

# Brokenness - 2 Corinthians 4

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[0:00] That's what the blue line is.

Yeah, yeah, it's definitely on. Hello, everybody. My name is Mark. It wasn't a much of an introduction, so I'll tell you who I am, so you don't think I'm just an average ax murderer that's doing stuff.

I was actually born in the UK, returned to the UK about three years ago with my wife, after spending 25 years outside the UK.

And we've, for the last 30 years, we've pretty much worked with Calvary Chapel Bible Schools across the world. We spent a bunch of time living in Austria. Then we spent a bunch of time living in Hungary, which is a fantastic place.

Spent eight years living in Hungary. And then we moved to the very end of the earth and pretty much spent the best part 15 years in New Zealand. So I kind of am a New Zealander.

[1:13] In my heart, in my mind, in my attitudes, in my words, in my whole mentality, I'm a Kiwi, right? So I ain't gonna wear black. There you go.

The only color in my wardrobe is literally black. So my wife and I, my wife's currently in New Zealand. I'm sure she's not here with the kids and the grandkids. They serve in a couple of different churches in New Zealand.

My son pastors a church in Auckland. And my son-in-law is the youth pastor in a church in Toronga, Mount Manganui, which is on the northeastern side of the North Island of New Zealand.

And my wife and I work a lot with pastors and people who do ministry. And really as pastoral support, just be there.

I help people not feel alone. Encourage them. Involved in different countries all over the place. So we often travel quite a lot. So today here, and we're gonna be, if you've got your Bible with you, and I hope you have, whether it's physical, whatever language you're saying, or whether it's on your phone or whatever, we are gonna be in 2 Corinthians.

[2:22] And so we'll get there. We're gonna be in 2 Corinthians 4. We'll get there in a moment or two. But just by way of introduction, I'll continue to tell where we're sort of going. I don't know.

I became a believer in 1978, which is at least 1,000 years ago. Last millennium and that. I taught my first Bible study the same year.

Probably awful. Might have been heretical, but was probably awful. So pretty much 50 years in, of being involved as a believer in ministry, you kind of begin to process some stuff.

And one of the things that I guess I was thinking about this morning used to do worshipping, you just want people to see Jesus.

Whatever the other stuff is, all the complexity is, you just want people to encounter risen Jesus. Because if they encounter the risen Jesus, the other stuff doesn't matter.

[3:30] Right? Because once they encounter the God who pursues them with grace, everything changes. You just want people to see Jesus. Isn't that true?

I mean, you're not going to say no because I've just guilted you into doing that. Yes? Good old pastor all front. It's been right for now. I've just guilted you into something. But you want people to see Jesus, don't you?

More of that in a while. We're going to talk about that in a little while. But first, let's pray and then we'll launch into what we're going to do. Father, we do and continually want to express that we just desire to see you.

Lord, we want to encounter you and continue to encounter you as we've done so far throughout this time. Lord, we want to see Jesus. Lord, will you walk amongst us?

Will you continue to walk amongst us? Will you touch us? Will you lead us? Will you give us understanding? Not just to our minds, but also to our hearts.

[4:34] Father, will you do business with our hearts? Will you... May we be a changed people when we leave this place. We're not a club. We are gathered here today on the promise that you are in the midst and this is your body.

And that your grace pursues us. Father, will you, as we look at your word, will you lead us? Will you teach us? Will you have your way in our hearts? For we ask these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. I spend a lot of time traveling and doing things in different places. A lot in Southern Hemisphere, a bunch of stuff in Europe, a couple of countries in Europe, and even the States, occasionally Asia and Africa, but mostly in those three areas.

And a couple of years ago, I was walking down... I can't even remember where it was, but I remember the instance. I was walking down the street and there was somebody walking to a murray and on the front of their T-shirt there was something printed.

Now, I love things printed on T-shirts. I'm that kind of a guy. My son hates those things. But I love it. And on the front of this T-shirt, there was this phrase and it said, broken crayons, still color.

[5:47] And I went, huh. I could not get that phrase in my head. Because that's a really strange phrase, isn't it? I think it's kind of interesting, but it's kind of weird. Why would you say that?

