



2 Corinthians

TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY

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Introduction

Before writing the letter we know as 2 Corinthians Paul had found himself in an awkward situation. After writing our 1 Corinthians he had discovered that there were many in Corinth who were still living in flagrant sin. This had precipitated what Paul describes as a painful visit to them (2 Cor 2:1) in which he had to exercise some church discipline, followed by quite a strongly worded letter to them (which has been lost to history). Combined, these understandably caused significant strain in the relationship between Paul and the Corinthian church.

On top of this there were those who Paul sarcastically labels “super apostles” (2 Cor 11:5,12:11) who had crept into the church and were questioning and undermining Paul’s authority. It seems like these super apostles fitted the Corinthian mould, they looked impressive and were trying to build an impressive looking ministry. Part of their critique of Paul was that he wasn’t very impressive and therefore not that worth listening to. Unfortunately it seems that what they were advocating was a powerful and impressive Christianity which was out of step with the humble example of the crucified Lord Jesus.

So Paul had his work cut out for him. 2 Corinthians was written to try and restore the relationship he’d had with them previously. He’s also trying to correct some of their thinking about what authentic Christ-like ministry looks like compared with that of the super apostles. However, never one to miss an opportunity to build up his people, Paul includes, along with the justifications of his ministry, some gold about the nature of the Christian life, how God has acted toward us in Christ and how he calls us to respond to him and those around us.

I’m pretty excited for us to be working our way through this first chunk of 2 Corinthians together. Over the coming years I’m hoping to continue to come back and work our way through the entirety of 2 Corinthians.

In Christ,

Chris

1

God of all comfort

2 Corinthians 1:1-11

Getting started

1. Can you think of a time when someone comforted you well? What was it that they did that was so comforting?

Explore

Read 2 Corinthians 1:1-2

2. In his greeting, what is Paul eager for his readers to know?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

3. What does Paul want the Corinthians to know about God in this section?

4. Why does God comfort us in this section?

5. What does Paul share with Christ?

6. What is Paul's hope for the Corinthians in the situations he faces?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:8-11

7. How bad was the situation Paul was facing?

7. What does Paul say was God's purpose in what he was facing?

8. What does Paul's hope rest on?

9. What does he hope for from the Corinthians? What else does he hope for?

Apply

10. What's one thing you personally can learn from Paul about facing suffering?

10. What's one thing you personally can learn from Paul about being committed to loving others?

Pray

2 Not Fickle

2 Corinthians 1:12-2:13

Getting started

1. Have you ever had someone change their plans with you at the last minute? How did it make you feel? What would it take to get them back in your good graces?

The background to this passage is that Paul had told the Corinthians he was planning on coming to visit them but then decided against it. Between writing 1 and 2 Corinthians Paul made a really painful visit to Corinth in which he had to rebuke some people in the church pretty severely, he also had to write a painful letter because it seems like his visit hadn't changed the minds of the offending parties.

Explore

Read 2 Corinthians 1:12-14

2. How has Paul acted toward the Corinthians?

3. What does he hope for on the day of the Lord Jesus?

Read 2 Corinthians 1:15-2:4

4. What were the plans that Paul had made that he didn't seem to be able to follow through on?

5. As a follower of Jesus why is it important to Paul that he not be thought of as fickle?

6. How has God in Christ acted toward both Paul and the Corinthians?

7. What reason does Paul give for not following through on his plans to visit Corinth? (v. 1:23-2:4)

8. What does Paul want for the Corinthians?

Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-13

9. How have the Corinthians seemingly responded to his painful visit and letter?

10. What does Paul then urge them to do? Why?

Apply

11. How does Paul in this passage model to us how to deal with conflict with other Christians?

12. Are there ways that you sometimes make plans in a worldly manner? How can you more closely reflect Jesus in them?

Pray

3 The aroma of Christ

2 Corinthians 2:14-3:6

Getting Started

1. What is a smell that has strong emotional memories for you?

Explore

Read 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

2. How does Paul describe Christians in this passage?

3. What are the different responses to being the aroma of Christ? Why?

4. According to v. 17 how does Paul speak?

Read 2 Corinthians 3:1-6

5. What is Paul's letter of recommendation?

6. What do the lives of the Corinthians show? How?

7. Where does/doesn't Paul's confidence lie?

8. What do you think Paul is talking about when he contrasts letter and Spirit? What is the difference?

Apply

9. How do you deal with the experience of your faith being an aroma of death to someone?

10. How can you be growing in your awareness/thankfulness of the Spirit's work of writing the gospel on your heart?

10. When you feel insufficient for what God's called you to, what do you need to remind yourself?

Pray

4 Two ministries

2 Corinthians 3:7-18

Getting Started

1. Can you think of a time when something you owned became obsolete?

Explore

Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-11 and Exodus 34:29-32

2. Paul is referring to the events of Exodus 34:29-32. How glorious was the giving of the law to Moses?

3. How does Paul describe the differences between the ministry of the Law and the ministry of the Spirit?

Read 2 Corinthians 3:12-18 and Exodus 34:33-35

4. How is Paul different from Moses?

5. What veil existed in Moses' day? What veil still exists in Paul's day?

6. How is this veil removed?

7. What is the result of this veil being taken away?

Apply

8. There is something in us that likes rules, they're easy, and they give us an easy benchmark with which to compare ourselves with others. We've got something vastly superior in the ministry of the Spirit but how do we make sure we don't slip back into rules based thinking?

9. How can you personally grow in your contemplation of the Lord's glory in order to be transformed into his image? What might that look like concretely?

Pray

5 Treasure in jars of clay

2 Corinthians 4:1-15

Getting Started

1. Can you think of a time when you have seen or discovered something immensely valuable in shabby packaging?

Explore

Read 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

2. What has Paul avoid doing?

3. What does Paul aim to do?

4. What does Paul remind the Corinthians of when it seems like the gospel has failed?

5. What does and what doesn't Paul preach? Why?

Read Mark 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

6. How does Paul describe himself? How does he flesh out what that means in what comes afterward?

7. How does their hardships actually serve to highlight the treasure they have?

Read 2 Corinthians 4:13-15

8. What is Paul confident of? Why?

9. Why is this to the benefit of the Corinthians?

Apply

10. In what ways do you find yourself trying to make yourself look good? How can you work at trying to make your life about showing Jesus is Lord?

11. What do you need to be reminding yourself when you're confronted by your own weaknesses, struggles and frailties?

Pray

6 By faith and not by sight

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:10

Getting Started

1. Can you think of a time where looking forward to something in the future helped you in the present?

Explore

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5

2. Why doesn't Paul lose heart?

3. What does Paul instead focus on? Why?

4. What is the earthly tent Paul is talking about? How does he describe living in it?

5. What is Paul looking forward to? Why?

6. What is it that guarantees this?

Read 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

7. What do you think it means to live by faith and not by sight?

8. What does Paul make his goal? Why?

Apply

9. Do you find it easy to lose heart in the face of your own frailty? What can you be reminding yourself from this passage to help with that?

10. In what ways do you find yourself living based on what you can see? How can you instead be guided more by faith (ie. What God says is true but what we can't see with our eyes)?

11. How can you grow in making pleasing God the goal of your life?

Pray



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