

## 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

Sunday 7/1/2012

Chapter 4 of 2 Corinthians is an amazing chapter. We have learned so much about how the devil blinds us from the Gospel. We learned that there are two different aspects to the Gospel. There is the aspect of the Gospel that you receive the day you get saved. That is what Dottie was just singing about. After we get saved, God intends us to do something with that Gospel so we fulfill the Gospel. The Gospel, of course, is the good news that Jesus died according to the Scripture, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures. That is the job of us as Christians. That is why God saved you. I think today you are going to see some things that carry it on a little bit farther.

Last week we saw this blinding process, how the devil blinds us from the inside, from probably one of the greatest single aspects of the Word of God, and that is in Matthew 13 in the parable of the sower. I broke it down and showed you how there are four case studies that we looked at. If you are contemplating in your mind and wanting to be part of the counseling ministry as we kick it off here this next year, these are the things that you have to learn. These are the case studies that you have to get down. Today we will look at yet another principle found in this amazing book on ministry within this amazing chapter on the personal application of the ministry, how you and I are to do it.

### I. Direct vs. Pondered Sermons

In preaching the Bible and listening to preaching of the Bible, there are some sermons that when you hear them or when you preach them, they are very direct. I do not know if you have ever analyzed the different ways that messages come across or different reactions to it, but in preaching the Bible and teaching the Bible, there are some sermons that are very direct, absolutely to the point, and require an immediate response. That would be messages on salvation. If you would preach to God's people about sin in their lives, I can think of a thousand messages that I have preached over the 40-some years that require a direct response.

There is a sermon I preach out of Joshua called "The Sin in the Camp," and it is a message about Achan. Achan was back with the Nation of Israel, and they were fighting the great battles back there in Joshua, and God gave them some specific instructions. There were some things that they were not to do, and God told them that this first battle, all the spoils belonged to the Lord. But the Bible goes on and talks about how Achan saw a goodly Babylonian garment, and he saw some wedges of gold, and he took those, and he disobeyed God. The Bible says that he took them back to his tent, dug a little hole, and put them in there and covered them up, and then went out like there was nothing going on.

The Bible says that when you read that story, after that happened, Israel could not stand before their enemies. You are going to find that a number of events took place in Israel's world that really brought about disaster, and nobody could figure it out. Moses began to lose faith. People began to get killed, and nobody could figure it out, and finally God brought it to light that Achan had sinned in the camp.

Now, I have preached that message a thousand times, and I use that as an example. The title of that is "Sin in the Camp." It is a picture of when you and I have sin in our lives and do not confess it, or we try to hide it, that it is not your own sin. When we look at that story, we find that the congregation of Israel was affected. We find that the leader, Moses, was affected. A little bit later on, we find that the man himself, Achan, was affected. It goes to show you that your sin is not your own.

That is a message, if you preach it, that demands immediate response. People hear that, and you know where you are at. You know what you have got to do. So there are sermons like that. Sermons that when a guy preaches them, he hits your white tweeny eyeballs, and you know exactly that you have to do something. You may say, "Well, I did not respond, so it did not affect me." No, you did respond by not responding. You are either going to choose to do right or choose to do wrong. Some sermons, when you hear them, they demand that. Right there in your seat, you make a conscious choice: "Yes, I am going to do it, Lord," or "No, I am not going to do it." Some sermons are that way.

There are other sermons that have to sit with you for a while. You have to process it. You have to let it do its extended work. Not always when you hear preaching does it always have an immediate effect. Sometimes, but some sermons do not. Sometimes you and I will get more out of a sermon thinking about it through the rest of the week than you actually do by just hearing it when it is preached. That is by design. That is the way God does it. I tell you all that because today's message out of this next set of verses here is a message just like that.

There is a great verse that illustrates that. I do not know if you have ever seen it in the Bible. It is one of my favorite verses that I have marked in my Bible. It is in the book of Luke in the Gospels. It deals with the story of Mary when she was told that she was going to bring forth the Messiah to the nation of Israel. That was a pretty overwhelming thing to drop on her that day. I put myself in her place so many times when God has shown me something in the Word of God or God has done some amazing thing in my life, and it is almost too much to comprehend.

I cannot even imagine Mary, just some little gal out there, who the angel of the Lord shows up and says, "Oh, by the way, you are going to bring forth the Messiah to the nation of Israel. Oh, and He is not just going to be the Messiah to Israel. He is going to be the Savior of the whole world." What a thing to tell her. Yet the Bible says, and how many times I have found myself here, the Bible says in Luke 2:19 that when Mary heard all of that, when God gave her all of that, when He laid out to her everything that He was going to do, the Bible says:

*Luke 2:19*

*But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.*

How many times have I been in my own place in my own life? How many times when I have come across some great truth that God has revealed or God has done some great thing that I just have to take it? I say it to myself so many times that I will enter my breath into myself, or alone, I will say it out loud. I will just simply say it. Mary pondered all these things in her heart. This message will be like that today. You will not get all of this today. Frankly, some of you will never

get any of it. But some of you, like Mary, will take this and let God simmer it on the back burner of your heart. Some of you this week will take what is said today, and though you will not be able to grasp it all at this particular moment in time, God will just cause it to simmer for a while, and like Mary, you will ponder it in your heart. You will kind of put it on the back burner of your heart and just let God make that thing throughout this week.

Many of God's people just put it on the back burner. The problem is your pilot light is out. You have no light of God to do anything with it. You will relegate this message just like you do so many of them in your stack of files of things that you have heard but really do not change anything in your life.

## II. The Price Tag and Trade-Off of Life

In our very first lesson, you will remember as we began to look at 2 Corinthians, I told you that this aspect of this book really deals with teaching us ministry. In the very first lesson, I showed you that when we started this book, how the book defines ministry around suffering, how you and I go through things in life, you and I experience things in life, you and I will, through the happenstance of life, or in many cases through the stupid things that we do in life, or in some cases through the stand that we take for the Lord, you are going to suffer. The Bible says that God takes that suffering, and as you grow through it and as you learn from it, then God takes that and helps you help somebody else that is going through it.

I showed you, if you remember, all the negative words of this book that he uses to really lay out the downside of ministry as suffering. He talked about tribulation and affliction and anguish and being grieved. He talks about being troubled and how to be, and people who are distressed and perplexed. He talks about when we feel forsaken and cast down and persecuted. He talks about how that when we are beaten or stoned or shipwrecked or in bondage, he talks about being smitten, being in perils and weariness and painfulness and infirmities and stripes and rods and labors and burdens and wrath and all of the things that are the negative things in life.

Yet it is these very negative things, these very things that the world looks at and thinks are terrible. Very frankly, most Christians want to stay as far from as they can, but it is these terrible negative things that are what made Paul's ministry. I tell you today that understanding ministry is understanding the concept of suffering. The Christian life should be a life of ministry. I say it every week. That ministry of life or giving life to others and dealing with people is you going through your own sufferings, your own issues, your own problems that you may better help others go through theirs.

