

Treasure in Earthen Vessels 2 Corinthians 4

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing our weaknesses and manifesting Christ's life through dependence on God amidst earthly struggles.

Topics: "Dependence On God", "Heavenly Calling"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes that Christians are called to enjoy heavenly things and live by their revelation, rather than merely navigating the challenges of this world. He explains that while we experience burdens in our earthly existence, our true identity is rooted in Christ, who empowers us to manifest His life through our actions. Darby highlights the importance of recognizing our weaknesses and relying on God's strength, as the treasure of God's glory is placed in our earthen vessels to demonstrate His power. He encourages believers to apply the cross to their thoughts and actions, ensuring that their lives reflect Christ's grace and truth. Ultimately, he calls for a commitment to manifesting Christ in every aspect of life, trusting that all circumstances work together for our good.

Transcript

It is a great thing to remember - what Christians too easily forget - that we are called to the enjoyment of heavenly things, and we live by the revelation of them. God has not introduced grace and His Son and Spirit to make us get along easily in this world - it was not needed - but to bring us to the enjoyment of heavenly things, and to live in them. What characterizes a man is what his mind is on, and then all his ways flow from that.

The apostle says that we "in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened;" that is, all we have of this world. The Lord uses it as an occasion of His dealings with us; but He does not take that up until salvation is settled. Redemption being settled, we find difficulties and exercises come in, and the apostle gives us here and in chapter 12 what the principle and power of his walk were. What we are called to is the manifestation of the life of Christ; your whole life is to be nothing but that. God is revealed, we have life, and the Holy Ghost is our power; we are set here as the epistles of Christ, for men to read. Whilst waiting for Christ to manifest Himself in glory, we have to manifest Him in grace.

It is not pleasant to "do well and suffer for it;" but is not that what Christ did? It is what we have to do in lowliness and meekness. He first gives us a place in heaven, Christ our life, and then sets us down here to do that. We have the revelation of God Himself in the person of His Son. He dwells in us, and we in Him; and we know it, for He has given us of His Spirit. Our place before God is settled; Christ is our life. We

have the knowledge of God, and power to walk in this world; and, another thing, heavenly things are revealed - the things that belong to the place in which we are. "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given us of God." There we are to live, and get the motive that characterizes us as Christians. If that were always so, we should be always really epistles of Christ - in our houses, our dress, in our every-day life, in all the things that are the expression of a man's heart. Is Christ the motive in every thing we do? If not, we leave Him for some vanity or other. What every Christian has to do is to commend himself "to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (v. 2), that if they judge him, it should be for consistency.

Verse 6. "God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts," &c. That is where every Christian is. The glory of God is revealed in my heart, and I am thus to manifest it in the world, that they should see it in my words and ways and in my gift, if I have one - that all I say and do should give out the light of the knowledge of God in a world of pitch darkness. It has been revealed in our hearts to make it shine out in the dark of this world. It is a blessed place, but a very distinct and definite one. If Christ is revealed, He has brought in the knowledge of God; all the glory of God, His holiness, His majesty, His love, has shined into our hearts, that we may give it out. That is very simple if it were all; but it is not all. It is God's way to put this in an earthen vessel. The apostle does not speak here of wickedness, but weakness. We have to get the flesh put down, and we get chastening. We know that, but the apostle does not go on that ground here. It is not a question of sin or failure, but of the path of the Christian as such. The first element is, he has the whole glory of God revealed; but in this "earthen vessel, that the excellency of the power may be of God" - constant dependence.

Great, excellent, and wonderful as the treasure is, He has put it in a place which, to man's eye and mind and thought, is unfit for it - as to power, I mean. Therefore in your life, even when you are going on right, you get these two elements - all the glory of God revealed in your heart; but put purposely in an earthen vessel, because there is a great deal for us to learn as regards what poor, weak, wretched creatures we are. Peter says, "I will go to prison and to death for Thee." "Will you?" the Lord says. "I will see." We all know what it was. You may say he had not the Holy Ghost. No, but the flesh is as treacherous now as it was before the Holy Ghost was given; of course there is more power to keep it down. We may learn slowly what it is, but learn it we must. It comes out even when we are seeking to serve Christ honestly, as Peter was. It is the thought of God to put the treasure in this vessel that it may learn itself what it is, and we must learn it. We may earnestly and honestly go and preach Christ, and heartily; but if we have not learnt ourselves there is some confidence in self, and we make mistakes. It is lovely to see Moses going down and associating Himself with the poor brickmakers; but he had not learnt himself, and he killed an Egyptian, and then ran away.

