

**Introduction:** Life in this world is hard. Everyone is susceptible to illness, violence, emotional pain, hunger, lack of resources, loneliness and multiple other hurts. And, we all have an expiration date, we will all die, we just don't know when. \*\*\* People cope with these uncertainties in a variety of ways and with differing degrees of success. But, in the long run, there is only One Person who can give us the comfort we need when the trials we are living with would overwhelm us. That Person is the Savior King, Jesus Christ. \*\* I remember when my sister had first given her life to Jesus and began to attend the church that is still her church. The year was 1984. I had given her some Keith Green cassette tapes. That summer, her almost five year old son and his friend got too close to a dangerous dog from next door. He mauled my nephew, biting off the top of one ear. She was a nurse, and as she rode with him in the ambulance to the hospital where she worked, a song was playing in her head, 'How can they live without Jesus / how can they live without God's love?' And, she later told me, she had the peace of God. \*\*\* By the time he was a teenager, there were no visible marks on my nephew's body. When Debi and I prayed, I reminded the Lord of what He did when Peter cut off the servant's ear while He was being arrested. He did not have to answer this prayer, but in this case, He graciously did! \*\*\* Our passage this morning deals with persecution and daily dying with Jesus in the everyday lives of Christians in Jesus' Church. \*\*\* With this introduction, let's consider the apostle Paul's testimony of how Jesus gave him and his team life and victory in an evil world.

**I. The glorious gospel of Messiah is that God brings the light of knowledge to hearts in Messiah, giving His Church treasure in 'jars of clay'. (2 Corinthians 4:1-7)**

- A. Paul's team has a ministry because they have been shown mercy, so they proclaim the gospel to the glory of the Messiah as servants for His sake. (Verses 1-5)
1. For this reason, having this ministry, just as we have been shown mercy, we are not fainting. (Verse 1)  
**Ministry:** The Lord chose Paul as His vessel to carry His Name before the nations ... and the sons of Israel (Acts 9:15).  
**Mercy-endurance:** Because Paul had received God's mercy which he had been shown, he was given endurance to carry out the ministry he was given.
  2. But we have renounced the hidden shameful deed, not walking in craftiness, nor distorting the Word of God; but, bringing to light the truth, commending ourselves to every conscience of men in the presence of God. (Verse 2)  
**Renounce shameful deed:** Paul and his team have been given grace to disown every shameful act that they used to feel they had to hide from other people to keep up the appearance of being good enough.  
**Bring to light the truth:** Now, they can bring to light the truth, which is Jesus (John 14:6).
  3. But if also, it had been hidden, our gospel (to those perishing it had been hidden); those in whom the 'god' of this age blinded the minds of the un-believing in order to not discern the light of the glorious gospel of the Messiah. (Verses 3-4b)  
**Perishing persons:** People who are not believing the gospel of Jesus as a way of life are perishing.  
**'god' of this age:** The 'god' of this age (the accuser and deceiver of those still without the Holy Spirit dwelling in them) is causing blindness in those without fully committed faith in the faithful Jesus.  
**Gospel of glory:** Everything about the Messiah Jesus, and all He did, is glorious good news for all.
  4. He is being the image of God; because, not ourselves we are proclaiming, but Jesus Christ: Lord; but, ourselves servants of you all for the sake of Jesus. (Verses 4c-5)  
**Savior-King:** Jesus Christ means Savior King in English and that is what He IS! He is the image of God because He IS God. He is the Sovereign Lord of all He created.  
**Not ourselves:** Paul says his team does not proclaim anything of themselves, but they are always proclaiming (or preaching) the Savior King.  
**Servants of y'all:** They do this as servants of all people for whom Jesus died so they may be forgiven so all people may become disciples of Jesus. This is for Jesus' sake because He desires all to be saved and come to knowledge of truth (1 Timothy 2:4).
- B. God brought light from darkness to bring the light of the knowledge to hearts to His glory in Messiah, and the Church has this treasure in 'clay jars'. (Verses 6-7)
1. For, God having said, 'From darkness, the light will shine', which (light) has shined in our hearts, to bring to light the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (Verse 6)  
**Light spoken:** God spoke light into existence from darkness on the first day (Genesis 1:3-5)  
**Light of knowledge:** Now, God is miraculously working the light of the truth of the Savior King to shine His glorious light into the hearts of people being saved from sin to become God's adopted children by His grace through His faithfulness.
  2. But we are having this treasure (of the gospel of the Savior) in earthen vessels ('jars of clay') that the excellency of the power might be of God and not from us. (Verse 7)  
**Paradox:** The proclamation of the powerful good news is entrusted to people made from the earth (Genesis 2:7), 'earthenware pots' (NJB), 'jars of clay' (NIV).  
**God:** God knows what He is doing. His Son became human so He could reconcile people to Himself. This is God's mysterious power. Humorists say jars of clay are really 'cracked pots'. But, light shines through the cracks. However we look at this, God's power is made known by this reality:

