

1

(Theme slide for this message)



2

(Sit in chair with head in hands)

-- “Have you ever felt more than exhausted? More than spent? Drained to the point where you are losing heart?”

-- “You have started to despair and you wonder if this following Christ is worth it. It just seems too much.”

-- “Your head may feel heavy, but it is your heart, the very core of your being, that is giving out.”

-- “Not your physical heart, but your “center,” where the decisions of life are made, where thoughts and emotions and will all come together.”

TR: In the midst of afflictions, it is easy, even common, to see folks lose heart.

2 Corinthians 4:1, 16

¹Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, **we do not lose heart.**

¹⁶So **we do not lose heart.** Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

ESV

3

God's Word for us today starts and ends with the idea of NOT LOSING HEART.

TR: The passage in 2 Corinthians 4 presents a common picture from the Hebrew Scriptures . . .



4

. . . that we are common clay pots . . . jars of clay.

TR: The question we need to look at today is . . .

A graphic on a dark blue background. The word 'BUILT' is in small, bold, black capital letters at the top. Below it, the word 'UP' is written in large, green, stylized letters. A blue arrow points upwards from the 'U' to the 'P'. Overlaid on the 'UP' is the phrase 'through suffering?!' in a white, cursive font.

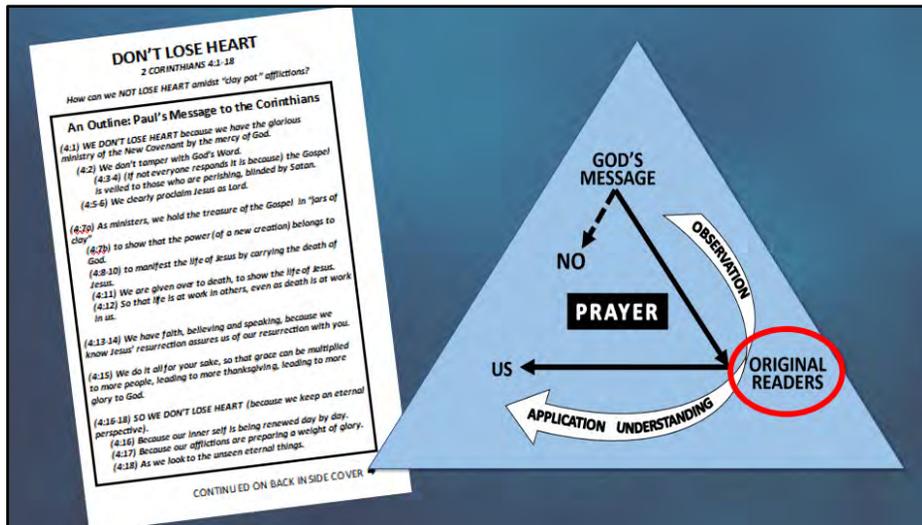
***How can we NOT lose heart
amidst "clay pot" afflictions***

5

READ SLIDE

- We are all ordinary pots. We may try to dress ourselves up to be fancy porcelain but we're really not.**
- Whether we are richer or poorer, in sickness or in health . . . we are just jars of clay.**
- And, as almost any ancient archeological dig will tell you, clay pots were everywhere . . . and they were easily breakable.**

TR: Today, I believe God has a great word for us who are tempted to despair, to lose heart as cleverly disguised ministers of the Gospel.



In order to not read into the text what is not there, we want to start with the critical step of prayerful observation and seeking of understanding of God's message through Paul for the original readers.

-- As we have done for a couple of weeks, let me take us through the text as we review my outline of it.

TR: Let's begin by taking the outline in hand and opening our Bibles or tablets to 2 Corinthians 4.

2 Corinthians 4:1 *page 1067 in handout Bibles*

Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

ESV

7

In the handout Bibles it begins on page 1067.

-- READ SLIDE

-- We always ask, “Wherefore is the ‘therefore?’”

-- And another good question would be, “What ‘ministry’ is the Apostle talking about?”

