

Bent Not Broken
2 Corinthians 4:7-10
Sermon Outline
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A. Surpassing Greatness (v. 7):

1. We have this treasure – We can continuously count on the fact that we possess the exceptional blessing of all the Holy Spirit living in us (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; Titus 3:4-6; Ephesians 5:15-18). Therefore we, who once were lost (Ephesians 2:11-19) now become persons who are of exceptional value to God and to each other.

a) We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus: The frailty of the “clay jar” of Paul’s humanity (vs. 7) is plainly seen in the constant hardships and persecutions with which he is buffeted for the sake of the gospel and through which he shares in Christ’s suffering (see 1:5; Rom. 8:17; Php 3:10; Col. 1:24).

b) By this treasure Paul reminds us that the Gospel is a valuable jewel (cf. Mt 13:44, 52) committed to him (Cf. Eph 3:1, 2, 7, 8). Human nature in its weakness and frailty is pictured in the phrase earthen vessels (Cf. Acts 9:15). The word exceeding (*hyperbolē*) means “excess, extraordinary quality or character” (Arndt). The word is used in the NT only by Paul (II Cor 1:8; 4:7, 17; 12:17; Rom 7:13; I Cor 12:31; Gal 1:13).^[1]

2. Surpassing greatness of the power – Our ability to overcome obstacles, resist the attacks of Satan, and experience the inner spiritual ability (1 John 4:4) in the face of danger to walk in the supernatural strength of God is immeasurable. Paul so experienced living in this resurrection power, (Philippians 3:10 – the Holy Spirit, Christ’s inheritance to us, Ephesians 1:13-14), he was able to do ‘all things through Christ who continually kept strengthening him.’ (Philippians 4:13). It is the same Paul who says we are more than conquerors (Romans 8:37).

- a) It is precisely because the proclaimers of the gospel are in themselves frail and fragile (witness vv. 8–9!), relatively insignificant and unattractive, that people clearly recognize that the transforming power (greek: δύναμις n. /dynamis/) of the gospel is God’s alone and that the strength (also δύναμις n. /dynamis/) of its ministers to endure hardship comes from God alone. This emphasis on the divine source of power and enablement is reminiscent of 1:1–10, 21–22; 2:17; 3:4–6; 4:1 and anticipates 12:9; 13:4.^[2]

3. Will be of God – All that we do, when we choose to rely on the inner strength the Lord provides (Ephesians 3:15-19) is energized by the Spirit of God whose permanent presence is the resilient force that leads and guides us no matter the obstacles we may encounter (John 15:5, 7-10).

B. Unbroken (v. 8):

1. We are afflicted in EVERY WAY – Despite all that we are equipped to overcome, we are constantly going to experience sufferings that are so intense, the pressure of the circumstances is going to press against our spirit (Psalm 34:17-19), doing everything possible to tear us down emotionally.

2. Crushed; distressed – Even though we will experience suffering in every way, we will not continually feel we are in a narrow room and hemmed in (a depressive state) because our circumstances are extremely painful. This is because of the ability the Lord provides

within us to overcome obstacles (Hebrews 12:4 – powerful word, Philippians 4:4-8 – prayer, Hebrews 1:14 – angels who guard us).

a) Perhaps it occurs first in the list precisely because it is the most comprehensive term available to denote any type of distress or tribulation. Although troubles pressed on Paul from every quarter, he never found himself crushed or cornered. στενοχωρέω – v. / stenochōreō/ refers to confinement in a restricted space in either a literal or a metaphorical sense. Because the power of God was active in preserving his life and his spirit, Paul never found himself in a plight from which there was no escape (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13).^[3]

b) Through divine intervention, he was always able to retain his buoyancy of spirit. Acts 18:12–17 illustrates this general truth. When the Corinthian Jews made a concerted attack on Paul and brought him before Gallio’s tribunal, he was not left without room to operate, for the Proconsul dismissed the charge of religious sedition made against Paul, thus enabling him to continue his work in Corinth for “many days longer” (Acts 18:18 RSV) and his missionary endeavors in the eastern Mediterranean for the next decade (a.d. 52–62) “with the assurance of the benevolent neutrality of the imperial authorities.”^[4]

3. Perplexed but not in despair – There are times we repeatedly become doubtful or unsure of how to proceed when we encounter difficult circumstances. We do not need to continually feel like we are at an utter loss and destitute because we have the treasure of the Holy Spirit powerfully living in us. It is He who is our peace if we remain determined to set our minds on the activity of God (Philippians 4:8-9).

