

## God's M.O.

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Northwest Community Church, December 1, 2024, Todd Havekost

### Introduction

During our recently concluded sermon series on Job Dave used the illustration of how TV crime shows often appeal to our innate desire to identify cause and effect. Job's friends argued wrongly that suffering is always caused by sin.

Another common story line running through TV crime shows is that detectives attempt to capture serial offenders by identifying patterns in the way criminals operate. That pattern is often referred to as the criminal's M.O., from the Latin *modus operandi*. M.O. is a term that can be broadly applied to refer to how a person operates in any sphere of activity.

The first verse of today's passage, 2 Corinthians 4:7, tells us that God has a very distinctive M.O. But unlike the crime shows, we don't have to do any detective work to figure it out. He has explicitly and repeatedly told us His M.O, how He chooses to operate.

### 2 Corinthians 4:7

**But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves (4:7).**

To identify "this treasure" we need to look back to verse 6. **For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ (4:6).** There we see that the same God who spoke light into existence at creation (Gen. 1:3) has displaced the darkness formerly in our hearts (and that is still in the hearts of unbelievers, 2 Cor. 4:4) with the treasure of **the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.**

We might expect this glorious knowledge of God, "**this treasure**," to reside in a glorious container. But instead, it is found in **earthen vessels**, clay pots, common containers.

Why is there such a tremendous disparity between the commonness of the vessel and the glory of the treasure contained within? Verse 7 tells us **so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.** This is not a mistake; it is not an accident. It is God's stated M.O., the way He has chosen to operate.

God manifests His all-surpassing power through ordinary people like you and me when we depend on Him so that it is apparent to all that He is responsible for what is accomplished.

This M.O. is highlighted repeatedly throughout Scripture, which suggests it is particularly "near and dear" to God's heart and how He operates. Ironically this M.O. is even apparent in God's selection of the author of this verse, Paul, to be His primary messenger [apostle] to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:7-8). Would you be surprised to learn that God selected a mediocre public speaker (at best) for that crucial spokesman role? "**Unskilled in speech**" was how Paul described himself later in 2 Corinthians (11:6).<sup>1</sup> Paul wrote in his earlier letter to the Corinthians that God did this **so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men but on the power of God (1 Cor. 2:5).**

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<sup>1</sup> "**Contemptible**" according to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 10:10). This dynamic is highlighted in the extended 1 Cor. 2:1-5 passage.

## Judges 7

In our study of Hebrews this summer we repeatedly encountered object lessons God placed in the Old Testament (OT), physical events and objects we can see designed to shed light on spiritual truths we cannot see.<sup>2</sup> One OT object lesson that speaks directly to God's M.O. is found in Judges 7. I hope Judges 7 is already on your "playlist" of favorite OT stories, and if not, I hope after today it will be.

The context of Judges 7 is God preparing to deliver His people from their Midianite oppressors. Gideon, Israel's leader at the time<sup>3</sup>, has an army of 32,000 soldiers at his disposal.

With good jokes, the comedian spends a long time weaving the context, preparing for the punch line at the end. In epic movies, directors include hours of drama to build suspense for the grand climax at the end. But Judges 7 doesn't follow that pattern. At the beginning, God gives away the punch line, He dispenses with the drama.

**The Lord said to Gideon, "The people who are with you are too many for Me to give Midian into their hands, for Israel would become boastful, saying 'my own power has delivered me'" (7:2).**

God says, "you have too many soldiers, you will proudly attribute your victory to the size of your army. I want to win this battle in a way that everyone will know it was My doing."<sup>4</sup>

God's explicit mode of operating, here in Judges 7, today in 2 Corinthians 4, seen throughout the Bible, and repeatedly demonstrated through His people today, is to accomplish God-sized works through ordinary people and the (often small) collections of people who gather in Jesus' name as His church. Why has God chosen that as His M.O.? Because He wants to ensure that everyone knows it is His power accomplishing big things.

The "what" - God achieves great things through ordinary people.

The "why" - So that everyone will know this victory was God's doing – not what His people "bring to the table", not their numbers; not their abilities; not their strength; not their resources.

