CRAWFORD BIBLE COMMENTARY

BIBLE STUDY

2 Corinthians Chapter 4 —
Treasure in Earthen Vessels

A Verse-by-Verse Bible Study from the Crawford Standard Bible

Introduction

2 Corinthians Chapter 4 is one of the most encouraging chapters in the Bible for believers who are weary, weak, or suffering.

In Chapter 3, Paul described the glory of the new covenant.

Believers are being transformed into Christ's image, from glory to glory.

But someone might ask:

If the gospel is so glorious, why are its messengers so weak?

Paul was not impressive to look at.

He was often sick, beaten, poor, and misunderstood.

His critics in Corinth pointed to his weakness as proof he was not a true apostle.

Paul answers with one of the most beautiful pictures in Scripture.

“We have this treasure in jars of clay.”

The gospel is a priceless treasure.

But God has placed it in ordinary, fragile, breakable people.

Why?

“To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”

Paul also explains why some people do not believe.

It is not because the gospel is unclear.

It is because the god of this world has blinded their minds.

But the same God who said, **“Let there be light,”** shines into human hearts to show them the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Then Paul describes his suffering honestly.

Pressed but not crushed.

Perplexed but not in despair.

Persecuted but not abandoned.

Struck down but not destroyed.

And he ends with a glorious perspective.

Outwardly, we are wasting away.

Inwardly, we are being renewed day by day.

Our troubles are light and momentary.

The glory ahead is eternal and beyond comparison.

So we fix our eyes on what is unseen.

The chapter moves through five movements:

- The Integrity of the Gospel (verses 1–4).
- Christ, Not Ourselves (verses 5–6).
- Treasure in Clay Jars (verses 7–12).
- Faith in the God Who Raises the Dead (verses 13–15).
- Eternal Glory Outweighs Present Suffering (verses 16–18).

The central truth of 2 Corinthians 4 is:

God places the treasure of the gospel in weak human vessels so that His power is seen, and though believers suffer outwardly, they are renewed inwardly and look to an eternal glory that far outweighs their present troubles.

I. WE DO NOT LOSE HEART

2 Corinthians 4:1 — Through God's Mercy

“Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.”

Paul begins with a strong statement.

“Through God's mercy we have this ministry.”

Paul never forgot that his ministry was a gift of mercy.

He had been a persecutor of the church.

He did not deserve to be an apostle.

But God showed him mercy.

“We do not lose heart.”

Paul faced constant opposition, suffering, and criticism.

He could have given up.

But he did not.

Why?

Because a ministry received by mercy is sustained by mercy.

Paul will repeat this phrase at the end of the chapter.

It frames everything he says.

Cross References

1 Timothy 1:13

> even though I once spoke against God, persecuted His people, and treated them with violence. But God showed me mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.

Galatians 6:9

> So let us not grow tired of doing good, because at the right time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

2 Corinthians 4:16

> So we do not give up. Even though our outer self is wearing out, our inner self is being made new day by day.

Spiritual Principle

Remembering God's mercy keeps us from losing heart.

Application

When you feel like giving up, remember that your calling came from God's mercy.

II. RENOUNCING HIDDEN THINGS

2 Corinthians 4:2 — Openly Declaring the Truth

“But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in deceit, nor distorting the word of God. Instead, by openly declaring the truth, we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.”

Paul describes how he ministered.

“We have renounced the hidden things of shame.”

He refused to use secret methods he would be ashamed of.

“Not walking in deceit.”

He did not use tricks or manipulation.

“Nor distorting the word of God.”

He did not twist Scripture or water it down.

“Instead, by openly declaring the truth.”

Paul simply told the truth plainly.

“We commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.”

He did not need letters of recommendation.

His honesty spoke to people's consciences.

And he lived knowing God was watching.

Cross References

Romans 6:21

> What benefit did you get from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things lead to death.

1 Thessalonians 2:3

> For the appeal we make does not come from error, impure motives, or trickery.

Ephesians 4:25

> So stop telling lies. Each of you must speak the truth to your neighbor, because we are all parts of the same body.