**God puts His light in jars of clay**

**II. Always dying with Jesus results in His life being made known and being raised with Him, so His followers are tasty salt preserving God's shining light to all. (2 Corinthians 4:8-15; Matthew 5:13)**

- A. Despite trouble, Paul's team is not crushed; always carrying the death of Jesus in their body that also His life in their body may be made known. (2 Corinthians 4:8-10)

1. On every side being troubled but not being crushed; being puzzled but not being despairing; being persecuted but not being forsaken; being cast down but not being destroyed. (*Verses 8-9*)  
**Four pairs:** Paul's team is experiencing four types of difficulties in doing their assigned mission: they are troubled, puzzled, persecuted, and being cast down (by the 'god' of this age and un-believers).  
**Grace:** However, by the grace of God, they are in no way crushed, desperate, forsaken or destroyed. The Christian life on this earth is hard, but all believers who persevere in Messiah will get out alive!
  2. Always the death of Jesus in the body carrying about, that also the life of Jesus in our body might be made known. (*Verse 10*)  
**Life after death:** Jesus said His followers must take up their cross to follow Him (Matthew 16:24-26; Luke 9:23-25). All who die to themselves, and their ambitions, receive the life of Jesus so they may show His light to make Him known to others as His Church, in the new life of His humility He gives.
- B. Paul's team is constantly delivered to death for Jesus' sake, knowing the One having raised Jesus will raise them with Him, resulting in thanksgiving to the glory of God. (*2 Corinthians 4:11-15*)
1. For constantly we, living, to death are being delivered for Jesus' sake, that also the life of Jesus may be made known in our mortal flesh. (*Verse 11*)  
**Death to life:** Ministers of Messiah face death every day they live; but, by God's grace, this reveals Jesus' life in them. First, Paul said this life is made known in the Body (Church) of Jesus. Now, he says, the light of Jesus' life is made known in people who will die, 'clay pots' that will break down.

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2. So that, death in us is working, but the life in you all. (*Verse 12*)  
**For Church:** Certain ministers are called to a life of greater suffering (2 Corinthians 11:23-30). But, God uses their suffering to bring un-believers to the faith of Jesus (1 Corinthians 9:19-23).
3. But, having the same Spirit of truth, according to (what) had been written, 'I believed, therefore I spoke', we also, we are believing, therefore we are speaking. (*Verse 13*)  
**Psalm 116:** Paul quotes half of a verse (10) from Psalm 116. He expects biblically literate people to supply the second half, 'I, I am afflicted greatly'. He is using Israel's songbook to continue his theme that faith in the Savior leads to sharing His suffering and affliction. But he has more to say ...
4. But, knowing he who having raised up the Lord Jesus, also, us with Jesus he will raise up, and He will bring (us) into presence with you all. (*Verse 14*)  
**Raised to life:** The resurrection of Jesus changes everything! All who are absolutely convinced Jesus was resurrected from death know that, whatever afflictions they suffer in their mortal bodies made from the clay of the earth, they will be filled with the resurrection light of the life of Jesus.

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5. For all (this is) for the sake of you all, that grace, having grown, through of the many thanksgiving may overflow to the glory of God. (*Verse 15*)  
**Glory of God:** Suffering for Jesus so others may have assurance of forgiveness and salvation in Him, results in both His grace increasing and more people becoming more thankful.  
 And as more 'clay jar earthenware' people have God's light of salvation in them, God is greatly glorified.

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- C. Jesus' disciples are the salt of the earth'; but, they must not be made tasteless to be cast out. (*Matthew 5:13*)
- Pre-context:** Jesus has just declared that those persecuted for His sake and righteousness are happy and will have the reward of prophets in the Kingdom of heaven. (*Verses 10-12*)
1. [Jesus continued to speak:] You all are being the salt of the earth. (*Verse 13a*)  
**Truth:** Jesus declares the truth His disciples are salt, which is both a tasty seasoning and a preservative.
  2. But if the salt may become tasteless, in what will it be restored to salt? (*Verses 13b*)  
**Tasteless:** Salt may lose its taste. Jesus asks: Can its taste be restored, and how?
  3. To nothing it is still being able; if not, (it) having been cast out, to be trampled underfoot by men. (*Verse 13c*)  
**Trampled:** Jesus is issuing a strong warning to those who may be proud because of the blessings they have by the grace of God. If they should forget God's grace and trust in themselves, they will be cast out and trampled!
- Post-context:** Jesus says they are light by His grace. Then He commands them that it must shine, their light, before men in order that men may see of them beautiful (good) works and men may glorify their Father in heaven. (*Verses 14-16*)  
 So putting together all we have heard this morning, we can say it is God's will that *disciples are called to preserve and proclaim God's light*.

**Conclusion:** The glorious gospel of the Messiah is that God brings the light of knowledge to hearts in Messiah and gives His Church treasure in 'jars of clay'. His ministers are always dying with Jesus to have His life being made known in them and being raised with Him. Then, they are tasty salt preserving and proclaiming God's light to all.

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