

# Extraordinary Power for Ordinary Times

by Michael Flowers

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*In ordinary time, we've been given the ministry of the spirit, and we must not lose heart by fixing our gaze and affections on the unseen, falling in love with Jesus Christ, and exercising the eyes of faith.*

**Duration:** 25:44

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:20, Romans 14:17, 2 Corinthians 3:7, 2 Corinthians 4:7-12

**Topics:** "Ordinary Season"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the power of God and the messiness of our lives. He highlights that despite the challenges and difficulties we face, we should not lose heart because we have been given the grace and forgiveness of God. The speaker refers to the passage in 2 Corinthians 4, where Paul shares his own experiences of hardships and despair, but ultimately finds hope in relying on God. The sermon encourages listeners to focus on the eternal kingdom of God rather than the temporary things of this world.

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## Transcript

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh, Lord, our rock and our great Redeemer. Amen. Let's be seated.

All right. Does anybody know what time it is? Does anybody know what time it is? Uh-oh. I know.

Somebody said ordinary time. Ordinary time. What does that mean? What does it mean? Just mundane and boring, right? That's after Pentecost.

Everything becomes very boring and routine. And we just can't wait to get back to Holy Week and Easter vigil and Easter time, right? And then the rest of the Christian life is just that boring, ordinary time. Is that the intent of the liturgical calendar? Is that what we're talking about? The thing about the liturgical calendar and historic Christian faith is that terminology doesn't change that fast.

It doesn't transform itself like our culture does in nanoseconds now. When we use the word ordinary, it just means plain. It means nothing special.

And that's typically the way we can understand this time frame of the calendar. It's just nothing special until we get back to Advent. You know what an ordinal number is? There's ordinal numbers and cardinal numbers, right? Ordinal numbers usually have a TH behind them because they describe the position of

something in a list.

First, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and so on, right? Now, a cardinal number is a number that says how many of something. Just one, two, three, four, right? That's a cardinal number. That's what that is.

It all comes from Latin. An ordinal number comes in to the concept of ordinary time. It's ordinal time where we count.

In this case, there's two ordinary times on the calendar. Let's roll back to Epiphany, the visit of the Magi. That next Sunday is called the first Sunday after the Epiphany.

So we begin to count after the Epiphany until we get to Ash Wednesday. This is ordinary time because we're counting from the day of Pentecost to Advent again, where we actually celebrate the first and the second Advent of Christ. OK, but this time it's after Pentecost when the work of redemption, wow, we've heard Christ say it is finished.

So we see an empty tomb and then we see the sending of the Holy Spirit and the establishment of the kingdom of God already, but not yet. Because what are we waiting for? We're waiting for a second Advent, a second appearing is what that means. Advent means appearing, manifestation.

So don't be bored during the season, right? Because we're counting from Pentecost when God himself was poured out upon all people, all nations. And the effect of that is what we just did in praying for Lisa to go to the nations. Right.

Last week, we prayed for Georgia and Anita to go to Zambia at the end of the service. We'll say, send us out, father, to do the work that you have given us to do. That means that we are an apostolic church locally and globally.

Right. We're sent ones. Apostle means sent one.

So ordinary time, as I was reading the New Testament passage in verse seven, it says, but we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. The NRSV translates surpassing extra ordinary. Extraordinary.

I would say, brothers and sisters, that this is extraordinary time. It's extraordinary time because we've been given the grace of God. We've been given the forgiveness of sins.

Jesus is building his church and he sent God the Holy Spirit to be with us forever till the end of the age. I am with you. It's the way that Christ is with us until the end of the age.

Today's passage in Second Corinthians four, Paul tells us the means of enduring faithfulness, the means of his enduring faithfulness. If we look back at the first verse, which is not printed in your bullet in chapter four, he says, therefore, based on chapter three, since through God's mercy, we have this ministry, we have this ministry through God's mercy, we do not lose heart. We do not lose heart in the face of his countless problems, persecutions, disappointments, relational rejection.

Opposition of all kinds, Paul experienced and was living. He says. In verse one.

We do not lose heart. Does anybody here today want to lose heart? I think it's a universal cry in all of us not to lose heart. Not to be gutted by our experiences, not to be gutted by our context or by the

circumstances that may come our way or that we may produce by our own brokenness.

But Paul is saying amid all of the things that he's going to list throughout this book, this book is a list of his trials and tribulations and persecutions and circumstances that none of us would sign up for. At least I wouldn't sign up for those things. And yet in one of the accounts in Acts, the Lord is speaking to Ananias, I believe it is.

I'm going to show Paul the many things that he will suffer. There is something arranged for this apostolic man to encounter, and he's sort of in this passage giving us the rationale for why in all of this he doesn't become discouraged, he doesn't lose heart. Further on within the chapter we read in verse seven, but we have this treasure in jars of clay.

Speaking of his own life, right, his body, his fragile self. We're all jars of clay, but we have this treasure. Why? Why is it like that? Why does God do this? Why did God choose such fragile people to dwell in, to place this treasure within? Our fragility has not turned him away to show that the surpassing power or to show that the extraordinary power, the extraordinary power in our being.