Yet, as in ministry, as in anything, as in anything in life, there is always a price tag to pay. No matter what you would do, there are two concepts of life that you better just learn in general. For me, there are two fundamental basic concepts of life. The quicker you understand these, no matter whether you are saved or you are lost, it does not really matter these two, the quicker you understand these, the better off you will be because this is what life is. It is real simple. People talk about the complexity of life. No, life is really not complex. We make it complex because we do not understand the fundamental principles by which life works. There are just two.

The first basic principle is that there is a price tag for everything that we do or try to accomplish on planet Earth. I do not care what it is. Whatever you decide to do with life, there is going to be a price that comes along with it. If you want to do something for God, there is going to be a price tag that comes with that. If you are going to want to live your life for yourself and do your own thing, there is a price tag that comes with that. That is one of the greatest things that people never learn. That is what makes life complex. You live your life the way you want it. You do what you want to do. Suddenly, when your life is in a catastrophe, you are actually scratching your head and saying, "Why?" The answer is simple: there is a price tag to everything we do.

The second great concept goes right along with that, and that is simply this: everything in life, everything in life that you do, is a trade-off. Everything in life you do, you will trade this for that. If you are here this morning and you love the Lord Jesus and you are doing the work of God in your life to the best of your ability, and you are one of the people in this church that really dedicate yourself to, you are far from perfect, but in your mind and in your heart, you are going to give your life to God. When you chose that, you traded something for that.

I had a young lady years and years ago, I was preaching in a camp. It reminded me when Donnie was singing that song because they sang that song that night. A gal got up and gave a testimony right after the song, and I was going to preach afterwards. She was a beautiful gal. She was just absolutely beautiful. She was just absolute perfection. She got up and gave a great testimony, and then she sang a song. Afterwards, I preached, and at the end, I went up to her and I thanked her for her song and for her testimony. As I was standing there, another girl came up, and I will never forget this. Another girl said, "You know what? I really was moved by your testimony tonight." She said, "I would give the world to have a testimony like that." That little girl looked back at her and said, "That is exactly what I gave up to get it."

Life is a choice. Life is a trade-off. She traded the world for her relationship with God. But I can turn that around. A lot of God's people trade God and all He has for the things of the world. Life is a trade-off. There is not anything you do that you do not trade this for that. Those two fundamental issues of life are two of the greatest principles that you will ever learn. They answer almost everything in our world of why things are the way they are. We make our own choices, and in making our own choices, there is always a price tag that we have to make and pay with that choice. Whenever we choose by our own choosing, we trade something for it.

I have seen young ladies trade their millennial inheritance at the judgment seat of Christ because of the guy that she married. I have seen guys trade their millennial inheritance and throw away a life of ministry because of the woman they married. The Bible lays down a set of clear principles. They are very clear. We look at them. We read them. We decide to do something else. When that little gal or that guy would come to me and say, "I do not know what happened, Bob. I wanted to do God. I do not know how I got messed up with this guy. I do not know what happened." My answer is real simple: "It is not hard to figure out, sweetheart. You traded this for this. Pal, you traded this for this."

Everything in life is a trade-off. Everything. No matter what you do, you are going to trade something for it. You need to trade up, not down. You need to make sure that what you trade for

brings a profit for the Lord, not for yourself. I have seen young men and young ladies. I see it all the time. I see young men and young ladies start to come and to go to church. I have seen it in all my years of ministry, and they will get into a situation where God begins to do something in their life. They will begin to get into their situation where God begins to really work in their life. Then they will get to the point where they will see people in the church or make friends with people. They will see people that have no concept of ministry, have nothing they want to do with ministry. They will see people that are involved in ministry, and instinctively they will always go to the crowd that does nothing.

Then down the line someplace, at the judgment seat of Christ, when they have lost everything and their life is a sham and their life is a mess, they are going to actually sit there and look at God and say, "What happened?" God is going to say, "You know what happened? You traded this for this. You knew who these people were. You knew what these people were. You knew what the ministry was. You chose that, and you traded it. You traded it." That is just the way that it works.

### III. The Price of Ministry and Dysfunctional Christianity

This is why most Christians will never do the ministry. They simply will not pay the price for it. They are like the generation of kids that we have today. Let me preface what I am about to say by saying this: I appreciate the young teenagers that we have in this church that really love God. I appreciate the young singles that we have that really love God. You married folks, you are another bracket. I am not focused on that because in the generation that we live in today, you find most young men and young ladies do not have a clue, do not care, could care less about anything. They have no values in their life. They have no accountability in their life. They have no responsibility in their life. They are absolutely broken down in every aspect of their life. They grew up thinking that life owes them a living. No responsibility has led to no accountability. They have no values in their life. They do not know or care about right from wrong.

We are living in a society where a man, what Easter Sunday, I think it was. Maybe I got the time wrong, but a guy here in Raytown, out at 6:00, 6:30, 7:00 in the morning, was out for a jog. Some two punk kids drove by, or three kids, whoever, and just decided to shoot him. What is wrong with a society like that? What is wrong with a group of kids that when I was a kid growing up, we had gangs, but the chief gang guy was the guy that won all the marbles when we shot marbles? Now the chief gang is the guy who does not shoot marbles; he just shoots people. This is the generation of kids that do not care. They do not care about anything.

I appreciate the young men and the young ladies here that are single that do care, that you have some real character. I appreciate that. I appreciate you teenagers down there at Restart. I watch you down there working out there in that hot heat and doing a job, man, when there are other teenagers that would not even walk across the street, and yet you are faithful every week. But I say that because most of the generation today are not like that. Most of God's people are like the generation of kids who just do not know the meaning of anything that has any value to it.

God's people today want the easy route. They want everything that God has for them, but they want it on their terms, on a silver platter, and then somebody to spoon-feed it to them. You like this church because you come on Thursday night and you get lots of good stuff out of the Bible. You come on Sunday morning and you get lots of good stuff out of the Word of God. But the bottom line is you get so much good stuff, you get to the point where you get like most kids, you get spoiled, and then you do not really do anything. Around this world, there are men and women that would die to have what you have on Sunday morning and Thursday night. I know you have no clue of understanding that because of where you are at based on the choices that you have made.

The Bible says you have to be a workman. The Bible says you have to be a wise master builder. God's people want it easy today. They want everything that God has, but as I said, they want it on their terms. The moment it gets a little warm for them or a little hot for them, we saw it in case study number two last week: the ones that have no root, they spring up, they are happy about it. But when the sun gets hot, the Bible says they endure for a while and then they are gone. They have no idea of God's price tag or what He paid for them. Like that little girl that said, "Oh, I would like to have their testimony. I would give anything in the world to have a testimony like yours." And she looked right back and she said, "That is exactly what it cost me."

The choices we make in life, the choices we make in life, the true riches versus the worldly riches. If there is one word today in my mind, anyhow, that defines the whole society that we live in, I will tell you, it is one word, and it is the word "dysfunctional." We have a dysfunctional government. We have a government for the last three years that cannot even pass a budget. We have a government for the last three or four years that cannot get anything done. We have a government, but at the same time, we have marriages that are dysfunctional. Oh my goodness. Marriages that are absolutely dysfunctional. We have families that are dysfunctional. We have relationships that are dysfunctional. Then we wonder why we have kids who are dysfunctional.

