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"For the Word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:9)

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THE TREASURE OF THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IN EARTHEN VESSELS

Introduction

2 Corinthians is the most personal of Paul's letters: in it he reveals his feelings more than in any other. He reveals profound truth about His ministry and **the eternal gospel which is our precious treasure and heritage**. We shall consider 2 Corinthians 4 together today.

2 Corinthians 4:1, *"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not"*. His theme remains the ministry of the gospel and Christian responsibility for evangelism and missions throughout the world. The truth that held him steadfast no matter what the opposition or difficulties was that he and his colleagues had received this ministry *"received mercy"* (verse 1). God's mercy in his Son is the basis of our personal knowledge of God. In his letter to the Romans, it is 'in view of God's mercy' that Paul appeals to us to offer our bodies to God as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1). Here in 2 Corinthians it is the secret of his ministry in the midst of trials and testings.

We often meet with discouragement. Things happen in our work, family life, studies or service of God that may upset and disturb us. For instance, when workers or members in the Church fellowship have to move on, we can be discouraged. Paul, however, had far greater grounds for strong encouragement in the Lord. God is our source of strength and inspiration in the end.

Counterfeit Gospels

First, counterfeit gospels exist. Paul implies this when he declares in 2 Corinthians 4:2, *"But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth"*. When we proclaim the gospel of our Lord Jesus, we are in conflict not only with ignorance but worse still, with counterfeit gospels. **Throughout the history of the Church, the gospel has been counterfeited by false doctrines, practices and teachings. Counterfeits and charlatans engage in deception and false claims of miracle healings, supernatural events and emotional appeals, often dishonouring to God.**

It is natural to be upset by charlatans and counterfeits. Opponents of the gospel are often underhand in the way they go about things, deliberately manipulating people's feelings and ignorance. They may profess to obey God's Word while at the same time distorting the Scriptures and practising deception. It is a discouragement to meet people who profess to teach God's truth and the gospel of his Son but who turn out to be spiritual deceivers out to mislead believers. The world is sadly full of counterfeit 'gospels' of health and wealth and ...

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salvation by works or the sacraments or extreme or defective doctrines. Those who follow **bogus teaching tend to focus upon human personalities or to preach themselves** (verse 5). However, we must not miss an important consolation: forgeries exist only because the reality they counterfeit is valuable!

Spiritual Battle

Second, 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, *"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not..."* Behind all counterfeit teachings and 'gospels' is the activity of the enemy of souls, Satan. He tries to obscure the true message of the gospel, to place 'a veil' over the minds of men and women so that they cannot see or understand the good news. He wants them to perish (verse 3). To this end, he tries to blind 'the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (verse 4) but only with God's consent.

It is specifically the glory of the Lord Jesus, the image of God, that Satan does not want people to understand (verse 4). This explains the unique and unusual opposition we may often sense when we determine to proclaim the Lord Jesus to people. The evil one is not particularly concerned when we talk about religion in general or even superficial Christianity but he is disturbed when we proclaim the Lord Jesus as the only Saviour and His glorious gospel of salvation.

Human Weakness

Third, 2 Corinthians 4:7, *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels"* characterise us. Paul pictures our bodies as 'jars of clay', an image of fragility. We are just ordinary people with ordinary people's vulnerabilities. It is amazing to note that God commits the stewardship of His glorious gospel to such unworthy and unprofitable people as us! Our opponents may often appear better equipped to achieve their aims than ours. Not many of us are wise by human standards, not many of us are influential or important as the world reckons (1 Corinthians 1:26-27) but God have mercy on us to save and use us for His glory.

Hard Pressed

Fourth, 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, *"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed"*. What people did to our Lord Jesus they may do to us, so that every day we reveal and share in the death of our Saviour. *"Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body"* (verse 10). We put ourselves at risk for him because of our profession of faith, so that death may be said to be at work in us (verse 12). Not all of these experiences may be ours all the time, but there are other Christians elsewhere in the world who may experience this and much more.

Fifth, 2 Corinthians 4:16, *"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish"*, take a toll on us. Although the conflict is essentially spiritual, it takes its physical toll as well. Sometimes it may look as if everything is falling apart. We may catch glimpses of just how weak our bodies are and the strain our exacting service imposes on them, but be assured that His grace is sufficient for us and we are able to triumph in the end.

Trials and Afflictions

Sixth, 2 Corinthians 4:17 *"For our light affliction"*. We would be dishonest if we did not admit life's woes and trials. We undergo the trauma that all men and women experience in a fallen world. We are as vulnerable to diseases, depression and accidents as others. Additional...

