Encouragement For Living

I May Not Look Like It, But I'm A Winner

Sermon Series through 2 Corinthians- Part 8

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

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June 8, 2008

Introduction: Did you hear what happened to "Big Brown", the Kentucky Derby winner yesterday? He won the KY Derby by 4 lengths and the Preakness by 5 lengths. The horse who was highly expected to win the Triple Crown, came in last. He did not look like much of a winner...but I believe we would be foolish to think anything less of this great animal.

Illustration: One of my favorite brief jokes is the one entitled: Lost Dog," the classified ad says. "Three legs, no ears, blind in one eye. Answers to the name of Lucky."

I visualize that dog and despite his description, I still see a dog who is energetic, happy, and just plain fun.

One day, you and I will get to heaven...right? When we do there will be all kinds of people we will want to meet, starting with Jesus. But the day will come, when one of us will whisper to the other, "There he is...that's the Apostle Paul". And we will stand in awe of how this man let God use him to do great things. Paul is a winner...right?

Not all of the Corinthians thought so. If the Corinthians were to run a classified ad for the Apostle Paul, it might have read like this: " *Lost Preacher: Lots of scars, matted eyes, thorn in his flesh, poor speech. Answers to the name of "Chief of Sinners".* For the Corinthians, the description fit the man or the name was the reason for his personal features. For some of these dear church folks, Paul was not a "winner" in any fashion.

Today, in our text, Paul addresses why he presents a glorious Savior with wonderful powers, yet he himself looks like a loser in many ways. May we look in a mirror and see the kind of man that Paul saw when he viewed his own reflection.

Verse by Verse we learn why I am a winner, even though I don't look like it.

My weakness leaves no doubt to the source of real power. Verse 7

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. ***2 Cor. 4:7*** *[NKJV]*

EXAMPLE: Do you remember the commercials for the cereal "Wheaties". Athletes of all kind appeared in commercials and their picture was put on the box. It was called the "Breakfast of Champions". You wanted to be a winner, so you ate what winners ate. Their skill and power was found the wheat and bran flakes. (We ate oatmeal...the breakfast of farm horses and mules)

Try as they may, General Mills is not going to "feed you" into being a champion. It's not in the box.

Paul is saying that God has purposely allowed the light of the glorious gospel to be shown in weak, clay pots, so everyone would know that the power does not rest in a man or a woman.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ***Ephes. 3:20*** *[NKJV]*

I like how the NLT Bible states this verse:

Now glory be to God! By his mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope. ***Ephes. 3:20*** *[NLT]*

That is a winner to me! When God uses a weak person to do great things.

The external does not necessarily illustrate the truth of the internal. Verse 8-9

We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed-- **2 Cor. 4:8-9** [NKJV]

EXAMPLE: Our family will wrap Christmas presents in some old box we found in the house. A Velveeta cheese box or a Vanilla wafer box. It doesn't look like much on the outside (except Kevin really likes Velveeta cheese), but you know there is something better, the real gift, on the inside (or you hope there is?).

Paul is saying "I don't look like much on the outside, but there is a reason for that. It is so folks don't get confused when God does something through me or with me." The power to transform lives or to overcome life's trouble is all of God.

And...

And Paul is also saying that what you see on the outside, is not necessarily what going on in the inside. To explain, Paul sites four examples:

-We are squeezed, but not crushed
-We are confused, but not driven to despair
-We are hunted down, but never left alone.
-We ARE (left it off your notes) knocked down, but not knocked out.

When Paul wrote these out, he used Greek participles that puts an emphasis on the second part. It doesn't make sense...earthen vessels are weak and expendable. They are the Styrofoam cups of our day. Yet...because of the power that belongs to God, the expected does not happen.

Folks, people will see us squeezed by daily pressures, confused by the unexpected or unplanned for, hunted down by the world's unfairness and sinfulness, and we will be knocked-down on the seat of our pants...but we are not destroyed or made useless.

What is happening to me on the outside, this clay pot, does not reflect who I am on the inside or what God is doing in me to prevent me from being destroyed. Still a winner.

Sometimes I will look like Jesus...even in His dying. Verse 10-14

always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So then death is working in us, but life in you. And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you. ***2 Cor. 4:10-14*** *[NKJV]*

Now this doesn't sound like much fun, does it. Paul says that his life is a continual illustration of the death of Christ.

Yet in doing this, the result is life. How can this be?

To understand what Paul is saying here, I want you to turn to another letter that he wrote, where the same lesson is being conveyed. Turn to Philippians 2:5-11

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. **Philip. 2:5-11** [NKJV]

Here is the process of Dying...

Jesus humbled Himself to become a man. He humbled Himself to give his life as a payment for our sinfulness. When we allow the mind of Christ to rule over us, then we will die to self. Our desires, goals, personal wants will take second place to what God's direction for our life. The dying of Jesus is synonymous with humility and obedience to God the Father.

Did you notice what Paul said: . *'So then death is working in us, but life in you.'"* We would expect him to say, *"So then death is working in us, but life is working in us as well"*

When we display the dying of Jesus Christ, the humility and obedience of Jesus Christ, it will cause others to embrace Jesus.

us

Paul also reminds that we not only are to look like Christ in His dying... but one day we will share in His Resurrection (vs. 14)

in His likeness in

knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.

I may not look like a winner today, but when we have our glorified bodies, things will look differently.

It's in eternity, where winners are never in doubt. Vs. 15-18

Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal. ***2 Cor. 4:15-18*** *[NKJV]*

It is true that in this life we must make a decision for Christ.

It is true that in this life, that Christians will demonstrate the power of Christ in earthen, weak, vessels or bodies.

It is true that in this life we die to self (just as a kernel of corn is put into the dirt, that life and fruit can be produced). We bear in this body the dying of our Lord Jesus.

It is also true that in eternity, no one will ever doubt we are winners. The vessel of clay will be changed in a twingling of the eye and we will forever be with our Lord.

Because of Jesus and Jesus alone, I am a winner! What about you?