TR: Why didn’t Paul and his ministry partners lose heart?

An Outline: Paul's Message to the Corinthians

(4:1) WE DON'T LOSE HEART because we have the glorious ministry of the New Covenant by the mercy of God.

8

READ SLIDE

- The glory, as we learned from chapter 3, that is far surpassing and permanent, not like the old Mosaic covenant.
- This new covenant provides for us the work of the Spirit of the Lord, transforming us from one degree of glory to another.

TR: Because they don't lose hope, Paul and his companions . . .

2 Corinthians 4:2

But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

ESV

9

READ SLIDE

TR: When we lose heart we may be . . .

An Outline: Paul's Message to the Corinthians

(4:1) WE DON'T LOSE HEART because we have the glorious ministry of the New Covenant by the mercy of God.

(4:2) We don't tamper with God's Word.

10

. . . tempted to tamper with God's Word.

-- We may want to make it a bit more politically or culturally correct.

TR: If we lose heart, we may listen to the criticism, like with Paul probably received from the false teachers, that his ministry wasn't very effective with his hometown crew.

2 Corinthians 4:3-4

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

ESV

11

READ SLIDE

TR: If we lose heart we may be tempted to tamper with God's Word . . .

An Outline: Paul's Message to the Corinthians

(4:1) WE DON'T LOSE HEART because we have the glorious ministry of the New Covenant by the mercy of God.

(4:2) We don't tamper with God's Word.

(4:3-4) (If not everyone responds it is because) the Gospel is veiled to those who are perishing, blinded by Satan.

12

**. . . in order to gain a better response level from others.
-- But that would mean that we imagine the battle for souls is merely a human struggle . . .
-- . . . rather than a spiritual battle with forces we cannot usually see with our eyes.**

TR: If we lose heart we may start to change the focus of our proclamation.

2 Corinthians 4:5-6

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

ESV

13

READ SLIDE

- Referring back to the Genesis creation account, Paul reminds us that the Gospel of Jesus Christ as Lord . . .
- . . . is the good news of a new creation.

TR: When we lose heart and don't sustain focus on the glorious new covenant, we may slip into . . .

An Outline: Paul's Message to the Corinthians

(4:1) WE DON'T LOSE HEART because we have the glorious ministry of the New Covenant by the mercy of God.

(4:2) We don't tamper with God's Word.

(4:3-4) (If not everyone responds it is because) the Gospel is veiled to those who are perishing, blinded by Satan.

(4:5-6) We clearly proclaim Jesus as Lord.

14

... not proclaiming Jesus as Lord.

-- Syncretism is the welding together of Biblical truth with worldly idols.

-- We want to be more acceptable to the world around us, to get a better response rate to our proclamation ...

-- ... so we make Jesus one of the many ways sincere people can be made right with God.

TR: Instead of such compromise, Paul reminded the Corinthians that ...

2 Corinthians 4:7

**But we have this treasure in jars of clay,
to show that the surpassing power
belongs to God and not to us.**

ESV

15

READ SLIDE

TR: In this verse he makes a . . .

(4:7a) As ministers, we hold the treasure of the Gospel in "jars of clay"

(4:7b) to show that the power (of a new creation) belongs to God.

16

**. . . statement of fact: we . . . READ SLIDE
-- and a statement of purpose . . . why God has made it this way.
In order . . . READ SLIDE**

TR: The false teachers were all about the health and wealth gospel, imagining all the glories of kingdom are now. But Paul makes clear that the life of a jar of clay isn't all easy . . .