Broken crayons, still color. So I started to think about this and I thought, that's really, really strange. And then there was another environment. I actually saw it pop up somewhere and I thought, broken crayons, still color. I thought, hmm. So I decided to find out where the phrase came from.

And actually, it was a T-shirt that was produced by the British military in support of veterans with PTSD. People had been in war situations that through their being in war situations, they had encountered things which had kind of broken them.

And I began to start thinking about this whole idea of brokenness and fragility. Which, I'm kind of now nearly 64, so I've got a reasonable appreciation of brokenness and fragility.

Because I know things work when I get out in the morning because they hurt. Right? And then some things just don't work. And it's a joy to find out what isn't going to work on a daily basis. Let's be honest about this.

[7:03] So one thing I know is you're all getting older. I'm getting older. You'll certainly feel older by the end of this sermon. I guarantee it. Right? So there is this process taking place.

And obviously, when you get a bit older, you become a little bit more aware of it. Because when you're young, you're invincible, aren't you? Right? Or you feel invincible. You can do anything. You try and do the same things when you're old and you can't walk for three days.

If you're lucky. So I started to think about this whole idea of fragility. And obviously, you know, having been involved in church ministry in different countries and stuff for the best part of 50 years, you kind of pick up some wounds.

And there are some scars which are very obvious. And there are scars which are not very obvious. And so I started to think about this whole idea of fragility.

And this idea of brokenness. And kind of, where does it fit in relation to God's will for our lives? Because I don't like it. You know, I'm completely sure of the fact that I don't like brokenness.

[8:14] I don't like weakness. I don't like fragility. Now, some of that's because I'm a man. So I don't think about things properly. And some of that's because I'm English.

Bit of me is English. And the other bit of it's key where he really doesn't like it. Because it gets in the way of things. But I started to think about this. So what I want to do today is I want to look at a portion of scripture in 2 Corinthians 4.

2 Corinthians is a fascinating book. When I first, when I became a believer, I read it and I thought, this is really boring. Well, this is just monumentally boring. Why is it there? Then I realized after years and years and years and years, because it's a book where Paul ultimately defends his authority as apostle and also, after years and years of ministry, says God is faithful, even the fact that, even though the fact that things have gone wrong, God is incredibly faithful.

And it became a book that was so rich to me in that understanding because it declares God's faithfulness through years and years of all sorts of different situations that Paul encountered.

Some difficult, some very, some painful, and some, you know, very challenging. And yet God was faithful to him. So it became a book that was very, very significant to me.

[9:34] So we're going to look at a passage in 2 Corinthians 4. So I want to read to you, but I want to bookmark it with a thought. I want you to notice something. Have a look at 2 Corinthians 4.1 and have a look at 2 Corinthians 4.16.

2 Corinthians 4.1 says this, Therefore, seeing we have this ministry as we have received mercy, we faint not.

So that's verse 1 of chapter 4. In different versions, it will say, having this ministry by means of mercy, we do not lose heart or we do not lose spirit, depending on which version you've got. Have a look at verse 16. Therefore, we do not lose heart even though our external man is in ruins, but that internal man is renewed day after day.

So you get two phrases, 15 verses apart, where Paul says, we do not lose heart. There's two bookmarks for a thought that's going to be in there.

[10:52] It's a kind of an aside in the book, but there's this whole bracket here, which is bracketed by this idea of we do not lose heart. Now, depending on the words of your translation, it will say heart or it will say spirit, soul.

The idea is we do not lose heart, we do not lose courage, we do not lose, we don't give up. It's a fascinating thought and we're going to look at what happens in between those two statements.

All right? Now, it's interesting, isn't it? Because, you know, bits of your body can break, but you can sort of carry on.

You still have the heart to carry on. My mom's 93, blind, fantastic woman, complete warrior woman, completely dangerous. Things don't work, but she carries on.

I mean, absolutely, bless her. It's fantastic. So your body can break, but once your heart breaks, it's different. Same with your mind, isn't it? You know, we struggle with, and we're so aware today of mental health issues, and rightly so, that, but you can still carry on, but if your heart gives out, and I'm not just talking about the physical heart, if that gives out, you've got a problem, obviously, but that sense of who we are, if we just kind of get to the point of giving up, it's almost fatal.