The "how" - the rest of Judges 7 tells that story.

In verse 3, all the fearful soldiers are sent away, that reduced the army from 32,000 to 10,000. But God is still not satisfied, "**the people are still too many**" (v. 4). So God introduced an arbitrary selection criteria to further reduce their numbers to 300. Now that was a group that God was prepared to work with

Verse 12 tells us this army of 300 was arrayed against opponents **as numerous as locusts**. Verse 16 explains God's plan: **[Gideon] divided the 300 men into three companies, and he put trumpets and empty pitchers into the hands of all of them, with torches inside the pitchers**. Interesting, "**torches inside [empty] pitchers**", does that sound familiar? In 2 Corinthians 4:6-7, earthen vessels housing the treasure of the light of the knowledge of God.

Verse 20 records the execution of the plan. **When the three companies blew the trumpets and broke the pitchers, they held the torches in their left hands and the trumpets in their right hands for blowing, and cried, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!"** We read in verse 22, **the Lord set of the sword of one against another even throughout the whole [Midianite] army**, creating confusion among the enemy soldiers so that they killed one another. Thus, the Lord's army (of 300) won the battle against the huge Midianite army.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples from our study in Hebrews included (a) God gave the specifications of the tabernacle to teach us about heaven; (b) the priesthood and its ordinances teach about gaining access into God's presence; and (c) the sacrificial system prefigured what Jesus would accomplish as the lamb of God taking away the sins of the world. And there are countless other examples throughout the OT.

<sup>3</sup> Israel's leaders were called "Judges" during that era, thus the name of the book.

<sup>4</sup> God's M.O. is another reason He is so opposed to pride. It is not "look what I've accomplished" but "see what God has done."

Let's consider a dialog we here at Northwest might have with God. "God, imagine what impact we could have for You if we had multiple campuses with huge auditoriums and 32,000 people attending Northwest on Sundays." He might say, "if that was the case, people would attribute your church's impact to your numbers, not to My power."

"OK, I can see that, how about if we stick with one campus but have many services and 10,000 attending here." He might respond, "if that was the case people would still attribute the impact to your size and resources."

"Well God, we have a lot less than 300 people, I guess there's not much we can do." He might say, "that's right, no one would expect much from a group of that size. But you see, that is precisely my M.O., that is exactly how I like to work. So when I accomplish big things through a group like that:

- People believing in Jesus for eternal life, transformed lives, healed marriages;
- Vibrant Spanish speaking and ESL and Food Pantry ministries and many others;
- Giving in recent years more than a million dollars to fund missions initiatives around the world;<sup>5</sup>

then everyone will know that they are witnessing 'the surpassing greatness of God's power' working in them and through them."

### 2 Corinthians 4:8-9

So what should we expect life to be like as an **earthen vessel** through whom God shows the surpassing greatness of His power?

I grew up in a house of 3 rambunctious boys. You could see signs of our handiwork anywhere you looked. The gutters on the front of our garage were riddled with dents from our errant basketball shots. The basement windows were covered with wire grids to protect them from batted tennis balls used in baseball games played on the adjacent driveway.

But probably the most obvious evidence of our presence was on the everyday tableware. Mom had a nice set of china dishes set aside for guests, and the 3 of us treated those dishes with care. But our everyday plates and cups showed extensive signs of wear. They were beat up with all kinds of scratches and chips.

As earthen vessels actively engaged in God's kingdom work while living in a broken world, we can also expect wear and tear. We can expect to encounter hardship and adversity. Paul goes on to discuss this in verses 8 and 9, where he uses 4 sets of contrasts to describe in the experiences he and his fellow workers encountered.

#### **We are afflicted in every way ... (4:8a).**

The book of Acts reports that the apostles repeatedly faced overt and even violent opposition as they sought to advance the gospel and church of Jesus. We will say more about that in verse 9.

But even if that is not our current experience<sup>6</sup> (for which we are thankful), we are no strangers to many other types of adversity, including physical and mental health for ourselves and loved ones, and relational heartbreak among family members or close friends. Yet despite affliction that may strike on multiple fronts and with great intensity ...

