

Prayer Burdens

1. Please pray that in 2008 the gospel burden among the saints would flourish and that the recently saved would get to know our wonderful Lord Jesus in a deeper, more experiential way as well as being richly and firmly rooted in His Word.
2. Please continue to pray that the Lord would provide serving ones for the Grade 6 gospel which will start in a few weeks.

Announcements:

General

1. Hall 3 Meeting Schedule

The Lord's Day meeting schedule is as follows:

10:00am - 10:30am

Lord's Table

10:30am - 11:00am

Refreshments and informal fellowship

11:00am - 12:00am

Praise, Songs and Message

The church in Toronto

Twelve Baskets Full Week 9

January 7 - January 19, 2008

The Treasure in Earthen Vessels

Weekly Bible Reading:

2 Corinthians 1:1-4:18; Acts 12:1-19; Luke 10:38-42; 11:1-13, 33-36:

12:1-48

Hymns:

1206; 634; 639; 614; 117;

Monday

Verses for Morning Revival

2 Corinthians 1:12a

12 For our boasting is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in singleness and sincerity of God, not in fleshly wisdom but in the grace of God, we have conducted ourselves...

2 Corinthians 2:4a

4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you through many tears...

2 Corinthians 1:8b

8 ...we were excessively burdened, beyond our power, so that we despaired even of living.

2 Corinthians 11:10

10 ...while his letters, someone says, are weighty and strong, his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible.

Readings for Inspiration and Truth

Introduction: Our Christian Conundrum

1. We Think Our Weaknesses Hinder the Indwelling Christ

"As we read 2 Corinthians carefully before God, we seem to meet two persons—Paul in himself and Paul in Christ. Everything Paul speaks of, from chapter one to chapter thirteen, is all according to this principle. If we summarized Paul's message in this book, we could cover everything with his words in chapter four, 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels.' In chapter one we see this treasure being put into the earthen vessel. From 3:1 through the end of the book, we see the earthen vessel on the one hand and the treasure on the other hand. After reading these words before God, we spontaneously will see under His enlightenment that the earthen vessel does not hinder the treasure from shining. The earthen vessel does not bury the power of the treasure."

2. We Want to Be the Ideal Christian

"When I first became a Christian, I had my own concept of the ideal Christian, and I tried my utmost to be that kind of Christian. I thought that if only I could

attain to the ideal I had conceived, then I would attain perfection. I wanted to be perfect, but I had my own ideal and standard for being a perfect Christian. I thought that if I could reach this standard, I would be perfect. I thought a perfect Christian should smile from morning to night. If he shed tears, I thought he was not victorious, but a failure. I would even say he was wrong. I thought a perfect Christian should be bold, unafraid, and courageous in every situation. If he was fearful in anything, I would say he did not have faith. I would say he was not perfect because he did not trust in the Lord. I also thought the perfect Christian was never sad. If a person was sad, I doubted that he was perfect. I could mention many other criteria, but I do not need to mention too many of these concepts to you. I believe that many of the younger brothers and sisters have ideals of what a Christian is. I am not criticizing because I used to think the same way myself."

3. We Think Christians should be Without Problems: Like Angels

"One day I read the passage in 2 Corinthians where Paul was sorrowful. I asked, 'Was Paul sorrowful?' I read that he shed many tears. I asked, 'Did Paul cry?' I read that Paul suffered and was sad. I asked, 'Did Paul suffer, and was he sad?' I read that he was burdened and despaired even of his life. I asked, 'Did Paul despair?' As I continued reading, I saw that there were many things of which I had never thought. I had never considered that a person like Paul would have these problems. I began to realize that Christians are not another type of angel. God has not put a race of angels on the earth and said, 'These are Christians.' I also began to see that Paul was very close to us; he was not so far off. Paul was someone I know; he was not a stranger. I know him because I saw that he was a man."

Tuesday

Verses for Morning Revival

2 Corinthians 4:7

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not out of us.