Spiritual Principle

God's truth must be shared openly and honestly, without tricks or distortion.

Key Truth

The gospel needs no gimmicks.

It needs faithful, honest messengers.

III. IF OUR GOSPEL IS VEILED

2 Corinthians 4:3 — To Those Who Are Perishing

“But if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing,”

Paul anticipates an objection.

If the gospel is so clear, why do so many people reject it?

“If our gospel is veiled.”

Paul uses the picture of the veil from Chapter 3.

“It is veiled to those who are perishing.”

The problem is not the message.

The message is clear.

The problem is with the hearers who are on the road to destruction.

Their hearts are covered.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:18

> The message of the cross seems foolish to those who are being lost, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

2 Corinthians 2:15

> To God, we are the sweet smell of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

John 3:19

> This is the judgment: The light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light, because what they did was evil.

Spiritual Principle

When people reject the gospel, the problem is not with the message but with the heart.

IV. THE GOD OF THIS WORLD

2 Corinthians 4:4 — Blinded Minds

“in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

Paul explains why some cannot see.

“The god of this world.”

This is Satan.

He is not truly a god.

But many people in this world follow him and live under his influence.

Jesus called him **“the ruler of this world.”**

“Has blinded the minds of the unbelievers.”

Satan works to keep people from seeing the truth.

He blinds minds through pride, distraction, false beliefs, and love of sin.

“So that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ.”

The gospel shines like light.

But blind eyes cannot see it.

“Who is the image of God.”

Jesus perfectly shows us who God is.

To see Christ is to see God.

That is exactly what Satan does not want people to see.

Cross References

John 12:31

> Now is the time for this world to be judged. Now the ruler of this world will be thrown out.

Ephesians 2:2

> You used to live that way, following the ways of this world and the ruler of the power of the air—the spirit who is now at work in those who disobey God.

Colossians 1:15

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He is the firstborn over all creation.

Spiritual Principle

Behind unbelief is a spiritual battle; Satan works to blind people to the glory of Christ.

Application

When you share the gospel, remember there is a spiritual battle.

Pray for God to open blind eyes.

V. WE PREACH CHRIST JESUS AS LORD

2 Corinthians 4:5 — Not Ourselves

“For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.”

Paul states the heart of his message.

“We do not preach ourselves.”

Paul was not trying to build his own reputation.

His critics were promoting themselves.

Paul refused to do that.

“But Christ Jesus as Lord.”

The message is about Jesus.

And Jesus is Lord.

“And ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.”

Paul saw himself as a servant.

The word means **slave.**

He served the Corinthians because he loved Jesus.

This is the right order:

Christ is Lord.

We are servants.

Cross References

1 Corinthians 1:23

> But we preach Christ crucified. This message offends the Jews and sounds foolish to the Gentiles.

1 Corinthians 9:19

> Though I am free from everyone, I have made myself a servant to all, so that I may win as many as possible.

Romans 1:1

> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called by God to be an apostle and set apart to share God's good news.

Spiritual Principle

True ministry points to Christ as Lord, not to the minister.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Christ is the message; we are only the messengers and servants.

VI. LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS

2 Corinthians 4:6 — In the Face of Jesus Christ

“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.”

Paul explains how blind eyes are opened.

“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness.’”

Paul points back to creation.

In the beginning, the world was dark.

God spoke, and light appeared.

“Has shone in our hearts.”

The same God who created light in the world creates light in the heart.

Salvation is a new creation.

Just as God spoke light into the darkness at creation, He shines into dark hearts and gives sight.

“To give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Where do we see God's glory?

In the face of Jesus.

Moses saw God's glory reflected and had to veil his face.

Believers see God's glory shining in Jesus Christ.

Paul himself experienced this on the road to Damascus, when a light from heaven shone around him.

Cross References

Genesis 1:3

> Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

John 1:9

> The true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

Isaiah 9:2

> The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. On those living in the land of deep darkness, a light has shined.

Spiritual Principle

Salvation is God's creative work, shining light into dark hearts.

Key Truth

The same voice that created the stars can create light in the darkest heart.