#### **We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed (4:8a).**

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<sup>5</sup> Over the past 6 years through our (relatively small) church God has provided more than 1.1 million dollars of funding for ministries outside Northwest through Land Sale Proceeds, General Fund budgeted amounts, and designated giving.

<sup>6</sup> At the same time, we do observe the culture becoming progressively more hostile to Christian values and truth claims.

Repeated adversity did not sideline the apostles. It did not derail them from fulfilling their God-given stewardships.<sup>7</sup> We will see later in the chapter the importance of viewing our experiences of adversity in the context of eternity.

### **Perplexed ... (4:8b).**

We may find it encouraging that in the face of adversity even Paul described himself as being “perplexed.” Even he asked “why?” questions for which he didn't have the answers. Walking by faith recognizes and accepts God always has things going on behind the scenes that are above our pay grade, as we have seen so clearly in our recent series on Job.<sup>8</sup>

Walking by faith does not demand that we have all our “why?” questions answered. Instead, it reflects a settled rest based on our absolute confidence in God's goodness.

### **Perplexed, but not despairing (4:8b).**

When we “let it go” by resting in the realization that God knows the “why?”s, that He is weaving together everything in each of our lives into His infinitely wise bigger “story”, and that He will ultimately make things right (whether in this life or in the life to come)<sup>9</sup>, we avoid heading down the black hole of despair. Instead, we maintain hope and remain on mission with purpose.

### **Persecuted... (4:9a).**

As we discussed last week, as was the case for Paul and the early church, potentially violent levels of opposition are also experienced today by many of our brothers and sisters around the world. This is the inevitable outcome of living in a world that is currently under the dominion of the devil, a structure confirmed by Jesus' description of Satan as **the ruler of the world** (John 14:30).<sup>10</sup>

Because the world system has been under Satan's rule since the fall in the Garden in Genesis 3, we shouldn't naively expect righteousness to prevail on the broad national and world stages. Christians and the church will always have formidable enemies, both demonic and human (as agents of demonic evil). We will see more shortly about Paul experiences of persecution (in 2 Cor. 11).

### **Persecuted, but not forsaken (4:9a).**

The key for Paul and for us is to never lose sight that though we face enemies, the MOST IMPORTANT PERSON is ALWAYS on our side. This assurance is referenced many times in the New Testament (NT).

- **“Greater is He who is in you than He who is in the world”** (1 John 4:4b).
- **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”** (Romans 8:31b).
- **“He Himself has said, ‘I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you.’”** (Hebrews 13:5b).

### **Struck down ... (4:9b)**

The cumulative effect of adversity and hardship can knock us off our feet. But though we may be reeling and thrown for a loop ...

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<sup>7</sup> In our recent series on Job, we observed this spectrum of potential responses to adversity ranging from Job (“**shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?**”) to that of his wife (“**curse God and die**”) (Job 2:9-10).

<sup>8</sup> I have always found it instructive that God never did fill Job in on the “bigger story” that led to all the disruption in his life.

<sup>9</sup> Sometimes in hindsight we get a glimpse in this life of how God worked through our adversity to bring about His wonderful purposes. In other cases we may not understand the profound wisdom of His story until we look back from the new earth with a perspective informed by eternity.

<sup>10</sup> In the wilderness temptation in Matthew 4 (vs. 8-9), when the devil offered to give Jesus **all the kingdoms of the world** if Jesus would **fall down and worship** him, Jesus didn't respond “your offer is invalid because you don't have that authority.” Instead, Jesus refused to succumb to Satan's temptation to take the “short cut” easy path to glory, instead affirming His commitment to continue on the Father's (much harder) way.

### **Struck down, but not destroyed (4:9b).**

We are not destroyed. Adversity and opposition don't have to represent the last word. They don't have to sideline us from faithfully remaining on mission.

[Using "bouncy Paul" object to illustrate how Paul always bounced back from adversity ...]

As earthen vessels through whom God displays the surpassing greatness of His power:

- We are afflicted in every way but not crushed.
- We are perplexed but not despairing.
- We are persecuted but not forsaken.
- We are struck down but not destroyed.