4. Persecuted but not forsaken – Our commitment to live out our faith can cause others, as it was in the case of Paul, to intensely focus on aggressively remaining hostile and oppressive towards us (2 Corinthians 11:23-29). Even though this can be the case with the power that is of God, the continual presence of the Holy Spirit will provide us peace, because trials teach us perseverance (James 1:2-4) and bless us to win the ‘Crown of Life’

(James 1:12). We will never be forgotten because the Holy Spirit lives in us, Christ is at the right hand of God making intercession for us and is committed to keep His angels around us (Psalm 34:7; Hebrews 1:14); and as Paul stated, 'nothing separates us from his love.' (Romans 8:38-39)

5. Struck down but not destroyed – There are times when life will continuously hit us hard even causing us bodily injury or emotional pain (2 Corinthians 11:22-29). Even though these incidents may be continuous, God's power will preserve us and protect our well-being so that it is impossible for us to come to ruin (Matthew 10:26-29).

a) Weakness allows the glory of God to be revealed. To point to difficult physical circumstances was not to point to spiritual inner despair or inferiority (4:8–12). Both the psalmist and Paul spoke of their trials in order to glorify God (4:13, quoting Ps. 116:10). Paul poured out his heart with reference to his suffering for the sake of Christ. He shared a divine perspective on suffering that has been an encouragement to many in the straits of affliction.^[5]

6. Carry about the dying - Because we may all go through incidents that cause physical pain due to our commitment to Christ, we can constantly carry about the same physical wounds that Christ bore. Paul was constantly being exposed to death.

a) Paul's term for "bearing around" ("carry around" – NIV) the dying of Jesus was typically used for pallbearers, implying that Paul not only preaches but also carries around Jesus' dying in the persecutions he faces daily. The word he uses for Jesus' "dying" includes the stench and rotting of a person who was dead or dying; hence Paul describes his participation in Christ's sufferings quite graphically.^[6]

b) First, the resurrection life of Jesus is evident at precisely the same time as there is a "carrying around" of his dying. Indeed, the very purpose of the believer's identification with Jesus in his sufferings is to provide an opportunity for the display of

Jesus' risen life. Second, one and the same physical body is the place where the sufferings of Jesus are repeated and where his risen power is manifested.^[7]

7. Life (Zoe) of Christ - This is the point of focus of our suffering. The more we are committed to obeying Christ, the more we die to ourselves (John 12:23-26), and sometimes, the greater our suffering. The more we suffer while committing our lives to Christ, the greater our transformation to becoming like Christ; *"Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."* (Colossians 3:1-4; NASU)

a) But though Paul saw suffering as paradoxically beneficial for himself (Phil. 3:10), he was ultimately motivated by the example of his Lord who gave His life on behalf of others (Mark 10:45; cf. Phil. 2:5-8). Paul believed his own sufferings were a means through which God could minister to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:5-6; cf. Eph. 3:10; 2 Tim. 2:10). As Christ had brought life to others through His suffering and death, so Paul's suffering (with **death ... at work in** him [cf. 2 Cor. 4:10-11]) was a means of causing spiritual **life** to be **at work in** others (Col. 1:24).^[8]

8. Life (Zoe) of Christ - The transformation to the character of Christ produces the fruit of the Spirit; inner peace, greater strength for long suffering. We can love anyone and can experience a joy that surpasses understanding. No matter what, we can be kind, be of good character, be faithful, gentle, self-controlled, and effectively make wise decisions so that we do not stumble through our trials (Galatians 5:22-23; 2 Peter 1:3-11). This is the life Christ died to produce in and through us (John 10:10).

9. Maybe manifested in our body - The life of Christ will become a vivid reality to all those around us so that we can say like Paul: *"I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."* (Galatians 2:20; NASU)

- ^[1] Pfeiffer, C. F., & Harrison, E. F., eds. (1962). [*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament*](#) (2 Co 4:7). Moody Press.
- ^[2] Harris, M. J. (2005). [*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 340). W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press.
- ^[3] Harris, M. J. (2005). [*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 343). W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press.
- ^[4] Harris, M. J. (2005). [*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 343). W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press.
- ^[5] Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). [*Tyndale concise Bible commentary*](#) (pp. 569–570). Tyndale House Publishers.
- ^[6] Keener, C. S. (1993). [*The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament*](#) (2 Co 4:7). InterVarsity Press.
- ^[7] Harris, M. J. (2005). [*The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: a commentary on the Greek text*](#) (p. 347). W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.; Paternoster Press.
- ^[8] Lowery, D. K. (1985). [*2 Corinthians*](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 564). Victor Books.