Yet that same word defines modern Bible Christianity for the most part. I have never seen in all the years of being in the ministry a more dysfunctional church and Christianity than I see today, not fully in any way, shape, or form fulfilling the fundamentals of the Gospel. Last Thursday night, somebody asked a question about being a missionary and how everybody wants to talk about foreign missions, but are not we missionaries? I took the time to lay that out, not to do it again this morning, but just to make the point: yes, we are missionaries. If you are saved this morning, you are a missionary. Your mission field is right here where God puts you.

But last week we learned that most people will not do it. We looked at it from the inside, and I gave you four case studies. Why are you going to spend enormous amounts of time? I am going to spend all of my life preaching my heart out, going to the ends, doing everything I know how to do. Yet God's people are not going to fulfill what God wants them to do. It is just the way that it is. In the admission of the ministry, if you ever decide to do it and you decide to suffer for God by your choosing, you will always have the victory. We talked about that when the world and people's lives are crashing in because they will not do what is right. You stay on top of your game, and you stay all the way to the end. We talked about it in 2 Corinthians 2:14, "Thanks be to God, which always causes us to triumph." There should never be a time in your life, in my

life, as a child of God, that we do not have the victory. I am going to show you today why that is. I say again, you will not get this today. This will not sink in today. This will be something like Mary that you will want to ponder in your heart.

#### IV. Suffering in Ministry: A Leper Colony Analogy

Dealing with people, I was reading this week, I go back every once in a while and try to take on a weekly basis and read some dear saint's biography just to keep up on things so I do not lose touch with it. I was reading the story of Mary Slessor. Mary Slessor was a woman, a great study for some of you young ladies. I think we have maybe had her book back here in the bookstore. Mary Slessor was a missionary to the lepers in India. I got reading, and I thought to myself, "You know what, what she did is a lot like what we do in ministry." Because when you start to look at dealing with people in the ministry, it is a lot like working in a leper colony.

Leprosy in the Bible is a type of sin. It eats away at your flesh, just like sin does. In fact, when you go back in the book of Leviticus and you find where leprosy is really detailed out, you know that there were three kinds of leprosy. I see this all the time in God's people. There was a leprosy of the flesh. Then there was a leprosy that got in your clothes. Then there was a leprosy that got in your house. Boy, I looked back in the Old Testament and saw that, and I thought to myself, "Boy, tell me the Bible is not the Word of God. Tell me the mind behind that book does not go way beyond where our mind goes," because that is exactly what happens when you start to get sin in your flesh.

I have seen it happen in God's people's lives. You start hanging with the wrong crowd. You start doing the wrong things. You start listening to people who do not care about the Word of God or care about the ministry, and you are smart enough already to know who they are, what they should or should not do. You start to let that leprosy get in your flesh. It eats at you. The next thing it does, it gets in your clothes. The clothes you have on today say who you really are. Some of you are just plain drab because you are just a normal guy. Some of you just do not dress up. You do not dress down. You are just normal. You look normal by the way you dress. You can always tell when a woman is out fishing for somebody by the way she dresses. It gives it away. It is not like we do not know. It is like, "Look at me. I am painted up like a possum berry, folks, and I am the only one who knows." No, the whole world knows. The whole world knows you look like a barn with a fresh coat of paint on it. You drive down the road and you say, "Hey Herb, who painted the barn?"

The things we wear say who we are. Personally, this is no offense to anybody that has got one on, and I see you out here. You have A&E. You have KC. You have 413. You have "Run fast, eat slow." That is a good one. I like that. You have the Chiefs on yours. You have Superman on yours. I like that. You have back here, you have whoever she is on there. I like that. You have, I can only see HD. She is HD. Okay. I like that one. I am not, I am not that you get, you have an American flag on yours. When you walk in, I did not know whether to hug you or salute you. Now this is just me. I am not a T-shirt type of guy that has things on him. I do not like to buy clothes from American Eagle. No offense. I love that shirt. I mean, I like KC. I would, but not very often do I do that. I would wear a Superman shirt, but I would be in fights all day long, so I

do not do that. I am just a kind of a plain guy, but my point is, when that leprosy gets in your clothes, you start doing things differently than you did before, and then it gets in your house. When it gets in your house, then it affects your family. It affects your kids. Your sin is not your own.

I have seen couples. I have seen kids. I have seen parents. I have seen where I call them black holes because anybody that gets around them that are right with God gets sucked into what is wrong because leprosy is like a disease, and we are like lepers. We are like people who work in a leper colony. You are there to help the people, but you have to be careful that you do not contract the disease yourself, and you have to take some safeguards to that. You can never lose your balance in ministry. We know that balance by now is perception or perspective, purpose, and passion. We know that you always have to keep looking and understanding who you are and what you are doing, the ability to work with people in the horrendous situations, lives being destroyed.

One of the hardest things in dealing with people is watching the kids get crushed. The kids get destroyed. I sit there and watch the family not do what is right, or a husband not do what is right, or a wife not do what is right, or both of them not do what is right. I have seen those little kids who were innocent that wanted to come to church, that wanted to learn. I know as well as I am standing here, and many other people feel the same pain. I know as well as I am standing here, those kids are never going to have a chance. That is going to get crushed. The devil is going to make sure. I would like to do something. I would like to say something. I would like to scream something. But you know what? They are not my kids. There are times you have got to learn to turn it over to the Lord. That is when you look into your own congregation, and you know what you see? You see some of you young men and some of you young ladies out there that came out of tremendous, horrendous experiences yourself and your family. You bolster me. You give me courage. You give me hope that God can do that in spite of horrendous situations.

But I am going to be honest with you, I do not like it. I think parents were given to a kid to raise them up in the Word of God. That is the surest thing that kid would get saved. Yet parents are oblivious to that in many cases. You see defeat upon defeat in some people's lives. But you and I have to hold the line. You and I have to be on top of our game. You and I cannot have a bad day. You and I cannot take a chance on getting out of the Word of God. I have got to be careful who I hang out with. I have got to be careful that I am not going to associate with people that are going to pull me off my game. It is very subtle. But you have got to be smarter than the problem.

## V. The Treasure in Earthen Vessels and Four Miracles

Now I want to read today where we really left off last week. It says here in 2 Corinthians 4:7:

*2 Corinthians 4:7-12*

*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*

*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;*

*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.*

*For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.*

*So then death worketh in us, but life in you.*

Oh, I love this. Dear Father, help us today to see this. Lord, there are good people here today who want to do what You want them to do. I believe that this church, it only goes, it only moves, it only accomplishes what You have for us to do as a body, as a church, by the men and women who are the boots on the ground who make it happen because of what You have done in their life. As the old song said, all of us sat five rows back at some point in time. All of us sat there and listened to the Word of God be preached. God came down and talked to us when the old choir sang "Just As I Am." We knew it was talking about us, and we received the Gospel. But Lord, it is not enough just to receive the Gospel. We need to take it after we receive it and carry it to somebody else and fulfill the very reason that You saved us. Help us today. Help this sermon to just simmer in so many of God's people's lives. Help them to just think about it all week, the rest of this day, the rest of the month. May God, You enact and bring up the lights here and there flickering in their hearts down throughout this next week of things that they need to see. We will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

Now, verse 7 says, "We now understand this treasure in earthen vessels as our bodies." I say it again, when you receive the Gospel, God gave you the light of the Gospel, and now you are to fulfill that Gospel, not fulfilling it by making it any better, but fulfilling it by taking it to somebody else. You are going to see the reason God saved you this morning. God chose us to be His vessels of ministry.