2 Corinthians 4:8-10

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, **so that** the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

ESV

17

READ SLIDE

TR: Note especially the SO THAT statement in verse 10

(4:7a) As ministers, we hold the treasure of the Gospel in "jars of clay"

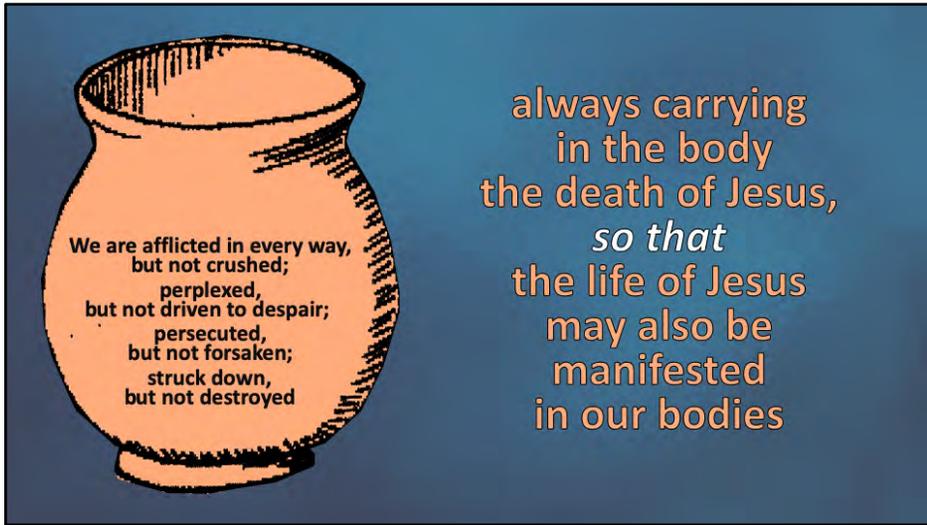
(4:7b) to show that the power (of a new creation) belongs to God.

(4:8-10) to manifest the life of Jesus by carrying the death of Jesus.

18

God allows this treasure in jars of clay IN ORDER TO . . . READ SLIDE

TR: Remember the connection point of the SO THAT . . .



19

READ SLIDE

-- The life of Jesus will NOT be manifested in our clay jar bodies IF we do not carry the death of Jesus in those same jars of clay.

TR: Paul then underlines his point several times.

2 Corinthians 4:11-12

For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So death is at work in us, but life in you.

ESV

20

READ SLIDE

TR: Redeemed jars of clay understand . . .

(4:7a) As ministers, we hold the treasure of the Gospel in "jars of clay"

(4:7b) to show that the power (of a new creation) belongs to God.

(4:8-10) to manifest the life of Jesus by carrying the death of Jesus.

(4:11) We are given over to death, to show the life of Jesus.

(4:12) So that life is at work in others, even as death is at work in us.

21

READ SLIDE

- we carry the death of Jesus
- we are given over to death
- death is at work in us

-- BUT this is all for the purpose of manifesting the life of Jesus . .
. so that life is at work in others.

TR: Paul was OK with the incredible tension because of his faith in the resurrection of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 4:13-14

Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak,¹⁴ knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

ESV

22

READ SLIDE

-- quote from Psalm 116:10 - *I believed, even when I spoke: "I am greatly afflicted";*

TR: What was Paul able to believe and speak about the glorious new covenant that includes God's new creation work?

An Outline: Paul's Message to the Corinthians

(4:13-14) We have faith, believing and speaking, because we know Jesus' resurrection assures us of our resurrection with you.

23

Because he knew that Jesus' resurrection assures us of our resurrection.

-- And that resurrection is of all of God's people.

-- Colossians 3:1-2 says that we HAVE BEEN RAISED, “

TR: Paul doesn't tamper with God's Word, because he doesn't lose heart, because he knows . . .

2 Corinthians 4:15

For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

ESV

24

READ SLIDE

-- Paul embraces the clay pot/treasure tension,
-- being given over to death but with the marvelous hope of resurrection life,

TR: because . .

An Outline: Paul's Message to the Corinthians

(4:13-14) We have faith, believing and speaking, because we know Jesus' resurrection assures us of our resurrection with you.

(4:15) We do it all for your sake, so that grace can be multiplied to more people, leading to more thanksgiving, leading to more glory to God.

25

. . . of the vision of multiplied grace, thanksgiving, and ultimately, multiplied glory to God.

