

TRIUMPHANT LIVING
"Hassled But Not Defeated"
Taught by Bruce Bickel
November 1, 2013

Good morning, men!

Audience Members: Good morning!

It's good to be with all of you. Thank you for your prayers. It's nice to be back. I was under the influence of a little bit of the flu. I never got sick until I married a pediatrician. {LAUGHTER} She has all the immunities and she brings them home. I can wake up and she'll say, "I can tell you what flu bug you have. This is such-and-such a daycare center." She can almost tell you which flu comes from which daycare center. I get sick because I'm married to a pediatrician.

Let's pray and ask the Lord to go before us.

[MUSIC]

Indeed what a foretaste of glory divine, Lord, we have because of your Word, how you reveal to us the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Father, we humbly come before you this day trusting that you'd be pleased to open our eyes that we might behold you more clearly for Christ's sake. Amen.

Ministry is who you are where you are, whether you're a CPA, a salon owner, a bus driver or a plumber. Whatever you are, you're in ministry. Just realize that, just keep your eyes open and ask yourself, "Lord, what are you doing around me, this day, so that I can join what you're doing? And when I join what you're doing around me, that I know it's going to be blessed because you're the author of it." That's what we're going to talk about today as we move into this next section on Scripture about "hassled but not defeated". So I want to ask the Lord to go before us. Turn to 2 Corinthians 4:7-12.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this very important passage of Scripture, we just trust, Lord, that you'd be pleased to help us understand the significance of who we are and the ministry that we have is who we are where we are; not because of what we do, but it's because of you are making us into. You've already told us in the 2 Corinthians 3, that we're being transformed from one stage of glory to the next, and the Gospel objective really is to restore the glory of man to reflect the glory of God. Father, you now put us in the position in this world to be the reflection of your glory because you're changing us from one stage of glory to the next. May we remember, Father, that the Gospel really is about the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Father, help us understand this passage and how practical it is. Yes, we're going to be hassled in life, but we're not going to be defeated, and we are never, ever the victim of circumstances; we're just the vessel in the circumstances for your glory. May it be so for Jesus' sake. All the Brave Men said...

Audience Member: Amen!

Let's look at 2 Corinthians 4 beginning at verse 7. In previous weeks, we've been looking at this passage, the first six verses, describing an evangelical lifestyle. Paul gave us three characteristics in verses one to six of an evangelical lifestyle, and that would be a courageous lifestyle. We do it fearlessly. It doesn't mean that we're not bold or boisterous or vociferous. What it means is you do it without fear. You talk about the person and work of Christ without fear because you know you are not the objective of the ministry and he is the one who takes care of the results. You can do that with graciousness. You can preach grace and truth. But you do it without fear.

Secondly, it's non-manipulative. You don't need to make things happen by watering down the Scripture to get the response you want. We're non-manipulative. We don't alter the Word of God. We teach it clearly and truthfully.

The third characteristic of an evangelical lifestyle, in addition to being courageous and non-manipulative, is it's truthful. We preach and teach the truth of Christ alone.

Now we come to a Scripture that says let's take that mindset of this is who you are. You're courageous, you're non-manipulative, and you're truthful. Let's apply that into your life. The thing I like about Paul is he's always so logical. He never gives us a principle of truth without giving us some arena in which we need to apply it.

Now we begin to see how we apply our evangelical lifestyle in the first six verses of 2 Corinthians 4:7-12. I'm reading from the New American Standard, 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; ⁸we *are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹For 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. ¹²So death works in us, but life in you." This is the Word of the Lord.

Audience Members: *Thanks be to God.*

Do you ever wonder why God doesn't make life easier? Why is it that when it rains, it's always your basement that floods? How come when the snows come and the freezing weather comes about, it's always your car that the battery goes dead? How come very time you have an nice event planned with your spouse or your family, your kids, someone gets sick? Something always happens that disrupts your situation. Why is it that God doesn't make life easier for us? If we're to be the reflection of his glory, how come he doesn't make it easier? Do you sometimes feel that you're living in a hostile environment? Is life as a Christian like living in a hostile environment? Well if you think that, you're absolutely right? We do live in a hostile environment.

What Paul says is there's a life that God gives us that's based upon his power. We need to have a different understanding of the word "power." Unfortunately in our Christian vernacular, we think that when you are powerful, you're not going to have any hassles, that everything is going to be wonderful, you're going to enjoy the abundant life free of all frustration and hassles.