VII. TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY

2 Corinthians 4:7 — The Surpassing Power Belongs to God

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”

This is the heart of the chapter.

“We have this treasure.”

The treasure is the gospel—the light of the knowledge of God's glory in Christ.

Nothing is more valuable.

“In jars of clay.”

In Paul's world, clay jars were cheap, ordinary, and easily broken.

People sometimes hid valuables in them.

Small clay lamps were also used to carry light.

Paul says believers are like those clay jars.

Weak.

Ordinary.

Fragile.

“To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”

This is why God puts His treasure in weak vessels.

So that no one will think the power comes from the jar.

When God works through weak people, everyone can see that the power is His.

Cross References

Jeremiah 18:6

> “People of Israel, can't I do with you as this potter does?” declares the LORD. “Like clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, people of Israel.”

2 Corinthians 12:9

> But He told me, “My grace is all you need, because My power works best in weakness.” So I will gladly brag even more about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power can rest on me.

1 Corinthians 1:27

> But God chose the things the world thinks are foolish to shame the wise. God chose the things the world thinks are weak to shame the strong.

Spiritual Principle

God puts His treasure in weak vessels so that His power is clearly seen.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Your weakness is not a barrier to God's work; it is the stage on which His power is displayed.

Application

Do you feel too ordinary or weak for God to use?

That is exactly the kind of jar God chooses.

VIII. PRESSED BUT NOT CRUSHED

2 Corinthians 4:8 — Perplexed but Not in Despair

“We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;”

Paul now describes life as a clay jar.

He gives four contrasts.

The first two are in this verse.

“Hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed.”

Pressure came from every direction.

But Paul was not crushed.

He was squeezed, but not destroyed.

“Perplexed, but not in despair.”

Paul did not always understand what was happening.

He was confused at times.

But he never lost hope.

Notice that Paul is honest.

He does not pretend life was easy.

But he shows that God's power kept him from being destroyed.

Cross References

Psalm 42:5

> Why are you so downcast, my soul? Why are you so troubled within me? Put your hope in God, for I will still praise Him, my Savior and my God.

2 Corinthians 6:9

> known, yet treated as unknown; dying, and yet we live on; beaten, and yet not killed;

2 Corinthians 11:23

> Are they servants of Christ? I am speaking like a madman, but I am more so. I have worked much harder, been in prison more often, been beaten more severely, and faced death again and again.

Spiritual Principle

God allows pressure, but He does not allow His people to be crushed.

IX. PERSECUTED BUT NOT ABANDONED

2 Corinthians 4:9 — Struck Down but Not Destroyed

“persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”

Paul gives the last two contrasts.

“Persecuted, but not abandoned.”

People hunted Paul.

But God never left him.

“Struck down, but not destroyed.”

Paul was knocked down many times.

Beaten.

Stoned.

Left for dead.

But he got back up.

The clay jar was cracked and battered.

But the treasure inside was never lost.

Cross References

Psalm 37:24

> Though he stumbles, he will not fall flat, because the LORD holds him by the hand.

Psalm 34:19

> The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD rescues him from them all.

Hebrews 13:5

> Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “I will never leave you; I will never abandon you.”

Spiritual Principle

Believers may be knocked down, but God never abandons them.

Key Truth

Down is not out when God is holding you.

X. CARRYING THE DEATH OF JESUS

2 Corinthians 4:10 — That His Life May Be Revealed

“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”

Paul explains the meaning of his suffering.

“We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus.”

Paul's sufferings were a daily sharing in the sufferings of Jesus.

His scars, weakness, and hardships reflected the cross.

“So that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”

But in that weakness, the resurrection life of Jesus could be seen.

When a weak, suffering servant keeps going with joy, people see that something more than human strength is at work.

They see the life of Jesus.

Cross References

Galatians 2:20

> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 6:17

> From now on, let no one cause me trouble, because I carry the marks of Jesus on my body.

Romans 8:17

> And if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ—if we share in His sufferings so that we may also share in His glory.

Spiritual Principle

The life of Jesus is revealed most clearly through those who share His sufferings.