It belongs to God and not us. It's all about him and not me. And so in ordinary time, we've been given the ministry.

What? What is this ministry he's talking about in verse one where he says, therefore, since through God's mercy, we have this ministry. In chapter three, Paul says this, contrasting the old covenant in the new covenant, verse seven in chapter three. Now, if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone, what we just heard in the Old Testament reading came with glory so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory fading, though it was will not the ministry of the spirit.

I want you to take that home with you. Will not the ministry of the spirit be even more glorious? There it is. If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness? The ministry of the spirit brings righteousness, right? Beautiful.

That's our only hope of righteousness. The kingdom of God is righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Paul says that in Romans 14, 17.

It's what it is. That's what the kingdom is. It's an embodiment of God's righteousness, peace and joy found dwelling within the Holy Spirit, found dwelling within us.

That's what the kingdom is. And so in ordinary time, we've been given the ministry of the spirit. Three, eight, we have to appropriate and grab a hold of and contemplate, as we see at the end of chapter three, the contemplation brings transformation.

Being given the ministry of the spirit whereby the law we heard read today out of Deuteronomy is written now on our hearts, the new covenant, the new means of transformation is upon us. In ordinary time, we are accounting down from Pentecost to Advent. Yes.

And apart from the liturgical calendar, we're counting down from Pentecost to the second advent or the final appearing of Jesus. Returning to make all things new to restore all things is final new creation. Indeed, we are living between the first and the second advent, the first and the second coming, appearing of Jesus.

Some have described this time as a time of paradox and tension. And I, I relate to that. It's called the already not yet kingdom.

Present, but not in fullness, because we have this treasure in earthen vessels, but Paul goes on to say in Ephesians that that treasure, that deposit is a guarantee. It's a guarantee that the presence of God in our lives, the presence of the Holy Spirit within us is only a foretaste of what's to come. Thanking God that he gives us some tastings, right? He's got that banquet table out there and we get to taste and see that the word is good and that pulls us through and we do not lose heart because of that man.

In this sense of great paradox is what Paul is talking about to the Corinthians because it's given them problems, his paradoxical life, his problematic life, his life of problems. It seems like everywhere he went, things got stirred up and people came against him and rejected him. And, you know, he was stoned so many times and beaten and shipwrecked and left for dead.

And, you know, it's just like this. This man just endured so many things, but he did not lose heart. How did he do it? Well, it was a problem for some of his churches because.

Those representing the king of kings and lord of lords to the Corinthians, they should not be living on the outside of the margins, so to speak, they should not have so many bad things happening. Paul's having to explain himself, he's having to defend his apostolic calling. The Corinthians feel that an apostle should be outwardly victorious and successful.

And appear that way, what's the problem, Paul, why is your life such a mess to show the extraordinary power that it belongs to God? And not ourselves, that's why his life is such a mess, and that perhaps is why we're all working through the mess of our lives. I don't care how tight you nip your sheets on your bed, there's some mess in your life. I know it because I know me, I know it's all right, it's a universal mess, it's all over the place, creation's groaning because of the mess.

The reign of sin and death has been served notice on the day of Pentecost, my brothers and it's passing away. And the new age of the kingdom is on its way and we pray every Sunday, thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven, new heavens and new earth are coming. Therefore, we do not.

Lose heart. Now, there is a problem with our culture that wants it faster than our phones can't be fast enough and our computers can't be fast enough and and we want it now, we want immediacy. Our faith cannot have that kind of mindset of the things that are seen that Paul's going to address here in this chapter, he says, we don't look at those things, we don't set our affections on those things that are seen because they're temporal, they're passing away.

Even the this present evil age is passing away and everything that's associated with this present evil age is passing away. So it's not good to invest in something that's passing away. Right.

It's like. Investing in a Pinto or something, it's it's coming on. You go or whatever those cars used to be.

It's over. Yeah, right. And so Paul gives this list that we're pretty familiar with.

Verse seven, we have this treasure in jars of clay to show the extraordinary power belongs to God and not to us. And then he goes, we are afflicted. He's giving a defense to a church that he founded.

Right. He's having to write back and defend himself here. And he's saying, and there's some irony in this.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed. Perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed. Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies for we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake so that the life of Jesus also may be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

And he concludes in verse 12, so death works in us, that life works in you. This is called sacrificial, self-giving love, the love of Christ constrained, Paul, he said, the love of Christ constrains us so that life may work in you and all of us today. Might I say that this could be the Christian life, but I don't think Paul's just talking about apostolic torture.

Right. I think he's describing what it means in our baptism to come into participation with the death and the resurrection of Jesus. That when we are immersed into the waters of baptism by water and the spirit, we enter into a real participation in Christ and we come into union with Christ.

And that means if we suffer with him, we will reign with him. Romans 8, I mean, there's all this co-suffering that's going on. And, you know, we cannot doubt of it.

Some of this we can't opt out of. It's not like a choice. Well, I'm not going to choose that on the menu.