[12:20] There's almost a fatality to it. So Paul bookmarks this entire portion of 2 Corinthians 4 with, we do not lose heart, we do not lose heart, even though the external man's falling apart, it's renewed every day inside.

So I want to look at this idea of brokenness and fragility, and this is kind of something that I've been thinking about over the last two or three years.

because of getting older, because of health stuff, because of experiential stuff, because of stuff that's happened over the years, and sometimes you look back, I really regret that, I wish I'd have done that.

So let's read a little bit. I want to read to you the first sort of five verses of 2 Corinthians 4. It's not where we're going to land, but it needs the context. Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have reserved ministry, we faint not, but we have renounced hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

But if our gospel is hid, it's hid to them not lost, in whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine upon them.

[13:39] For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ the Lord, and ourselves your servants, for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of the darkness, has shined into our hearts to give light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Let's pray. Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your kindness. And pray that you would minister your words to our hearts.

And we thank you for that in Jesus' name. Amen. Just by way of context, have a look at 2 Corinthians 1, verse 8. Flip back a little bit in your Bibles or swipe a little bit back on your devices. And verse 8, this is Paul's thesis. Therefore, we do not want you to be ignorant of our afflictions that struck us in Asia. That being so grave and beyond our strength, that he even brought us to despairing of our lives.

So the context for Paul is a real struggle. Throughout chapter 3, he makes this wonderful point about the fact that Christ is sufficient.

[14:58] that Jesus is enough. The grace of God is enough. Despite his weakness, all his difficulties, all the things that he's encountered, Jesus is enough.

And then he brings us to this point. He says, but we do not lose heart. It's interesting that despite the difficulties he's encountered, his point of focus is, but we preach, not ourselves, but Christ Jesus Lord and your servants for Jesus' sake.

And he wanted people to encounter Jesus. At the end of the day, Jesus is going to make a difference. He wanted people to see and encounter the living Christ.

I mean, think of his own experience on the Damascus Road. An extraordinary thing. That literally, he was stopped in his tracks in a very literal way by encountering the risen Christ and his life was never the same again.

And that's what we want, isn't it? We want people to encounter the living Christ. There's a point in the Gospels where the Greeks come, I think it's to Philip, they come and they say, sir, we want to see Jesus.

[16 : 27] And that phrase has always struck me. And if I ever get to the point of actually having a church, I don't have a church, I've been involved in a lot of different things and planting, but I don't have my own church in that sense. But if I had a pulpit, what I would do is, I would have written on the inside of the pulpit, so none of you guys could see it would be the phrase, but sir, we want to see Jesus.

Because that's going to make a difference when we encounter him, isn't it? Yeah? You don't sound sure. You really don't sound sure. How much guilt do I have to give you?

You really don't sound sure. Okay. Now, but we want to encounter the living Christ. Now, I don't know about you, but if I were to ask you, and again, it's a guilt-ridden question, so don't feel free not to answer it. Would you want Jesus to be seen through your life?

I think the answer, genuinely, for a lot of it, is yeah, I just wish, but I know that there's a lot of stuff that gets in the way of that. That's generally called me. Right?

You want people to see Jesus. Now, it's interesting, Paul, he says, we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus. That's the first point he makes. Then he makes this extraordinary statement.

[17 : 48] In verse 6, for God commanded the light to shine out of the darkness, and he shined into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in Christ Jesus.

The words in English are difficult to understand. The words in the original language are really complex, but it's this idea that God has just made to shine in such a bright way that people would encounter himself in the very face of Jesus.

Have you ever gone into a place where, or drawn back the curtain in the morning or something where the light's so bright you kind of go, whoa! It's literally impossible to keep looking because it impacts you so much because it's so bright.

That's the idea here. God has placed that brightness where has he placed it? He's placed it in us. One, that we ourselves would see the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus, but also others would see him too.

It's extraordinary that the grace of God has made shine the full knowledge. Now, the word here for kind of knowledge is this idea of experience and revelation.

