

## **“But We Have This Treasure ...”**

“... in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God, and not from ourselves. We are pressed on every side, yet not straitened; perplexed, yet not unto despair; pursued, yet not forsaken; smitten down, yet not destroyed: always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us, but life in you” (2 Cor. 4:7-12).

In both this chapter and the prior one Paul has mentioned himself and the other apostles as ministers of a new covenant; in verse one of this chapter he wrote “... seeing we have obtained this ministry, even as we obtained mercy, we faint not.” He likens the message he and the others heralded about to “light” — light which would give “knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:6). In the section cited above (2 Cor. 4:7-12), the apostle contrasts the abiding nature of the gospel (treasure), along with its power, with the frailty of men (fragile, earthen vessels): ministers who had been chosen to announce it and carry it to a world lost in sin. The frailty of the men who proclaimed it only emphasized the greatness of God’s message couched in them.

Thus follows four statements which show the “exceeding greatness of the power of God”. “We are pressed on every side, yet not straitened.” The word “pressed” (troubled, KJV) means “restricted,” “distressed,” or “hard pressed”. One need look no further than the trials which came upon him to see the pressures he knew as he moved from place to place. Yet although he was “pressed,” he was not “straitened”: a word which signifies that he was “confined” or crushed to the point where he could not do God’s work. His confinement in Rome particularly illustrates this thought. In his last letter to Timothy he said, “Wherein I suffer hardship unto bonds, as a malefactor, but the word of God is not bound” (2 Tim. 2:9). He felt strongly the confinement of his bonds but his letters which still were sent forth to others, which, inspired by his life and the gospel he preached, continued his work of preaching and converting of others.

Then he said “perplexed, yet not unto despair”. The word “perplexed” tells us there were times when the apostle was uncertain about what to do next. On his second journey he traveled from region to region, forbidden by the Spirit to preach in those places. He came to Troas, still perplexed (Acts 16:6-7). But a night vision of a man standing and saying “come over into Macedonia and help us” removed his perplexity. He and his company immediately set sail for Philippi and his perplexity gave way to certainty and deliberateness. He still acted although he was uncertain; it was not “unto despair”.

Paul was “pursued, yet not forsaken”. Before his conversion Paul had persecuted Christians from city to city. After his conversion “the hunter became the hunted”. Case in point: on his first journey he had preached in Antioch of Pisidia but the opposition of unbelieving Jews compelled him to leave for Iconium where once again disobedient Jews caused him to flee. Then he went to Lystra where he was ultimately stoned by the instigation of Jews who had followed him there from both Antioch and Iconium (Acts

14:19). His second journey was no different. Unbelieving Jews forced him to leave Thessalonica and when they heard he was preaching in Berea, they followed him there as well, forcing him to flee to Athens (Acts 17:13f). Yet, in all his trials God had not forsaken him. He was “smitten down, yet not destroyed”. He might have lost a battle but he did not lose the war! The victory was his in Christ (1 Cor. 15:57)

He said he always bore in his body the “dying of Jesus”. He met persecution and hardship at every bend of the road, yet through his trials he demonstrated the life of Jesus; accepting with patience the trials thrust upon him; he accepted them and steadfastly, without complaint, continued his work. Each day may have wrought new opportunities, but the same woes of dangers from the day before yet faced him. The threats and dangers he daily faced, he yielded to: the power of Christ’s resurrection had transformed his life.

All this was to the profit of his readers; he faced death daily that the hope of eternal life found in the message he preached might bring the Corinthians and all others to accepting the message that true life might work in them!

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