

Overwhelmed but Not Overcome

2 Corinthians 4:7–10

Introduction

The events of these past few weeks have been somewhat overwhelming – and emotionally weighty – in ways I haven’t experienced before ... It all began with hearing about the tragic death of Elaine ... Then our 42-year-old fire captain, Chris Brown, suddenly passed away ... To add to the heartbreak – Chris’ one-year-old Black Lab died – just two days before his funeral ... We scrambled to have the dog cremated so he could be laid to rest with Chris ... I was asked to lead Chris’ funeral — my first time ever presiding over a firefighter’s funeral ... This had its own set of challenges which involved many things I had to attend – along with purchasing a Class A uniform.

The actual day I was to perform Chris’ funeral – marked the anniversary of Mary’s passing ... Yesterday – I stood with our town select board and others – in an Honor Chair ceremony for POW/MIA here in Northwood — reading names and offering prayers ... And nearly right after that – we gathered here again for Elaine’s funeral ... May I be honest and transparent with you? ... I have felt overwhelmed – and emotionally drained for days ... And I know I may not be the only one ... Many of us are carrying the weight of grief – the sorrow of saying goodbye to another church member – the third person in a year ... And this isn’t even counting what “regular life” is throwing at each of us ... And yet – here we are this morning – bringing our heaviness into the presence of God – trusting that He will meet us here.

And it’s in moments like these – when life feels overwhelming – when our hearts feel fragile – that the Word of God speaks with a power – nothing else can ... The apostle Paul – knew what it was like to be pressed – perplexed – and struck down – yet he also knew the treasure that holds us together ... Let’s listen to how he put it in 2 Corinthians 4:7–10 (NLT):

“We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves. We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed. Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.”

Paul is sharing with us – something simple – yet extremely profound ... Life can overwhelm the clay – the earthen vessel - - But it can never overcome the treasure – imbedded within the spirit

Transition

So, what does this mean for us today? ... What does it mean to live as clay jars – carrying a treasure? ... How do we hold – both realities at once — the fragility of our humanity – and the power of His presence? ... Paul begins by reminding us that the clay may be fragile – but the treasure is unshakable.

The Clay Is Fragile - - But the Treasure Within Is Firm - - verse 7

Paul didn't sugarcoat it – we as flesh – are clay vessels and are fragile ... Weak – vulnerable – and we can tend to crack easily ... At times – life can overwhelm us ... Grief blindsides us – while responsibilities can weigh us down ... But when life and responsibilities – seem overwhelming - - Here is the good news ... The treasure contained within these clay vessels are not fragile ... The treasure is firm – strong – and mighty ... Another translation put verse 7 - - “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, - to show that the surpassing power - belongs to God and not to us.” ... The treasure within is – Christ in us – which is the Spirit of the Living God – dwelling in these fragile vessels ... Our weakness isn't proof of God's absence ... Our weakness is the stage for God's power ... Catch this little nugget ... Our weakness reminds us of our need for alignment.

See – the cracks in our clay vessel – don’t waste the treasure – those cracks actually reveal it – and allows it to flow ... The Passion Translation captures this concept beautifully ... “We are like common clay jars that carry this glorious treasure within, so that the extraordinary overflow of power will be seen as God’s, not ours.” ... When we are broken open – what spills out is not for our destruction – but for His glory ... Not for our despair – but as a means for Christ to shine through ... The clay vessel may be fragile – but the treasure within is firm – unshakable, and enduring.

We May be Overwhelmed but We are Not Destroyed - - verses 8–10

Being overwhelmed is something we have all felt ... But remember – destruction is not our destiny ... Paul gives us a list of life’s blows - - We are pressed on every side by troubles – but not crushed ... We are perplexed – but not driven to despair ... We are hunted down – but never abandoned by God ... We are knocked down – but not destroyed.

Do you hear the tension in those words? ... Paul doesn’t deny the pressing – the confusion – the personal attacks... He actual names them ... He admits, “I feel overwhelmed.” ... Yet every blow is matched by a greater truth ... Did you catch that ... Why a greater truth? ... Because the treasure – is what holds the earthen vessel together ... The Spirit within us – keeps us from being overcome – from being crushed and destroyed.

Paul goes even further ... He says we carry around the death of Jesus – so that the life of Jesus – may also be revealed in us ... The Message paraphrases it like this - - “If you only look at us, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives. That’s to prevent anyone from confusing God’s incomparable power with us.” ... That means even in death – in grief – and in overwhelming moments – resurrection life is at work within us ... What looks like an ending – becomes a place for Christ’s life to shine through ... So yes, we are clay ... Yes, we get overwhelmed ... But no – we will not be overcome.

Takeaway

Here's a spiritual truth I want us all to take home today ... If you catch it – it can help propel you into greater growth and maturity ... It is in these times of overwhelming – that what is truly on the inside of us – is exposed and revealed for all to see.

Yes, we are clay vessels – fragile – emotional – and easily overwhelmed ... But we also carry a treasure – Christ in us – our oneness – that is firm and unshakable ... And when life presses in – when the weight feels unbearable – when the crushing comes – it will magnify what we truly believe – thus causing us to manifest that belief.

Life's pressures become a magnifier ... It doesn't create what's inside of us – it actually exposes it ... Pressure causes a bubbling up of the “real you” – for as a man thinks in his heart – so is he ... Pressure will expose whether you are living out of the clay of the flesh – a worldly indoctrinated mindset - - Or out of the treasure of Oneness – a renewed mind of the Spirit.

The pressure is real ... The weightiness of the matter is undeniable ... The rapid fire of circumstances can become overwhelming ... And yes – it will crack the clay vessel ... But be assured – the treasure inside remains stable and firm ... And it is this treasure that keeps our earthen vessel from being destroy – as Paul so apply states - - “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; struck down, but not destroyed.”

My closing thought is this ... When life begins to press – turmoil arises – and a sense of overwhelming begins to bubble up within ... We need to understand – that this is our earthen vessel sending us an alarm to realign ... To get back into sync with the Spirit ... To draw our attention away from the external – and to place it back on the internal – where the treasure resides ... To refocus – realign – and reharmonize – with the indwelling Spirit ... And if need be – call in some reinforcements ... Call upon other brothers and sister who will lift you up in prayer – to assist in your realignment.

Closing Prayer

Father - - You know we are earthen – fragile jars of clay ... You see our emotions – our grief – our weariness ... You see the places where we feel pressed – perplexed – and struck down ... But You also know the treasure – You placed within us – Your very Spirit ... Lord – we confess today – when the crushing comes – what is inside – will be revealed ... May it be – what spills out of us – is not fear – not despair – not flesh – but Your Spirit.

Strengthen us, Lord – to function not out of the old clay nature – but out of the new creation life of the Spirit ... Let the pressure magnify the treasure ... Let the cracks in our vessel reveal the glory of Jesus shining through ... And so, we pray – when we are overwhelmed – may we not be overcome ... When we are struck down – may we not be destroyed ... Keep us anchored in the truth that the treasure is firm – greater than the clay ... I declare this in Jesus' mighty name, amen.