

# Treasure in Surprising Places

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 20 November 2022

Preacher: Angus MacLeod

[ 0 : 00 ] And as we begin, I want to ask a wee question, because I know it's something that I feel very true in my own life, and something that I thought once I became a Christian would happen.

Have you ever thought that life should be easier, especially for us as Christians? Because if the good news about Jesus is so true and full of hope, shouldn't we struggle less, or maybe just feel less overwhelmed?

Shouldn't it look or at least feel more impressive to be a Christian? Have you ever thought, maybe, am I just doing something wrong or missing something?

Or at least as you look around church and you think of Bon Accord and think, well, surely the church should be more impressive. When we look out at the city with all its troubles, when we think of our neighbors, we think of the lack of interest in God, how are we ever meant to reach them?

Or even care for a fraction of their needs? And this feeling of just inadequacy as we look out on the world and feel the weight of this world upon us is not something new.

[ 1 : 20 ] It's not just something that's happened in the past two or three years. But this is something that the Christians in the church at Corinth were facing, and they were asking as they looked around and saw the world that they lived in.

And they felt that they weren't up to the task. Because of these challenges, and also made worse by new teachers that have arrived. And they begin to question Paul.

Paul, who had founded this church in Corinth and who writes this letter, they begin to doubt Paul and say, well, surely, Paul, if your message is true, shouldn't your life, Paul, be a lot better?

Because you seem to be struggling. And these new teachers are saying that the life of a Christian should be about blessing now and should be about prosperity and power. Life should be easier.

And their lives, these new teachers, they looked impressive. They had powerful personalities. Something you would want. But Paul has much to say in contrast to these teachers.

[ 2 : 30 ] To these men of prosperity, he says to them, and you can read it in the earlier chapters of this second letter he writes to the Corinthians, that Paul responds to them. He doesn't respond listing off all his powerful abilities.

Instead, he writes about his weakness. He writes about his struggles. The challenges that he's faced in his life as he seeks to reach people with the good news of Jesus.

Paul, as we just read in the first half of this chapter, tells them what it is. What is powerful. What really works. What is faithful ministry and what brings life to others is not about someone proclaiming themselves or having it all together or looking impressive, but by anyone openly speaking about Jesus Christ as Lord and themselves as his servants.

This, he says, is a message of power, of life, and of good news. And today we're going to focus our time looking mainly just from verse 7 to the ends, from 7 to 18 in chapter 4.

So please do keep that open if you can. And we're going to be looking at this passage in three points. So we're going to first look at power in weakness, and then life in death, and then finally hope while we wait.

[ 3 : 52 ] And you'll find that on your sheets. And it's also up on the screen. So first of all, we're going to look at power in weakness. Because Paul, as well as talking about weakness, he has much more to say.

He says that Christians are actually part of something absolutely incredible. Something powerful.

Because he says that this powerful, life-giving message of Jesus that he spoke about in the first half of this chapter, that Christians have received and believed, is a great treasure.

We see this in verse 7. He says it's a great treasure. But he uses a picture to show why it might not feel like that right now. Because he says in verse 7, this treasure, well, it's inside a jar made of clay.

And see, in the times before electricity, back in the days of Paul, candles were put in jars made of clay. And they had oil in them, and they were used to light their way. A bit like my torch from earlier. But they were used, and they helped people to find their way around it. It was a common of commodities. You used it, you broke it, and everyone had it. But it served a vital purpose.

[ 5 : 16 ] And if you want an equivalent today, something that we treat the same way, we use it and we throw it away, while I was waiting for Joe to pick me up because there was no trains, it's a simple coffee cup.

You use it, and you recycle it or throw it away. You don't even think about the cup, unless it's got a really nice, pretty pattern on it like that. But you don't think about the cup, because it's what's inside that you're after.

That's what you pay four pounds for. It's the coffee inside that helps you get through a difficult Monday morning at work, or a rather long sermon on a Sunday morning. But that's what you, it's what's inside that really matters.