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troubles may arise from our Christian faith and testimony. Some may come from people who have evil intentions regarding us (Psalm 34:19-21). In addition, we have trouble with ourselves. Like Paul in Romans 7:24, we exclaim, *"O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"*

Seventh, 2 Corinthians 4:18, *"While we look not at the things which are seen"*. If we focus our attention on what is merely visible to the human eye, the battle in which we are engaged seems hopeless, but we look up to the eternal reality that is found in Christ forever.

But we do not give up for God is not finished with us yet! Having identified with God for victory, we are able to persevere on unto victory by His divine enablement!

A Self-Authenticating Gospel

First, there are many counterfeit gospels, but our gospel, the ministry of the new covenant, is self-authenticating. **We do not have to resort to underhand and deceptive ways to get people to receive our message. We deliberately renounce such worldly and defective approaches.** We do not use deception and we do not distort God's Word. 2 Corinthians 4:2, *"but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."*

Behind this confidence is the hidden and all-powerful ministry of God the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth. Fallen and depraved men and women are to accept the truth about themselves as sinners, and acceptance of the gospel message demands; then God the Holy Spirit powerfully convicts them of its truth and lead them to evangelical repentance and salvation.

The full and sound presentation of the truth of the gospel receives the Spirit's full endorsement. As we declare the whole counsel of God and the gospel, without compromise and without fear as to what men and women may say or do in reaction to it, we must rely upon the Spirit's power to help them recognise its truth of salvation.

God of Salvation

Second, although 2 Corinthians 4:4 the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. 2 Corinthians 4:6, *"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*

The new birth or regeneration by the Holy Spirit in the salvation of a soul (Titus 3:5), is as dramatic and powerful a work as Creation itself. The gospel of life shine into people's hearts to give spiritual understanding of Jesus' identity and work at the Cross to the saving of souls. At the new birth, men and women are made spiritually alive in Christ. God the Holy Spirit regenerates hearts as the gospel, the new covenant is preached. 2 Corinthians 4:5, *"For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."* The power of God is deployed to awaken souls when Christ is preached with authority and unction.

Purpose in our Weakness

Third, 2 Corinthians 4:7, *"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."* This is another way of expressing the principle Paul established in 2 Corinthians 1:8-9.

2 Corinthians 1:8-9, *"For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which..."*

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came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead".

The theme of man's physical weakness runs through Paul's letters to the Corinthians. It is important to see ourselves as only 'jars of clay' and not to have exaggerated views of our puny strength. Even those Christians whom we most admire for their godliness and gifts are just as much jars of clay as we are. **God chooses them so that the power of the gospel is not in its messengers but in its message about Jesus Christ our Lord and God is to be glorified in the end.**

The Adequacy of God's Grace

Fourth, 2 Corinthians 4:8,9, *"We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed"*. He never allows us to be pressured beyond what we can endure with his help. We know and discover that God will finally see us through at the appropriate time with His sufficient grace.

Difficult experiences bring precious proofs of Christ's presence, power and protection (2 Timothy 4:17). We may be struck down, we are not depressed or downcast (verse 9). We may lose a battle but we do not lose the war! Identified with our Saviour in His death, we are wonderfully privileged to be identified with Him in His resurrection power (verse 10) over the grave as well. Death's experiences are followed by eternal life! Furthermore, when we walk in our Saviour's footsteps, possibly death in us brings life to others (verse 12). **History illustrates and confirms that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church and God's people will not be deserted by Him in the hour of need.**

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Spiritual Renewal

Fifthly, 2 Corinthians 4:16, *"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."* This privilege is foreign to the experience of unbelieving men and women. We may find unique refreshment, even in extreme tiredness, when we know that we do God's will (see John 4:31-34). **In the heat of the spiritual battle, there is always spiritual refreshment for the soul from the Lord.**

It may also be experienced when the wear and tear of the body are at their height of weakness when aging. In Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones' last days, Elizabeth, sat beside him, 'he pointed her to the words of 2 Corinthians 4:16-18'. Elizabeth relates, 'When I asked him if that was his...

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experience now, he nodded his head with great vigour' (I Murray: DM Lloyd-Jones, Vol II, p 747).

Eternal Glory Outweighs Temporal Troubles

Sixth, 2 Corinthians 4:17, "*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*". We would be dishonest if we did not admit to the reality of difficulties but our testimony is that the Lord delivers the righteous from all their troubles (Psalm 34:19). The ultimate promise of deliverance from all our troubles is in the life to come, whereas for unbelievers their troubles then begin and never end (Psalm 34:21). **Eternal glory is what our Saviour promises us when He returns.**

Our troubles work for our spiritual benefit as they prepare us for heaven. Sanctification is the work of God in us begun towards conformity to Christ and glorification is sanctification completed. Glory equals the 'inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light' (Colossians 1:12; cf 1:27). Glory is when the bride, the church is presented to the bridegroom our Lord Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:22, 28). At the end of it all, the wonder of all that is before us in glory far outweighs all our troubles. Seen in the right perspective, **all our troubles are but transitory, but it brings in eternal rewards one day** (Revelation 14:13).

