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# Insignificance and the God of Glory

## 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

**Introduction** How can my life count for much – I only do...

- Round and round without real significance...
- See others who seem to be making an impact...

What I do in ministry is so small

- Small in the grand scheme of the kingdom...
- Small in the glories of the gospel...
- Small in the view of others...

Maybe what you do hovers around the gift of helps...

What is the huge challenge when you or your life or your ministry is small?

- To become discouraged...
- To quit and not be involved...

But notice the challenge for Paul in his own ministry in verse 1, “*Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.*” And again in verse 16, “*So we do not lose heart.*” This is the problem: that we are tempted to lose heart and quit.

But Paul began with these words, “*Therefore, since we have this ministry...*” What ministry is he referring to? It is the glorious ministry of the New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:6). So, he does not lose heart (4:1,16) in the face of difficulty or decline.

But if his is such a grand ministry and he had to persevere, how much more difficult is it for us when our lives and ministries and work seems small and insignificant.

But he will not quit. And neither should we. Why?

Ringling out from this chapter is an enormous emphasis on glory. It is all about the glory of God. That is, God should be so large and weighty in our lives to such a degree we will not lose heart in the midst of any ministry.

- (3:8) – It is a *with more glory*.
- (3:10) – It is a *surpassing glory*.
- (3:18) – It is the *glory of the Lord* into which we are being transformed.
- (4:4) – It is the *gospel (good news) of the glory of God*.
- (4:5) – It is the *glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*.
- (4:15) – It is a *thanksgiving that abounds to the glory of God*.
- (4:17) – It is an *eternal weight of glory*.

So, how do we work through the struggles in life and ministry so that we do not lose heart in view of the God of glory?

**Strategies: The Practices Employed****(v.1-6)**

How we do ministry and the way we go about it are profoundly affected by the glory of the ministry of the New Covenant.

.<sup>2</sup> But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.<sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing.<sup>4</sup> In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.<sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.<sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

**The Conduct of our Ministry****(v.2)**

Paul's language is clear in what he rejects and what he embraces

There will be *no deception* in life and ministry...

There will be *no distortion* of truth in ministry...

There must be *a full and complete disclosure* of truth...

**The Challenge in our Ministry****(v.3-4)**

One of the great struggles in each sphere of the church's purpose is that people don't get it... So we become frustrated and discouraged and turn to things that work.

We must understand that the god of this world, Satan, is actively blinding unbelievers so that they cannot see the light.

And what a gospel it is that we have to proclaim. It is "the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (v.4b).

So how do these truths affect Paul's understanding of ministry? It shapes...

**The Concepts for our Ministry****(v.5-6)**

I see two powerfully important ideas that are central to not losing heart in the glorious ministry of the gospel to a blinded and dead world.

There is the centrality of *the supremacy of Christ* (v.5).

So here it is. The glory is great. The blindness is perverse and pervasive. But Jesus is supreme and God is sovereign and the good news is glorious.

But here is the root of so much discouragement. "We have this glorious treasure of light and life in earthen vessels, in frail and failing jars of clay" (v.7). So we must not lose heart...

## **Suffering: The Problems Encountered (v.7-15)**

<sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. <sup>8</sup> We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; <sup>10</sup> always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. <sup>11</sup> For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. <sup>12</sup> So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Here is the surprise. The glory of the treasure entails the suffering of the vessel. If we are to have God's power released in ministry, we will have the frailty of the vessel exposed in suffering. My beloved, there is no other way.

### **The Purpose in God's Design (v.7)**

The earthiness of the vessel shows that the power is from God. And when there is no power, what is often then sought is an elegant and strong and beautiful vessel.

### **The Pain of our Experience (v.8-9)**

Here are the kind of things that are the shared painful experiences that Paul suffered and we are exposed to.

CIRCUMSTANCES & MOLDING - We are being pressed down and squeezed in - but we are not in a strait place.

FEAR & THE FUTURE - We cannot see the passage (road) ahead, but we are not in a dead end.

MISUNDERSTANDING & LONELINESS - We are pursued & hunted down - but we are not left without friends.

PREJUDICE & FAILURE - We are thrown down and removed from a position of trust & preeminence - but we are not utterly loosed from the assembly.

What has God brought into your life to break the earthen vessel?

### **The Principle for our Understanding (v.10-12)**

Here is *the reality* of what is actually going on in the trials (v.10).

Further, *the reason* these circumstances come is that we are handed over to death so that Jesus' life may be revealed.

So *the result* is that we are sharing the fullest expression of body life. We are entrusted with death so that life may flow to others.

So the hardness or smallness of ministry is *how you experience the suffering of Christ*. It is through this experience that the gospel is furthered...

### **The Persuasion by our Faith (v.13-15)**

<sup>13</sup> Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, <sup>14</sup> knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. <sup>15</sup> For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

Paul has same attitude of faith as the Psalmist in Psalm 116:10 when he connects the difficulties he is experiencing with the dynamic of being delivered by God. So his identifying the hardships of life in ministry is not the *absence* of faith, but an *attitude* of faith.

The discouraging difficulties do not keep us from a grand expectation that the gospel will spread...

The ever-spreading *grace* brings forth the abounding *gratitude* that is *glorifying* to God.

### **Shaping: The Perceptions Entailed (v.16-18)**

<sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

The way we behave is driven by what we believe. You will often hear it said, "It is all a matter of perspective." That is not what Paul is saying here. What he means here is more represented by our saying, "Keep it all in perspective."

#### **Inward, not outward (v.16)**

We are looking at what God is doing in us. The outer man is in decline. But God is at work to develop and renew and sustain the inner man. I will not lose heart in failing and increasing frailty of my physical body when I experience the constant inward renewal of my soul by God's marvelous work.

#### **Future, not present (v.17)**

We are weighing it all in the light of glory. The incredible difficulties and pain expressed in verse 8 that is sacrificial, life out-pouring are momentary and light when we place them on the scale over against the massive weight of the solid and stupendous glory to come.

#### **Eternal, not temporal (v.18)**

We are seeing the invisible, the eternal. So with spiritual eyes trained by faith through the Word we focus, not on what is near and passing and temporal, but on what is high and eternal and lasting.

Now stop a moment and reread that sentence again. The momentary, light afflictions: (1) are *producing for us* an incomparable weight of glory (2) *while we are looking* at what is not seen. There are two conditions to our having that weight of glory: the experience of afflictions while gazing on the unseen.

So, we will not lose heart. The greatness of the treasure in the frailty of the vessel gives us the privilege of pouring out our lives for others because we are convinced there is a glory to come that will make it all worth while.

## Closing

Gideon's breaking of the jars hiding the lamps in Judges 7.

- Small in number...
- Lamps hidden in pitchers...
- Pitchers broken releasing light...

Woman's breaking of the perfume jar to anoint Jesus feet.

- Insignificant woman looked down on by others...
- The fragrance in a clay jar...
- The jar broken and perfume poured out...