And yet, you don't think about the outside. See, in this chapter, in verse 6, Paul has just said that this picture of a disposable clay pot, was in verse 6, was how God describes creation.

He created the world, the God of light, let light shine out of darkness. This God has made his light shine in the hearts of believers.

[ 6 : 25 ] Christians are those whom the creator God, who brought light out of darkness, is the one who put light inside of Christians. And this knowledge of the good news of Jesus.

And this knowledge is a treasure that resides in us. The flesh and blood of a human. And just like how Adam, the man who was formed out of the dust, and to dust he returned, we are frail.

We are weak humans who, life begins and it comes to an end. But we are those who God has put something wonderful within, this powerful message of the good news of Jesus.

It's a great treasure. And yet, God has deliberately put his message inside a human who will get tired, who will get weak, not some fancy ornate vessel.

And we read in verse 7, if we carry on, it says, why God does this, why God does it this way. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

[ 7 : 38 ] Because this image, this picture of a frail vessel of Paul's weakness and our own weakness is compared against the all-surpassing power of God.

See, the weakness of Paul doesn't take away from the power of God. Actually, it highlights it. And see, Paul goes even further in verse 8 to describe what it feels like.

What it feels like for a Christian to live. What it feels like for day-to-day reality. He says in verse 8, he says, Paul's point is that Christians aren't exempt from life's challenges or all the challenges that come from being someone who speaks of Jesus in a world that's hostile to him.

Yet they're sustained through them. So that while God has allowed Paul to feel the pressure from the weight of the world around him, God's great power is at work in his life.

God saves him from being completely crushed. So that while he's often perplexed and confused about the world and all its challenges and where he's to go, yet because of God's power in his life, he doesn't succumb to despair.

[ 9 : 11 ] So that while he was often persecuted for speaking about Jesus, feeling the heat of people's dislike and their displeasure, he was never once abandoned by God. So that Paul can say if such a brittle and frail vessel such as him can survive intact, the praise doesn't belong to him, but belongs to God.

To the sustaining power of God. And Paul would say this is the only explanation why he hasn't collapsed already. His trials have caused him some cracks. There's some scars.

But he remains whole because of this divine glue that holds them together. See, Paul uses this picture of a clay, frail pot to highlight that God can and actually deliberately chooses to use frail, weak people to proclaim his glory to the world.

From outside, someone might doubt that a Christian has anything to offer. But God deliberately uses them for his glory. So it's not powerful people that make a difference, but the powerful message of God.

See, if you were given this great big treasure chest that was dredged up from the North Sea, this big old wooden box that's broken and battered, you can just about see some gold coins in it.

[10:37] You wouldn't be like, no thanks, maybe come back with a nice oak box. No, I don't want that. No, you'd take it. But see, the people in Corinth were beginning to turn away from Paul, to turn away from Christians who looked weak in the outside.

They wanted their leaders to look successful. They wanted power that they could follow. But they're missing the treasure that's within. What about you?

Do you see this treasure that's in surprising places? What about you as you look around the church and you see the person beside you, this frail Christian, that maybe the next bump might seem like it might collapse them in on themselves.

But do you see that inside that Christian beside you, inside the members of this church, that there's a treasure that is greater than anything the world has?

And actually something inside them that is holding them together, that's sustaining them. Which takes us to our second point, our life in death.

[11:44] See, because going through the difficulties of this life, going through its challenges, and just even listening to what Joe prayed for, and hearing the list of things that are going on in the lives here, in the lives of the world around us, it can remind us just how fragile we are.

It can cause us to lose heart as we attempt to speak about Jesus to the world around us. Paul tells us to take courage in verses 10, 11, and 12, that there is much that will be done through these clay pots, through you.

Look with me at verse 10, where we read, we always carry around in our bodies the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. We read again in verse 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 bodies.

See, for us who have believed in this message of Jesus, these clay jars, they're always being given over to death, to challenge, so that his life, so Jesus' life, may also be revealed in us, in our mortal bodies.

this life of Jesus is made known through us. So this life of Jesus comes to others, even though it doesn't feel like that always to us.