2 Corinthians 12:9, 10b

9 ...My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in weakness. Most gladly therefore I will rather boast in my weaknesses that the power of Christ might tabernacle over me

10for when I am weak, then I am powerful

Readings for Inspiration and Truth

An Ideal Christian Does Not Exist

"Many people have a concept of an ideal Christian. Please remember that this ideal was created by us, not by God. That kind of ideal Christian does not exist, nor does God want us to be such. Here we meet an earthen vessel, but the special characteristic of this earthen vessel is that a treasure has been put into it. The treasure transcends and overshadows the earthen vessel and manifests itself from within the vessel. This is the meaning of Christianity and of being a

be manifested. But when we are opposed, persecuted, and criticized, when we have problems with our health, and when we are troubled by the saints in the church, we are in a proper situation for the manifestation of life. When Paul was with the Corinthians, he was in that kind of situation. This afforded him an excellent opportunity to have the Spirit within him manifested as life.

"In verses 8 and 9 Paul indicates the kind of difficult situation he was in. He says, 'We are afflicted in every way, but not straitened; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.' In these verses Paul mentions four things. First, he says that they were afflicted in every way, but not straitened. The Chinese version says that they were attacked in every way, attacked from four directions: the front, the rear, the right, and the left. Nevertheless, they were not straitened, cramped. This indicates life. Not to be straitened in such a situation is to have the manifestation of life.

"Second, Paul says that they were perplexed, unable to find a way out, but not despairing. The apostles were shut up; they did not have a way out. However, they were not utterly lacking a way out. This part of verse 8 contains in Greek a play on words. First Paul speaks of being unable to find a way out, and then, of not being utterly unable to find a way out. Once again, this is life. Seemingly they were unable to find a way out. But because of the Spirit in them as life, they were not utterly unable to find a way out.

"Third, Paul says that they were persecuted, but not forsaken. This means they were pursued by enemies, but they were not abandoned, deserted; that is, they were not left behind in an evil plight.

"Finally, in verse 9 Paul says that they were cast down, but not destroyed. Although they were struck down, they did not perish.

"Paul was afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and cast down. All this provided an opportunity for life to be manifested. Life overcomes all these things. Even though he experienced affliction, perplexity, persecution, and being cast down, Paul was still very living. He was not straitened or despairing, and he was not forsaken or destroyed. Life certainly was manifested in him."

(Witness Lee, The Life-study of 2 Corinthians, Msg. 31, pp. 276-278)

Do You Feel Happy When You Are Afflicted from Every Side?

"Sometimes the Lord allows us to be in a situation where we are afflicted on every side. Do you feel happy when you are in such an environment? Sometimes it seems as if the Lord drops us into the midst of this kind of environment, an environment where we are attacked from the front and the rear, from the left and the right. We are afflicted in every way, that is, according to the meaning of the Greek, we are afflicted from every side. This is for the manifestation of life."

"Perhaps you are wondering who the attackers are, who are those who cause affliction on every side. The ones who attack you the most may be those in your own family. Your husband or wife, your children, and your in-laws may make things difficult for you. If you cry out for the Lord to have mercy on you, He may indicate that the greatest mercy is for you to be in such a situation in order to have the manifestation of life."

than to see a naturally reticent person. It is better to see a man in whom God has placed meekness than to see a person who is weak and impotent by nature. It is better to see a person in whom God's power resides than to see a naturally strong man. The inward difference is enormous. It matters little what kind of earthen vessel we have; the treasure can always go inside. The earthen vessel remains an earthen vessel, but it is now a filled vessel. All weak people think that they are too earthen; their vessels are too full of clay and they are without any hope. Please remember that we have no reason to be disappointed or troubled. Whatever is spiritual, strong, powerful, and comes from the Lord can be manifested in us and will shine brighter and be magnified through the earthen vessel. Since this is the case, we can see the importance of the treasure.

“Brothers and sisters, **everything depends upon the treasure**. I must repeat, all situations revolve around this matter. Every outcome is positive. Those whose eyes are on the negative things are fools. The Lord can express Himself through everyone. When we have the treasure, many will know it.”

Friday & Saturday

Verses for Morning Revival

2 Corinthians 4:7-11

? 7^But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not out of us.

