

Keynotes from Nick Hiscocks am Sermon on 25/07/2021

Title: "Embracing our weakness!"

Text: 2 Corinthians 4 verses 7-18

Scripture references from the ESV

2 Corinthians 4:7-18 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So death is at work in us, but life in you. ¹³Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, ¹⁴knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. ¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

With the new building, and Steven coming on board as Assistant Pastor, it must feel like an exciting new chapter for Broadstone – a new chapter not to enjoy the building for its own sake but to proclaim Christ to the world around us, to share the love of God and to pass on the great hope we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. With all that has happened in the last 18 months, the opportunities and need are greater than ever and the world is hungry in a way it hasn't been before. The old adage is true – the church is the one organisation that exists for the benefit of its non-members.

As we delight in God, to the glory of God, that is to the benefit of all those around us who are still outside the kingdom of God at the moment.

While the country still lives in uncertainty, it is an exciting time for the Christian church, and also for Broadstone as you settle with a new team and a new building to worship God and proclaim him to all those around us.

However, reaching out and sharing the gospel is really hard!

- It's tough personally. Often, we seem to get nowhere, or we don't know where to start or maybe we try but then don't know what to say. We feel very weak and hopeless, sure that everyone else does it better!
- It's tough as a church. There are 10,000 people to reach in Broadstone, and only just over 100 of you! You may feel weak as a group.

How can we keep going, when we have tried and failed so many times, when the novelty of the new building wears off, and when we are struggling both personally and corporately?

Paul gives us three reasons why we are not to lose heart in the vital proclaiming of Christ. (**2 Cor 4:1** see p4)

1. **The weakness is deliberate** – it is a design feature of ministry! (**v7** above)

There are two clashing images:

- **Treasure** – an image for the preciousness of Jesus Christ, revealed to human hearts by the power of God.
- **Jars of clay** – an image for Paul in his sufferings and struggles. Clay jars are breakable, disposable and weak.

Paul lists some of his struggles and suffering (**vv8-9** above), any of which can be our experience too.

Weakness is what Christ proclaiming ministry feels like.

- **In the Christ proclaiming church** the music won't be the same quality as you hear at home, the courses you run won't attract hundreds of people, and the staff photos won't look like something out of Hello magazine.
- **The Christ proclaiming Christian**, aiming to say something about Jesus to a friend, won't feel ready, won't feel they know enough, and will feel that nothing about themselves or the message is attractive to people.

- **For the Christ proclaiming parent**, trying to bring children up to know Jesus, it will usually feel like too much bother. It may feel unnatural to talk about the Bible, and any family time will have disruptions and might not last more than 90 seconds!

It will all feel weak, but God says that this is no accident!

Our weakness is a deliberate design feature of Christ proclaiming ministry to highlight God's power (v7).

All the expressions of Paul's sufferings (vv8-9) have a corresponding expression of God's power. Paul has really suffered, but he is not finished. Paul's life had confusing changes of plan, painful physical sufferings, and years in prisons. Yet, aside from Jesus, he has influenced the world for Christ more than any other human being.

His human weakness showed God's power.

- In March last year, Simon arrived at Christ Church Westbourne. He wasn't a Christian but was hungry. It seemed like a disaster, because no one could meet with him or befriend him. There was only Zoom and the Bible! But he became a Christian by God's power and despite the circumstances.
- Frail Christian grandparents may have many Christian family members, because they taught them about Jesus and above all prayed for them. God's power is displayed in their weakness.

It shouldn't surprise us that this is how it works! This follows the pattern that Christ showed us (vv10-12). Just as death for Christ meant life for others, so death for Paul meant life for the Corinthians.

As we endure struggle, weakness and embarrassment in proclaiming Christ, others can know eternal life.

All of this should change our attitude to weakness. As we long to proclaim Christ in all our different places and different ways, **embracing our weakness becomes liberating when we realise it shows God's power.** It's ok:

- not to feel ok when we speak about Christ
- not to know all the answers
- not to be sure what to say

Our feeling of unreadiness is actually our readiness. Our inadequacy is God's raw ingredient.