[13:10] But how is this life of Jesus made known to the people around us? Well, we're told at least two ways here. And the first is that as people look on at our weakness, or they sit with us and they pray with us, they will sometimes see Jesus delivering us from what is coming upon us, our challenges that we face.

Somehow, we make it through, so that that difficulty, or that sickness, is overcome, or endured. And all we can say is, thank you Jesus, and they rejoice with us.

Other times, it's sadly, it's the comfort and peace that we receive, though these trials aren't taken away. And it can feel exhausting.

Our experience often feels like death to us, even as the life of Jesus is made known through us. But we can say, as verse 16 does, though we do not lose heart.

Therefore, we do not lose heart, though outwardly we are wasting away. Inwardly, we are being renewed day by day. We see God's work in the lives of us and those around us.

[14:24] We're not promised that it all be well outwardly, but that God will renew us as we depend on him. Paul's message gives us hope, too, so that when we feel weak, and yet somehow, by God's grace and the prayers of those around us, we keep going, we can confidently say, like Paul, it is God who has done it.

See, one of the most discouraging things I feel as a Christian is that I look at myself and see how inadequate I feel for all that's ahead of me. I come to this church and my prayer is, please help me just to write an essay and not forget God in it, even though the essay is about God.

And I see my weakness. But one of the most encouraging things I have is the fact that I train within a church like Haddington, and I get to know it then.

I get to know the people there. I get to see how God is at work in their lives in little ways, keeping them going and sustaining them through incredibly hard experiences and all that life throws at them, through being parents, difficult jobs, caring for loved ones' sicknesses, bereavements.

And often my heart breaks at what they have to endure. But my heart rejoices at God's work in their life. See, I get to see how the love of God is radiated through them.

[15:50] I hear the result of their faith as I speak to others and they're encouraged to keep going as they see God's work in the lives of the people in our church, as they see God's faithfulness.

And I know that's true for Joe and the elders here. As they get the joy and the privilege of being part of your lives, they get to see God doing all those little things that keep you going and sustain you. We're also told another way that God demonstrates his life through us or how Jesus' life is made known through us. Paul described it earlier in verse 2 of this chapter of an open statement of truth by speaking about Jesus.

And as you go through and look at Paul's life, you can't separate his suffering for Jesus and his speaking for Jesus. And we see this in verse 13 where he says, it is written, I believe, therefore I have spoken.

Since we have the same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore we speak. And see, Paul is quoting from the psalm that we sung and we read earlier.

[16:57] That psalm that has such emotion and such sadness of the trials of life that have come upon the psalmist. Surrounded on all sides, feeling overwhelmed and yet in his distress cried out to God.

And God gave him the strength to keep going and so he sings. He sings of the faithfulness of God. So Paul, by quoting this, says that despite the difficulties of his ministry, that Paul, just like the psalmist, in the midst of his distress, he also speaks about God to all.

He has the same faith as the psalmist, the same spirit that lives within him and so he speaks. And he speaks about God's faithfulness.

That's what the psalmist does. He says, I was near death and I cried out, Lord save me. And the Lord saved him. And this is what we speak about to the people around us.

We cry out to God and he delivers us and so we speak. And this is the theme of God's people all the way through the Bible.

[18:13] So what you've probably seen as you've gone through Hosea, you see that God's people constantly being in need, constantly getting things wrong, constantly making a mess of things, but constantly crying out to God and God being faithful and God delivering and the people then rejoicing in God's faithfulness.

And so we speak. We speak of this God to others. We don't tamper with it as it says.

We don't change it. We just tell them who God is. We tell them of this God. And it doesn't feel powerful. It doesn't often even feel impressive. But I think it's amazing being a part of the lives of Christians and seeing their witness in everyday situations as they go to work, as they live in their homes, as they speak to loved ones.

They often don't see the fruit of their labors. They often don't see the power that's at work. But God's words aren't wasted. God's words are powerful, not because you are, but because of God's power and the power in his word.