I do not know if you know this or not, but you still find over in the ruins in Europe, where the Roman Empire was, and it was all through Europe there for about 1,500 years, you will actually find them digging up these little lamps and these little vessels made of clay. They were for one reason: they held oil. That is what he is talking about here. Your body and my body are made of clay, but inside it is the oil, and the oil is a type of the Holy Spirit of God. Yet God wants to use you and use me. Yet in spite of all this, the Bible tells us how weak as humans we really are. Clay vessels are very fragile. If there is one thing the Bible does show very clearly, and there is no problem with seeing this at all, in every case it shows us the frailty of man.

Psalms 8 is a favorite passage of mine. It is something that always, when I read it, it is one of those things that I ponder. I just read to you that we are the treasure in earthen vessels. In Psalms 8, it says this:

*Psalms 8:1-9*

*O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens.*

*Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger.*

*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained;*

*What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?*

*For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.*

*Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:*

*All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field;*

*The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.*

*O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!*

That is one of the greatest verses in the Bible to ponder. When you look at all the heavens that God created, when you go out and look at the moon and the sun during the day, and you see all of the things at night and all of those stars that God made, the work of the moon and the sun, and the work of His hands and the work of His fingers, and then you stop and consider and ponder God being mindful of you and me. Why? With all that He could create, with all the awesome power that He had, why did God in all of His infinite wisdom ponder for a moment and be mindful of you and me who are so frail in everything that we try to do, who not only are frail but mess our lives up every day? "What is man that thou wert mindful of him and the son of man that he visit?" In spite of that, God sent His Son for you and for me.

God shows you and me, God was mindful of man. Yet the Bible says in Psalms 37:2 that we are like the grass that grows and then gets cut down when we die. Psalms 78 says that we are just flesh like a wind that passes away and comes not again. James 4:14 says that our life is like a vapor that appeared for a little while and then fades away. Yet in spite of what God said, you and I know this is true, all of our days in life are a veil of tears. One disappointment after another. We are under a curse if you know anything about the Bible at all on this old planet as a fallen creation. Why God would choose us as His vessels to carry the light of God's Word. Why God would be mindful of man and then visit man and then set the precedent that God was going to put the treasure, the treasure of God, in this earthen vessel. Oh my. That is something to ponder, is it not?

Yet the reason is very clear when you look at 2 Corinthians 4:7. It is very simple and yet very profound. He simply says, "that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." God wants the honor and glory in everything on this planet and everything that is done. So what God decided to do was take the weakest, frailest vessels there were, put His glory into it, energize them with the Holy Spirit of God, and then let that frail, weak vessel that has a tendency to break and be busted and to make every situation in life go south, let them do and carry the Gospel. You know why? Because at the end of the day, God would get the honor and glory out of it.

There is one thing we can all say. If you do anything for God, if I do anything for God, there is one thing we can all say. The Bible says:

*1 Corinthians 1:27-29*

*But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;*

*And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:*

*That no flesh should glory in his presence.*

God wants the honor and glory. Nobody can ever say, if you are honest, "Look at what I did for God," but rather we have to say, "Look what God did through me. Look what God did in spite of me." As Baptists, we are not much on miracles. That is a shame. Part of that is because of the Charismatics; they miracle us to death. But the truth of the matter is, if you know your Bible, there is an incredible study. There are four miracles to the child of God. The thing that always, you talk about human nature, you talk about our sinful ways, these four miracles are the only true four miracles that we have in our lives as Christians that are bonafidely given to us, and they are the four that nobody wants.

I guarantee you, if you found out you had cancer this week, if you found out that your kid was sick, if you found out that you had some irreparable disease, or you were in some car wreck and your chances of walking were next to nil ever again, and you lost your eyesight and the doctor says you have about a one chance in 10,000, you know what you would do? You would be screaming, crying for God to give you a miracle, but you do not want these miracles. The truth of the matter is, if you got these down, you probably would not have to worry about the one we are always crying about.

The first miracle that applies to you and me is the miracle of God's Son. The very fact that God was mindful of man. The very fact that God brought His Son down to us. That is a miracle. God was manifested in the flesh. The Bible says He was born of a virgin. That is a miracle. The miracle of God's Son.

The second miracle is the miracle of the Word of God. You have a book. It was written by God, given to you. If somebody in this church won a lottery and won \$100 million in a lottery, and you are their friend and they said to you, "Because you are my friend, look, I got \$100 million. I will never spend it all. Here is a check for \$1 million." Would you wait until Friday to cash it? I am just asking now. Would you wait until Friday to cash it? Would you take the check home and throw it up on your dresser? Would you have to say to your wife, "Honey, I think I left that in my pants. Did you wash it?" Would you really? Would you just wad it up with all the other papers in the glove box of your car? No. If somebody wrote you a check for a million dollars, you would hire a Brinks truck to take you home from this place. You would have an armed guard around you until the bank opened, and you would be there at 9:01, waiting to get into that bank to get your money. Yet God wrote you a book that is worth so many millions and billions and trillions of times that we care nothing about it. You know why? Because it would be a miracle for you to

win a lottery. But God gave you the miracle, the Word of God, right in your hand today, and you do not even care about it. I hear people all the time, "If I won the lottery..." Well, you won the lottery when God gave you the miracle of the Word of God; you are just too stupid to see it.

The third miracle is the miracle of the new birth. All the liberals say out there, "There is no hell. How could a righteous, holy God take a sinner and send him to hell?" I just got the opposite: How could a holy, righteous God take somebody like me to heaven? It is a miracle. It is a miracle.

The fourth one is the one we are talking about today: the miracle of God using me and you. Oh, you do not need us. I know my own life, as hard as I try to do what is right. Some of you do not care to do what is right at all. I am not saying I put myself above you by any stretch of the imagination. I am just saying I know what a rotten guy I am and how I must be a pain in the backside of God sometimes, if God even has a backside. But I look at myself and I wonder how God puts up with me. Why would God ever want to use me? In my mind, the way I look at it, God has a lot more issues to deal with with me than He gets out of me. But He does. The reason why He does that is so nobody can ever say, "Look at what I did." If you are really honest, you realize that God did it that way, that no flesh could glory in His presence. The treasure in these earthen vessels is the light of God's Word in us that when we, in our frail, weak clay bodies with all of its trials and tribulations and all of its sufferings, the miracle that God would use it, use our lives if we let Him.