We need to be clear about this strange arrangement otherwise when we spend time with unbelieving friends, we won't intend to share Christ with them. We'll give up talking about Christ to one another or to our family because it seems too hard. We'll reject any church that doesn't look good on the surface because it doesn't impress us.

We keep going however weak we feel because the weakness is deliberate, but it isn't the only thing Paul has to say that will keep us going!

2. The resurrection is definite (vv13-15)

Paul quotes from **Psalm 116** (see p4) to show that he has confidence in God to rescue him from death. We too, with the same spirit of faith, can have confidence that God will rescue us from death (**v14**) and if God can rescue us from death, then we will continue to proclaim Christ, whatever the struggles and suffering it brings us. God has raised Jesus from death, so God will certainly raise us. Resurrection is definite, and it's going to be the most staggering day! All believers will be raised together with Jesus and standing in his presence!

If you truly believe that, then you will keep on speaking even through the costs, weakness and struggle. Paul's conviction about this gave him courage and it will do the same for us.

- **Do you still believe the resurrection is going to happen?**

Nothing in the world will help you believe that. You need to know the truth of it.

- We live in a beautiful part of the world, but this is not the main event. **The best is yet to come.**
- When life is full of suffering, weakness and fallenness, this is not the main event. **The best is yet to come.**

We are absolutely confident that the Lord will deal with the mess, bringing in the new world and raising us up to be with him.

We keep proclaiming Christ because the weakness is deliberate, the resurrection is definite and

3. The glory is infinite (vv16-18)

As we start to feel our age, some of us are experiencing loss of strength, loss of memory and maybe loss of hair!

- **Outwardly** we are wasting away – being **deconstructed**
- **Inwardly** we are being renewed – being **reconstructed**

This is not a distinction between body and soul, as if there are no bodies in the new creation. There will be new bodies! Rather **v16** is talking about life in this fallen age compared with life in the perfect new age.

Seniors in the church may be physically weaker, spend more time sitting and have more aches and pains but

- they are spiritually stronger, keener and clearer.
- they talk less about themselves, and more about their Lord.
- they worry less about the present and are more excited about the future.

There is a reason for that as we read in **v17**. The sufferings of the present age are actually doing something. They are preparing us for the mind-bogglingly wonderful glory that is to come.

It is like the early stages of a new building. To build a glorious new building, you can't do without the mess and mud of the foundations. There are pipes sticking out everywhere, wires all over the place and spilled concrete. You wonder if it will ever be what it is meant to be. Then one day the finished building is there in all its glory! The unsightly mess has been the preparation.

In some way, God uses temporary weaknesses to prepare eternal glory. Theologian J I Packer distinguishes 3 senses of glory in 2 Corinthians:

- a) what God displays of his brilliance (the glory of God in the face of Christ (**2 Cor 4:6** see p4))
- b) what God receives from his people (the praise he gets as grace extends to more and more people (**v15**))
- c) that which God gives to his people, the transforming from one degree of glory to another (**2 Cor 3:18** see p4))

When you put all these together, **the final glory of God with his people will be stunningly magnificent.**

Paul calls his sufferings (beatings, imprisonment, being deprived of food and sleep) light and momentary, because, if weighed against the coming glory, that is what they are. The things that are seen are transient and will pass away, but the things we cannot see are eternal and will last forever.

Outwardly we are nearer and nearer to death. Inwardly we are nearer and nearer to glory

and we must fix our eyes on what we cannot yet see (v18)

- When it comes to Christ proclaiming ministry, the world will always come up with better sounding messages and get better looking results, because the world stands for what can be seen.
- We, however, preach an invisible Saviour, to change invisible hearts, and to prepare for an invisible future. Invisible doesn't mean unreal. So we proclaim Christ and keep going beyond the novelty of a new building, new staff or a new start in the autumn.

We proclaim Christ because the weakness is deliberate, the resurrection is definite and the future glory is infinite.

Psalm 116: 1-10 I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy.

² Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.

³ The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish.

⁴ Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray, deliver my soul!"

⁵ Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful.

⁶ The LORD preserves the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me.

⁷ Return, O my soul, to your rest; for the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.

⁸ For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling;

⁹ I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

¹⁰ I believed, even when I spoke: "I am greatly afflicted";

2 Cor 4:1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

2 Cor 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

2 Cor 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.