

Week 5, 2 Corinthians 4

Hook



Main Point: God enables believers not to lose heart, even when suffering.

Current Event: What is the most expensive item that you've ever purchased on eBay? Below are seven of the priciest auction listings ever sold on eBay, arrange them in order from least to most expensive:

1. Ferrari Nezo – One of only 399 on earth, sold in 2004.
2. Shoeless Joe's baseball bat – This bat was used by Shoeless Joe from 1908 to 1920. Named "Black Betsy," it was made of hickory and was the only bat he never discarded. Sold in 2001.
3. Ian Usher's worldly goods – In 2008, Usher, a British skydiver, sold all of his possessions including his three-bedroom home, parachuting gear, a beat-up Mazda, personal introductions to his friends, and a trial position as a sales assistant at the rug shop where he worked.
4. Gulfstream II – This 12-seat luxurious jet was sold on eBay in 2001.
5. Giga-yacht – Measuring in at 405 feet, this yacht came complete with 10 multi-level suites, eight guest cabins, a cinema room, fitness room, office area and built-in helicopter garage. The yacht was sold in 2008.
6. Atlas F Missile Base – This decommissioned facility was built by the federal government during the Cold War era and was designed to withstand a direct nuclear hit. The facility is located in Adirondack State Park in upstate New York. Sold in 2002.

7. Bridgeville, California – This 830-acre town included eight houses, a café and a post office. Sold in 2002.¹

Answer: 3 (\$309,292), 2 (\$577,620), 1 (\$1 million), 7 (\$1.77 million), 6 (\$2.1 million), 4 (\$4.9 million), 5 (\$140 million)

Transition: Today's lesson will examine the immeasurable value of the Gospel and how it enables believers to press on despite suffering.

¹ <http://www.cbsnews.com/media/10-most-expensive-items-ever-listed-on-ebay/10/>

Week 5, 2 Corinthians 4

Book

Main Point: God enables believers not to lose heart, even when suffering.

Text Summary: 2 Corinthians 4 Paul wants his readers to know the immeasurable value of the Gospel. He presents the value of the Gospel in three ways. First is the content, not the delivery, that makes the message special. Second, even though this world brings pain, the Gospel brings hope and healing. Lastly, Paul shows us that we don't lose heart even though we are wasting away. Why? Because of Jesus' Resurrection, believers can be confident in their own resurrection. The value is not in us, but in God.

2 Corinthians 4:1–6 [Read]

Sub-Point: The believer does not lose heart because the Gospel is bringing about incredible changes in a fallen world.

Verses 1–2 Paul considers his task to preach the Gospel a blessing—more than enough compensation, outweighing the struggles he has experienced along the way.² And these struggles are real—one such source of discouragement were the false apostles in Corinth.

These adversaries had levied accusations against Paul that he deceitfully used the Gospel to advance his own purposes—what's worse, the Corinthians church members were passive in their response to these false charges.³ The verb used in verse 2 “translated ‘to tamper with’ is found only here in the New Testament. Its use in the papyri in relation to the dilution of wine suggests that Paul had in mind the corruption of the word of God by mingling it with alien ideas.”⁴

The apostle defends himself against this accusation. Paul had no need to tamper with the Gospel in efforts to make it more palatable for those who hear it because he was not seeking the admiration of men or their money.⁵ Paul only preached the Gospel with boldness and openness—no secretiveness, no tampering, and no deception (v. 2).⁶ The accusation was baseless and so Paul could commend himself before others and God.

² Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Romans – Galatians*. [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008], p. 466.

³ David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 562.

⁴ Colin Kruse. *Tyndale New Testament Commentary: 2 Corinthians*. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987], p. 102-03.

⁵ David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 562.

⁶ Ibid.

Why might Paul have reason to lose heart? What kept Paul motivated (verse 1)?

In your own words, what does it mean to lose heart? How does one prevent this loss?

Verses 3–6 If Paul is preaching the Gospel with openness and boldness, then why do some still fail to believe when he preaches? Paul argues that those who do not respond to the Gospel are blinded by the evil powers at work in the world; the Gospel is veiled to them (vv. 3–4).⁷

The Gospel of Jesus Christ is Paul’s life’s motivation; he preaches and works to advance the cause of Christ, not his own interests (v. 5).⁸ As Paul serves Jesus, he also serves His body—the Church. As difficult as it might be at times, Paul serves the Corinthians knowing that in doing so, he is serving the Lord (Matthew 25:40).⁹

Submitting to Christ as Lord is submitting to be a servant. Longman and Garland note, “acknowledgment of the lordship of Jesus leads naturally and inevitably to lowly and unquestioning service to one’s fellow believers.”¹⁰ They continue, “to confess, ‘Jesus is Lord’ is to say to other Christians, ‘I am your slave, for Jesus’ sake’”¹¹

God’s radical work in Paul’s life is the reason for the apostle’s service.¹² He cannot overstate how his salvation experience transformed his life (as it should be for all believers). In verse 6, he compared it to the way God brought light from darkness in Genesis 1:2–4.¹³ Through this incredible rebirth, the believer knows the glory of Jesus and through it, encounters the life-altering glory of God.¹⁴ Paul’s experience causes him to want to share the truth with as many as possible, even when the task is grueling and the people are challenging.

What does it mean in verse 5 for the apostles to proclaim Christ and not themselves?

What are ways in which we “proclaim ourselves”?

How has Christ’s lordship over your life led to service to other believers in the last year?

2 Corinthians 4:7–18 [Read]

⁷ The “god of this age” or “god of this world” in verse 4 is a reference to Satan, not God the Father [see also at Ephesians 2].

⁸ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2228.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 563.