XI. GIVEN OVER TO DEATH

2 Corinthians 4:11 — For Jesus' Sake

“For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our mortal flesh.”

Paul repeats the thought.

“We who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake.”

Paul faced death constantly.

He was always in danger because he followed Jesus.

“So that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our mortal flesh.”

In his dying body, Christ's life was on display.

This is a pattern for every believer.

We die to ourselves.

And Christ's life shines through.

Cross References

Romans 8:36

> As Scripture says: “For Your sake we face death all day long. We are treated like sheep led to be slaughtered.”

Philippians 1:20

> I eagerly expect and hope that I will not be ashamed in any way, but that I will have full courage, so that now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.

John 12:25

> Whoever loves his life will lose it, but whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Spiritual Principle

Dying to self allows the life of Christ to be seen in us.

XII. DEATH IN US, LIFE IN YOU

2 Corinthians 4:12 — The Fruit of Suffering

“So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.”

Paul sums up the meaning of his suffering.

“Death is at work in us.”

Paul was suffering and wearing out.

“But life is at work in you.”

Because Paul was willing to suffer, the Corinthians received eternal life.

His sacrifice brought them blessing.

This is the pattern of the cross.

Jesus died so that we might live.

And His servants pour out their lives so that others may receive life.

Cross References

John 12:24

> I tell you the truth, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it stays only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.

1 Corinthians 4:10

> We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, but we are dishonored!

Colossians 1:24

> Now I rejoice in what I suffer for you. In my body I am doing my part to share in Christ's sufferings for the sake of His body, the church.

Spiritual Principle

The sacrifice of God's servants brings life to others.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Like seeds that fall into the ground, lives poured out for Christ produce a harvest.

XIII. I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE

2 Corinthians 4:13 — The Spirit of Faith

“It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak,”

Paul quotes Psalm 116.

“I believed; therefore I have spoken.”

In that psalm, the writer was in great trouble.

But he kept trusting God and kept speaking of Him.

“Since we have that same spirit of faith.”

Paul had the same faith.

“We also believe and therefore speak.”

Real faith cannot stay silent.

Even in suffering, Paul kept preaching.

His speaking flowed from his believing.

Cross References

Psalm 116:10

> I believed, even when I said, “I am deeply troubled.”

Romans 10:10

> For it is with your heart that you believe and are made right with God, and it is with your mouth that you declare your faith and are saved.

Matthew 12:34

> You brood of snakes! How can you say anything good when you are evil? For the mouth speaks what fills the heart.

Spiritual Principle

True faith leads us to speak about God, even in hard times.

Application

Does your faith lead you to speak?

XIV. HE WILL ALSO RAISE US

2 Corinthians 4:14 — Presented with You

“knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to Himself.”

Why could Paul keep speaking in the face of death?

“Knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus.”

Death was not the end.

The God who raised Jesus would raise Paul too.

“And present us with you to Himself.”

One day, Paul and the Corinthians would stand together in God's presence.

This hope gave Paul courage.

He could face death because he knew the resurrection was coming.

Cross References

Romans 8:11

> If the Spirit of the One who raised Jesus from the dead lives in you, then the One who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who lives in you.

1 Corinthians 6:14

> God raised the Lord, and He will also raise us by His power.

1 Thessalonians 4:14

> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, we also believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in Him.

Spiritual Principle

The hope of resurrection gives courage to face suffering and death.

XV. FOR YOUR BENEFIT

2 Corinthians 4:15 — Thanksgiving to the Glory of God

"All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God."

Paul explains the purpose of everything he endured.

"All this is for your benefit."

Paul's suffering was for their good.

"So that the grace that is reaching more and more people."

As the gospel spread, more people experienced God's grace.

"May cause thanksgiving to overflow."

More grace leads to more thanksgiving.

"To the glory of God."

And more thanksgiving brings more glory to God.

This is the ultimate goal of all ministry.

Cross References

2 Corinthians 1:6

> If we are troubled, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which helps you patiently endure the same sufferings we suffer.

