

November 5, 2017

## *The Most Excellent Way*

*"I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed."* I Corinthians 1:4-9

*"But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us...So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."* II Corinthians 4:7-18

A couple of weeks ago we talked about the true nature of the gospel; the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which satisfies the requirement of the Law of Sin and Death and gives us hope for a life after this one. In today's context Paul will remind us that this gospel has been placed in "...*jars of clay*..." so that we will rely on our God and Father to empower everything that we do.

Why "...*jars of clay*..."? It has become popular among some who preach the name of Jesus to suggest that our God wants us to have lives filled with an abundance of riches. I am convinced that this is a false teaching and the Apostle would underline the same thinking in our context for today.

Those of us who follow Jesus are not choosing a life filled with earthly riches. Paul would describe our existence this way, "*We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*" (II Corinthians 4:8-9) Choosing to live as a believer is not choosing the easy road. A true believer will suffer and struggle, not live on 'easy street'.

Why will we suffer as believers? If we look at Paul's description of our trials we will, I believe, understand what he is telling us we can expect.

**We are hard pressed on every side:** Living as a believer in a world that follows a completely different standard is almost overwhelmingly hard. The world teaches us to be self-serving, to do our own thing and to take whatever it is we might want. The temptation to follow that teaching is tremendous. It would be much easier to just 'go with the flow'; to fit in. That's pressure!

**We are perplexed:** Having chosen to deny ourselves and follow Jesus will leave us perplexed and confused most of the time. We have chosen the life of a humble servant and we live among those who demand service. It means that much of what happens in our world will make little sense to us, and the choices we see others make will be and should be peculiar to us.

**We are persecuted:** Standing up for the right will not make us popular. More often than not it will open us up to the criticism and condemnation of those who think our position is wrong. Standing against violence and selfishness and sin-filled choices, even when done in love, will not make us popular.

**We are struck down:** Yes, for those who truly believe, there will be days when we are left in the dirt. There will be those who attack us, ridicule us, and generally seek to hurt us and destroy us and/or our reputations. Living as a true believer can and does lead some to attack us and try their best to destroy us.

All of these struggles are promised to those who truly follow Jesus, but we are not without hope. Even though we are hard-pressed we are not crushed; even though we are perplexed we are not left in despair; even though we are persecuted we are not abandoned; even when we are struck down we will not be destroyed.

Perhaps the biggest threat to true believers is the challenge to our focus. The world wants us to focus on what is temporary. The world wants us to chase riches and popularity and power. The world wants us to go along with everyone else, choose whatever makes us 'happy', and take whatever we want. But in the end, all of these things will be destroyed.

A true believer does not live for what is seen and temporary, but for what is unseen and eternal. These struggles make us more effective as those who hold the gospel. When we live the hard way because of our great hope; then we can understand and reach those who are seeking that great hope.