### 2 Corinthians 4:10-12

**Always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body (4:10).**

Think of how God could have communicated the good news of Jesus. He could have displayed it on a 1000-mile wide High-Definition TV screen in the sky. But instead, God has chosen throughout the ages, not to overpower, but to woo. He has chosen to present His message and win people over through the sacrificial love of His servants as we **carry about in the body the dying of Jesus**.

And what is the purpose of this suffering? **So that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body**. So that we will be modern-day living object lessons demonstrating the love of Jesus.<sup>11</sup> So that others will come to know our Savior who loved them and gave His life for them.

Exhibit #1 of this for all the ages was Jesus Himself, Who "**emptied Himself**" (Philippians 2:7) of God-power and loved us all the way to the cross. Witnessing His forgiving love for others even while enduring the crucifixion, the centurion concluded "**Truly this man was the Son of God**" (Mark 15:39).<sup>12</sup>

God's strategy of sending forth His message through living object lessons of sacrificial love continued without interruption after Jesus through the book of Acts and continues through His faithful and often persecuted church down to this day.

**For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh (4:11).**

As we carry in our bodies the dying of Jesus, taking His message to others despite opposition and hardship, living out His sacrificial love, the life of Jesus is made known through us. People hear His message, it becomes real to them, and they believe in the Savior.

**So death works in us, but life in you (4:12).**

Paul endured hardship for Jesus (**death works in us**). But that resulted in gospel life coming to the Corinthians.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> We can be object lessons to the world just as the OT tabernacle, priests and sacrifices were of Jesus (as referenced in footnote 2).

<sup>12</sup> I love how Michael Card expressed this in his song "Why?" "Why did they nail his feet and hands, His love would have held Him there?", Joy in the Journey, 1994.

<sup>13</sup> Woven throughout the Corinthian letters was an underlying disrespect by an influential group of their leaders toward Paul's apostolic ministry, which is unique to Corinth among all the recipients of Paul's NT letters. One facet of that opposition appears to reflect a version of

## 2 Corinthians 11:23-27

Long-standing opposition from a group of leaders at Corinth put Paul in a position where he needed to defend his apostolic authority and ministry, which is captured in chapters 10 to 13 at the end of 2 Corinthians. We might be surprised to see how Paul approached that defense. For his credentials as a “servant of Christ” he listed his sufferings.<sup>14</sup>

Many of these represented overt hostilities from opponents of Jesus trying to terminate Paul's ministry. Others reflected obstacles that are inherent aspects of life in a fallen world. In either case, let's consider this list a great example for us of how Paul did not allow these sufferings, individually or cumulatively, to derail him from continuing to serve Jesus.

Picking up in the middle of verse 23 of chapter 11:

- **In far more labors**
- **In far more imprisonments**
- **Beaten times without number**
- **Often in danger of death<sup>15</sup>**
- **Five times I received from the Jews 39 lashes**
- **Three times I was beaten with rods**
- **Once I was stoned**
- **Three times I was shipwrecked**
- **A night and a day I have spent in the deep**
- **I have been on frequent journeys**
- **In dangers from rivers**
- **Dangers from robbers**
- **Dangers from my countrymen**
- **Dangers from the Gentiles**
- **Dangers in the city**
- **Dangers in the wilderness**
- **Dangers on the sea**
- **Dangers among false brethren**
- **I have been in labor and hardship**
- **Through many sleepless nights**
- **In hunger and thirst**
- **Often without food**
- **In cold and exposure.**

If you wanted to sideline Paul, if you wanted to derail him from fulfilling his assigned stewardship from God, if you wanted to do something that would keep him down from which he would not bounce back, how would you go about doing it? After going through this list, can you think of anything his demonically inspired human opponents hadn't tried?

The only other thing I can think of is killing Paul. Several of the items listed here do reflect direct attempts on Paul's life. Why didn't any of those attempts succeed? Because God wasn't going to let that happen until Paul had finished the ministry and fulfilled the stewardship God had assigned to him.

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what we today call “prosperity theology.” One of their many complaints against Paul was “since you are suffering that shows you don't have God's favor.” Interestingly we just saw a major dose of that from Job's 3 “friends.” So there is likely some irony in Paul's words in this verse.