Nowhere in the Scripture are we promised that. We have this idea of power that says I'm going to become mature enough that I can handle anything without any consternation. Nowhere in the Scripture are you promised that.

You see, what he's saying is the power source is from him and not from us. We think that we have the power, when Paul says this, "to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from us." Who's the source of power? We need to get over the fact that we think it's us. It's not. He's the source of power. Do you think you live in a hostile environment? Of course we do.

The great problem with the space shuttle missions was how to survive in a hostile environment. They had two options. They could go change the environment of hostility and say, "We're going to change all of space; we're going to correct the environment, so we're going to have people can survive in this non-hostile environment." Could NASA go change the space environment? No, they can't do that. Their other option was this, "We're going to have to train the astronauts to survive in a hostile environment because we can't change the environment."

Well brothers, you and I can't change the environment of hostility in which you and I live called the system of this world. You can't change that. What Paul does tell us in this passage is how he equips us to survive in that hostile environment. That means we need to understand the very definition of power. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from us." (2 Corinthians 4:7) You see, there's a sovereign design behind all these hassles.

Paul is describing for us normal Christian living. Let me give you the best definition of normal Christian living. If somebody ever says to you, "What's it like to be a Christian? Tell me, what is the secret of the Christian life," read these verses, "⁸*we are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body (our mortal flesh)." That, dear brothers, is normal Christian living. That's what we're called to do. We're called to be courageous, non-manipulative and truthful in an environment that's going to hassle us.

Let's take a look at the process of all of this. What's the plan? The plan behind all of this wonderful sovereignty of God is this—there's a sovereign design behind all the hassles of your life and my life. Let me ask you a question. What would you do if you were the owner of the world's largest diamond? I understand it's about the size of a golf ball or something, a tennis ball. What would you do with it? I know what you would do with it. You'd take it to work and put it on your desk so people could look at it. Or you would put it into a pendant and give it to your grandchild to take it to show-and-tell at school. Is that would you would do with it? Or you would put it into a ring and wear it. Of course not. You would do probably the same thing that the current owner of the world's largest diamond is doing. He has it locked up in a bank vault because his mindset is this, "This is so precious, it's so significant, so glorious and so glamorous, that I don't want it to come in contact with humans, because if it does, it might destroy it's luster and decrease it's value or diminish it's glory," and so he says, "I'm going to hide it. Nobody's going to see it because its mine."

Notice verse 7, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels." So you notice what God has done. He's taken the most precious commodity in all of the universe—that's the life of his Son; it's the treasure. It's what we saw in verses 12-17 of 2 Corinthians 3, where he described for us the Gospel. The Gospel is this—it's the knowledge of God in the face of Christ. It's the knowledge of God in the face of Christ. That's the treasure that God implants in your life when you're regenerated. He gives you the knowledge of himself. You see his glory in the face of Christ. When you read the Scripture, you begin to see the glory of the person and work of Christ and you begin to see the glory of the Father because that's the treasure that God has implanted in your life through the ministry of the Holy Spirit when you were regenerated. You see, that's the treasure. He's taken the most precious commodity of the universe, but notice where he puts it. He puts it in the weakest thing he ever created. Who's that?

Audience Members: Us.

Us. We are the weakest thing that God ever made. We have this treasure, the life of God. One of the best definitions of Christianity is it's a share life experience. God shares his life with us through the Gospel. He shares his life with us. But notice what he does. Unlike the owner of the world's largest diamond who has it in a lock box at a bank, because he doesn't want it to come in contact with people, because he's fearful that it will diminish it's glory, devalue it, make it's value decrease and hinder it's glory. God does the opposite. He thinks, "What's the weakest thing I've ever done? I'm going to put the most precious commodity in all of life in that weak thing so that when they survive and somebody says, 'How in the world can you put up with that stuff? How can you go through life in this hostile environment? How do you survive?' and the only answer is 'I've got an MBA from Pitt.'" No, that's not the power that he's talking about. He's talking about the power that comes God and not from us. So you see the plan is this—God takes the most precious commodity in all of the universe and he places it in the most fragile container he ever had. That's why the Scripture says earthen pots, earthen vessels, clay pots or jars of clay. Jars of clay are what? Fragile.

Friends, you and I are fragile. You and I live in this hostile environment and it takes its toll on us. I'm not suggesting this is easy. I'm not suggesting you're not going to be bruised and battered. He's going to describe for us four different scenarios in which you live in a hostile environment in which you and I are called to be courageous, non-manipulative and truthful, to live an evangelical lifestyle, because it puts his glory on display.