8^We are pressed on every side but not constricted; unable to find a way out but not utterly without a way out;

9^Persecuted but not abandoned; cast down but not destroyed;

10 Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

11 For we who are alive are always being delivered unto death for Jesus' sake that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Readings for Inspiration and Truth

How the Life of Jesus is Manifested Our Mortal Flesh

“When Paul was with the Corinthians, he was living and powerful, but he was also kind, humble, and forbearing. All these virtues were part of the manifestation of the Spirit experienced by him...Therefore, Paul was full of life. Not only was life manifested upon him, but it also worked in the believers there at Corinth.

“Life could be manifested in Paul because he experienced the killing of the cross. Suppose Paul did not have any problems, troubles, opposition, or persecution. Suppose he was also strong physically and never had any problems with his health. If such had been the case, it is not likely that there would have been the manifestation of life in Paul. But when Paul was with the Corinthians, he did have problems and difficulties, and he did encounter opposition and persecution. Sometimes even the saints in Corinth caused him trouble. Paul knew that if everything had been easy and comfortable, it would not have been possible to have the same manifestation of life.

“When we are in a comfortable environment, there is less opportunity for life to

Christian. In Paul, we see a man who was afraid yet strong. He was troubled in his heart yet had hope. He was surrounded by enemies yet was not captured. Although he met with persecution, he did not feel rejected or cast aside. He seemingly was knocked down, but he did not die (2 Cor. 4:7-9). We see his weaknesses, but when he was weak, he was powerful (12:10b). We see him bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus, but the life of Jesus was manifested in his body (4:10). We see him being slandered, but he had a good name. He seemingly led others astray, but he was honest. He seemingly was not famous, but everyone knew him. He seemingly was about to die, but he lived. He seemingly was punished, but not unto death. He seemingly was sad, but he always rejoiced. He seemingly was poor, but he made many rich. He seemingly had nothing, but he had everything (6:8-10). This is a real Christian. This is true Christianity.”

To Be a Christian is to Live a Life in Which There is an Incomprehensible, Spiritual Paradox

“A Christian is a person in whom there is a basic, but harmonious, paradox. Christianity means having a life in which there is an incomprehensible, spiritual paradox. God gives us this paradox. Some people think there is only a treasure but not an earthen vessel. Others think that the earthen vessel prevents them from going on. Human thought is always so extreme. We think it would be ideal just having the treasure. We think that the earthen vessel prevents us from going on. Before God, however, we see a treasure placed in earthen vessels. The earthen vessel is not destroyed, and it does not frustrate anything. The treasure is in the earthen vessel.

“Once I met a sister in the Lord. As soon as I met her, I knew that she had a quick disposition. She acted and spoke quickly; she was quick to rebuke others and quick to write letters. Thank the Lord, however, that there were probably one hundred letters in her wastepaper basket which had never been mailed. Because of the earthen vessel, she would write the letters, but the letters in the wastepaper basket proved that she also had the treasure. The treasure was in the earthen vessel. When one saw her, he knew her. She was this kind of person by nature, but one could also see the Lord in her. Sometimes we see a person suffering under trials. But we also see the riches he possesses. This is the treasure in the earthen vessel.”

We Do Not Need to Pretend that Everything with Us is Ok!

“I hope we would see something before the Lord. Today God is not requiring or expecting abstract things. Some brothers ask me why they are so weak. I say that weakness does not matter at all; they will become strong. One brother asked me what he should do after having done a terrible job. I told him that it was not a problem because the important thing is that God puts this treasure into us. We do not need to pretend, by fixing up the earthen vessel. We do not need to cultivate a certain tone or style. Everything comes from God. The treasure can be expressed from within us, the earthen vessels.”

Wednesday

Verses for Morning Revival

Acts 12:12-15

- 12** [Peter]...went to the house of Mary...where there was a considerable number assembled together and praying.
- 13** And when he knocked at the door of the entry, a maiden named Rhoda came to listen.
- 14** And when she recognized Peter's voice, she did not open the gate for joy, but ran in and reported that Peter was standing before the entry.
- 15** But they said to her, You are crazy! But she insisted that it was so. And they said, It is his angel.