TR: Paul doesn't want the Corinthians to get lost in following his thinking . . . so he repeats the big idea . . .

2 Corinthians 4:16

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

ESV

26

READ SLIDE

TR: His summary paragraph again presents the clay pot/treasure tension, but in different word pictures.

An Outline: Paul's Message to the Corinthians

(4:16-18) SO WE DON'T LOSE HEART (because we keep an eternal perspective).

(4:16) Because our inner self is being renewed day by day.

27

READ SLIDE

TR: The contrasts continue . . .

2 Corinthians 4:17

For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,

ESV

28

READ SLIDE

TR: Why don't jars of clay with glorious treasure inside lose heart?

An Outline: Paul's Message to the Corinthians

(4:16-18) SO WE DON'T LOSE HEART *(because we keep an eternal perspective).*

(4:16) Because our inner self is being renewed day by day.

(4:17) Because our afflictions are preparing a weight of glory.

29

READ SLIDE

TR: To keep our minds on things above we must . . .

2 Corinthians 4:18

. . . as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

ESV

30

READ SLIDE

TR: We won't lose heart, even as our clay pots carry the death of Jesus, as we face the afflictions of this life that come even when we are faithfully following Jesus, because we . . .

An Outline: Paul's Message to the Corinthians

(4:16-18) SO WE DON'T LOSE HEART (because we keep an eternal perspective).

(4:16) Because our inner self is being renewed day by day.

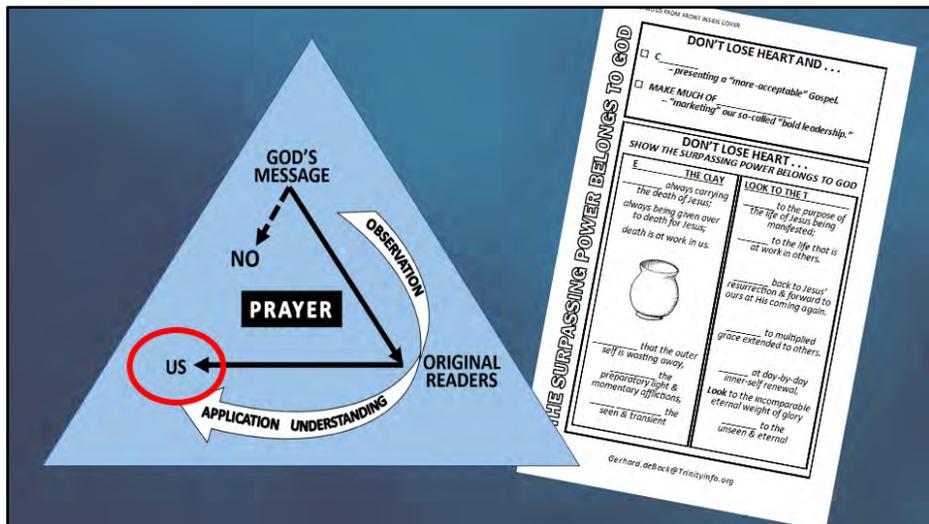
(4:17) Because our afflictions are preparing a weight of glory.

(4:18) As we look to the unseen eternal things.

31

READ SLIDE

TR: I hope you took the time to wrestle through and ponder the author's intention in this passage. I did and came up with the critical next step . . . standing between two worlds . . .



... of asking how do these truths apply to us today.

-- I had a lot more points in this section, until I had coffee with new friends. He said that he often feels overwhelmed by the sermon.

-- So, I don't want to share every possible application, but the key ones that I need to take home with me.

TR: Certainly the big idea is clear . . .

DON'T LOSE HEART AND . . .

33

READ SLIDE

TR: And the early verses warn us that losing heart can be manifest in the temptation to . . .

DON'T LOSE HEART AND . . .

□ *CHEAT*

- presenting a "more-acceptable" Gospel.

So, be transparent!

