Glory in Jars of Clay

2 Corinthians 4

We left off last week in 2 Corinthians 3 with the reminder that, as Christians, we live, love, and make our judgements based upon the Spirit of God and the law of Christ. Even though there was a time where people said “we worship on this mountain or that mountain,” we are now living in a time where true believers worship God “In Spirit and in Truth.” We carry God’s Spirit wherever we go and His glory can be seen in us, in fact even in spite of us and our weakness. This is how the apostle Paul could be so confident in his preaching. He truly believed that God’s glory could be seen in the message of the gospel, even though he himself, apart from God, was a broken man.

This brings us to chapter 4 of 2nd Corinthians where Paul which starts with:

4 Therefore,

I have always been taught that whenever you read “therefore” you have to go back and see what it is there for. Therefore, we will back up a couple verses.

**17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.**

**2 Corinthians 3:17-18 NLT**

The increasing glory that we display as Christians doesn’t come from us. Our transformation is primarily an inner spiritual transformation. This is why being old, being out of shape, having a low IQ, or having any type of physical limitation in no way limits God’s ability to show His glory. We can be bold about who God is in us regardless of our own human limitations. Human limitations and weaknesses and even our own sin can be disheartening, but God’s glory cannot be diminished. As Paul will write later in this same book:

**“I will not boast about myself, except about my weaknesses. 6 Even if I should choose to boast, I would not be a fool, because I would be speaking the truth. But I refrain, so no one will think more of me than is warranted by what I do or say, 7 or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”**

**2 Corinthians 12:5-10 NLT**

Under the Old Covenant you wouldn’t find many boasting about their weakness or admitting to having some “thorn in the flesh.” Just like most Jews believed in an earthly political King, so they equated earthly physical success to spiritual victory. But the Apostle Paul kind of blows that up a bit. He seems to demonstrate that admitting human weakness and hardship plays a key role in displaying God’s glory. As he goes on to say in 2 Corinthians 4:

**Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. 6 For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.**

**2 Corinthians 4:1-6 NLT**

If I got up here and told you that I am the light and that I am successful and strong in everything I do, I would be using deception. I have weaknesses just like every other human on the planet. I don’t like my weaknesses and though I would like to get rid of them. It is my weakness that demonstrates how glorious Jesus is and I am not. I’m like the outside of a Kiwi or a banana peel. The outside isn’t the tasty part. But hopefully, through the Spirit of God living in me, you are able to see and taste His sweetness. And in that you are able to tell the difference between my earthly body and my spiritual being. As Paul goes on to write:

**7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8 We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10 We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11 For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. 12 So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.**

**2 Corinthians 4:7-12 NLT**

Our earthly trials paired with our hope in God, helps to magnify how God’s glory is reflected. Have you ever met someone who is exceedingly joyful even though nothing ever seems to go right for them?

It is otherworldly.

My grandfather’s mother and father died when he was very young. He was never a rich man. He lived in a small house in downtown Sumner that he bought for $3500. He barely finished high school and was a machinist for probably over 30 years. He had his first heart attack at 49 years old. I saw him get angry a few of times, usually in disagreements with my grandma, my mom, or my uncle. He was your average clay jar, that had been shaped from the soils of adversity.

When he retired, he worked tirelessly recycling cardboard to supplement his retirement income. But the man always seemed content. He would hum songs to himself while he worked in his garden, split and stacked firewood, or tooled in his shop. He wouldn’t have made onto any how to be successful who’s who list. But he oozed with God’s spiritual glory.

Oh, and he always had time for me. Or so I thought. I now know that he always **made** time for me. I wish I had made more time for him. But at a younger age I didn’t value the things of God as much as I valued the things of the world. I wanted to be a shiny fancy vessel and I wanted to spend my time with other shiny vessels. When you are young the last thing you want to hear is that death is at work in you. But my grandpa knew that death was at work in him and so he chose to impart Christ’s life to me whenever he had the opportunity.

The Spirit of Christ isn’t shown through physical strength and success. It is displayed through the Fruit of God’s Spirit living in us. My Grandpa never claimed to be a great man, but he often talked about His Great God and Savior! And I knew how much he loved Jesus because he told me and he showed me. It is human nature (the sin nature) to be drawn to people who have worldly success. Don’t be deceived by it. Because physically speaking we are all jars of clay. Some of us admit it while others of us fight it. Some of us have come to know God and others are still trying to be Gods.

The only true glory that is in us comes from God’s Spirit and it is true that it can be part of our success on an earthly level.

But true believers in Christ should always be quick to point people to the Good stuff that God has done in them and let them be amazed at the contrast between light and dark and earth and spirit. This why Paul finishes 2 Corinthians 4 by saying:

**13 It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” Since we have that same spirit of[c] faith, we also believe and therefore speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. 15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.**

**16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.**

**2 Corinthians 4:13-18 NLT**

You know what is easily seen? Power, influence, Money, cars, houses, big promotions, bling, I mean it is called bling because it catches your eye and captivates you.

You know what is less visible? At least to those who are looking for bling.

Faith, hope, Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, and Self-Control. These are the things that show God’s glory and Christ’s presence in us. It is not the things that are easily seen on the surface that matters, it’s what’s inside.

As Jesus once said to the Pharisee’s and experts of the law.

**25 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean.**

**Matthew 23:25-26 NLT**

These Pharisees had their eyes fixed on what was temporal, the things that were easily seen by those whose eyes were veiled. They were blinded by their view that worldly prosperity and spirituality were linked. They were the ones Paul wrote to Timothy about when he said:

**6 But godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 8 But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 9 Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.**

**1 Timothy 6:6-10 NLT**

As Christians our most important task in life is allowing God’s Spirit to be shown in our lives. We should not lose sight of that in our worldly pursuits. And don’t ever be ashamed of being an earthen vessel, in which God’s glorious presence resides.

My Grandpa was your average earthen vessel, but in my lifetime I saw God’s Spirit shine from him in ways that are almost blinding to me now. I didn’t see it then because my eyes were fixed on the wrong things.
As God said to the prophet Samuel:

**7 …“Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”**

**1 Samuel 16:7 NLT**

And as the apostle Paul wrote:

**16 So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view.**

**2 Corinthians 5:16 NLT**

How do you judge success? By how shiny your earthen vessel is or by how God’s glory shines through your earthen vessel?