## VI. Four Comparisons of Suffering

Now I want to focus on verses 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 here for the rest of our time. I want to show you some great lessons on suffering. I do not expect this to impact you today. I expect you to ponder it. But these are tremendous verses, and they show us the difference between our suffering and the world's suffering. There are two kinds of people here today. We are all going to suffer. We are under a curse on this planet. Everybody is going to suffer. But there are two kinds of people in this room: you are either going to suffer for your own stupidity or you are going to suffer for God. But you are going to suffer. There will never be anybody to go through life and say, "I never suffered." You are all going to lose something in life. Something is going to happen. You may get away with it for a while. You may think you are going to beat the odds, but you will not. You will not at all.

There are two kinds of people here today: those that are suffering because of the sake of this whole world and those that are suffering because of your walk with God. The great thing about it is you get to choose which one you want to be. I think of the story of Moses. Moses is such a great example of where you and I are at in our struggle. Here is somebody that struggled all of his life and everything that he did from the very time he first met God. He struggled. You know the story of Moses. He was raised in Pharaoh's court. He had the greatest education. He had the greatest family. He had the greatest name. He had everything going for him. That guy wanted for nothing. You are talking about a guy who had the world by the tail. He had everything he wanted. We know that Egypt is a type of the world. He was in the upper echelon. He could not get any higher. Yet the Bible says:

*Hebrews 11:24-27*

*By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;  
Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;*

*Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.*

*By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.*

We are all going to suffer in this life. No one is going to escape it. The only thing you have to decide is who you are going to suffer for: your own stupidity or the God who died for you. There are two kinds of fools in the Bible. The first kind of fool is an unsaved man. The second kind of fool, as the Bible says, is the fool for Christ. 1 Corinthians 4:10. We are all fools. I just choose to be a fool for Him, not for this world.

What Paul does or says in verses 8, 9, and 10 is to show us the difference in these two types of suffering and really lets us see how God takes the suffering for Him and uses it then for others. It is incredible. He says in verse 8, four great comparisons here, four great comparisons you want to see when you get working with people down the line someplace. You are going to use stuff like this. They are going to have issues in their life, like many of you have issues in your life, and you are going to teach this to them much like I am teaching it to you, except you will probably be one on one with them.

The first thing he says here is:

> 1.) *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed.*

What a great contrast between the child of God suffering for Christ's sake and the person who is suffering for the world's sake. Troubled on every side, yet not distressed. Paul certainly was. His writings are filled with the troubles he experienced for the Gospel's sake. It says "troubled on every side." You know this morning that as a child of God, you are caught in a great vacuum of a great spiritual battle that is going on all around you. He says "troubled on every side." You know why? Because you are going to have trouble as a Christian. You know why you are going to have trouble on every side? Because you are surrounded in this world. That is why you are surrounded. You will have trouble on every side. You will have trouble everywhere you look. You know why? Because the world is against you. This is why some of God's people will not break from the world. They do not want the trouble on every side. They want to try to make friends with the world. There is no making friends with the world. You cannot have one foot in and one foot out. You are either in or you are out. But that is what a lot of God's people try to do. You cannot do that. You are surrounded. The trouble on every side. You are surrounded. It is all around you.

I think of right after Christmas, or right around Christmas, we lost a great American hero. Dick Winters passed away right before Christmas, I think it was. Dick Winters, most people do not

know how he came to fame. He was the commander of Easy Company, 506th, in the story "Band of Brothers." He was a great leader. He was a great man. A saved man. Loved the Lord. I will never forget one time when he was in Bastogne, and they pulled the 101st, as they did the 82nd and a lot of other guys, to plug the hole when the Germans broke through in the Ardennes, and Bastogne was completely surrounded. I will never forget, I love guys like this. I wish I could have met him. I wish he could have been in our church. I wish that I had a chance to teach him the Bible because he had what I look for. They are surrounded in Bastogne. He had a 28th Division, which was an infantry company, and he had a bunch of other, but the airborne guys, they were all an elite group, and they were completely surrounded. One of the 28th guys were all running away from it. When he first was going in the line, one of the captains or lieutenants came down and saw Dick Winters over there, who was a captain, and he comes over and he says, "You better get out of here. We are surrounded." Winters looked at him and said, "We are paratroopers. We are supposed to be surrounded."

You are a Christian this morning. You are supposed to be surrounded. You are supposed to have trouble on every side. Christ had trouble on every side. You are to have trouble on every side. Make sure it is not trouble because of the stupid things you do. Make sure it is the trouble you get into for doing what God wants you to do. You are supposed to be surrounded. Trouble on every side is what is supposed to be for you and for me. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 1:9-10, we looked at it a while back, he says, "We had a sentence of death." He thought he was going to die. There was never a time in his life when he did not have trouble on every side. You and I will have trouble in our suffering on every side, yet not distressed. Oh, there is the contrast. There is no stress in a child of God's life. He knows who he is working for. He knows what is happening.

The word today in our world, the link off of that word, is the word "stress." There should never be stress in a child of God's life. It is God's work. You are working for Him. We just do our job. We simply are the vessels. God does all the issues. In that, you learn to rest in the Lord, and you have trouble, but you are never distressed because you know who you are working for, and you know your trouble is because you are doing it for Him. You know when you have stress is when the trouble you have is because you got it yourself. The stress that brings in our life is simply the things that we do our way that blow up in our face. We do not know how to handle it. It is our trouble, so it is our distress. When it is God's trouble, there is no distress. You can actually walk out and say, "Whoa, that is a mess. God better do something about it. I have got to go."

Every time I get into trouble is when I start doing God's job. My job is to be the vessel. His job is to solve the problem. Every time I get stress in my life, it is when I quit doing my job and I start trying to do His. Let Him deal with it. You work for Him. I have my job; God has His. I think back to Exodus 17 and that great picture of prayer where Moses is a picture of you and me, and it is the Battle of Rephidim, and Joshua is down there fighting Amalek, and Moses is up there, and he is lifting up his hand. The Bible says when, as long as his hands are up, they are winning. When he starts to get tired and drop his hand, they start losing. That is a picture of your prayer life. But I want you to notice that it was not Moses down there fighting the fight. Moses was on the mountain praying without ceasing. It was Joshua, Jesus, who was doing the fighting. Our problem, my problem, is we get in the fight we never should get in. He does your fighting. Your

job is not to fight. Ephesians 6, he gives you all the armor. Not one place in that passage does he tell you to fight. He tells you to stand. Stand. But fighting is a lot easier than standing. It is tough when somebody comes up and gets in your face and talks about your mother or talks about your father, and you know you want to take his teeth out, but you do not. There are people who will try to provoke you in life to get you to do something, and the moment you do it, you are in trouble. The hardest thing to do is just to stand there and take it. For God, I will tell you something, the hardest thing to do is to stand there and take it. It takes courage. It takes guts. It takes perception. It takes a purpose, and it takes passion to be able to stand there and be troubled on every side, yet not distressed. Not my problem. I am just a vessel. Fill me up, and I will do what You want me to do. All this trouble out here, that is Your deal. You handle it.