A Heavenly Perspective

Finally, 2 Corinthians 4:18, "*While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*" If we employ the perspective of an earthly time frame, we may sometimes appear to be "losing" temporarily. When we consider things from an eternal perspective, we recognise we are on the winning side finally! Victory is already ours in our Saviour because he has already gained it for us and heaven is assured. God's saving purposes through the ministry of the new covenant, are certain, "*... for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*" (verse 18).

2 Corinthians 4:16, "*For which cause we faint not*". Biblical Balance and maturity is important here in our thinking and practice in the walk of faith. To engage in the ministry of the new covenant is another way of expressing biblical evangelism and missions to the saving of souls that may inevitably provokes opposition from Satan and may bring discouragements along the way but God is faithful. For every discouragement, God has a matching encouragement for us in His own time! **Our blessings far outweigh our difficulties in the end.**

Conclusion

Our glorious future in Christ more than compensate for present hardships. The key to the encouragement we need is fixing our eyes on the unseen and supremely upon our unseen Majestic and Sovereign Saviour and Creator God who saves (Isaiah 45:22). Let us do just that and fully trust in him and look up unto the Lord the author and finisher of our faith.

*Rev Jack Sin, Maranatha B-P Church, S'pore
(adapted from Maranatha Messenger dated 16 March 2008)*

WELCOME TO NEW LIFE B-P CHURCH LONDON
CHURCH THEME: WORK OUT YOUR OWN SALVATION WITH FEAR
AND TREMBLING. (Philippians 2:12)

Our worship services begin promptly at **11.00 am and 4.00 pm.**

Please stay back for Bible Study and fellowship lunch after the morning worship and for tea after the evening service. Do invite your friends to come to Church.

Worship Services			WELCOME
Morning	<i>Today: 20/04/2008</i>	<i>Next Week: 27/04/2008</i>	We extend a warm welcome to all worshippers this Lord's Day. We like to welcome Nick and Zona Righetti to our morning worship service last Lord's Day.
<i>Chairman:</i>	Jonathan Kim	Jonathan Kim	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Message:</i>	Knowing the Power of His Resurrection	Living Without the Fear of Death	
<i>Text:</i>	Philippians 3:10-11	Philippians 1:19-26	
<i>Organist:</i>	Anthony	Anthony	
Evening			
<i>Chairman:</i>	Pr Mark Chen	Pr Mark Chen	
<i>Preacher:</i>	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	Pr Mok Chee Cheong	
<i>Message:</i>	Wisdom and Divine Guidance	Divine Discipline is not Punishment	
<i>Text:</i>	Proverbs 3:5-6	Proverbs 3:11-12	
<i>Pianist:</i>	Anthony	Joy	
Other Duties			NEWS/ANNOUNCEMENTS
	<i>Today: 20/04/2008</i>	<i>Next Week: 27/04/2008</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catechism class: Catechism class will begin on 04 May 2008. Those seeking baptism and transfer of membership must attend. Please approach Pr Mok for more information. • 12th Annual Congregation Meeting on 06 Apr 2008: Following the meeting, the Task Force would like to inform the congregation that Pr Mok will be stepping down from his office at the end of August 2008. He and his wife will return to the missions field under the auspices of Life BPC, Singapore. • Corrigendum: Please note that the offering last week should be £500.09 instead of £451.09. We apologise for the mistake. • Sabbath School: New leaflets have been produced to encourage children of ages 6-12 to attend Sunday School. Please feel free to distribute the leaflets to any child, especially yours, who may be interested in joining in. Please note that class will be held at the Library after the morning worship service. • Book Table: Please feel free to browse the book table for materials that are of interest to you.
<i>Ushers</i>	Josiah / Yetta	Chin Kiong / Esmeralda	
<i>Sunday Sch:</i>	Carol	Hui Min	
<i>Lunch:</i>	Constance	Maureen	
<i>Washing-up:</i>	Volunteers	Volunteers	
<i>Bible Study:</i>	No DHW Class	No DHW Class	
Appointments of the Week			
Fri 25 Apr	7:00pm	Young Adults Fellowship: Combined SGAT Meeting	
Sat 26 Apr	4.00pm	Prayer Meeting & Bible Study: Led by Pr Mok	
<u>Last Week's Worship Service Collections</u>			
Offering: £371.48		Lunch: £42.50	
<u>Memory Verse</u>			
<p><i>Last Week (Apr 08 Wk 3): Psalm 121:7</i></p> <p>The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul.</p> <p><i>This Week (Apr 08 Wk 4): Psalm 121:8</i></p> <p>The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.</p>			