I must keep watching the flesh, for I know what it is; then I lean on a strength that is not mine, and wait for God's direction and guidance; for I know myself in such a way as to have confidence in Another, not in myself. By the discovery of my weakness I know I have no power but in God. Paul had a thorn in the flesh. He had been put down when he was converted, but he had to be kept down that he might know it was not the capacity of Paul, but that the power of Christ might rest upon him. God says, "It is I working in you. Cannot I work through your boggling?" "Oh, then," says Paul, "I will keep it! Most gladly will I glory in mine infirmities." Here he says, "We are troubled on every side, but not distressed;" for we have God to look to. "Perplexed, but not in despair." I cannot see a way out for myself, but I have God, and He is a sure way. "Persecuted, but not forsaken;" for God is with me. "Cast down, but not destroyed." He lived in the consciousness that the Lord was always there, and that he wanted Him. Even in truth and sincerity of

heart we are apt to go on as if we did not want the Lord. If for one instant I have not Him with me I am nothing. Where we are seeking to serve Christ we have to learn our own lesson; but where there is not that dependence there will be failure. In small things or in great things we cannot do anything without Him, and we are not to do good in the strength of our own thoughts; we are slow to learn it.

There are two remedies for this. First, "Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus." (v. 10.) The apostle applies it to himself, and that goes very far, though it is not all; but if you applied the cross to every thought that arises in your heart, you would find how many thoughts the cross would crucify. The flesh would never put up a thought at all. What thought could a dead man put up? Of course, we have to be gentle and courteous as Christians; but the old man has been put to death, and I have to reckon myself dead. Here he is carrying it out every day. I might fear there are many here who do not so apply it to every thought and feeling and purpose; who do not so distrust the flesh, and everything in mere human nature. If I let my body live, there is flesh. But he says, I bear about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifest in my body. In order to manifest Christ always, I hold the flesh dead. That is his part in faith. Then comes the second thing - God's part. "We which live are alway delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." However faithful he was, God had to help him. He could not trust him, and He cannot trust you. He puts you through circumstances where the flesh comes out, and then says, There now. Paul could say all this trial and exercise was for Christ's sake. With us very often it is for flesh's sake.

The fulness of the glory is ours. The glory has shone into our hearts; but He puts it in an earthen vessel, because our hearts have to learn what we are. No will can be allowed; no self-stirring, no flesh, no thought from the vanity of this world can be allowed - nothing that does not suit this treasure. But do not thoughts come into your mind, and allowed there, that do not suit the treasure of heaven? Things that do not take the form of gross evil, but a quantity of things that are not Christ? Take the day's conversation, Has there been no vanity, no idleness? Is your speech "alway with grace, seasoned with salt"? If you take up a newspaper and read of the vanities of the world, do you then turn to read of Christ and His glory, and not find your heart dull? If you do not find it out, you may be sure it will get duller and duller. It hinders the preciousness of Christ to you. You have lost power. You do not go and read your Bible and pray with the same freshness. When I apply the cross of Christ, it stops the moving of my heart. The Lord puts me through circumstances that put me to the test. If death came and found me a dead man, what effect would it have? What is killing a dead man? With the apostle the flesh was kept down, and he was looking to God. He says, "We were pressed out of measure, beyond strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life;" but we trusted in God, who raised the dead. Would their killing him prevent God's raising him? It would bring it nearer. We can bless God for it. He puts down the flesh that wants putting down. "Death worketh in us, and life in you." Death was working in Paul, and nothing but life worked as regards others. Oh that it were so with us!

The practical effect of it is, "All things are for your sakes." When self is down, I begin to think the thoughts of God, and every thing is for us. I see "all things are yours - life, death, things present, things to come - and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." Do you believe that "all things are for your sakes"? that all that happens in the world, no matter what the motives that govern men in it, every thing is for your sakes? He makes every thing work together for your good, every circumstance in your life. They may not be pleasant, but we have not to be occupied with them as the world is. God overrules all. He lets man go on, but "makes the wrath of man to praise Him." Peter says, in Acts 2 - You, by wicked hands, crucified and slew Him - but it was by the "determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God." We want only to have

confidence that He has a purpose, and that purpose is to glorify His Son. Whatever is needed for that He will do. If my eyes are straightforward to glorify Him, every thing goes right. If I go against His path, He will knock me over. If I am in His path, He helps me on; but I must be there with His strength. Paul says, "We faint not." I do not go on in my own strength. I may be weary or weak, but it is God. I may be faint in my mind; but "when I am weak, then am I strong" "The inward man is renewed day by day." Dependence is renewal. You never get in the grace of to-day strength for to-morrow. If I have learned in it more of Christ, it is profit for eternity, of course; but if the manna was kept a day it stank - it became self-righteousness. You must be dependent every instant. (v. 17.) Every trouble gives the apprehension of what is to come. "Never mind," he says, "it is a 'light affliction.'" The inward man is not touched, it is "renewed day by day;" and we get blessing by these very things.

I would ask you, Are you ready to take this place, willing to be under God's hand, cleaving to Him with purpose of heart, saying, "I want to get Christ, to win Him, and here I have one thing to do - to manifest Christ"? Are you willing to have your flesh put down? It is singleness of eye. What Satan is at is to get us to have, if it were ever so little, confidence in the flesh. Do you say, "Let the vessel be dealt with as He will, in whatever He sees needed, so that Christ may be manifested, whether by life or by death"? Is that the desire of your hearts?

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-nelson-darby/treasure-in-earthen-vessels-2-corinthians-4/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net