1. **Intro:**
   
   A. **Slide#1** Color blindness or color vision deficiency is the inability or decreased ability to see color, or perceive color differences, under normal lighting conditions.
      1. The picture behind me depicts the American Flag, as seen by most people (center top); as seen by red-blind persons (your right); as seen by green-blind persons (your left); as seen by violet-blind persons (left middle); as seen by totally color blind people (right middle)
      2. **So, if color blindness is not** being able to **see** a color(s) others **can** see, **then** isn’t it true, there’s a possibility that one can be “mentally” color blind? (i.e.) blind to truth that is quite evident to others.
         a) **Slide#2** This was posed to the famous agnostic Thomas Huxley by a very sincere Christian.
         b) Huxley, admitted that this was possible, and added that if it were, he himself, of course, could not know or recognize it.

      (1) Paul continues his discussion about blindness, being veiled to the gospel.
   
   B. **Slide#3** Title: Earthen Vessels
   C. **Slide#4** Outline: A Great Light in Gloomy Darkness! - A Great Treasure in Jars of Clay! A Great Glory in Light Affliction!

2. **Slide#5** A GREAT LIGHT IN GLOOMY DARKNESS! (1-6)
   
   A. Paul looks at 4 people, starting with himself!
   B. **Slide#6** Himself! (1)
   C. This ministry – The ministry it had been talking about in the last chapter (see 6,8)
   D. We do not lose heart - Sometimes the size of the task becomes a motivation in itself!
      1. **Slide#7** Winston Churchill inspired England to stand firm against Hitler in WWII.
         “Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization…The whole fury & might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war…Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, & so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire & its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will say: “This was their finest hour.”
      2. This is similar to what Paul is saying in verse 1.
      3. A ministry God intended would never cause us to lose heart.
         a) It doesn’t drag us down; it lifts us up. - It doesn’t depress us; it motivates us.
   E. As we have received Mercy – Paul reminds himself of the Mercy he’s received.
      1. **Slide#8** “Mercy cost nothing to receive, but it cost everything to give.”

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1 Charles Swindoll, pg.61.
a) It cost Jesus His life!

F. **Slide#9 His Opponents!** (2)

G. 3 charges were leveled against Paul, by his opponents & his slanderers, that he wasn’t doing!
   1. We see a lot of this going on today in ministry!
   2. **Slide#10** “Like supermarket cereal, when Christianity is brightly packaged & sugarcoated & enticingly offers free prizes on the inside, we fail to see the fine print on the side of the box. And so we never know about all the empty calories we’ve eaten…or realize how malnourished we’ve become.”

H. So, Paul says, we are not hiding anything in our ministry, nothing is veiled.

I. **Slide#11 Those Perishing!** (3,4)

J. Here’s a clear explanation why the same truth is exciting to one person & boring to another!
   1. Jn.3:19-21 And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.
   2. Like Haman(Esther 7:8) before he was lost forever, his face was covered.

K. **Slide#12 Jesus!** (5,6)

L. Only God can cause light to shine out of darkness, both in the creation of the world & in the creation of a believer’s heart.
   1. He gets all the credit! – “We may carry the lamp that shows Christ to others, but the flame is from the Lord!”

M. In the face of Jesus - In J.C. we see what God is like! He who has seen Me has seen the Father.
   1. I see the glory of God when I look into the face of Jesus:
      As a baby born into poverty; As a 12 year old sharing His wisdom; As a Carpenter serving in His divine leisureliness, performing His menial/humble tasks daily, content to await God’s time there; As a Compassionate man meeting the needs of the hurting or hungry; As One in Authority over Satan in wilderness; As One showing Mercy in forgiving sin; As One on the cross where He laid down His life…for me; As One who rose triumphant over the grave, death, evil; As the One who ascended into heaven.

III. **Slide#13 A GREAT TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY!** (7-15)

   A. **Slide#14 Power!** (7)
   B. This isn’t how we’d have displayed our power!

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2 Charles Swindoll, pg.50.
1. We wouldn’t have chosen a “stable” but a “stadium” to bring the Messiah into the world. Likewise, we wouldn’t have chosen “earthen Vessels”/“clay pots” to place the precious treasure of the gospel in.

2. Slide#15 We would rather be glazed & polished, even displayed on some safe shelf somewhere...or maybe in some saint museum.
   a) Slide#16 God of course wants to take us off our shelf & if need be break us & pour us out

C. The illustration (6,7a) Paul pictures our body as a jar of clay, into which God has placed the treasure of the gospel.