I'm going to choose this over here. It just is. And if we can accept the isness of the brokenness of this world, right, then we will not lose heart because our affections are not set on those things.

Whether I get that new house, that new job, that new what, what, what, what, you know, if our affections are there, these are good things. But if we wrongly attach to these things, then the attachment brings us down, because ultimately everything that we attach to is passing away. It's temporal.

And Paul is saying that we set our affections on things. Above questions, three, set your affections, set your heart, set your mind on things above. Now, this doesn't mean a disembodied, disembodied life.

Done that several times. We need an extinguisher on the front row just in case that happens, because this stuff is really flammable and you'll be able to leave and say, my pastor is on fire. My pastor is on fire, literally.

Yeah, he is a holy roller because he's trying to get the. Yeah. OK, so if I start doing that and I don't know what I'm doing, go, whoa, that's a new liturgical phrase.

Whoa, whoa is me. There we go. OK, so we're playing around with this.

This stuff's not my notes. Yeah, I meditate on this passage all week and just went deeper and deeper into the rabbit hole anyway. So I would encourage you to do that.

Go into the rabbit hole of this passage. Maybe, maybe at least start with chapter three and work through five, three, four, five. I mean, that's a good chunk of what we're trying to say today, because this is the Christian life and avoidance will only make it worse.

Acceptance of the struggles that come our way and the sufferings that come our way. It's almost like trying to resist makes it worse. Am I calling us to suffer alone? Am I calling us to view our lives as just some type of fatalistic people? No, that's not it at all, is it? It's not it.

It's it's participation in Christ and he will choose the sufferings for us. Right. He chooses those things.

I'm going to show him the things that he will suffer for my namesake. That was Paul. That's why we call the cross the passion, the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And in this kind of suffering, Paul says, we don't lose heart. Now, does that mean that it didn't feel like being crushed? Not at all. It felt that way.

Let me give you a little insight into his psychology in chapter one. OK, and then we'll close as we lift the plane up off the runway. Paul is saying in the same book in chapter one, beginning with verse eight.

We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure. Far beyond so that we despaired even of life.

This is the guy who wrote most of the New Testament. We despaired even of life. Indeed, our hearts in our hearts, we felt the sentence of death.

But should I just stop there and not read the book? But but this happened, this happened. He's reading he's reading something into his circumstances in his life. He's reading in the narrative of the co-crucified and co-risen Jesus that he's been linked to.

He's reading it in now and he's interpreting the circumstances of his life. He says, but this happened that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God. Wow.

What's I mean, what's the big deal about relying on yourself? Self-reliance, don't we teach that in America? Isn't that a good thing? Isn't that through the Holy Spirit, self-reliance, pull yourself up by your boots, go do it, man. You're responsible. Yeah.

And no, because when we rely on ourselves, we don't need God. Right. We can pull it off.

We can do church without the Holy Spirit and we can do all these things because we have the liturgy. That's why we stress the fact that we're charismatic and Catholic. No, no, we need the spirit of God to make the Eucharist what it is.

We need the spirit of God to make baptism what it is. We need the spirit of God to bring the kingdom to earth as it is in heaven. So we don't want to rely on ourselves and maybe because these guys were so high powered and supercharged and equipped that the Lord had to arrange certain things out on the field just to remind them.

Yeah, I know you had a couple of you raised the dead back here and you did this. But, oh, there's trouble ahead because you didn't do all of the other stuff. That was me, the Lord is saying.

Right. That was me. So that we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead.

He has delivered us from such a deadly peril and he will deliver us on him. We have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us as you help us by your prayers. So he's now saying, like, hey, we're not in this alone.

We're helped by your intercession and prayer. You're participating with us in this ministry of the spirit as you help us by your prayers. That many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in an answer to the prayers of many.

Wow. Yeah, it's a beautiful thing. Yeah, I think I'm going to end there.

The thing is, is that I want to encourage us to live in the eternal perspective and to realize is that when Paul says we look not at the things that are seen, but we look at the things that are unseen. You have to live life in paradox, because how can you see anything that's unseen? Fix your eyes on Jesus. Jesus is invisible.

Jesus is at the right hand of the father. How can we fix our eyes on Jesus? But we're told time and time again to look at the things that are not seen and to live in the unseen real because it's more solid. It can be more physical than any physical or material thing we've ever seen.

It's just in another realm where Jesus is now as new creation, because he was raised bodily. He has a body, but it's a different kind of body. And so it's a new materiality.

How do we do that? It's with the eyes of faith. We have to exercise eyes of faith, the eyes of our heart are the eyes of faith. Open the eyes of my heart, Paul said that was his prayer in order that he could look at the things that are not seen.

So let that be our prayer. Lord, today, open the eyes of our heart that we may see the glory that is in this room, all around in the angelic forces. There are more of those with us and there are with them.

There are more of those with us than the God of this world who has blinded the minds of those who do not believe. Right. It's been determined that we have to not lose heart.

And we do that by fixing our gaze and our affections on the unseen and fall in love with Jesus Christ. And he will guide and lead us and empower us as he's building his church. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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