34

READ SLIDE

- Cf. the temptation to change what God's Word says to be more politically correct . . .
- . . . OR even more often, to be "correct" in keeping a relationship with our loved ones.

TR: We also need to be careful about losing heart and . . .

DON'T LOSE HEART AND . . .

❑ **MAKE MUCH OF OURSELVES**

- *“marketing” our so-called
“bold leadership.”*

So, focus on Servant-leadership!

35

READ SLIDE

TR: These warning certainly hit home as we think about how we share the Gospel with others, but for me, the really powerful application this week comes from the tensions presented in verse 7 and following.

DON'T LOSE HEART . . .
SHOW THE SURPASSING POWER BELONGS TO GOD

36

I don't want to water-down the Gospel AND I don't want to make it about me.

-- READ SLIDE

TR: My original sermon outline had six or seven points . . . but I'm a simple clay point . . . I needed it to be really only two.

DON'T LOSE HEART . . .
SHOW THE SURPASSING POWER BELONGS TO GOD

EMBRACE
THE CLAY

37

**If I want to not lose heart . . . AND show that the surpassing power belongs to God . . .
-- . . . I MUST EMBRACE THE CLAY.**

TR: But that must be held in a tension of faith with the second point . . .

DON'T LOSE HEART . . .
SHOW THE SURPASSING POWER BELONGS TO GOD

EMBRACE
THE CLAY

LOOK TO THE
TREASURE

38

I must . . . LOOK TO THE TREASURE.

TR: How do you and I EMBRACE THE CLAY?

EMBRACE THE CLAY

***Embrace always carrying
the death of Jesus;***

39

READ SLIDE

- Jesus bids us, Come and die.
- If we will not take up our cross and follow Him . . . if we aren't ready to die with Him in the dailies of life . . .
- . . . then we haven't embraced the clay.

TR: We embrace the clay by . . .

EMBRACE THE CLAY

***Embrace always carrying
the death of Jesus;
always being given over
to death for Jesus;***

40

READ SLIDE

- we carry the death of Jesus (willing to suffer in this life as He did . . . because this world is no longer our home).
- we are given over to death (willing to even die for Christ)

TR: WE embrace the clay when we realize . . .

EMBRACE THE CLAY

***Embrace always carrying
the death of Jesus;
always being given over
to death for Jesus;
death is at work in us.***

41

READ SLIDE

- Elsewhere in the Bible we are told we must die to ourselves.
- And that we have been crucified with Christ.

TR: Paul's concluding/summary paragraph helps us further by saying we must . . .

EMBRACE THE CLAY

***Embrace that the outer-self
is wasting away,***

42

READ SLIDE

-- As Paul says to Timothy (1 Tim 4:8): for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

TR: We must not be fatalistic in just “letting ourselves go” physically, but we must realize that the chips and cracks in the clay pot are to encourage us to . . .

EMBRACE THE CLAY

***Embrace that the outer-self
is wasting away,
Embrace the preparatory light
& momentary afflictions,***

43

READ SLIDE

-- I know that “death moments” as clay pots don’t feel LIGHT and at time not MOMENTARY.

TR: But we embrace the clay when we . . .

EMBRACE THE CLAY

***Embrace that the outer-self
is wasting away,***

***Embrace the preparatory light
& momentary afflictions,***

***Hold loosely the
seen & transient***

44

READ SLIDE

TR: Joni Erickson Tada recently wrote of her struggle with envy . . . it made me think of Asaph in Psalm 73 when he looked to how the wicked seem to be blessed. Until he worshipped God, remembering the hope that is beyond this life, he could not embrace the clay of dying.

**I began to pray for a contented heart,
settled thoughts, a mouth that didn't
complain, eyes that refused to envy
others, and ears that stopped
listening to the devilish lie that "one
is better off dead than disabled."**

Joni Erickson Tada

45

Joni's words as she again trusted God as good and as the giver of good gifts were . . .

-- How is God calling me . . . you to embrace the clay, carrying the death of Jesus?