So that as you have your neighbors over and you don't really know what to say to them and you try and mention the fact that you're a Christian or try and slip in the fact that there's some cattle services coming up and you feel, that was weak.

[19:44] We can hope and we can speak. And as a church, as you seek to reach out into this world and the city and those around you, we really need to learn this message that Paul has.

That real faithful Christian ministry often feels like an uphill battle. It doesn't always appear successful. It can be, as Paul says, feel more like death.

But as Paul says, as it feels like death in us, as we try and speak those awkward words or as we feel the displeasure from people, it also is, as life is at work in others.

And we do pray and we long for moments of power. We long for days of God's power at work in our city, saving loads of people and revival breaking out. And as the psalmist says, O Lord, will you not revive us again that your people may rejoice in you?

But that's a rare thing. It's rare where God does these wonderful outpourings. The way God ordinary works, the way he normally works in his world is through the lives of ordinary people, everyday Christians who go out into this world with the good news of Jesus, day after day.

[21:08] And you're probably thinking, oh man, we've got a visiting speaker and he's telling us about how hard the Christian life's going to be. Well, we hope there's another way. And like the hearers of Paul, we think, surely there's another way.

But think with me about the life of Jesus. Think with me about the picture of the ultimate picture of treasure in a surprising place. The God who took on flesh and came into our world.

God with us. Though the whole universe was made through him, was tired and spent much of his life alone in prayer. Though he was the king of the whole universe, humbled himself, as a servant. And because he looked frail and weak, he was rejected because he wasn't the powerful leader they wanted. So he was beaten, he was mocked, and they killed him rather than celebrate him. And he died in weakness and humiliation. His flesh was crushed. People thought he was a failure. that was until the life, that powerful life of God, rose him from the dead.

[ 22 : 23 ] Sunday morning, he rose. Death couldn't hold him. The grave couldn't hold him. And he proclaimed the resurrection from the dead. And this message has gone to the ends of the earth.

People from all over the world know and believe. And it was proclaimed through weak people, ordinary Christians, going through their daily lives, speaking to their neighbors.

So we take courage knowing that even though we feel weak, and especially because we feel weak, God will proclaim his good news through us. We ask, have you embraced this way of weakness so that people would see God and not us?

But that leads us on to our last point as we come to an end. We talk about hope while we wait.

Because we have a good news and we have great hope to share, but we also have hope ourselves as we wait.

Because Jesus' life of weakness is not the end of the story. Suffering and struggle will come to an end. the grave will not hold us either. And it's this future resurrection that Paul constantly comes back to throughout his ministry.

[ 23 : 42 ] In verse 14 it says, 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. Paul says that same power that rose Jesus out of the dead, that destroyed the tomb, that walked out, is at work within you and it will raise you from the dead.

We do not need to lose heart at our weakness now because of all that awaits us. Death is not the end. See, sickness and death will not separate us from Jesus.

See, he knows the suffering. He knows our weakness because he experienced it. He will raise us up and welcome us into eternal life. Paul thinks of it in such a way he calls it momentary troubles in verse 17.

See, these momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory that far outweighs them all. Paul can call it light and momentary not because he minimizes his own suffering or any of your suffering but because of what it's compared to.

The scale of the reward far outweighs all that we're going through right now. He says it is going to be worth it but what is hard is we can't see that right now.

[ 25 : 07 ] And verse 18 shows us that. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen but what is unseen since what is seen is temporary and what is unseen is eternal.

This world right now feels like it's all there is. It feels like the weight and the pressure and all that is around us is all that there is but it's temporary. See, what is weak right now will pass and what will come will last.

So we have to constantly fix our eyes on what is not seen so that even when our experience of the Christian life is of a clay pot ministry where we're frail and we feel weak and we feel how can we do anything Jesus will say to you well done my good and faithful servant.