When you stop doing your job and you start doing God's job, that is when you get stressed, or you start doing it all yourself, your way, and then you wonder why your life is a disaster. You wonder why you have so much anxiety. You wonder why you have so much depression. You wonder why you have all these things going down in your life. I will tell you why: it is because you have tried to do it your way, and it is not working. That is exactly why. God always pays for what He orders. You hear me say it all the time. He paid for you, and He ordered you and me to go out there and do a job. Let Him deal with the problems. We are going to be troubled on every side. Oh, I have trouble. We are Christians. We are supposed to have trouble. We are supposed to be surrounded on every side. We still have the victory. God's people are such weak-kneed, lily-little people today, little twinkie pies that they just cannot handle anything. They do not want to offend anybody. They do not want to say anything negative to anybody. They just want to get along with everybody.

The second one:

> 2.) *Perplexed, but not in despair.*

There are times as a Christian that you do not know what God is doing, and it looks perplexing. The situation will look perplexing. The situation may even look confusing, but keep in mind the great principle of 1 Corinthians 14:33, "God is not the author of confusion." It brings you back to what I said: you are not responsible for all the situations you find yourself in, but you are responsible for how you deal with it. When I say that, I immediately think of 606 BC. I think of Daniel. I think of Ezekiel. I think of Hosea, and I think of all those prophets that are the post-captivity guys or captivity guys too. They were doing what is right in a nation that was not doing what is right. They were in a nation that was against everything that God said. They were trying to do what is right. God was going to come down and judge that nation. God did come down and judge that nation. Because those boys were doing the right thing, do you know what? They went into captivity like everybody else. You know what the difference was? Everybody else was perplexed. Daniel was perplexed. Isaiah was perplexed. Ezekiel was perplexed, but none of them were in despair.

I look at it as today in America. America is about to get whacked by God big time. Everything you see in this country is the signs of God, a God judgment falling on this country because of what this country did with the Word of God. Here we are, Old Paths Baptist Church. In spite of

that, some of us are going to lose our job. In spite of that, some of us are going to lose our homes through no fault of whatever you did. You look at that and you think to myself, "Oh wow, what a terrible thing," until you get the principle, "This world is not my home," until you realize that you are supposed to be surrounded, that God will always meet your needs. He will never leave you nor forsake you. All of those things are supposed to separate you from what the world or Christian world really is. You are going to be perplexed. I am perplexed sometimes, but I have given you the principle: Never doubt in the darkness what God has given you in the light.

Moses, Hebrews 11:27, the last thing it said, "he endured," and there will be times that you have to endure. The Bible says he endured as one who saw Him that was invisible. That is your problem. Most of you cannot see God when everything is going on, let alone when everything is going bad. You have no enduring in your life. Perplexed, but not in despair. I think despair is a terrible word. I really do. It gives the indication of no hope. People in hell are in despair. The world leaves you helpless. The world system. When you suffer because of the world, it leaves you helpless, but with God, all things work together for good to them that love God, that are called according to His purpose.

I want to give you five rules that when you face a perplexing situation, you will use these. When you get into a situation that is perplexing, the reason why you do not have any despair is because of these five things I am going to give you right here.

1. When you find yourself in a perplexing situation that you do not know what to do, don't do anything. Don't make any decisions. The worst thing you can do when you do not know what to do is to do something. When you are in a perplexing situation, I find myself in ministry with church and everything that we do in people's lives. When I see a situation and I do not know what to do, I do not do anything. I will tell you why in a moment.
2. Examine myself. Maybe this perplexity was brought about because of my stupidity or something I did not do right.
3. Stay with the principle that got you where you are at. In other words, when you cannot see where you need to go and you are perplexed about what to do, just stay with what brought you where you are at. Go with what you do know. Stay in the light of the Word of God that you can clearly see. Realize that God did not bring you this far to drop you off now. Rest in that and realize that if you cannot see it, if it is perplexing, that is okay. Maybe God has put a roadblock in you so you will not do anything. But we are such people, we have got to make a decision. We have got to do this. I have got to have this. I have got to go here. I have got to get this done. When God is not clear, we just step over God and say, "I am going to do it," and then wonder why it fails. When you get to that point and it is perplexing, do not do anything. Look inside yourself to make sure it is not you. But if that is okay, then stay with the principles that got you where you are at.
4. Always remember, it is God's job to make it clear. Not your job. It is God's job to show you. He will do that in His timing when He is ready. You need to learn to wait on God.
5. Go to the book, and you will find the exact same issues that somebody else went through, and you will get light on it.

A couple of Thursday nights ago, somebody asked a question in Proverbs 11:13, or I mentioned it, that "where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety." That is a great verse. That is a great verse for when you are in a time of perplexing. Most people think that verse means that when you have a decision to make, you go to this guy, this guy, this guy, this guy, and then you take the polling of it. The one who told you the same thing the most is what you do. You roll the dice. You go get advice from everybody out there. I have had pastors saying, "When you go in a council of many counselors, there is safety. So talk about it with God's people, find out what is going on." Let me tell you something, that is not what it is talking about. The counselors you have are 66 books in your Bible, and there are over 200,000 cases of men and women who have been in the exact same situation that you are in. Find out how they got out of it. In times of perplexing, you have something the world never has: the unchanging principles of the Word of God and a record of over 200,000 men and women who, just like you, went through the affliction for God, and God brought them through.

The Christian life is like a long dark tunnel. Every hundred yards, there is a light bulb. We have got to walk down that tunnel. We just love it when God turns all the lights on at one time. Life is never that way. He will turn it on as you walk down that tunnel, one light bulb at a time. Sometimes you will have to walk in the darkness for a while before He turns that light on. He just wants to see if you are willing to walk in the dark or if you are going to stay, "I am not going anywhere until you turn the light on."

One of the greatest studies in the Bible, you have heard me talk about it many, many times, is the aspect of the tower of David or a high tower. Being able to be in the Word of God to the degree and in a relationship with God that you can see over the obstacles and the circumstances and the issues of life. You do that by examples and in samples and principles that pull it all together. I know I am the pastor, and I know that I solve a lot of your problems, and you come to me with your problems, and I know I am training you to tell whether it will be a problem. But at the end of the day, the only difference between me and you, really, the only difference between me and you fundamentally, the only difference between me and you is my tower is just a little bit higher than yours. That is all. It is like the difference of hunting a deer standing on the ground, and you cannot see squat unless it runs you over or attacks you or comes up and says, "Here, I am a deer, shoot me." You are not going to get one. You get into a deer stand that you are up off the ground 20 or 30 feet. You have a whole other dimension to look at. You have three dimensions. You can see everywhere. You can see above this. When you hear something, you can see what it is. You do not have to try to peek through the bushes. Now you are above it. You can look over and you can see it. That is what the Word of God does for you. That is why there will be times you will be perplexed. There are times that I am perplexed, but I will tell you something: there will never be a time when I am in despair because I know that book, and I know that God is going to take care of me. I know that there is a certain amount of suffering that goes along with it. It just comes with the territory. When you are willing to pay it, when you are willing to get that, pay that price, God is going to carry you through. It is just that simple.