Romans 5:15

> But the gift is not like the sin. Many died because of one man's sin, but God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflowed to many more.

2 Corinthians 9:12

> This service you are giving not only meets the needs of God's people, but also overflows in many thanks to God.

Spiritual Principle

The spread of grace leads to overflowing thanksgiving and God's glory.

XVI. RENEWED DAY BY DAY

2 Corinthians 4:16 — Wasting Away, Yet Renewed

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”

Paul repeats what he said in verse 1.

“Therefore we do not lose heart.”

Now he explains why.

“Though outwardly we are wasting away.”

Paul's body was aging.

It was worn out by suffering.

It was getting weaker.

This is true for everyone.

Our bodies are slowly wearing out.

“Yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”

But something else is happening inside.

The inner person—the spirit—is being made new.

Every day.

Strength for today.

Hope for tomorrow.

Growth in Christ.

The outside is fading, but the inside is getting stronger.

Cross References

Ephesians 3:16

> I pray that from His glorious riches He will strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being,

Isaiah 40:31

> But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not grow faint.

Colossians 3:10

> and have put on the new self, which is being made new in knowledge to be like its Creator.

Spiritual Principle

Even as our bodies weaken, God renews our inner life every day.

Application

If you are growing older or weaker, take heart.

God is renewing you inwardly every day.

XVII. AN ETERNAL WEIGHT OF GLORY

2 Corinthians 4:17 — Light and Momentary Troubles

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.”

This is one of the most amazing statements in the Bible.

“Our light and momentary troubles.”

Think of what Paul had suffered.

Beatings.

Prison.

Shipwrecks.

Hunger.

Danger.

Yet he calls them **light** and **momentary.**

Not because they did not hurt.

But because of what he compared them to.

“Are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory.”

Light versus **weight.**

Momentary versus **eternal.**

In the Hebrew language, the word for **glory** also carries the idea of **weight.**

Our troubles are like a feather.

The coming glory is like a mountain.

“Far beyond all comparison.”

There is no comparison at all.

And notice that troubles are **achieving** glory.

God uses our suffering to prepare something wonderful for us.

Cross References

Romans 8:18

> I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

1 Peter 1:7

> These trials prove that your faith is real. Your faith is worth far more than gold, which perishes even though fire tests it. Real faith will bring praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Romans 5:3

> Not only that, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces endurance,

Spiritual Principle

Present suffering is light and brief compared to the eternal glory ahead.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

Put your troubles on the scale beside eternity, and they become light.

XVIII. WHAT IS UNSEEN IS ETERNAL

2 Corinthians 4:18 — Fixing Our Eyes

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”

Paul ends with the secret of not losing heart.

“So we fix our eyes not on what is seen.”

What is seen?

Our problems.

Our pain.

Our weakness.

The world around us.

“But on what is unseen.”

What is unseen?

God.

Christ at the right hand of the Father.

Heaven.

The coming glory.

“For what is seen is temporary.”

Everything we can see will pass away.

“But what is unseen is eternal.”

The things of God will last forever.

Where we fix our eyes determines whether we lose heart or keep going.

Cross References

Hebrews 11:1

> Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Hebrews 12:2

> Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before Him, He endured the cross, ignoring its shame, and now He is seated at the right hand of God's throne.

Colossians 3:2

> Set your minds on the things above, not on earthly things.

Spiritual Principle

Fixing our eyes on eternal things keeps us from losing heart.

Key Truth

What you look at determines how you live.

Look at what lasts.

XIX. FIVE GREAT LESSONS FROM 2 CORINTHIANS 4

1. The Gospel Is Clear, but Unbelief Blinds

“The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers.”

Principle:

Satan blinds unbelievers to the light of Christ, yet God shines His light in willing hearts.

2. We Carry Treasure in Weak Vessels

“We have this treasure in jars of clay.”

Principle:

God works through our frailty so that His power, not our strength, is glorified.

3. Suffering Is Not the End

“Struck down, but not destroyed.”

Principle:

Affliction presses us but cannot destroy us, for Christ's life is revealed even in our weakness.

