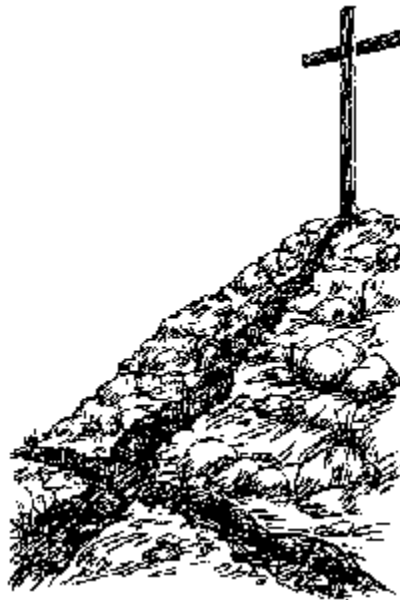


# In Earthen Vessels

2 Corinthians 4:3-7

Rock Hill Baptist Church  
605 Rock Hill Road  
Lexington, Tennessee  
38351

Brother David Buffaloe, Pastor  
[www.bibleteacher.org](http://www.bibleteacher.org)



**(2 Corinthians 4:3-7 KJV) "But if our gospel be hid<sup>1</sup>, it is hid to them that are lost<sup>2</sup>: {4} In whom the god<sup>5</sup> of this world hath blinded<sup>3</sup> the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image<sup>4</sup> of God, should shine unto them. {5} For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. {6} For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. {7} But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us."**

<sup>1</sup> kalupto {pronounced *kal-oop'-to*}, Perfect Passive Participle, has been hindered, has been placed behind a veil.[Matthew 8:24, Present Passive Infinitive, the boat was covered/ hidden by the waves; Luke 8:16, to cover or prevent others from seeing light from a candle; Luke 23:30, hiding from God during the Great Judgment

<sup>2</sup> apollumi {pronounced *ap-ol'-loo-mee*}, Present Passive Participle, the lost, destroyed, shipwrecked. EXACT same use in verse 9, following.

<sup>3</sup> tuphloo {pronounced *toof-lo'-o*}, Aorist Active Indicative, to darken the mind

<sup>4</sup> eikon {pronounced *i-kone'*}, image, icon

<sup>5</sup> Refers to Satan:

(John 12:31 KJV) "Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out."

(John 14:30 KJV) "Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me."

We “have this treasure in earthen vessels”: as ministers of the Gospel of salvation through Christ, the message we have is glorious - powerful - life changing. That which the minister of the Gospel is entrusted with is, as Robertson (Word Pictures) puts it:

**It is the power of giving the illumination of the knowledge of the glory of God . “ The power is limitless, but it is stored in very unlikely receptacles” (Plummer).**

That's what we as pastors, preachers, and evangelists are. God has given us a great and glorious mission, to tell others about the saving power of Jesus Christ. Yet we are mere mortal men, “**earthen vessels**”, nothing special in ourselves. God put the immortal and lifesaving message of the Gospel in finite, fragile, breakable vessels. We bleed, mourn, hurt, suffer, rejoice, are tempted, and live as any man does, though both flock and the world around us may consider us to be “super-Christians” or naturally better than they themselves are. If we fail to live up to the standards of those around us, we are often condemned to a greater degree than other mortals are.

We even hold one another to a higher standard.

Often we fail to embrace our wounded for, if they were doing as God decreed, wouldn't they have prospered? We forget that God's prophets are often killed by those whom they attempt to serve.

God has given each and every one of us a wondrous gift, though we must ever be careful, lest we forget that we are mere “earthen vessels”. The day I was ordained into the Gospel ministry one old soldier, a preacher of many years, whispered gently in my ear: “I'll be praying for you, David – you're going to need it!” He was right, because the Gospel Ministry, though it is very rewarding, is also extremely volatile.

My hope, our hope, as preachers of the Gospel does not lie in this “earthen vessel” we see. Our hope must be greater than we are. Why?

### **1. Because We Battle A Superior Power**

**(2 Corinthians 4:3-4 KJV) "But if our gospel be hid<sup>1</sup>, it is hid to them that are lost<sup>2</sup>: {4} In whom the god<sup>5</sup> of this world hath blinded<sup>3</sup> the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image<sup>4</sup> of God, should shine unto them."**

We battle a superior power, the arch-angel Satan.