¹³ David K. Lowery, “2 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 563.

¹⁴ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2228.

Sub-Point: The believer does not lose heart because the Holy Spirit enables him to continue.

Verse 7 The apostle could not get over the magnificence of the Gospel. Paul uses a metaphor to compare the value of the message of the Gospel and the results it produces with the relative worthlessness of the Gospel's ministers; likening the Gospel to a treasure and the ministers to jars of clay.¹⁵ Kruse explains, "earthenware vessels were commonplace in virtually every home in the Ancient Middle East. They were inexpensive and easily broken ... once broken they had to be discarded. They were thus cheap and of little intrinsic value."¹⁶ Paul understands his unworthiness compared to the message he preached. And this is by design so that no one would question the source of the Gospel and its power.¹⁷ Salvation is from God, not a work of men.¹⁸

Why has God put His power in us, the jars of clay, according to verse 7?

Verses 8–12 The demands of Paul's ministry were intense and contrasted his human limitations with God's divine enabling.¹⁹

Human Limitations

Afflicted in every way
Perplexed
Persecuted
Struck down

God's Enabling

but not crushed
but not driven to despair
but not forsaken
but not destroyed

The apostle experienced physical suffering (2 Corinthians 1:8–9) and psychological affliction (2 Corinthians 7:5–6). He experienced hardship but was not thwarted; this was solely due to God's intervention.²⁰

Paul's life was a mix of death and life. He carried around the death of Jesus, meaning he endured intense suffering for Jesus. However, the life of Jesus was also displayed in Paul as the apostle was clearly spiritually alive.²¹ This duality reminds the reader of one of the themes of 2 Corinthians—comfort in the middle of affliction.

And this is Paul's thought in verse 12; the more Paul suffers ("death is at work in us"), the more

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 469.

¹⁶ Kruse, *2 Corinthians*, p. 106.

¹⁷ David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 563.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 563.

¹⁹ David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 563.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 563.

²¹ David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 563.

divine comfort he receives, the more that he can pass on to the Corinthians (see 2 Corinthians 1:4).²² In this way, Paul emulates Christ, bringing life to others through his suffering and death.²³

What is the result as we are given over to death for the sake of Christ, according to verse 11?

In what ways does the Christian life demonstrate life in the midst of death?

Verses 13–18 What enabled Paul to continue to minister even in the face of death? First, in verse 13 he expresses that he believes in the Gospel and so he must share it (quoting a similar sentiment in Psalm 116:10). Faith cannot remain unvoiced. Second, Paul continues to preach through suffering because he is convinced that Christ's Resurrection guarantees the believer's resurrection. In short: 1) the Gospel is true so I must preach despite the consequences 2) the last consequence (death) has been left powerless.

Paul suffered for Christ and His Church. The Corinthians experienced the benefits of Paul's suffering: as Paul ministered to the Corinthians, the Corinthians matured and then ministered to others, and so God receives glory (v. 15).

Paul does not lose heart, but he is human; it is evident that he is wasting away (v. 16). However, while he grew physically weaker, he was becoming spiritually stronger, being renewed each day and matured to look more like Christ (v. 16).

Verses 17–18 express an eternal view, a perspective that focuses on the unseen. When we focus on what is seen, suffering and struggle and earthly power are in view and cast shadows on all else. But when what is presently unseen holds our attention and focus, suffering and trials and hardship lead to God's glory and our joy. We know God is able.

How does affliction prepare us for what is to come?

How are the things we see now different from the things that we can't see yet, the things God has prepared for us [v. 18]?

²² Murray J. Harris "2 Corinthians," in the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed., Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 10 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1976), 341

²³ David K. Lowery, "2 Corinthians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 564.

Week 5, 2 Corinthians 4

Took



Main Point: God enables believers not to lose heart, even when suffering.

Current Event: Tony Irving is an affiliate professor at the University of Washington, a geochemist, and an expert in meteorites. Irving is a part of a small group of adventurous treasure hunters who search for, collect, buy, sell and study meteorites. The professor's role is one of authentication—he examines the stones and determines which are meteorites and which are “meteor-wrongs”; one of Irving's team's most extraordinary findings is known as NWA 5000. This 26-pound lunar rock has been appraised at \$14.5 million dollars.²⁴

In what ways is the Gospel a treasure? How has affliction or hardship helped you to greater understand the preciousness of the Gospel?

Lesson Conclusion: This life is filled with affliction. Paul understood that. But what Paul understood more deeply than affliction was the hope and comfort we receive in Christ. What we receive from Jesus doesn't compare to what we receive from this world, good or bad. It is His kingdom that will come and never end, not the kingdom of this world. Though we suffer for the sake of Christ, we also will be resurrected because of His Resurrection. While we are afflicted in His name, we will be raised in His power.

Challenge

Follow God's Authority. Countless entities vie for our allegiance, but we must not give in to any lesser masters. Our role as followers of Christ is to trust in and follow His authority above all else. We can't place our hope and trust in people. We place our trust in God and follow His commands.

Serve Others Fully. Paul's hope in affliction was directly connected to the joy of his fellow believers in Corinth. Paul served his brothers and sisters completely and with great joy. We must do the same. Our joy must be connected to the joy and life of our brothers and sisters in

²⁴ <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/uws-tony-irving-is-the-go-to-man-in-the-red-hot-world-of-meteorites/>

Christ. Paul knew his suffering would bring life and hope to those in Corinth. We must look at our lives the same way.

Hope in God's Promises. What God has promised us is what we, as Christians, must value. In your own life, what do you label as valuable? What gives your life value? Whatever our answers, we need to see eternity with God as our ultimate hope, not what we have to gain or lose on this earth.