<sup>14</sup> A lot more could be said about what we learn from the fact that Paul considered these his primary credentials as a faithful servant of Christ. And ironically, these were the very things his opponents considered to be signs he wasn't a recipient of God's favor.

<sup>15</sup> Beginning from within weeks of his conversion (Acts 9:23-25). Another item in this list that also reflect an attempt to take Paul's life is “**once I was stoned**” in Lystra where his attackers **dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead** (Acts 14:19).

That's what makes 2 Timothy 4 such a beautiful passage. When Paul found himself in prison on death row. He took great encouragement recognizing the finality of that situation meant he had faithfully completed the 30-plus year "apostle to the Gentiles" stewardship God had assigned to him. **"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith"** (2 Tim. 4:7) After every affliction, after every attack, after every hardship, Paul had bounced back to persevere, to endure, to continue faithfully serving Jesus, until God called him home.

And that is our calling too, to walk by faith serving Jesus and fulfilling the stewardship He has uniquely assigned to each one of us, until He calls us home.

#### 2 Corinthians 4:16

**Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day (4:16).**

Despite all the adversity, Paul proceeds to explain why he does not throw in the towel, why he is not discouraged. To be sure the outer man, the earthen vessel is decaying. This certainly involves the inevitable processes of aging (to which many of us can personally attest). And for Paul and many it also includes the wear and tear that can accompany serving Jesus. Persecution threatens injury and death to Christians in many parts of the world. Serving God in hard places around the world can be taxing. And even exerting oneself in ministry here versus a life devoted to comfort or bodily health<sup>16</sup> could negatively impact one's life span.

But something far more important is going on than preserving and extending our physical health. **Our inner man is being renewed day by day.** Living for Jesus and experiencing His surpassing power working in and through us produces within us a joyful, resilient life full of meaning and purpose that no person or no adversity can take away. Jesus called this "abundant" life.<sup>17</sup>

#### 2 Corinthians 4:17

Let's come back to "bouncy Paul." Why does bouncy Paul keep returning to this upright position? I'm no engineer, but I read that the weight in the bottom creates a low center of mass. For all of us who have believed in Jesus for eternal life, verse 17 is that truth that if we truly "get it" will become that "weight in the bottom" of our lives that enables us like Paul to not only bounce back from any adversity but even flourish on the path of faithfully serving Jesus.

**For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (4:17).**

Verse 17 is a verse full of comparisons. The foundational comparison is between our current "affliction" and future "eternal glory." Having a frame of reference that sees our current affliction in the context of that resulting future eternal glory becomes our "weight in the bottom" that enables us to "bounce back" from any adversity to continue walking by faith. The comparisons in this verse have 3 facets, as shown in the following table. The column in red represents our current situation, green shows the future.

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<sup>16</sup> **Bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come** (1 Tim. 4:8).

<sup>17</sup> Philip Yancey recorded his surprise when he observed the intensity of this inner renewal in a very unexpected group of people. He wrote of his interviews with "'stars' ... people who dominate the media." He said of them "our 'idols' are as miserable a group of people as I have ever met." He told of "broken marriages ... dependent on psychotherapy ... tormented by self-doubt." He continued "I have also spent time with people I call 'servants,'" and listed people who work with lepers, the homeless, refugees, jungle tribes, outcasts. "I was prepared to honor and admire these servants, to hold them up as inspiring examples. I was not prepared to envy them. Yet as I now reflect on the two groups side by side, stars and servants, the servants clearly emerge as the favored ones, the graced ones.... They possess qualities of depth and richness and even joy that I have not found elsewhere. Servants work for low pay, long hours, and no applause, 'wasting' their talents and skills among the poor and uneducated. Somehow, though, in the process of losing their lives they find them." [The Jesus I Never Knew](#), pp 117-118.