[19 : 20] So you see, I can know some stuff. Right? I can know how to dunk a basketball in that hoop. Right?

I'm 5'8 and weigh 800 pounds. I know how to do it. I know the mechanics of it. I know the physics of it. Can I do it?

Not at all. And I'm not even going to prove that fact to you because I'm like air car horse. I can't even get off the ground. It's not going to happen. We're not talking about that kind of knowledge. We're talking about the knowledge that actually is the ability to do that.

It's revelation and experiential knowledge. We know him by the grace of God and God has made to shine into our hearts the brilliance of his glory through the person and the face of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you want people to see Jesus? I want to see more of Jesus but I want people to see Jesus. Yeah? I want that brilliance of who he is you want them to encounter them because then all the silly arguments go away.

[20 : 30] Who made God? You know or is God really kind? All that kind of stuff goes away when you encounter the living God because it's real.

Encountering is real. Yeah? And you kind of go wow yeah yeah this is what I really want Lord. But then you get a but because the next word in the text is but.

Now but is one of those words which you kind of go aha but it's a contrast isn't it? It lines something out in contrast to something else.

and this is where we're going to kind of land for the next little while with my watch say. Oh no idea what my watch is saying because I've lost time when I started.

Oh 20 minutes are good. Look at verse 7. but we have this treasure in earthen vessels so that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.

[21:46] Now this is a massive contrast and it's something that you wouldn't expect in one sense because I don't know what you value as a treasure right?

Probably for each one of us it's different things. Some things are very personal things. My wife has loads of things which to her are treasures and I look at them and I go okay.

In fact she's got a whole cabinet of them and a drawer full of them that I will not open because it frightens me. I am afraid I will not go anywhere near it I will not open it.

They're full of treasures right? So whatever your treasure is you generally don't put it something breakable.

Normally treasures are associated with putting them in safe places where they will not be taken or broken or or even seen in many ways you put things in safes don't you?

[22:55] Why? So people can't get to them. So here we have something but we have this treasure what's the treasure he's talking about? The treasure he's talking about is this shining knowledge of who God is in the glory of the face of Jesus Christ because we are people who are indwelt by the spirit of God Amen we have this treasure within that's the treasure people need to see Jesus people need the treasure of Jesus but he says we have this treasure in earthen vessels now I want you to note something there's a statement here which leads to something right?

it's a causative statement what does that mean? Okay here's a causative statement Mark is fat therefore he cannot run fast right?

There's a cause there's an effect yes the cause is Mark is fat effect he doesn't run quickly in fact I started taking up running which is a really bad mistake and you know how people's paces per kilometre are matched to different animals you've got the leopard which I think is like two or three minutes a kilometre I'm in the penguin tortoise category and actually I'm really quite happy in that that I like penguins and tortoise and whatever the plural of tortoises is we have a treasure treasure but this treasure is in earthen vessels so that the excellency of power of God may be once this is a causative statement we have this treasure in earthen vessels so that the power of God may be displayed okay so we kind of started by saying we do want people to see the Lord don't we we want to see his power we want to see who he is and everything like that okay this statement is quite conditional treasure is in an earthen vessel so that the power may be seen implication is if the vessel is not an earthen vessel the treasure isn't seen the power of the treasure isn't seen okay so conditional conditional you follow me on this one conditional is we want people to see

Jesus in our lives you go be an earthen vessel jar of clay depending on how it's put in your scriptures what does that mean okay there are three things here we need to understand about the earthen vessel the jar of clay right the first one is this the humble nature of the jar of clay now I love it when people say you're special and they say it in the good way rather than going you're special right I like it when people say you're special I like to be special in fact our entire social media expression most of the time and the entire world in its mentality in many ways focus on the fact that well I'm so special you're your own special you have your own truth your own your own specialness you're unique you're fantastic you're special now there are points in the scripture where Jesus makes the point that we are a special treasure yeah absolutely 100% that's not the point that's been made here because the jar of clay wasn't special because it was just a basic household pot they were all over the joint right the small one fat one round ones long ones thin ones partially damaged ones ones that have strange things growing in the bottom that green you know all that kind of stuff they were just vessels of clay the thing is they weren't special they weren't unique they were simply there they were the everyday vessel that somebody would grab to do something you're suddenly there and you've got to milk your donkey if you milk a donkey and you need oh I need a receptacle grab that one and then you're milking your donkey if you milk donkeys don't know it was just a vessel that was there it was available but it wasn't special the thing it made it special was what you had inside it whether it was water necessary for life or whether it was food or oil or whatever it was it was the content that made it special so the first thing about the viral jar of clay is it wasn't something that it was special or great it was just there and in many ways nobody gave thought to the vessel

