

God took twelve disciples and the Apostle Paul and turned the world upside down for Jesus Christ. These were ordinary men...men who **doubted** and **feared** and **denied**. This was before radio, before TV, before computers, before CBS and NBC and CBN and the internet...and God did it this way so that all could see that "the surpassing greatness of the power could be plainly seen to be of **God and not of man!**

Then, Paul says in verses 8-9...

This isn't what we really want, is it? We don't want to be a clay pot, and then we really don't care at all to be afflicted or perplexed or persecuted or struck down, do we?

I mean, I'd much rather be a beautifully painted and glazed and polished teacup displayed up on a shelf...untouched, just real pretty to look at...but God wants me to be a fragrant aroma and that means I have to be taken off the shelf...even **broken and poured out**.

Remember back in the Book of Jeremiah when God told Jeremiah to go buy a field right before Nebuchadnezzar came and took over Judah? Jeremiah was to put that deed in an earthen vessel until the time the Jews would be brought back into the land. The point I'm trying to make is that at some point that vessel would have to be broken in order to get that deed out!

Remember when Mary brought that alabaster vial of ointment and anointed the feet of Jesus? The vial had to be **broken** in order to get the expensive ointment out!

And, many times, before the glorious Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ will ever be brought out of these earthen vessels that contain it...the vessel must be broken...(twice broken: **once to receive the Gospel, and then to give the Gospel out**).

But, God doesn't allow all this just to be mean to us and to watch us squirm and to make us miserable...or to prove He's in charge...

No...it all points to the Cross...

There's a purpose in it and that purpose is that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves!

***When God wants to drill a man
and thrill a man
and skill a man
When God wants to mold a man
to play the noblest part;***

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*When He yearns with all His heart
to create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch His methods! Watch His ways!*

*How He ruthlessly perfects
whom He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts him,
And with mighty blows converts him,
into trial shapes of clay
which only God understands;*

*How He bends but never breaks
when His good He undertakes;
How God uses whom He chooses
and with every purpose fuses him
To try His splendor out...*

God knows what He's about!!

See, Beloved, sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ...experiencing the life of Christ...showing forth the life of Christ...requires an acceptance of death...

Verses 10-12...

Is this physical death? Could be...might be...but I believe it is a death to self...an acceptance of those four painful experiences mentioned in verses 8-9...being **afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, struck down.**

**When we accept those struggles as part of the process of releasing the sweet fragrance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to those around us, then we will also see that
being afflicted does not mean being crushed, and
being perplexed does not bring despair, and
being persecuted does not mean we're forsaken, and
being struck down does not mean we're destroyed!!**

Instead, God's power is perfected in our weakness...
**and when we die, Jesus lives...
and when we lose, Jesus wins...
and when we're weak, Jesus is strong...
and when we depend on Him, Jesus works in us!!**

See, when other folks see God's power perfected in our weakness, when other folks see God using **us**...it dawns on them that maybe God can use **them**, too!!

Do you want a ministry? Remember, ministry is simply service in the name of Jesus...Do you want to reach others for Jesus Christ? Do you want others to see Jesus in you?

Then, may I suggest that you live out the dying message of the dear Lord Jesus.

Don't hide your flaws. Let your humanity show. Be vulnerable. Be transparent. Let folks see your weaknesses. I don't mean self-deprecation...I mean honesty. Let down that "image." We all have this "image" we like to portray.

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I do...I want you all to think well of me. I want you all to believe I'm "deeply spiritual"! But, I'm not!

and, I've told you this before...I'm going to fail you. I don't mean to...but I know I will. So, don't look at me...look through me and see Jesus!

It's the flaws and cracks in the clay that allow folks to see through you and focus on the Lord Jesus. We'd be **amazed** how often God honors weak, broken pieces of pottery and how seldom He uses the fine china!!

Well, one more point and we'll be through...
We've seen the glorious ministry...
We've seen the glorious treasure...

Let's look at

3) THE GLORIOUS FUTURE

Verses 13-15...

Peggy Lee used to have a song, "Is That All There is?" Well, Paul I believe is saying, "Folks, this isn't all there is! There's much more out there!! I'm looking beyond death to the Resurrection!"

And, I believe if Paul were here he would agree with the writer of that song...

*It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus,
Life's trials will seem so small,
When we see Christ.*

*One glimpse of His dear face,
All sorrows will erase,*

*So bravely run the race,
'Til we see Christ.*

Let me ask you this...Have you ever been broken and asked the Lord Jesus Christ to save you? Was there ever a time in your life when you knew you were lost and you knew you needed to be saved and you called upon the precious blood of Jesus to save you?

If you know for certain that you're saved...

As one **clay jar** to another...as one **earthen vessel** to another...as one **cracked pot** to another...let's be willing to be **clay in the Potter's hands** this week.

Let's be willing to be **put on His wheel** and **molded** and **shaped** and **turned** and be **made into a vessel of honor** this week.

Let's don't struggle to get off that wheel...God knows what He's doing in our lives!

Let's be willing to be **broken** and **spilled out** in order to bring someone to a saving knowledge and a closer walk with Jesus.

May God help us to do just that, and may He be pleased!!!