

**2 Corinthians 4:1-16a**  
**(Isaiah 6:1-10; Luke 13:10-17)**  
**“So We Do Not Lose Heart”**

**Introduction**

In the previous chapter, Paul reminded us that God’s Word, glorious as it is, cannot make us new apart from God’s Spirit. Nor can it make us right with God, nor can it enable us to begin to grow into Christ-likeness, apart from God’s Spirit taking the Word and working it within us. The difference between those who study the Scriptures, attend church, perhaps serve in a variety of ministries, and yet never experience the presence and power of God in their lives, and those who daily experience the presence of God and delight in knowing him, is explained by Paul in his description of the difference between those who worship God with unveiled faces and those whose hearts are veiled in God’s presence. The Israelites asked Moses to veil his face because they did not want to have to know God in face-to-face intimacy, as he created us to know him. They wanted their religion, and Scripture, and worship to maintain a safe, distant relationship with God. But they did not want to have to gaze upon his glory.

So also today churches are filled with earnest folk who want everything that God has to offer, except for a close relationship with him that demands time and energy and intimacy. We don’t want to have to change that radically, and we know that if we ever get that close to God, we will never be the same again.

Now Paul takes us further, and claims that there is really only one treasure worth pursuing in life, and only one basis for confidence in facing the future. As we have seen, his defense of his ministry is a model for us of basing our lives, not on the changeable circumstances of life, but on what cannot be shaken, no matter what happens to our health or our family, or to the economy, or our community, or our nation. We need a place to stand and face whatever comes with the confidence that our lives have meaning and purpose, and a future that cannot be taken away. We need to know that we are pursuing a treasure that can never perish, spoil or fade.

This kind of confidence is unknown by most folk, even by those who fill American churches today. We so easily fall prey to the notion that the only life worth living is the one depicted by advertisers who sell us things by showing us images of beauty and robust health, of wealth and success, promising such a life to those who buy their products. These images have power to shape our longings and desires, to make us place our confidence in our conformity to what this world calls success, and to fear the loss of all that this world treasures. Yet everyone of us here knows that one day each of us will die, and that all that one has labored to achieve will pass on to someone else. Life as our culture pursues it is truly a chasing after the wind. Here, Paul calls us to a life worth living, that changes in circumstances cannot shake.

## Body

### **1. The only safe ground for confidence in life and in death: God's mercy (4:1).**

This implies our own need for mercy: namely, our sin and brokenness, our spiritual blindness apart from God's mercy.

This concisely summarizes the heart of the gospel, as over against the message of Paul's opponents: God saves sinners, and displays his power in those who share in Christ's sufferings.

But the question is this: How does this truth that we confess become the very ground on which we build our life? How do we begin to get free of the lie that our true happiness is to be found in meeting our culture's requirements for success?

### **2. The only sane response to such mercy: live in the light (4:2).**

Those who have known such mercy should renounce secret, shameful ways, and every temptation to deception or distortion of God's Word. We no longer have to pretend that our life – our relationships, our work and ministry – rest on our competence.

On the contrary, we should live lives that declare plain truth to the consciences of those around us, knowing also that we live in the sight of God. We can freely confess that we have nothing to commend ourselves except for what God has given us in his great mercy.

### **3. The only treasure worth seeking in this life: the light of the knowledge of the glory of God (4:3-6).**

Many who hear the gospel are unimpressed. They see no glory in it. Paul says that the veil still covers their hearts. Satan has blinded them. They think there is no glory in the face of Jesus Christ. They are like blind people, unable to see the dazzling brightness of the sun.

But we who have known God's mercy have received his light shining in our hearts "to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."

*This is the key to the glory revealed: It is simply Jesus, as in his life and teaching he reveals to us who God is and who we were meant to be.*

#### **4. The only place on earth where such treasure is to be found: in jars of clay (4:7-15).**

It is not to be had by what this world considers wisdom or prestige or power. It is not found in the places where the people of this age seek pleasure or wealth. It is not found in dazzling technology, neither is it found in athletic prowess nor in artistic beauty. You will not find it anywhere that this world looks for treasure.

It is found instead in jars of clay – in people like you and me – and is seen most clearly through the eye of faith in those places where we display the death of Jesus in our lives, so that his life might be displayed in our bodies. Paul gives us a series of pictures of what that sometimes looks like:

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

Where in your life are you hard pressed, perplexed – perhaps even feeling persecuted? Realize that such are the very places where God desires his glory to shine through our brokenness into the world around us, revealing his power to come to us in the depths of our lives, and make all things new.

#### **Conclusion**

He ends as he begins, on a note of confidence based on God's mercy: "So we do not lose heart" (4:16a). Why do we so often lose heart? Isn't it because we so easily forget what is the only lasting treasure? Isn't it because we place our confidence on the shifting sands of circumstances? God offers us nothing less than the joy of his presence, a presence recognized only by the unveiled gaze of the friend of God who treasures all of God's good gifts, but none so much as this: that we may know him and Jesus Christ, who is the express image of God, and the radiance of his glory. In Christ, we see who God is and who we were meant to be. And as we gaze at him with unveiled face, his Spirit transforms us from one degree of glory to another.