Then the third one:

> 3.) *Persecuted, but not forsaken.*

Now Paul really is the poster child for this because he was persecuted. He was shipwrecked. He was snakebit. He was beat with rods. There were all kinds of assassination plots against him. He was lied about. He was made fun of. They hated him with a passion. They beat him up and left him for dead. They threw him in jail and finally cut his head off. A pretty exciting life, would you not say? He understands all of these things. He realizes that God is using these own experiences to make this great point that he gives to this church in the next few verses. But he also says that you and I will have to pay the price of being God's vessel.

Hebrews 13:12-13 says:

*Hebrews 13:12-13*

*Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.*

*Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.*

2 Timothy 2:12 says, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him." Suffering is like suffering of this life; it is inescapable. I am choosing to suffer for Him and not for the world because with Him there is persecution. There will always be persecution, but He will never forsake you. Hebrews 13:5 says, "The Lord will never leave me nor forsake thee." That will be everybody's three by five card in this room. These are the comparisons.

Mel Subacher used to tell a story that I never forgot. It has carried me through because you are going to get persecuted. But the great principle is God will never forsake you. He will always be there for you. I heard Mel preach this story many, many times, and boy, it is a great story. When I find myself in these kinds of situations, I think back on things like that, and they really bring the Word of God to light and carry me through. He told the story many, many times about a little boy that went to school, and every day he went to school, when he got out of school, there was always a big bully out there that was just always beating him up. He would take everything he had. He would take his lunch money in the morning. He would take whatever he had left. He would dump his books. He would make fun of him. He would take everything he had. If the kid got something new and took it to school, the bully took it on the way out, and he just persecuted this kid relentlessly.

One day the kid got out of school a little early, and he started to come around the thing there, and he thought, "Oh, I made it." He got down the end of the school and looked around back, and just about ready to laugh and say, "I am going to get out of it today," when that bully came around the corner. That little guy started to take off for home. He lived about four blocks away. He said, "Oh, well," that boy took off after him, and he is running with all he has got, man. That boy is bigger than he is, and he is faster than he is, and that boy is gaining on him. He gets to the first intersection, looks back. He does not even stop. He looked back, and that bully is about a hundred feet behind him. He is moving everything. He has got his little heart coming out his mouth. He is running as hard as he can. He comes around the corner, and just a glance, he sees his house about two blocks away. That bully is gaining on him. He is just pumping everything he has got. He gets to that point. He gets to his house. He opened the gate and slammed the gate,

comes around the side of the house. He looks back. That bully just jumped right over that gate and never stopped. That little kid gets around to the back of that house. He gets his hand on the back door, and that boy just grabs him by the shirt. But at that time, the door opens up, and his big brother just got home on leave from the Marine Corps. That little kid said, "Mr. Bully, you want to bully me now? You want to take what I got now? You want to make fun of me now? You want to throw me down on the ground now? My big brother is here. Take it up with him." Ladies and gentlemen, that is just how I feel about it. You want to make fun of me right now? Go ahead. You want to throw me down on the ground? Go ahead. You want to take everything I got? Go ahead. Wait till my big brother gets here. We will settle it then, brother. That is exactly how I look at it. You are going to be persecuted, but not forsaken.

Then the fourth one:

> 4.) *Cast down, but not destroyed.*

I do not know any better place in the Bible to lay this out than Psalms 37:23-37. It says it all. Now you want to ponder something, ponder this, ponder Psalms 8, ponder this message, but ponder this. He says in verse 23:

*Psalms 37:23-37*

*The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.*

*Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand.*

*I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.*

*He is ever merciful, and lendeth; and his seed is blessed.*

*Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell for evermore.*

*For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever: but the seed of the wicked shall be cut off.*

*The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever.*

*The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment.*

*The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.*

*The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him.*

*The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged.*

*Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it.*

*I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree.*

*Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.*

*Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace.*

Wow. Cast down, but not destroyed. There will be times in this life when you get cast down. The world will cast you down. Your friends will cast you down. People will leave you, but God will never leave you. People will try to destroy you, but God will never allow anybody to destroy you. This is the child of God. As a child of God who will suffer in this life, there is the victory. He says the end result is peace. You are going to have, in the midst of all of this suffering, you are going to have the peace of God that passes all understanding. The reason you can have the victory is your suffering is for the Lord and not because of yourself. In that, there is a great victory. He will take care of you through it all because you work for Him, and He is your Lord and Master. He does it this way by design, "that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."

Now, when people work for me in ministry, when you do something for me, if you get into counseling ministry, and some of you already work for me dealing with people, here is the bottom line: you only answer to me. You work for me in this New Testament local church ministry. You do not answer to the person sitting next to you. You do not answer to the person who does not like you. You do not answer to the person who does not think maybe you, who you think you are. At the end of the day, everybody can have their opinion. You work for me. You answer to me and me alone as the pastor of this church. Many times you will be criticized by other Christians. If you made an honest mistake, then I will help you correct it and show you the way to fix it. But if it is just some guilt-ridden child of God, look at verse 32 there: "The wicked watches the righteous and seeketh to slay him." There are a lot of times people do not like what you are doing because they are not doing anything. There are a lot of times people want to take cheap shots at you because they are not serving God themselves, and they do not like you serving Him. You have got to take that into consideration.

The bottom line is simply this: it does not matter. As long as you are doing what is right and you are holding the line and doing the Word of God, you do not answer to them. You answer to me. I will take care of it. I will protect you. If there is a problem, I will take responsibility for it. It is as simple as that.

Matthew 27. You all know the story of Christ being crucified. He is walking down the road carrying that big cross on Him. He could not carry the weight of the cross. That cross is a picture of the burden of the ministry. So what they got, they got Simon of Cyrene, and threw him in there in the mix, got him out of the crowd, threw him down there, and that man helped Jesus carry the cross to Calvary to be crucified. I guarantee you, the Bible says they were spitting on Jesus. They were throwing rocks at Him. They were throwing garbage at Him. They were hitting Him in the face. They were beating Him. They were spitting on Him. They were making fun of Him. I guarantee you, just because Simon was in the proximity of Jesus carrying that cross, he got the same treatment Jesus did. What do you expect? You help bear the cross. You are going to help pay the price; that is the way it works.

Now on a broader scale, I will take care of you who work for me in this ministry. On a broader scale, making my point, "cast down, but not destroyed." We all work for the Lord. If you are

doing the ministry, there will be suffering. There will be persecution. There will be perplexity. There will be trouble on every side, but God will always have your back. God will always take care of you. You can always rest in the fact that not one thing is going to happen to you that God does not want to happen to you. I am telling you what, the greatest position you can ever be in life is when you are completely out of control, and you have no say in it, you have no control over it. Whatever happens to you or whatever way it goes has to come from God, because then you know that you got exactly what God wanted you to have. You can rest in that and be satisfied with that.