Remember the treasure is this—the treasure is the Gospel message, the life of Christ in you. The end result of the Gospel is to restore the glory of man to reflect the glory of God. When it says "so that the all-surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves," that's because he wants to put his glory on display. He's going to do this through the normal hassles of life that we go through just like everybody else.

There are a couple of applications we can make from this before we get into the individual verses. Let's make a couple of applications about this plan. This wonderful plan is to take most precious commodity in life, in the world, in the universe, the life of Christ, through the Gospel, and put it into your life, into a jar of clay that's very fragile.

The first application I would say is this—the value of the pot, or the jar of clay, is not the pot itself, but the treasure in the pot. Your worth and my value has value because of what's inside of it. It's not because of your earthen vessel, your clay pot, or your jar of clay. It's what do you contain? You see, the secret of your value, if you're in Christ today, is that you contain and share the life of God. There alone is your worth and your value. The Christian life is a shared life experience. Therein lies your worth, therein lies your value, therein lies your my significance. It's not what you do, it's whether or not you have the Spirit of God in you, that gives you value.

You see, our value is not because of what we obtain, but our value is because of what we contain. You contain the life of God. The treasure. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all-surpassing power to survive in this hostile environment comes from me and not from you." That's how God's put his life on display. You see, the plan is this—God just wants to give his life away. He does that by putting it into the weakest vessel he can find so that you and I go through the normal hassles of a hostile environment like everybody else, but we have a different response because we share the life of God.

Secondly, I would say this—another application for us would be this. Self-esteem has nothing to do with what you think of yourself, but what you think of God. Self-esteem has nothing to do with what you think of yourself, but what you think of God. Do you really recognize the treasure that's in you, resident within your fragile body? It's the very life of God, the treasure. Quite honestly, how can you suffer from a self-image problem when you realize I'm containing the life God? He's sharing his life with me. What more do you want? You see, you and I ought to be more concerned about being a clean vessel and not to diminish the treasure that's within us. Instead of focusing on the vessel, we need to focus on the treasure.

***Don:** Just a couple of things. I often...the other day I was reading Revelation, that we are priests, kings and priests, to our God and Father. I mean, if God regards us as that because of our union with Christ, then how can we have a self-esteem problem?*

Amen!

***Don:** And then, also, would you say that, currently, the way we're living in America now, we're leading a normal Christian life? I mean as far as persecution going on in the Middle East, an American Pastor in Iran, is in prison going through horrible persecution. In Egypt, churches are being destroyed. All across the Middle East and that kind of thing. Do you think it is possible for us in America where we still have some comfort to live the normal Christian life?*

That's a great, great question. I think there are two answers to that coin, and we need to look at both sides. One, my perspective is this. I'm no prophet, so this is just my conviction based upon the study of Scripture, which you can take for what it's worth. I don't see the Holy Spirit working in the United State of America. I think he's vacated us. I see it in certain segments of the

remnant of the true body of Christ, in certain little packages, but I don't see it nationally. I think he's basically said, "All right. I'll give you what you want. You don't want prayer in your schools? Your schools go to pot. You're on your own."

You see, what is the role of the Holy Spirit? It's a restraining element. It restrains things, through our convictions. What is the role of the Holy Spirit? To convict us of our sin. When you remove the Holy Spirit from our culture, you have what? No conviction of sin. You have no convincing of sin. You have no conversion from sin. You have no comforting in the new way of life. And you have no counseling in your decision making. Now in my judgment, only my observation, I don't see the Holy Spirit working very much in the U.S. That's one side of the coin.

The other side of the coin is what is it we need in America for us to live the normal Christian life, to be able to put God's life on display? Persecution. Several years ago, I had the privilege of teaching at the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary in China. I taught Christ in the Old Testament. I had some wonderful fellowship with about 30 pastors from [UNCLEAR] China, many of whom were having secret house churches. We talked about how we pray for each other. We committed to praying for each other. You know what the one thing they said they were going to pray for churches in the United States? That we would be persecuted. They said, "What has really caused growth in China has been that the church, the body of Christ, has been exposed to a hostile environment."

Now understand what I'm going to say here, and I say this cautiously. One of them said to me, "The best thing that ever happened to us was Communism, because it exposed the true from the false." It exposed the true...now I'm not saying that we need to be communistic. Understand that? Those of you who are listening to the recording, understand what I'm not saying. All I'm saying is there's a correlation...

