**What Troubles You?**

Ask congregation: What troubles you?

What’s your response to those troubles?

* Discouraged?
* Afraid?
* Defeated?
* Oppressed?
* Doubt your faith?
* Doubt God’s love?
* Feel like giving up?

What does your response say about Christian faith?

* Attractive?
* Encouraging?
* Interesting?

Let’s pause for an important grammar lesson: Conjunctions

* A conjunction: a word that joins separate words or groups of words together. It connects the words, phrases, or clause.
* Often a conjunction indicates contrast.

The Greek language has two common conjunctions to indicate contrast,  and . If you’ve been in one of my Bible studies you’ve probably heard me say that  indicates a minor contrast and  indicates a major contrast. I refer to  as a little “but” and  as a big “but”.

Examples:

* Last Friday was a beautiful day but it was cold. That would use .
* She’s a pretty girl, but a little ditsy. 

Both of those are minor contrasts and in Greek would use .

* We can enjoy a tax cut, BUT, it will mean we enjoy less services. 
* I can but a new car, BUT I will have a monthly car payment. 

Both of these statements indicate a major contrast.

Remember this as we read from 2 Corinthians this morning. Chapter 3 talked about the ministry of righteousness. The ministry of righteousness is the Gospel. It’s the message of salvation through the grace of God for all who believe.

This is what we’re about as Christians. Our salvation doesn’t come from what good people we are. Rather it comes as a gift from God to whoever believes Him. We proclaim this message in our words, in our attitudes, and in our behavior.

If you’re a Christian, one who believes Jesus, this is your ministry, to proclaim the message of righteousness through faith. In this we reflect the glory of Jesus. The Apostle Paul wrote, *We who…all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness…*2 Corinthians 3:18

So here’s a question for us to answer: does my response to my troubles reflect the glory of Christ?

Read the list of troubles:

What our responses:

* Discouraged?
* Afraid?
* Defeated?
* Oppressed?
* Doubt your faith?
* Doubt God’s love?
* Feel like giving up?

Do these responses reflect the glory of Jesus?

In the next chapter of this letter Paul shows us what it means in his life that he reflects the glory of Christ. He introduces his personal way of thinking with “*Therefore*…” *This is how having the ministry of righteousness affects me as I reflect the Lord’s glory.*

*Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.* 2 Corinthians 4:1 He uses the plural ”we” but he’s talking about himself. It’s a common technique to avoid sounding like he’s bragging.

First, he says he doesn’t lose heart. He’s not ready to quit. And we know that his troubles were serious:

*I have…been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.* 2 Corinthians 11:23-28 **Is that all?**

This time he did use the singular to drive his point home. This great man of God had troubles, personal troubles that far outweigh the stuff in the list we created, Our troubles can’t even compare to that.

Back to chapter 4 and the use of the plural, *We do not preach ourselves, BUT*

*Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.* 2 Corinthians 4:5 *What people see in me in the face of my troubles is not my power but the power of Christ in my life*.

He recognized that it’s pretty risky for God to leave the ministry of righteousness in our feeble hands. He describes our human frailty as being like clay pots, easily broken. *We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.* 2 Corinthians 4:7

Jars of clay are fragile. They’re easy to break, rather simple utensils, and usually unattractive. Of course now-a-days we pay extra to own and use clay pots, but in that day they were utilitarian vessels.

God trusted His ministry of righteousness in jars of clay because He knows that when people see us face our troubles with dignity and grace, they will see not our strength but the power of God.

**But** there’s a catch. It’ll only show God’s power when we handle our troubles with dignity and grace. That’s why we need to ask ourselves if our response to troubles reflects the glory of Christ.

*We are hard pressed on every side…*2 Corinthians 4:8 Beaten; flogged, stoned; shipwrecked, left in prison. I guess that qualifies as hard pressed.

* *We are perplexed…*2 Corinthians 4:8 Sometimes he was uncertain; he had doubts.
* *We are persecuted*…2 Corinthians 4:9 That’s a fair description of his experiences.
* *We are struck down*…2 Corinthians 4:9 He was knocked over and stepped on.
* Maybe we could say something similar. Re-use the list we created.