TR: But that's not all we are to do, right? We won't lose heart if we . . .

DON'T LOSE HEART . . .
SHOW THE SURPASSING POWER BELONGS TO GOD

EMBRACE
THE CLAY

LOOK TO THE
TREASURE

46

READ SLIDE

TR: Capturing the key thoughts from the other side of the tension, while we embrace the clay we . . .

LOOK TO THE TREASURE

***Look to the purpose of the life
of Jesus being manifested;***

47

READ SLIDE

- Our dying with Christ is not something morbid, it is purposeful.**
- We die when we serve others and don't draw what we've done to others' attention.**
- We die when we are exhausted but then we see people like sheep without a shepherd, and we again give of ourselves.**
- We die so that the life of Jesus is seen as the surpassing power.**

TR: Paul repeats that idea twice and then adds . . .

LOOK TO THE TREASURE

***Look to the purpose of the life
of Jesus being manifested;***

***Look to the life that is
at work in others.***

48

READ SLIDE

- What will we not do for the sake of our children?
- Will we not die for them that they might live?
- We don't lose heart when we see that our embracing of the clay leads to the working of Christ's life in others.
- The Christian life is one of great sacrifice . . . great dying . . .
- . . . but ultimately great reward.

TR: We look to the treasure when we . . .

LOOK TO THE TREASURE

***Look back to Jesus'
resurrection & forward
to ours at His coming again.***

49

READ SLIDE

- We will lose heart in the agony of death, like Rick's and even word that CJ's cancer is back . . .
- . . . if we don't look to the treasure of the resurrection.

TR: In a devotional that Kathy recently showed me, David Paul Tripp talks about . . .

ETERNITY AMNESIA

50

READ SLIDE

- When we forget that there is more than just what there is now.**
- When we live like this is as good as it gets.**
- . . . we demonstrate a forgetfulness of forever.**

TR: That includes having our minds blocked out from . . .

LOOK TO THE TREASURE

***Look back to Jesus' resurrection & forward to ours at His coming again.
Look to multiplied grace extended to others.***

51

READ SLIDE

- Eternity amnesia is a root cause of not proclaiming the gospel, of not being willing to be servants to others . . .
 - . . . because we forget that the investment of our sacrifices today can yield compounded blessings forever.

 - There is a dying to self when we don't make it about us . . . when we serve the children, the youth, the poor.
 - There is a dying to self that will overwhelm us and make us lose heart . . . if we don't look to the impact of changed lives.
- TR: Paul's closing paragraph then tells us to . . .**

LOOK TO THE TREASURE

*Look at day-by-day
inner-self renewal,*

52

READ SLIDE

- Like the manna of the OT, God will give us our daily bread, including the nourishment of inner-self renewal . . .
- . . . even when our outer self is wasting away.

TR: We must take our eyes off the light and momentary afflictions and . . .

LOOK TO THE TREASURE

*Look at day-by-day
inner-self renewal,
Look to the incomparable
eternal weight of glory*

53

READ SLIDE

- What is to come is not worth comparing.
- CF. the glory of the Mosaic Law versus the glory of the New Covenant
- Here it is a comparison of weight . . . EX dust on one scale and an NFL tackle on the other side
- We must embrace the clay because it helps us die to self . . .
- BUT we must also look to the treasure so that we do not lose heart.

TR: Isn't that where our passage ends up?