Audience Member: *We're already there.*

We're in socialism. Right. There's a correlation between persecution through a hostile environment and the revelation of the glory of God.

Now the other side of the coin is this. I think we need to take a look at some of the things that we are persecuted by that may not be as severe as other parts of the world because the whole country is not being persecuted, but we may be being persecuted individually. So I think there's another thing we have to take a look at.

I can't tell you what persecution is. I'm going to describe for you the four things that God in the Word says are the four elements of a hostile environment, and then you can apply that... is that being applied to that to me? The real question is not what's going on around me, but what's going on inside of me? How am I responding to what I am describing as a totally hostile environment?

So that's a big question. Let me just ask you this. In my study of revival, it seems to me, and Bishop Rodgers, you can help me understand this, prior to revival, there always was a period of persecution. You had great preaching and prayer and persecution—the three P's—that brought about revival.

Now I'm not talking about revivalism, which is the activity of revival. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about a sovereign visitation of God in all of his glory and all of his power. That's what I'm describing as revival. I'm not saying having a meeting on a Saturday night between 8 and 10 and saying, "We're going to have a revival." What if the Holy Spirit doesn't show up? What do you have? Well, you have a nice meeting.

Revival is this—a sovereign visitation of God in all of his power and glory. That's happened a few times in the history of the church. Three things always preceded that revival was persecution, preaching and prayer. You can trace it about 20-25 years before the revival occurred those three things began to happen.

Let me ask you a question, and be honest. Would you like to see a revival in America? Are you willing to pray for persecution? There's a correlation, brothers, between a hostile environment and how you and I respond in that hostile environment that puts the glory of God on display. We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from us.

If you really want revival in America, then we need to have Biblical preaching, we need to have Biblical prayer and we need to understand that we've got to pray for persecution. There's such a contrast between what's going on in society and how we are responding that the issue is this—to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from us.

When somebody says to you, "How in the world can you handle that? It's beyond my comprehension that you can manage that issue," the only answer is, "God alone is adequate." You see, that's 2 Corinthians. God alone is adequate. We saw that already. Where does our adequacy come from? Our competency? It's comes from the shared life of God, because we have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from us.

Where does our value come? Look at it this way. If the sacrifice of Christ was enough to satisfy the Father, how come Jesus doesn't satisfy us?

Audience Member: Say it again, Bruce, please.

If Jesus' work on the cross was satisfying to the Father—the Father accepted that and said, "What you have done for me, I am satisfied with," and yet we say, "I want Jesus plus." How come we're not satisfied with what the Father was satisfied with? It's because we've got such a warped image of who God is. We've got such a warped image of who Christ is. We think that

he's a great Steeler in the sky. You see, if God is satisfied with the person and work of Christ, how come we're not? We think there's Jesus plus other stuff.

You see, brothers, this is serious stuff and we need to realize that you and I are in a situation where God just wants to put his life on display. He's going to do that through the normal hassles of life. Instead of focusing upon our vessel, which we often do, we need to focus on the treasure. That's the life of God that's in you. Think about that. There's your worth. There's your value. There's your significance. Just go express it. Give it away like Dean did. Dean didn't do anything that the world's ever going to notice, but there was one young woman who saw that, and her life is changed, because what he did was significant. In the normal situation of life, ministry was who he was where he was. Very, very significant.

Ask yourself the question—when you're really thirsty and someone gives you a drink of water, what do you say, "Oh thanks for the glass." What do you say? Thanks for the water. Thanks for the water. You're thanking them for what's on the inside. So often times we focus on what's on the outside when we need to say, "Lord, thank you for the water that never runs dry that's on the inside."

In my judgment, a Christian who has a self-esteem problem is thinking more about their own vessel than they are the treasure. We need to think about the treasure. That's what we need to help our kids understand. It's not about the externals; it's about do you have the treasure of the life of God in you? Therein is your worth and your value. They're going to be persecuted for that. They're going to be harassed for that. But that's what this class is going to teach them. It's going to teach you how to manage that. The whole purpose of this plan is to put God's life on display.

The plan is to take the most precious commodity in all the universe, put it in the weakest vessel he ever created, to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God. What's the purpose? Notice 2 Corinthians 4:7b, and that is to show that the all-surpassing power is from God and not from ourselves. In other words, God's life within us is more observable in a hostile environment than it would be in a peaceful environment because we're jars of clay. Jars of clay are breakable aren't they? They're fragile. That's why we are referred to as earthen vessels or jars of clay or clay pots. God puts his life in a fragile human container and then permits us to be placed in pressure situations just like everybody else so that he can release his life through us by breaking us open through the hassles of life. In other words, you're going to stand in line just like everybody else.