If you know your Bible well you probably know where I’m going with this. When Paul wrote these things, he added the big BUT!

* *We are hard pressed on every side, BUT not crushed…*2 Corinthians 4:8 Our troubles don’t stop us from being ministers of righteousness.
* *We are perplexed, BUT not in despair …*2 Corinthians 4:8 We have our doubts and uncertainty but we do not despair. We’re not ready to quit.
* *We are persecuted, BUT not abandoned* …2 Corinthians 4:9 We know that God hasn’t left us. We also know that we are in true fellowship with Christ when we share in His sufferings.
* *We are struck down, BUT not destroyed* …2 Corinthians 4:9 We’re not dying. Our troubles are real and painful, but we’re still alive.

Our troubles do not prevent us from reflecting the glory of Christ. In fact they enhance the reflection. We, mere jars of clay, do not crumble under the stress of troubles. We show the power of God as we face them.

Actually, in facing our troubles we reveal Jesus. *We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.* 2 Corinthians 4:10

Even if, Wow! That would make a great song. Even if we’re persecuted, physically harassed, even killed, His life is revealed in us. *For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.* 2 Corinthians 4:11

Yes we face all kinds of trouble. Terrible trouble. Sometimes lethal trouble. But we have the ministry of righteousness, this treasure. We have this treasure in jars of clay. *So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.* 2 Corinthians 4:12

Paul quotes Psalm 116:10 *It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.”*

Then he explains how the ministry of righteousness moves forward. *With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.* 2 Corinthians 4:13f

We believe. We speak. We proclaim the truth. We preach Jesus. Our troubles cannot stop us. Why not? Because we know that no matter what happens here on earth, He will raise us from the dead to eternal life. However serious our troubles, Jesus will bring us through.

The ministry of righteousness reaches the people God puts in our lives. *All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.* 2 Corinthians 4:15

This is why how we respond to our troubles matters. People are watching. What do they see in us? Victory? Or Defeat?

Paul reiterates his point from verse 1, *Therefore we do not lose heart.* Even though it looks like we’re losing the battle; our troubles are too much to bear, like we’re dying, in reality we are being renewed. *Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.* 2 Corinthians 4:16

To the church in Colosse he wrote, We*…have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.* Colossians 3:10

This renewal isn’t dependent on my abilities. This is a passive verb, God is doing the renewing. He’s at work in me, even in my troubles, transforming me to His image.

It’s all good. God is involved and He’s working in everything to make this transformation happen. *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.* 2 Corinthians 4:17

That’s a great conclusion. Our troubles are light and momentary.

* Light, , means limited; even easy.

Compared to eternal glory, our momentary troubles, what we experience how insignificant.

The troubles we face are not wasted. God is preparing us. Our troubles lead us to depend on God in whom is eternal life.

We have troubles, BUT we have eternal life. Our troubles are but a moment. Eternal life is, well, forever.

Do you know what pixels are? Pixels are tiny dots of light that make us the images we see on our phones or TVs. If you have an HD TV there are perhaps 300 or more such pixels in an inch of one line. How many lines are there in a single image? Countless.

Imagine this sanctuary was an HD image. How many lines with 300 pixels per inch would that be? Now expand the image to everything we can see. How many pixels?

Your life in one pixel. Out of your whole life, which is one pixel, compared to all the pixels of eternity, is your trouble a dot or the whole image?

* Use the list we created

Paul figured this out. I have troubles. I am hard pressed, BUT I am not crushed. I am perplexed, BUT I am not in despair. I am persecuted, BUT I am not alone. I am struck down, BUT I am not destroyed.

Here’s how concluded this teaching, *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.* 2 Corinthians 4:18

This past week I visited with Tommy and John Thomas Oaks at Fairland Christian Church in Niles, MI.

* Magnificent Seven sermons

**THINK**

**ETERNITY**

In order to reflect the glory of Christ in the midst of our troubles, THINK ETERNITY. Remember, your troubles are a dot, what is to come is eternal.