4. Faith Fuels Endurance

“He who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us.”

Principle:

Because Christ rose, we believe He will raise us also and present us in glory.

5. Eternal Glory Outweighs Present Pain

“Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory.”

Principle:

Trials are temporary; the unseen, eternal realities are far greater than the visible struggles of this life.

XX. FOUR CONTRASTS IN SUFFERING

Verses 8–9 give four pictures of the believer's life.

Hard Pressed, but Not Crushed

Pressure comes from every side, but God keeps us from being crushed.

Perplexed, but Not in Despair

We do not always understand, but we never lose hope.

Persecuted, but Not Abandoned

People may turn against us, but God never leaves us.

Struck Down, but Not Destroyed

We may be knocked down, but we are never knocked out.

Crawford Bible Study Principle

The clay jar may crack, but the treasure inside is never lost.

XXI. WHY GOD USES CLAY JARS

Verse 7 explains why God puts His treasure in weak people.

So That His Power Is Seen

“To show that the surpassing power belongs to God.”

So That No One Boasts in the Jar

“And not to us.”

So That Weak People Have Hope

If God can use Paul, He can use anyone.

So That Christ's Life Shines Through

“So that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.”

So That Others Receive Life

“Death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.”

Key Truth

God does not choose strong vessels to show His strength; He chooses weak ones to show His power.

XXII. THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN

Verses 16–18 contrast two ways of seeing life.

What Is Seen

- The outer self wasting away.
- Troubles that feel heavy.
- Suffering that feels long.
- Things that are temporary.

What Is Unseen

- The inner self being renewed day by day.
- A glory that is weighty.
- A glory that is eternal.
- Things that last forever.

Key Truth

Faith sees beyond the temporary to the eternal.

XXIII. WHAT 2 CORINTHIANS 4 TEACHES ABOUT JESUS

He Is the Image of God

“Christ, who is the image of God.”

He Is Lord

“We preach... Christ Jesus as Lord.”

God's Glory Shines in His Face

“The glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

His Death and Life Are Seen in Us

“The death of Jesus... the life of Jesus.”

He Was Raised, and We Will Be Raised

“He who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us with Jesus.”

Crawford Bible Study Principle

To see Jesus is to see the glory of God, and to follow Him is to share both His death and His life.

XXIV. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR PERSONAL STUDY

Question 1

Why did Paul not lose heart?

He remembered that his ministry came from God's mercy.

He was being renewed inwardly every day.

He kept his eyes on eternal things.

Question 2

How did Paul share the gospel?

Openly and honestly, without tricks, deceit, or distorting God's word.

Question 3

Why do some people not believe the gospel?

The god of this world has blinded their minds.

The problem is not the message, but spiritual blindness.

Question 4

Who is “the god of this world”?

Satan, who influences those who do not follow God.

Question 5

How does God open blind eyes?

The same God who said “Let there be light” at creation shines into human hearts.

He shows them His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Question 6

What is the “treasure in jars of clay”?

The treasure is the gospel of Christ.

The jars of clay are weak, ordinary believers.

Question 7

Why does God put His treasure in weak vessels?

So that everyone can see that the power belongs to God and not to us.

Question 8

What are the four contrasts in verses 8–9?

Hard pressed but not crushed, perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed.

Question 9

What does it mean to carry the death of Jesus in our bodies?

Believers share in Christ's sufferings.

And in their weakness, the life of Jesus is revealed.

Question 10

Why could Paul call his troubles “light and momentary”?

Because he compared them to the eternal weight of glory to come.

Question 11

What does it mean to fix our eyes on what is unseen?

To focus on God, Christ, and the eternal glory ahead, rather than only on present problems.

Question 12

What should 2 Corinthians 4 change about the way Christians live today?

2 Corinthians 4 should cause believers to live:

- Not losing heart.
- Sharing the gospel honestly.
- Praying for blind eyes to be opened.
- Pointing to Christ, not themselves.
- Accepting their weakness as a place for God's power.
- Enduring hardship with hope.
- Being renewed inwardly every day.
- Fixing their eyes on eternal things.