One time David got into trouble, and he judged, he counted the people, it was against God, and God was very angry. God came down and He said, "Okay, David, I am going to whack you guys. You disobeyed Me." David said, "I realize it, whack on." He said, "Well, I am going to give you a choice. I will either give you pestilence for three years. I will have the enemies come down and take you over and beat the fire out of you. Or I will tell you what, I will beat the fire out of you. Which would you rather have?" David said, "Boy, there is something you do not have to pray about, Lord. You beat the fire out of me." You know why he said that? Because he knew if God had a hand in it, he would not get one more day than God wanted to have, and one less day than God wanted to have. It would be right what God wanted. When you can get to that place in your life that you realize in your life, what happens is what God wants to happen. He put it there for a reason, and you cannot worry about why and why it is not about this and that, and realize it because as a child of God, paying the price, this is what is going to happen. You let Him deal with it. That is when you get something done. That is exactly when you get something done.

## VII. Dying to Self for Life in Christ

Now he says in verses 10, 11, and 12, in closing here, look at verses 10 and 11:

*2 Corinthians 4:10-11*

*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.*

*For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.*

Let me break it down for you real simple. Let me give it to you in its most basic, profound form. He simply says, in verses 10 and 11, the more you die to self, the more you live alive in Christ Jesus for God to use you. The more you get self out of the way, the more you die to this world, the more you pick your friends who are going to love the Book and love God and love ministry instead of the slime balls you are hanging out with who care nothing about it. The more you transform yourself into the person of Christ and be what God wants you to be. The more you die to self and the things of this world and the selfish things of yourself and the selfish things of this world, the more you will be alive in Christ and used of God. It is just that simple.

I always tell people who struggle with things, and I have a lot of people that are young Christians, and they have gotten themselves in circumstances that they want to get out of when

they really try hard and they really do what is right. Sometimes they get overwhelmed by circumstances that the price tag of the old life catches up with them sometimes. But I have watched them consistently do what is right. I always tell them this. I have told this to so many young men that got into the ministry, that first step of stepping out, leaving home, leaving your friends, going someplace where you do not know anybody. It is all brand new. It can be really scary. I have told people that find themselves in those scenarios that they have the trouble. They are perplexed. They have all those things. I always tell them this. I say, "You know what? I watched you from the day God saved you. I watched you do what is right with the Word of God. When the other two guys that came in with you did not do what is right with the Word of God, you stayed, they left. You did everything the Bible says. Maybe you do not see it, but I have watched you grow to the place where here you are today. I have watched the hand of God in your life and everything you do."

Many times I can see things in your life that you do not see. I can see God's hand work in your life when you cannot, when other people cannot. I always tell people who struggle, I say, "You know what? I have watched you come to this point in your life. I have watched you go from this point through this, through this, through this. Now here you are. Here you are again with another circumstance in your life that you have got to make a decision on and do something with. It is scary. Let me tell you how it makes it less scary. Look at this: you may be perplexed about where you are going or what you are doing or the decision you have got to make, but I am telling you this: God did not bring you this far and bring you everything He brought you through to drop you now." Sometimes that is all you have got to focus on. Sometimes that is all you can see. Sometimes that is all you never lose sight of what God has done. When you do not know what to do, hold on to what you do know. You know that God, "I do not know where I am going tomorrow, Lord. I do not know what to do with this. I do not know how to handle this. I do not know." Do not worry about it. Focus on the fact, rest in this, take comfort in this: God has brought you where He has brought you. He is not going to let you fall now. Be patient. Wait. God's job is to reveal to you what He wants you to do. Get in the book, find men and women who had the same scenario. You know what the average answer is? "Oh, I am too nervous to get in the book." That is exactly why you will not get anything. You have got to go to that book. You want some counsel, get into the 66 counselors of that book, get everything that God has got for you. God did not bring you this far, ladies and gentlemen, to drop you now. You just got another level of learning that you have got to go through.

I think verse 12 is one of the greatest principles on ministry and suffering, as what we do as God's people. Paul said in verse 12:

*2 Corinthians 4:12*

*So then death worketh in us, but life in you.*

That ought to be the verse you ponder this week. If you could ever grasp the impact of what he is saying, your life would never be the same again. I know some of you could care less about this, and some of you, you are onto the ball game this afternoon or whatever you have going. I am just telling you, if you can, he is saying, "I went through all that. I went through all the trouble, all the

persecution, all the perplexity, all the beatings, all the strife, all the grief, all the hassle, everything I did." He says, "Church of Corinth, I went through it for you. So then death worketh in us, but life in you." Wow.

Listen, every one of you, if you right now could see what he is saying and grasp it and make it work in your life, if you could get past the biggest obstacle that every one of us have in our life today, and you know what that obstacle is? It is ourselves. If you could get past yourself, if I could get past myself, if you could see the struggle in your marriage, in your relationships with your kids, the addictions you have that you have struggled with, the things that the world has brought you down to, your personal issues that we have. If you could just see what Paul is saying, he went through all he did that somebody else could get the comfort that they needed by getting the comfort through his suffering, that death in his life brought life to somebody else, that you could help them through their suffering from the world, by the lessons learned and applied from our own suffering in our life and our issues of life. Most of the advice that I give you in the problems you have in life, very honestly, very basically, most of the advice I give you was just based on what I went through in my own life, and I failed in my life, and God showed me, and I learned the lessons, and I can apply them onto you. That is simply what life is in the ministry.

But no, some of you will not. Some of you never will. You will continue to do it your way. Suffering to approach this world system, which will use and abuse you, and you will never see the great truth laid out before you today. All your life, you will not only be troubled, but you will be distressed. All of your life, you not only will be perplexed, but you will live in a life of despair. All of your life you will be persecuted, and you will also be forsaken by your friends and the world system and everything you are trusting in. All of your life, you will be cast down. In time, you will be destroyed physically, and then comes the stress, then comes the anxiety, then comes the depression, then comes the bad relationships, then comes the turning to addiction for your problem. Then comes the Prozac to help you with your depression and your emotion. Then comes the booze, then comes the drugs, all to escape the suffering, which in reality just adds to the suffering and compounds it even more.

Listen, God will take you where you are at, and He will take the stupid things that we have done. If we are willing to stop our bad choices and bad thinking that have caused our suffering for the world and let God root us in the Word of God, build us up in the Word of God, and then establish us in the Word of God, God will take all of those things and add the things that now He gives us and the things that we are going to, He will change the suffering. He will change the persecution. He will take it from the world and put it in the aspect of ministry. Then God will do everything that He needs to do in your life and my life. This is why today I told you starting out, this is not something you are going to grab and immediately go out of here and say, "Oh, I got it." This is something that you need to ponder. "So then death worketh in us, but life in you." The things that we go through, if we can learn those lessons, become the life for others, taking your tragedies, your problems, and your issues, letting God have the victory and the glory in it, and then let God take it and bring it to somebody else. That is the ministry. That ministry is suffering. It is simply based on those things that we experience, the difference between suffering for Christ and suffering for the world. Let us pray.