

HONOURING GOD

In Season 4 of the ABC TV series of 'You Can't Ask That', the final episode focussed on Disaster Survivors. Eight people experienced tragedies including the Black Saturday bushfires, Cyclone Tracy, the Granville Train Disaster, Bali Bombings, Port Arthur and the Grantham floods. They each recounted their experience and the radical impacts that their stories continue to have on their lives, including ongoing trauma and anxiety affecting their physical, emotional, mental and financial wellbeing, with some now being unable to work. One man said that, as a result of his experience, he lost both his home and his Christian faith.

In 2 Cor 4:13, there is a quote from Ps 116:10 "I had faith, even when I declared, "I am suffering acutely,"" In today's passage, we look at **honouring God by declaring that God is at work, even in the midst of hard times**. However, for some of us, we may need to be honest and verbalise that "yeah, but today, I'm really struggling and can't see where God is in the midst of this." We honour God by proclaiming the gospel, we proclaim Jesus' resurrection and hang onto hope of an eternal heavenly home, plus we allow God's Spirit to continually renew us and continually use our (aging, injured and sick) bodies to glorify him.

GETTING STARTED: In 2 Cor 4:7, the apostle Paul describes our bodies as being like "clay jars". Most of us, at some time in our lives, have dropped a plate or a glass. Those who work in the hospitality industry know well the 'crash' when multiple items hit the floor. Some of us may have owned a valuable heirloom that has inadvertently been broken and destroyed. What is the worst 'breakage' that you've been experienced? What happened next? Drawing on this experience, how are we all like "clay jars"?

READ: 2 CORINTHIANS 4:6-18

Through his ministry, the apostle Paul experienced many hardships. He suffered physically, emotionally and mentally, yet he declared "since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart." (2 Cor 4:1) In 2 Cor 4:8-10, he declared, that regardless of the situation, he remained unbroken.

⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. (1 Cor 4:8-10 NRSV)

- Turn to 2 Cor 11:21-28 and scan over this passage. Make a list of the circumstances that Paul found himself in. Which of these circumstances would have potentially made Paul lose heart, feel forsaken, be driven to despair or might have 'destroyed' him?
- Any of these situations – in and of themselves – could have left Paul traumatised and dealing with anxiety, panic attacks and nightmares. He could have become paralysed with fear, to the point that he was unable to continue in ministry. What was it that helped him persevere and keep going?

Over the last couple of weeks, we have looked at the power of God's words. In 2 Cor 4:6, Paul reminds that God only had to say "Let there be light" (Gen 1:1-5) and light was created to enlighten the darkness. In the same way, God has spoken and brought "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" into our lives.

Below are two different translations of 2 Cor 4:1-5. These verses remind us not to twist God's words but to allow God's words to shine their light into our lives and reveal God's truth.

- Find and circle the words/ phrases: word of God, preach/ proclaim, manifestation of truth / setting forth the truth plainly, commend ourselves, gospel/ good news,

¹ Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. (NRSV)

¹ Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we received mercy, we do not lose heart, ² but we have renounced the things hidden because of shame, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God, but by the manifestation of truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. ³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ in whose case the

¹ Allen, L. C. (2002). *Psalms 101–150 (Revised)* (Vol. 21). Dallas: Word, Incorporated. p151.

god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. (NASB)

- What do you think is meant by:
 - “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ”? What does it mean to bring ‘light’ into people’s lives?
 - “setting forth the truth plainly”? What should that mean for how we share the gospel?
- What does Paul say, is the reason why people can’t understand or accept the gospel?

When we proclaim the gospel, we are speaking God’s words and bringing “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God” into people’s lives. (1 Cor 4:6)

- Reread 2 Cor 4:13-15. Paul comments “we also believe, and so we speak”. Why does Paul see that gospel proclamation as both a natural and essential consequence of faith? Does this mean that, if we don’t ‘speak’ the message, that we lack faith?

In 2 Cor 4:14, Paul wrote “we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will bring us with you into his presence.”

- Why did Paul see that the resurrection of Jesus was so pivotal to Christian faith? What are we being raised ‘from’ and what are we being raised ‘to’? (see also 1 Cor 15:12-19, Eph 2:1-7)

In 2 Cor 4:15, Paul has a ‘big picture’ vision, that the gospel – and God’s salvation – might extend “to more and more people” who may then “increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God”.

- Paul felt the weight of his obligation, to bring the gospel to as many people in his world and his generation, as possible. Why does there seem to be a reticence in the Western Church in this generation, to share the gospel? Is it because it is too hard? Is there too much opposition by non-Christians? Is it because Christians are not confident that the gospel is true or good news? Or is it because of something else?



A ‘clay jar’ is fragile, but is meant to be a vessel, something to be used. It is not something that is – of itself - strong and powerful. Paul writes that when God uses us, it should show that “this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us” and “the life of Jesus (should be) made visible in our mortal flesh”. (2 Cor 4:7,11). When God used the disciples in Acts 4:31, it was evident that they were “all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.” In 2 Cor 5:5, Paul wrote that the gift of the Spirit is also a guarantee, that we will be ‘re clothed’ in immortality in our heavenly home.

- What does it mean, for you, to ‘be filled’ with the Holy Spirit? What evidence is there, that the Holy Spirit is at work in you, in your words and actions?

Alex, a college classmate, lived with Cerebral Palsy and we always heard her coming, as she used callipers to walk. After finishing her theological studies, she became a hospital chaplain. At her funeral, her colleagues testified to the way God had powerfully used her to minister to hospital patients. Her walking aids had launched many conversations, as patients saw a tangible symbol of her own suffering. Similarly, the apostle Paul wrote how he’d prayed for God to take his physical problems away, but his prayers weren’t answered. Yet, he knew that God was empowering him and using him, so he chose to accept his situation.

⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. ¹⁰ That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:8-10 NRSV)

- We can be tempted to think that God can’t use us because “I’m too old/ frail”, “I’m too sick”, “I’ve got too many problems”, ... Do you believe God can still use you, even in your circumstances?

PRAY: for each other, that we will not give up or lose heart, but that we will honour God by sharing the good news of the gospel with people that we share life with and hang onto our hope of resurrection.