D. The implication (7b) This is done, so everyone can see that our glorious power is from God and is not our own.

E. Why did God choose to do it this way? Why such a precious treasure in weak & worthless vessels? (see 7b)
   1. Slide#17 Sometimes we think, “Since I’m chipped & cracked I can’t be used by God.” But the truth is when God places His light inside our vessel, the more cracks, the more light will be able to escape.
   2. God honors weak, broken, pottery...& how seldom He uses His fine China!
      a) How often do you use your fine China?

F. Slide#18,19 Like Mary’s expensive perfume, no one in the room was blessed with enjoying the fragrance until she broke the vessel that was holding it.
   1. Often this is God’s only way to pour out the fragrance of Christ...is to break one of His vessels(us).
   2. There isn’t anything significant about the vessel – it’s what’s inside that counts.
      a) Not saying you don’t count. Your “you” counts very much. But the real “you” is on the inside (soul/spirit/personality/ego).

G. Best things often come from our worst moments!
   1. Ask Joseph – sold by his brothers; then, saves his brothers from starvation.
   2. Ask Ruth – loss of husband, loss of country; then, gains the true & living God, & a new country, & a new husband.
   3. Ask Job – children’s death, lost all; then, gained all back.
   4. Ask Daniel – lost parents, country, language; then, elevated & given visions & dreams.

H. Slide#20 Pressed but not Squished! (8,9)
I. Hard pressed - carries the idea of “pressure”.
   1. They were under pressure like grapes being squeezed by a winepress.
J. Perplexed - means to be at a loss; to be in doubt, despondent. It suggests the idea of being lost & disoriented.

1. We are sore pressed at every point but not hemmed in. We are persecuted by men but never abandoned by God. We are at wit’s end but never at our hope’s end. We are knocked down but not knocked out! William Barclay

K. Persecuted but not forsaken - never abandoned by God.

1. Slide#21 Joan of Arc said when she was abandoned by those who should have stood by her, “It is better to be alone w/God. His friendship will not fail me, nor His counsel, nor His love. In His strength, I will dare & dare & dare until I die.”
   a) Ps.27:10 When my father & my mother forsake me, Then the LORD will take care of me.

2. Paul didn’t throw in the towel in the face of the hardships!

L. Knocked down but not knocked out - It’s not that a Christian doesn’t fall, but when he does, he always rises again!

1. We can lose a battle, but we’ll never lose the campaign!

M. Slide#22 Dying but Living! (10-12)

N. There is no abundant life without first an abasing death.

1. When we die He lives; when we lose He wins; when were weak He’s strong; when we are dependent He is powerful.
   a) This is paradox at its finest!

O. Slide#23 Raised up! (13-15)

P. (13) I believed & therefore I spoke – You must believe it or you shouldn’t be teaching it!

1. This is taken from Ps.116:10…interesting it’s a hymn of thanksgiving for deliverance from death.

2. These words I believed & therefore I spoke should be written over every bible student’s desk, over every pastor’s door, over every pulpit, over every S.S. teachers podium.

Q. (14) Death ends nothing - It merely closes the door on our earthly existence & opens the door of eternity.

1. He was certain that he could draw on a power which was sufficient for life & greater than death!

R. (15) For your sakes – When the Boulder Dam(Hoover) was being built some men lost their lives during its construction. It created Lake Mead which stretches 115 miles long. It irrigates 250,000 acres. By making this dam it brought fertility to vast areas which were once desert. A tablet was placed into the wall of the dam bearing the names of those who lost their lives for Slide#24 its construction it read, These died that the desert might rejoice & blossom as the rose.

1. When a man has the conviction that what is happening to him is happening literally for Christ’s sake he can face anything!
S. Do you want to make an impact in your work, neighborhood, school, or family?

1. Then merely **live out** the dying message of the Lord Jesus. Let it out. Don’t hide the cracks in the clay. Let people *see through you* & *see the Lord!*

IV. **Slide#25 A GREAT GLORY IN LIGHT AFFLICTION!** (16-18)

A. (16) Here is the other *book end* of **not losing heart** from vs.1.

1. **Slide#26,27** Our *physical* life is *slipping away*, but our *spiritual* is *climbing up the hill* that leads to the Celestial City, to the presence of God!

2. No need to fear the **years slipping by**, for they bring us nearer, not to *death*, but to *God*!

3. We are to **focus not** on the *external*, but the *internal*.

B. (17) **Light affliction?**

1. Wow, after his list in vs.8?

C. (18) We are to focus not on the *temporal* but *the eternal*.

1. **Re:Moses** in Heb.11:27 it says, for he endured as **seeing Him** who is *invisible*.

2. **Saints**, *rivet your eyes* on the *unseen*, the things which *last forever*!