XXV. PERSONAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 4 asks several important questions.

Am I Losing Heart?

What do I need to remember about God's mercy?

Am I Honest in How I Share God's Word?

Do I ever water it down or twist it?

Am I Praying for Those Who Are Spiritually Blind?

Who needs God's light to shine in their heart?

Am I Pointing to Myself or to Christ?

Who gets the attention when I serve?

How Do I See My Weakness?

As a problem, or as a place for God's power?

How Am I Handling Pressure?

Am I trusting God to keep me from being crushed?

Is My Inner Life Being Renewed?

Am I spending time with God every day?

Where Are My Eyes Fixed?

On what is seen, or on what is unseen?

XXVI. A CRAWFORD BIBLE STUDY PRINCIPLE

“Cracked Jars Let the Light Shine Through”

A clay lamp carries light.

The lamp itself is plain and ordinary.

But the light inside is what matters.

And sometimes, when a clay jar is cracked, the light inside shines out through the cracks.

That is a picture of the Christian life.

God has placed the light of Christ inside ordinary people.

We are cracked by suffering.

We are chipped by trials.

We are weakened by age and hardship.

But through every crack, the light of Jesus shines out.

People do not see how strong we are.

They see how strong He is.

This creates a powerful principle.

Do not be ashamed of your weakness.

It is where God's power is seen most clearly.

Principle:

The cracks in the jar are where the light shines through.

XXVII. FINAL APPLICATION

2 Corinthians Chapter 4 was written by a man who was hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down.

His critics said his weakness proved he was not a true apostle.

Paul said his weakness proved that God's power was at work.

He did not lose heart.

He did not preach himself.

He did not twist God's word.

He fixed his eyes on what is eternal.

2 Corinthians 4 therefore reminds us:

Never lose heart.

Never be ashamed of your weakness.

Never point to yourself instead of Christ.

Never forget that you are being renewed inside.

Never let present troubles hide eternal glory.

The church does not need perfect vessels.

It needs:

Ordinary people carrying an extraordinary treasure.

Servants who point to Christ as Lord.

Believers who endure with hope.

And eyes fixed on what is eternal.

The same light still shines:

Tell people that God can shine light into the darkest heart.

Tell people that Jesus shows us the glory of God.

Tell people that weakness is not the end.

Tell people that eternal glory is coming.

And in every trial:

Do not lose heart.

Let the light shine through.

Be renewed day by day.

Fix your eyes on what is unseen.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the mercy that has given us a place in Your work.

Thank You for the treasure of the gospel.

Thank You that You shined Your light into our hearts to give us the knowledge of Your glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

Thank You that You place this treasure in ordinary jars of clay, so that everyone can see that the power belongs to You.

Thank You that we may be hard pressed, but not crushed.

Thank You that we may be perplexed, but not in despair.

Thank You that we may be persecuted, but never abandoned.

Thank You that we may be struck down, but not destroyed.

Thank You that You who raised the Lord Jesus will also raise us.

Thank You that even as our outer selves waste away, You renew our inner selves day by day.

Forgive us when we have lost heart.

Forgive us when we have pointed to ourselves instead of to Christ.

Forgive us when we have fixed our eyes on our troubles instead of on You.

Open the blind eyes of those who cannot yet see the light of the gospel.

Help us share Your word honestly and boldly.

Let the life of Jesus be seen in our weakness.

Renew us inwardly each day.

And keep our eyes fixed on what is unseen and eternal.

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.”

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Key Verse

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” — 2 Corinthians 4:7

Central Truth

God places the treasure of the gospel in weak human vessels so that His power is seen, and though believers suffer outwardly, they are renewed inwardly and look to an eternal glory that far outweighs their present troubles.

2 Corinthians 4 in One Sentence

Paul explains that he does not lose heart because his ministry comes from God's mercy, that unbelievers are blinded by Satan while God shines His light in hearts through Christ, that the treasure of the gospel is carried in weak clay jars to show God's power, and that present troubles are light and momentary compared to the eternal glory ahead.