Trying to merge yesterday coming into the Ft. Pitt Tunnel, a guy slams his breaks in front of me. I slammed my breaks on and guess what happened to me in my rear? Somebody hit me and just wiped out my bike rack. I've got this wonderful bike rack, carries four bikes. I can open it up and it spreads out and I can pull down the lever and it's just really terrific. I look in my rearview mirror and here's my bike rack. My first response is, "Why me? What did that jerk do?" Then I

realized it's not the issue. The issue isn't the bike rack. The issue is what's my response for what just occurred.

So I went through the Ft. Pitt Tunnel and my bike rack is banging back and forth and I'm hoping it doesn't fall off. I pull off to the side of the road and a young man pulls off beside me. He comes up to me. The first thing I say...[UNCLEAR] he's like this. The first thing I said is, "Are you okay? Are you okay?" He said, "But I just ran into you." I said, "That's not the issue. Are you okay? I can replace the bike rack. But are you alright? Were you injured? Is your car okay?" He said, "You know, that's really a strange response because I thought you were going to give me the finger and cuss me out, because it was my fault." I said, "The issue isn't fault; the issue is response." It's not fault. The fault is we're driving cars. The issue is what's the response.

Now all he said to me afterwards was, "This has been an unusual accident." I said, "Well, I'm just glad you're okay." I didn't make a big deal of it. I didn't whip out the Scripture and sit down and preach to him. {LAUGHTER} I just want him to realize I needed to check me, not him. What was my response? "That's a hassle. That's going to cause me a lot of grief. Do I get this thing welded? Do I have to throw it away and go get another one?" Those are things that I have to manage. The real issue is, you see, those little things are hassles. They're not significant persecutions; they're just the hassles of life. They occur, but the question is how do you respond?

Dick: Bruce, isn't that what you taught us? Think/act /feel?

I would hope so.

Dick: That's [UNCLEAR]...

Here's our little card. Operate on your feelings. Let me tell you my feelings. My first feeling wasn't, "Oh joy! Praise you Jesus! Thank you!" That was not my feeling. My first feeling was, "Oh..."

Audience Member: Nuts! {LAUGHTER}

You can fill in the words. {LAUGHTER} But then I had to do this—remind...you know, it just irritates me sometimes, [UNCLEAR] quickly then I get over it. The Lord always knows what I'm going to teach the next day. {LAUGHTER} He gives me a lesson, "Okay hot shot. I know what you're going to say tomorrow because I've been the means for your study. Do you really apply it in your life? Or are you just going to stand up there in your nice suit and tie and tell these men what they ought to do rather than saying this is who you need to be?" Sometimes I find that very irritating. The Lord always says, "All right, you've got to apply this in your life before you teach it from your life." Hassles of life to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from us. So Dick is right. We've got to think right.

Carl: *Just one thing. I agree with what you said when you said that you didn't open your Bible and you didn't preach to him, but you really did.*

Amen!

Carl: *Because in your actions, you showed the Christ in you. What we have to understand is we can't minister victory until we've obtained it.*

Amen.

Carl: *We can't minister victory, in Christ, until we've obtained it. We can't minister victory, of Christ, until we've obtained victory in Christ, in us. Too many of us don't really recognize that.*

Well said.

Carl: *I did say one time before, that we're the only Bible some people are ever going to see. You don't ever know what that little man might go to now, but you've planted a seed.*

We need to realize that every time you have a response that is based upon this—think/act/feel rather than feel/act think—remember the one side produces habits; the other side produces holiness. When you begin to think correctly, you act correctly, respond correctly. Whenever you do that, brothers, you're successful, because you might plant the seed, somebody might come along and water the seed, and somebody else might harvest the seed. But don't ever think that you're not successful because you're not there to do the harvesting.

Dean was tremendously successful in giving away Christ's life by what he did for my assistant. He planted a wonderful seed. I'm just nurturing that seed as much as I can, because her whole demeanor has changed because of what one of my friends did for her, just in every day ministry of who you are where you are. We don't know the full results of all that, but we're just now taking it one day at a time.

Audience Member: *Bruce, I think evangelistically, do you think it's possible God might have had that man run into you so you can invite him to Friday mornings?*

It's possible. But I didn't. Does that mean I'm a failure?