2 Cor 4:17	Current	Future
Experience	Affliction	Glory
Intensity	Light	Weighty
Duration	Momentary	Eternal

- (1) Experience: Our current experience of affliction will produce future glory.  
(2) Intensity: When viewed against the immense weightiness of that glory, the intensity of our afflictions will appear light<sup>18</sup> by comparison.  
(3) Duration: The duration of our affliction is momentary when compared with our eternal experience of the glory.<sup>19</sup>

By “eternal weight of glory” Paul is referring here to the weighty reward God has laid up for those who faithfully follow Jesus. This is repeatedly conveyed throughout the NT through a variety of word pictures. In our sermon series this summer we saw that the author of Hebrews described this as being “partners” or “companions” of Jesus in His coming inheritance. Earlier this year in 1 Corinthians 3 we talked about increased intimacy with Jesus, about crowns reflecting Jesus’ approval, about ruling authority from and with Jesus (“training time for reigning time”), and about God's favor, God’s approval, God’s reward.<sup>20</sup>

That's exactly where Paul went in his "end of life" 2 Timothy 4 passage we just referenced. Immediately following **"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith"** (v. 7), he continued **"in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord ... will award to me on that day"** (v. 8)

Referencing rewards in general and this 2 Corinthians 4 passage in particular, Earl Radmacher wrote:

In one picture it's *crowns* we wear, in another picture it's *garments* we wear, in another picture it's positions of *rulership* that are there. God seeks to come from every angle possible to try to get us excited about the life to come and to make us think with Paul that this life's momentary afflictions are *nothing* compared to the rewards of the coming age.<sup>21</sup>

**For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (4:17).**

Note the connection verse 17 makes between adversity and reward, "affliction ... producing<sup>22</sup> ... glory." This idea that God's greatest promises of blessing and reward in the next life are to those who faithfully endure intense suffering in this one isn't original with Paul. He got it from Jesus.

Jesus introduced His most famous Sermon (on the Mount) with the famous Beatitudes, which are loaded with “faithfulness now will be rewarded later” teaching (as Dave discussed last week). At the end of the Beatitudes Jesus (as captured in Matt. 5) did something He very rarely did. He repeated Himself. I’m not aware of any other time Jesus ever repeated Himself in a single teaching context. He may have, but if He did, it was very rare.

<sup>18</sup> "Light" here is the same word Jesus used in Matt. 11 to refer to the "light burden" of following Him. **"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light"** (Matt. 11:28-30).

<sup>19</sup> **And this small and temporary trouble we suffer will bring us a tremendous and eternal glory, much greater than the trouble.** (2 Cor. 4:17, Good News Translation)

<sup>20</sup> Further validation that "**eternal weight of glory**" refers to God's reward is that this section culminates in chapter 5 with "**we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ**" (2 Cor. 5:10).

<sup>21</sup> Earl Radmacher, "Believers and the Bema", *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Spring 1995 (italics his).

<sup>22</sup> The lexical range of meaning for "**producing**" (Gk. *katergozimai*) includes achieve, accomplish, bring about, produce, create (BAG p. 422)



So when He repeats the greatness of the reward for those who endure the intense adversity of being persecuted for His sake at the end of the Beatitudes, we should understand He is making this a huge point of emphasis.

**Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matt. 5:10-12).**

He says it the first time in verse 10. **Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.** Those who endure persecution for standing with Jesus will have a rich entrance, a rich standing, a rich reward in the future kingdom of heaven.

Jesus could have stopped at the end of verse 10. He had made the point. But then to make sure we don't miss it, He went on beginning in verse 11 ... **Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great ...**

Enduring severe persecution for Jesus is one of the most difficult forms of adversity we can imagine. And we see the lengths to which Jesus went to send the message: "I know it is incredibly hard, but it is so important that you realize your faithful endurance will be so 'worth it'." It is so important that I am going to repeat myself.

Jesus will graciously reward us with incomparable glory for affliction that results from our faithful service for Him. And enduring persecution is "exhibit A" of that type of faithful endurance.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, any of you who are enduring other forms of severe affliction should also find great encouragement from Jesus' words here. Faithfully enduring severe affliction will bring great reward.

**For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison (4:17).**

Back in 2 Corinthians 4, Paul concludes verse 17 by foot-stomping that "it will be so worth it" message. We already observed the emphasis on comparisons in this verse. After making those three comparisons Paul goes on to say the immensity of the glory of the reward is "**far beyond all comparison.**" He uses a Greek word that means "extraordinary" or "surpassing". It is the same word he used in verse 7 translated as the "**surpassing greatness**" of God's power. It is where we get our word "hyperbole."