Our enemy Lucifer is *particularly* difficult to battle because many people no longer consider him to be real. In fact, many people consider Lucifer, that old Devil, to be no more than an emotion, or a principle of evil. Yet Satan is not a figment of the imagination, some boogie man made up to frighten little children. Satan is a literal Being, a fallen angel, with unbelievable power and beauty. Isaiah wrote of this creature:

**Isaiah 14:12-15 (KJV) "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! {13} For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: {14} I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. {15} Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit."**

recording his arrogant attempt to overthrow our Almighty God. Satan tempted King David to *number* his armies (1 **Chronicles 21:1-14**), a mistake of pride that led to the death of 70,000 Israelis. Satan tempted the Son of God and the Son of David, Jesus Christ, and unlike David our Lord rejected his evil offers by quoting from the

Holy Scripture (**Matthew 4:1-12**). Jesus Christ our Lord knows that Satan is a real being, with a real kingdom, and a real agenda (**Matthew 12:26**) . In the parable of the sower Jesus recognized that the primary mission that Satan, that old devil, has taken upon himself is to stand in opposition to the Word of God. Jesus said:

**Mark 4:15 (KJV) "And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts."**

Jesus in His Deity witnessed Satan's fall from Heaven (**Luke 10:18**), and this same Jesus called Paul into the Gospel Ministry on Damascus Road, telling him that he was sent to be a missionary unto the Gentiles:

**Acts 26:18 (KJV) "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."**

Oh my friends, there is a Satan, and he is a superior power. The preacher's battle is not

against flesh and blood, not against humanity itself, but our battle is with Satan and the angels that followed him in that terrible battle for power in Heaven.

**Ephesians 6:12 (NASB) "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."**

Here's the bad news – brace yourself, anointed of God. Satan is real, He is a real person, and he really stands against everything that we as ministers are called to do. Though a **Barna poll discovered in 2001 that nearly three out of five adults (58%) say that the devil, or Satan, is not a living being but is a symbol of evil; and that 45% of professing Christians deny Satan's existence, He is real and he is real powerful.**

**a** As human ministers we are unable, as **earthen vessels**, to defeat Satan. Man is born into this life “dead in sin”, and this “hides” the Gospel we preach:

**(2 Corinthians 4:3 KJV) “.. if our gospel be hid<sup>1</sup>, it is hid to them that are lost<sup>2</sup>”**

**(Ephesians 2:1-2 NASB) "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, {2} in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience."**

When we speak to this generation of people about the glorious salvation that is only possible through Jesus Christ, we are speaking to dead (nekros) people. The “natural” or soulish man is absolutely unable to respond to the Gospel message unless God intervene. We are told in:

**(1 Corinthians 2:14 KJV) "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned."**

Our Lord Jesus recognized this problem when He told the Pharisees:

**(John 8:47 KJV) "He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore **hear *them* not, because ye are not of God.**"**

If, as **earthen vessels** we are relying on our own

power, then we are trying to hunt bears with rubber bands and toothpicks.

b Further, our focal text tells us:

**(2 Corinthians 4:3-4 KJV) "... it is hid to them that are lost<sup>2</sup>: {4} In whom the god<sup>5</sup> of this world hath blinded<sup>3</sup> the minds of them which believe not ..."**

that Satan, the "god" of this world, is constantly at work hiding the message of the Cross and Empty Tomb. He is constantly controlling the media around us, the environment that we live in, and keeps on offering people *reasonable alternatives* to Jesus Christ our Savior. It is to me *unreasonable* to believe that this earth just formed from a ball of goo. Any thinking, intelligent person knows this to be an impossibility - the only way that evolutionists can get anyone to swallow the snake oil they peddle is to introduce mind numbing periods of time. No one has ever seen, nor will anyone ever see evidence of macro-evolution ... and to call evolution science is to tell the biggest lie ever created. Science has, up until Darwin's insane system of thought, always been about repeatable, provable phenomenon. The god of this world,

**(1 John 5:19 NASB) "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in *the power of the evil one.*"**

Satan has deceived man into accepting anything, no matter how ludicrous, rather than the precious Savior. What hope do we have?

## **2. We Must Remember The Battle Is God's**

**(2 Corinthians 4:5 KJV) "For we preach<sup>6</sup> not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. "**

a Praise God, we as ministers of that glorious Gospel do not preach (kerusso {pronounced kay-roos'-so}, Present Active Indicative, literally do not continue preaching) ourselves. Since the Lord called me into the ministry I have found that, when a pastor attempts to win a popularity contest with his people, he often loses the prize. If you're David Buffaloe, there will be those in your congregation that *compare* you to other local pastors, and you will be "tried in the balance and found wanting". I have had members tell me I'm too loud, so I quietened down and had other members say I preached too timidly. If you preach

boldly, you will be considered arrogant. If you preach quietly, you will be considered a coward. If you tell stories when you preach some will accuse you of Biblical illiteracy, but if you focus on preaching strictly from the Bible others will label you a fanatic. Just as it was in Paul's day, there is always an Apollos that someone will compare you to. We don't preach ourselves, nor do we condition our given message based on current fads or trend. No, dear pastors,

**(1 Corinthians 1:23 KJV) "... we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness;"**

The message we preach is one which the world considers foolish, and the Jews consider blasphemous. Few people today even believe in sin, insofar as our *anything goes* society is concerned. A **2001 Barna survey found that more than two out of every five adults (43%) believe that Jesus Christ lived on earth He committed sins**. Though your church may be packed with people, many of them may not believe in the Biblical Jesus, and many of them may not be saved. We must not be afraid, and we must not be overwhelmed. We fight and preach as God directs, but just as it was with Israel of old, the battle is not ours, but it is the Lord's.