Audience Member: *Absolutely not.*

Absolutely not. That's a good thought. That never entered my mind. Now maybe it should have. Maybe I'll see him again. But at that moment, I did not even think of that. But that's very possible. All those things are sovereignly ordained incidents in our lives, hassles of life, that permit us to give God's life away.

Ted: *We get on dangerous ground when we begin to say that God did this for this reason, we begin to attribute to God the reasons. We don't know.*

We have to be careful about that. The real issue is not the reason; the real issue is the response. That's the issue. It's not the reason, it's the response...and that it this—God just wants to give his life away.

The plan is to share his life with us. The purpose is to put his life on display. That's how God puts his life on display. He just gives it away. You and I are subjected to the same hassles that everybody else goes through in life. When we survive that situation, there's the possibility that somebody might say, "How in the world did you survive that?" Our response is, "God alone is adequate." That's 2 Corinthians 3:5. Look at that verse...let's back up to chapter 2, verse 16...go to 2 Corinthians 2:15 because I need to help you understand the context of the question...he gives the answer in 3:5, but the question is in chapter 2. Look at 2 Corinthians 2:15, "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." In other words, there are life and death consequences to your having the treasure of the life of God in you. Do you realize that? There are life and death consequences to your being in Christ. "

2 Corinthians 2:16a, "To the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life." Brothers, when you share the life of God, you are involved in life and death situations. And then here's one of the most important questions in all of the New Testament. Paul says this, "And who is adequate for these things?" (2 Corinthians 2:16b) What's that? To live a life that has life and death consequences to people. Who is adequate for that? Are you? Am I? Of course not. His answer is in 2 Corinthians 3:5, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God."

The word "adequacy" there might be translated competency. The question is this. Who alone is able to live a life of death consequences? The answer is God alone. Notice the phrase, "We don't consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God." Where do you become confident? Where do you become adequate? It's because of the treasure in your life. We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the all-surpassing power comes from God and not from us. What is the plan? The plan is that God puts his life on display. That's the purpose. The plan is that God share his life with us.

Let me give you a quick illustration of what I mean to show you that God is the source of adequacy. Turn in your Bibles to Judges 7 and we'll close with this illustration and pick this up next week. Bring your outline again for next week and we'll continue working our way through this passage.

Let me show you a powerful example of God putting his life on display through human weakness. Judges 7—this is the story of Gideon versus the Midianite army. Before the battle started, we're told in Scripture that Gideon and his men numbered 32,000. He faced a Midian Army that we know from history that contained 250,000. So there are the odds. Thirty-two thousand versus 250,000.

Take a look starting at verse 2. What does God say to him in Judges 7:2, "Gideon, you've got too many men." Now I can imagine Gideon's response. {LAUGHTER} "Right. We've got 32,000 versus 250,000 and Lord, you're telling me I've got too many men?" In other words, he said to Gideon, "The odds aren't great enough yet." So what does he tell Gideon to do? He tells him to begin to weed out some of the men and he ends up with 300. So he's going into battle. Three hundred versus 250,000. Now notice the reason. Read the rest of the story of Gideon in Judges 7 and you'll see this—because God says, "Because if you win the day, you're going to think you're the reason. You're going to win the day, Gideon, but I'm going to be the reason. It's not going to be you." That's weakness.

He takes the weakness of 300 men and he defeats an army of 250,000. The reason he did that, to make the odds more severe, to make it a more hostile environment, so that the end result would be that Gideon could not say, "It was because of my military strategic plan." The only answer he could say is this, "God alone is adequate." You see, brothers, there's no difference in your life and my life. You and I are modern-day Gideons. The reason God shares his life with the weakest vessel he can is because he wants to put his life on display so that at the end of the day, when you and I survive, all we can say is this, "God alone is adequate." God alone is adequate.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your Word. We thank you for your glory. We just thank you for who you are. Father, this is so practical and so powerful and so significant for us to understand, that you've called us to be the means by which you are going to reveal to a lost world that you are holy. That's what we read in Isaiah 36, "When I demonstrate the fact that I am holy to a lost world through you." Father, we are the means, but you are the reason. Give us the right response to help us understand that our worth, our value, our significance, and all that we are is satisfying to you because the one who you gave us was satisfying to you, even the Lord Jesus Christ himself. To that end, Father, may we focus upon the treasure in our earthen vessel and not so much about our vessel, and may it be so for Jesus' sake. And all the Brave Men said...Amen!!!