But here Paul uses it twice. A literal translation would be an eternal weight of glory that is "surpassingly surpassing" or "surpassing upon surpassing". NASB translates "**far beyond all comparison.**" Lexham Bible has it "beyond all measure and proportion." Language is inadequate to express how incomparably greater the glory is than the affliction. The reward is so great, so amazing, it is so worth living for Jesus, that properly understood, it will make any adversity we go through in this life seem like a tiny annoyance.

Picture yourself walking down the church hallway later today after second service when almost everyone has left. You happen to glance into the Welcome Center and see a gum wrapper laying on the floor. You take a few steps out of your way to pick up the wrapper and place it in the trash before resuming your walk out of the building

Now imagine someone comes up to you and begins gushing "thank you so much for picking up that wrapper. Because you did that act of service, I am going to give you a 2-week all-expense paid trip to a luxury resort anywhere in the world." What would your reaction be? I imagine it would be something along the lines of "wow, that is a reward beyond all measure and proportion for my small act of service!"

That is how it will be when we look back from the new earth one day and see the super-gracious super-abundant extent to which Jesus has rewarded us for faithfully serving Him and for enduring adversity for His sake in this life.

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<sup>23</sup> Paul also highlighted this same theme of the connection between current suffering and future glory in Romans 8, where he wrote "for I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (8:18).

Verse 17 gives us the opportunity to recognize that now, to live with eyes of faith now, to walk by faith now, realizing that **the small and temporary trouble we endure faithfully now will bring us an immense eternal glorious reward, far beyond all measure and proportion.**<sup>24</sup>

Living with this perspective creates the “weight in the bottom” of our lives that enables us to bounce back from any adversity. As we sang earlier: "And all the times I've fallen, I'd still be there on the ground, thank you Jesus, heaven changes everything."

With this truth as the foundation of our life, we like Paul though encountering severe affliction will never be crushed; though perplexed we will never despair; though facing immense opposition we realize we are never forsaken; and though knocked down, we will never be destroyed. It means that, for us as it was for Paul, nothing will keep us down, nothing will ever derail us from faithfully fulfilling God’s stewardship for us until the day He calls us home.

### 2 Corinthians 4:18

So how can we incorporate this life-changing truth of verse 17 into our daily lives?

**While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal (4:18).**

To the extent we don’t **look at**, we don’t orient our lives primarily based upon the material realities we perceive through the senses, but instead as Christians living with eyes of faith we orient our lives around what is **not seen**, the **eternal** truths we find in Scripture, to that extent we can live out the truth of verse 17 and bounce back from any adversity to flourish on the path of faithfully following and serving Jesus.

### Conclusion

Two sets of questions for us to reflect on as we close today. First, on God's MO:

How does your self-talk tend to go as far as having impact and making a difference for God? Does it run something along the lines of “I’m just an ordinary person, I don’t have that much to offer. There is no reason for me to get involved in things, nothing much would change.” That is more or less true for all of us, as far as it goes ...

How might that self-talk change if it was informed by what we learned today about God’s M.O., that God delights in showing His power through ordinary people like you and me? What if we link "I'm an ordinary person" with "but my God is all-powerful, and He delights in working through ordinary people like me to make great impact." That is His M.O., that is how He chooses to operate. What might happen if we ask Him to direct us into our next steps of dependent community and service, if we tell Him, "**here am I send me**"? (Isa. 6:8)

Second: On adversity producing glory:

What is your bounce back quotient? Have your experiences with adversity left you in a state of discouragement? Have life's setbacks sidelined you from fulfilling your stewardship from God?

What would life look like if with eyes of faith you embraced that in God's kingdom faithfully enduring adversity produces glory? Can you picture how a settled confidence that God rewards faithful endurance and service beyond all measure and proportion could spur you on to live for Jesus no matter what?

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<sup>24</sup> My paraphrase made up primarily from combining elements of multiple translations.