I mean if you've ever had this situation in the house or when you're doing something and you need something very quickly you just grab something and use it don't you you probably don't spend hours thinking about it's a very special jar of clay paper cups right very special paper cup can't use that right you don't do that you just kind of grab it and use it and you give literally no thought to the object itself you're more interested in what it's going in it or what it's saving or all those different components yes that's the first thing about the jar of clay it wasn't special it was every day second thing is they were inherently weak if you go to Rome good place to go and if you go to Testaccio if you don't go to Trastevere which is a beautiful place but very popular now you go to [29:48] Trastevere which is a little bit further down on the side of the Tiber you will find a mountain made of broken jars of clay because that was the actual port where back in the very old part of Rome that's where all the ships came in and all the various things of oil and substances came in in clarkes jars of clay and when they were finished using them they just broke them and over the years they've built a little mountain actually in Rome called Monte the Trastevere and you can go and see and it's just layers and layers and layers and layers of bits of broken clay jars and one of the things you see about jars of clay is they're fragile there is an inherent degree of weakness they're easy to break they have no intrinsic strength they have no intrinsic structural capacity but the interesting thing is their weakness is not an obstacle for them being used because at that point in time they were literally the main receptacle which everything was transported in now here's the same thing

I don't know how what your relation to weakness is like right I personally hate it don't like the idea I'd like to be strong I'd like to be efficient I'd like to be useful the reality is I'm not in a lot of cases I don't really like the idea I certainly don't like the idea of being comfortable with weakness or brokenness and we live in a society which really isn't very good with that is it social media isn't presenting the idea of you need to be really weak and vulnerable it's not doing that is it you know if anything the general idea is you have to present a sense of strength you're a strong independent person you're a strong independent young person you're a strong independent woman you're a strong independent whatever that's what's presented isn't it it's got no connection to weakness I want you to notice something our weakness is not a hindrance to God doing stuff

I often think that you know my incapacity my inability means that God is hindered that's giving me way too credit way too much credit my inability my lack of capacity my lack of skill is not a hindrance for God doing his work that's incredible isn't it it means that I can be you know a very well broken 63 64 year old bloke who doesn't have a very wide skill set has an empathy band which is about that wide who isn't good in literally every situation and yet God still can do stuff the same thing about the jar of clay is that it wasn't strong now here's the thing you go back to that statement this treasure is in jars of clay so that the power of God might be displayed you turn that around if this jar of clay is trying to be really really strong what doesn't get seen the power and the capacity of God God I'm really not comfortable with this is an open therapy session by the way I'm not comfortable with this idea of brokenness or weakness or inability and yet we're told here that we have this treasure in earth and vessels that the excellency of the power of God may be of God and not of us so the power here is not just power but the excellent nature of God's capacity he'll be seen it will be about him not about me first thing is the jar of clay is not special it's everyday second thing is that the the nature of the jar of clay is that it is inherently weak the third thing is it was vulnerable and available they were simply there to be used by the owner of that in whatever way he chose to use it I don't know if you've ever been in that situation where you've you suddenly taken something that isn't meant to do what it's supposed to do and you've used it in a different way because he just needed it at that moment in time right it's like my wife she has lovely like bone china teacups and things like that and occasionally I just needed them to put oil in them and things like that but don't tell her it's not what it's purpose it's not it's intention and yet I just needed it and so I chose to use it in a way that I chose to use it because it was available to me to be used it's interesting isn't it we how comfortably are we with God using us in the way that he wants to use us rather than our expectations of how we should be used they can be often very different things we often have great expectations for ourselves which isn't necessarily wrong and then sometimes feel a bit disappointed when we get used in very simple ways we don't have the right of self-determination we're actually blood-bought belong to