When I preached in Georgia our minister of music always sat on the back pew of the Church. While I preached the Gospel, unknown to me, this man - a carnal man - quietly yet verbally disagreed with every word I spoke. Acting as a minister of Satan, this young man was furiously undermining the precious Word of God. Today that man works as a clerk in a feed store, a testimony to the power of God. We do not preach ourselves, but Jesus! As the Apostle said:

**(1 Corinthians 2:3-5 KJV) "And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. {4} And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: {5} That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."**

b Further, we are not alone in this battle. As we preach

**(2 Corinthians 4:6 KJV) "... For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of**

## Jesus Christ.”

Eternal and Unchanging God, our Creator, the One who commanded “**Let there be light**” and there was light (**Genesis 1:3**), works with us as we preach the Gospel. When our Lord Jesus was in His earthly ministry He promised us that God the Holy Spirit would come to aid us in this great work.

**(John 16:7-11 KJV) "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. {8} And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: {9} Of sin, because they believe not on me; {10} Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; {11} Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged."**

God is with us. God the Holy Spirit indwells you, and because He is in you He is at every service you hold, every message you preach. We each have different styles of presenting the Gospel message. Some of you are loud, others soft. Some quote extensively from the Scripture, others less so.

Remember this: Jesus Christ our Lord preached to a certain rich man, and this man went away from the Master, choosing his own temporal riches over eternal glory with the Savior. Our Lord concluded the matter by saying:

**(Matthew 19:26 KJV) "... With men [salvation] is impossible; but with God all things are possible."**

God made all that we see around us, and God the Holy Spirit can soften the hardened heart. He can open the blinded eye. He can bring touch to the leprous limbs. As pastors we must remain fully surrendered to God our Father in both prayer and ministry of the Word. It is easy to come to this conference every Monday and feel overwhelmed, disconcerted, or unappreciated. We have a great work before us, a great burden, a terrible task. Yet the task we face, we do not face alone. The battle is the Lord's, not ours. As the Scripture says:

**(Romans 8:31 KJV) "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"**

and,

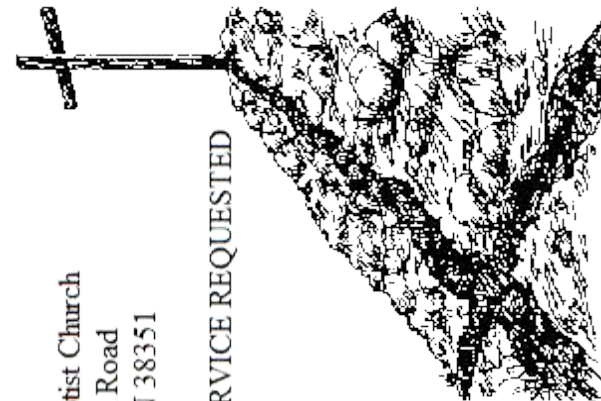
(2 Timothy 4:1-2 KJV) "I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; {2} **Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long suffering and doctrine.**"

Our hope is in the power of God, the power of God the Holy Spirit, the Power of God's Word. And, dear friends, let me remind you ... **God is going to win this battle.** Satan is already defeated, he just wants to take as many with him to hell as he can. We will overcome him, and continue to win souls to Christ, as God Himself works with us, mere **earthen vessels**. May God continue to bless your ministries as we labor together for our Beloved Master.



Rock Hill Baptist Church is located between Parsons and Lexington, Tennessee, on Highway 412. Look for our sign! We have services on Wednesdays (Adult, Youth, and children's Bible studies) at 7:00 PM, Sundays at 10:00 AM and 6:00 PM. Rock Hill is a family oriented Bible believing Church - Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever! Our Pastor, Brother David Buffaloe, will answer any questions you have about our Church if you contact him at 731-845-6104, or through his website at [bibleteacher.org](http://bibleteacher.org); or e-mail him by writing [webmaster@bibleteacher.org](mailto:webmaster@bibleteacher.org). Rock Hill is an independent Church

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Lexington, TN 38351

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