Readings for Inspiration and Truth

We Do Not Need to Improve or Fix the Earthen Vessel

"I like reading about the prayer of the early church for Peter to be freed from the hands of evil men. God heard their prayer. When Peter returned to the house and knocked on the door, they said that it must be his angel (Acts 12:12-15). Do we see that this is faith, real faith? God heard the prayers, but human weakness was in it. We do not see them doing anything to hide their weaknesses. Some people today have greater faith than those in the house of Mary and Mark. They are so certain that God will send an angel and break the lock on the prison doors...If the wind blows, they say it is Peter knocking. If the rain strikes the house, they say Peter is knocking. These people have such great faith, but what they believe does not happen. Let me say frankly: This kind of Christian can only do things by himself and cheat a group of gullible people. Those who know God will say that there is an earthen vessel in Christianity. In Christianity the treasure is in earthen vessels. Human doubt is really an abomination, and it is sin. Nothing that comes from the earthen vessel alone can be accepted. The crucial matter is not the earthen vessel, but the fact that a treasure has been placed in it. We do not need to improve or fix the earthen vessel. The treasure has been placed into the vessel.

"Many times we have the assurance that God has heard our prayer. During the moments when we feel that our faith is strongest, we may also sense the presence of doubts. When we hear God's voice most clearly, we will also hear the devil's voice. In this kind of situation, I thank and praise God for the faith He has given us. This faith cannot change; it is still present. Before God we can see that the treasure is all the time expressed through the earthen vessel. God's glory is manifested through the earthen vessel.

"Many Christians have a life and walk that are all too artificial; they do not express the treasure. These ones only have human endeavor, performance, and outward behavior. A normal Christian life, however, is one in which one may doubt even in the moments of his greatest assurance. It is one in which one finds himself inwardly weak even in the moments of his greatest strength, inwardly fearful in the midst of real courage before God, and inwardly doubting in the moments of exhilarating joy. This kind of paradox proves that the treasure

is in the earthen vessel."

Thursday

Verses for Morning Revival

2 Corinthians 3:5

- 5** Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God

2 Corinthians 4:10-11

- 10** Always bearing about in the body the putting to death of Jesus that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body
- 11** For we who are alive are always being delivered unto death for Jesus' sake that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

2 Corinthians 5:4

- ? 4^...we who are in this tabernacle groan, being burdened...that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life

Readings for Inspiration and Truth

No Human Weakness Can Limit God's Power

"Finally, I would like to say that I especially thank God because no human weakness can limit God's power. What do we think in our hearts? We tend to think that if there is sorrow, there should not be joy; if there are tears, there should not be praise; if there is weakness, there should not be power; if there is pressing on every side, there should be constriction; if there is casting down, there should be destruction; and if there are doubts, we should be unable to believe. But tonight I would like to loudly declare that this is not true. God wants us to arrive at the point where we see that everything human is just an earthen vessel to contain God's treasure. Everything human is an earthen vessel for God's treasure. Nothing human is able to bury God's treasure. We do not need to be disappointed when we meet with disappointment. Although we cannot make it, we should allow something positive to come in, and when it does, it shines better, more brightly, and more gloriously. Many times we have doubts after praying, and we think that everything is finished. When faith comes, however, it magnifies the treasure despite the lingering presence of doubt. Faith makes the treasure more glorious. I am not speaking of an ideal; I know what I am saying. God's treasure can be expressed in earthen vessels. This is a spiritual paradox; it is precious to every Christian. It is in the context of this spiritual paradox that we live and learn to know our God."

Everything Depends Upon the Treasure: Whatever is Spiritual, Strong, and Powerful Can be Manifested in Us!

"As we journey along this way, we will discover the immensity of the spiritual contradiction that exists within us. As time goes on, we find this cleavage, this dividing gulf, is ever widening; the contradiction within us is ever accentuated. At the same time, the treasure is expressed ever clearer. The earthen vessel remains an earthen vessel. How wonderful this picture is! We find a man whose original traits remain intact, yet God gives him a patience far more excellent than his natural resilience. It is better to see a man in whom God has placed humility