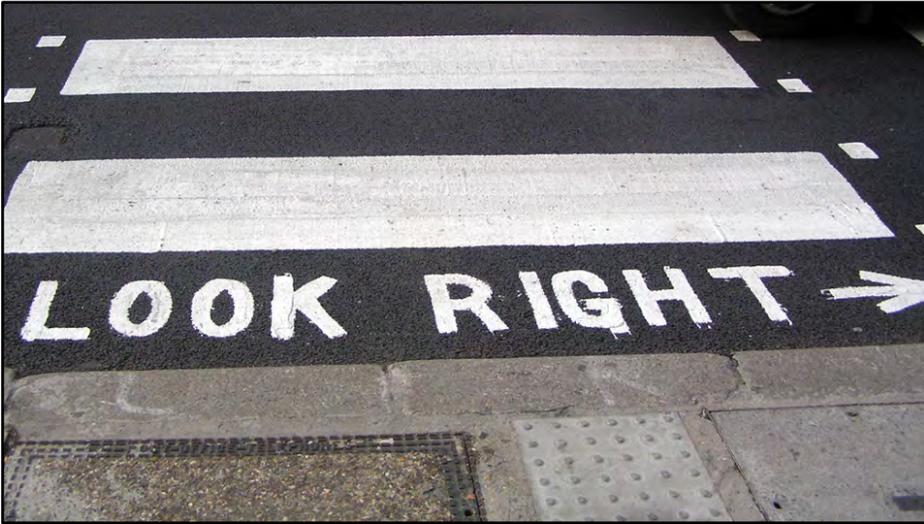
LOOK TO THE TREASURE

*Look at day-by-day
inner-self renewal,
Look to the incomparable
eternal weight of glory
Look to the
unseen & eternal*

54

We must . . . READ SLIDE

TR: Today God doesn't want us to get lost in all the potential applications of His Word, He simply wants to have us . . .



... LOOK RIGHT!

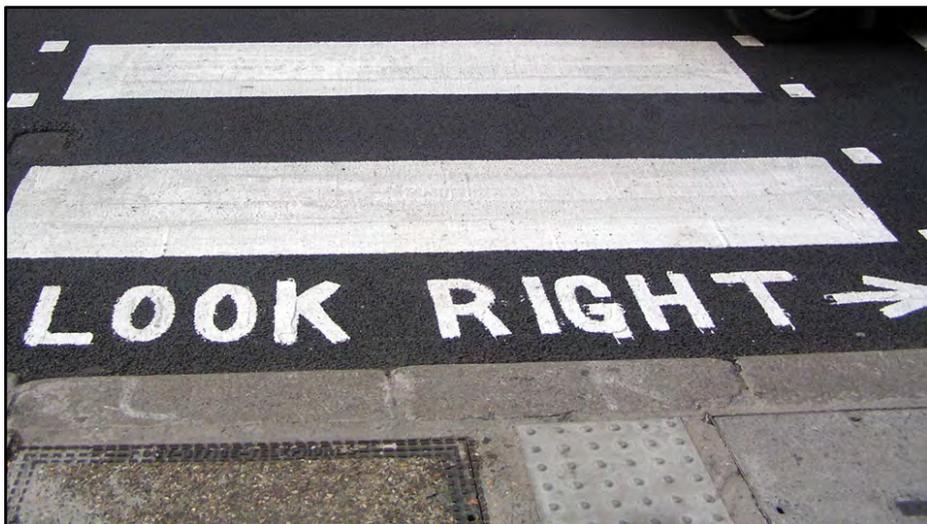
-- If you've ever traveled to countries that follow the British pattern of driving on the left side of the roadway, you may have seen something like this at the crosswalk, or the zebra crossing, as they call it.

-- Too many Americans have been hit by cars because they look the wrong way.

-- We are like that. When we make this world our home, we get used to looking at the clay and imagining that it is the treasure.

-- We need to embrace the clay AND look to the treasure.

TR: SAME SLIDE



56

How is God calling you to EMBRACE THE CLAY?

-- Instead of whining, or giving in to cheating or making it all about you . . .

-- . . . how is the Lord Jesus asking you to trust His goodness and allow the death that is at work in you do a good work?

How is God calling you to LOOK TO THE TREASURE?

-- Instead of being overwhelmed by the light and momentary afflictions . . . to be renewed DAY-BY-DAY as you look forward to receiving a resurrection body that will never die, never be sick, never give in to sin.

The message is simple today . . . EMBRACE THE CLAY . . . LOOK TO

THE TREASURE!

56