[36:36] Jesus you're blood-bought means you are purchased it means it's not a negotiation of contract it means that we belong to him and he can use us in whatever way he chooses to use us

the beauty of it being God who does that is these perfect knowledge and perfect grace is that he knows exactly where we slot into the big picture and it will be perfect fulfilling but we don't get the right to do that when we insist upon our rights it's a dangerous game we're blood-bought being available to God is a really important thing jar of clay was three things it was inherently common it was inherently weak and it was inherently available to be used as ever the master wished to use it now the treasure being in that earthen vessel means that the excellency of the power will be of

God and not of us and guess who gets to be seen you see I have a whole bunch of reasons why I don't want to be an earthen vessel and stop trying to actually make ourselves into a different earthen vessel from everybody else I'm just an earthen vessel but you see my concern about that is well if I'm weak and lacking capacity when I face all these terrible forces I'm just going to get destroyed legitimate thing isn't it so we have to be strong and pretend to be something different and say we're special and all these different things because it's protective I want you to notice something look at we're going to read in verse eight or so and then we'll kind of tie this together but if you notice in verse eight

I want you to notice God's capacity to keep the earthen vessel that was called Paul have a look at what it says but we have this treasure in this is verse seven we have this treasure in the vessels that the excellence of the power of God may be of God not it was we are troubled on every side and yet not distressed we are perplexed but we are not in despair we are persecuted but not forsaken cast down but not destroyed and he goes on to say that Jesus is working on death in us and life in you but notice what he says we are troubled we are not distressed we are perplexed but not despair we are persecuted but not forsaken we are cast down but not destroyed see

God has the capacity to keep the earthen vessel and that's what he did with Paul despite the things he encountered God kept the earthen vessel that was Paul and you got to see God at work when you look at these words they're fantastic he says we're under terrible pressure but we are not without hope we are confused by our circumstances but we are not without hope we are persecuted but we are not left alone and we are not without the hope of his presence we are beaten down we are not destroyed we're thrown down but we are not without the hope of him resurrecting us if you break down those words in the original language that's literally the essence of what's put here so here's my problem and we write in our guilt phase in the early part of the service we talked about do you want to see God expressed in powerfully through your lives and everybody's going yes because I made it guilty into saying it right but I know that it's genuine what does that path look like that path looks like brokenness it looks like fragility it looks like the earthen vessel that God will be seen and not me because the treasure is in the northern vessel and I don't really have the answer to this and I really don't even like the concept to be honest but I do think we need to redefine our relationship to fragility and brokenness in a biblical way broken crayons still color don't they and we see it as something fragility and difficulty we see it as something to be avoided literally at all costs right and yet it's actually a place that God often places us because he wants the world to see the greatness of his glory and the greatness of his grace so

I kind of don't really have any answers for you as we sort of close this out but I do want to encourage you to think about the redefining of our relationship to brokenness and the challenge is to be a jar of clay you know people who are broken who are weak but are available for the master's use so that the treasure will be seen not the vessel in which the treasure is Hudson Taylor who was just this amazing missionary to China said this he said all of the giants of God were weak men that did great things for God because they counted on the fact that

[43:51] God was with them all the giants of God were men and women who were weak and they did great things simply because they trusted the fact that God was with them so bit of a strange message really but that's my encouragement this morning is we want people to see Jesus and encounter him part of the cost of that is being a jar of clay amen well let's pray and then I think are the guys coming back yeah let's pray father thank you for your goodness and your kindness and father do pray that you would that your word and just these thoughts anything that's not of you lord take it away absolutely take it away but lord that which you're communicating with our hearts may it find a home may percolate in and through our hearts may be something that you draw to our mind and our heart through the person of your holy spirit when we find ourselves in those moments of weakness or incapacity that our weakness and our incapacity is not an inability!

to you but that you might by your grace display your power your love and your mercy and that people would see Jesus for this we ask in Jesus name Amen may may