He'll say it to you and to millions of other Christians who have held on to him who have responded to the good news of Jesus. As Paul says so that as he suffers this good news of Jesus will go out to more and more people and thanksgiving will overflow to God.

And we look down at verse 15 Paul says it is all for God's glory. All this for our benefit but all to the overflow of God's glory.

[ 26 : 36 ] And if you're not a Christian by now you might think I've put you off. Why would anyone want to be a Christian? It sounds rather weak. But I would say to you I think all of us struggle.

I think Christianity is just one of the few places you'll find that honesty. The world will tell you to hide our weakness. To pretend that everything's okay. But then we get glimpses of the powerful and the rich and our politicians and the celebrities and they seem even weaker than us.

And they seem just as scared as we are. because weakness is part of what it is to be human. We can't avoid the troubles of this life.

We can't hide from them. And also there's something else where we're all made for a relationship with God. God longs to give us that.

But we choose to live without Him. We choose to live in darkness. And this is the same rebellion to live our own way that brought pain into this world in the first place.

[ 27 : 49 ] But Christianity isn't hopeless. It has good news. Life does have a purpose and it does have a meaning. And suffering is just not oh well bad things happen. Suffering isn't the end.

there's a God who hears us when we cry. There's a God who knows our suffering. There's a church that He gives to care for those who suffer.

And this treasure of God and His message isn't something we earn. It's something God chooses to give us. and something that we forget is actually the so-called strong and the powerful have no need of God.

They think they can do it themselves. This message of weakness is so important because the good news of Jesus is for those who see that they need God and can't do it themselves.

And because of that there's no one too far. There's no one not good enough. But all it takes is people to see that I can't do it. And that's what the psalmist said in 116.

[ 28 : 58 ] Lord, save me. See, Jesus says He'll come to anyone who's weary and heavy laden. He will give them rest. And if you're not a Christian I would encourage you to get to know the people here.

Maybe someone who brought you or invited you. Come see Jesus. Come see if actually He is not someone who can understand your suffering and your needs and your burdens and come see a church who knows weakness and is open to talk to you who are not perfect people.

But for us and as we close it can be so tempting to base God's love for us on what we have now on how easy our life is and that's what they did in Corinth.

Our house, our bank account, our ease. Yet Paul would see that our treasure isn't in this world. We can use our lives now in service to Him because this world isn't all there is.

You see that soon we'll receive an eternal body. But while we wait we will suffer. Christianity isn't exempt.

[ 30 : 17 ] Christians aren't exempt from suffering. We may feel overwhelmed but we will be sustained. God delights to give abundantly to His people who ask for His help. There's comfort for us in affliction.

There's hope in death and there's life now and life to come. But we need to remind each other of this. We need to remind each other of the hope that we have.

The Christian life is full of joy. Full of joys now. But we're not adverse to weeping with those we love who weep. And we know that our suffering now will find its ultimate worth to come.

And what this city needs isn't perfect people. It doesn't need these super evangelists who will walk out into the streets and proclaim Jesus. What it needs is ordinary Christians who know the comfort and the love of God in the midst of difficult situations.

And who offer that same comfort out of being comfort to others. Who know God in the midst of affliction and share that God with them. Because that's what Jesus did.

[ 31 : 28 ] Jesus wept with those who wept. He cried out at death. He spoke words of comfort to people. He didn't stand far off. And his hope isn't for perfect people but weak people who see their need of rescue.

Let's pray. Lord today we come to you because we often don't feel up to all that you're calling us to. We feel often weak and helpless but Lord we thank you that your grace is sufficient for us.

Your power is made perfect in our weakness. That Lord we didn't come to you and be saved because of our goodness and our abilities. And we now don't live for you out of our goodness and our abilities.

But Lord you give us all that we need. Lord you care for us each and every moment. You sustain us. And we pray for any heart in here that is burdened and near collapsed.

Lord we pray that you would come and minister to them. You know each of our needs. Grant us by your grace strength to stand. Strength to face all that will come this week.

[ 32 : 42 ] Lord would you be with us. Would you guide us and lead us. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.