

June 14, 2009  
Pentecost 2

*"Treasures in Jars of Clay"*

## **2 CORINTHIANS 4: 5-12**

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**F**or we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. <sup>7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup> We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. <sup>10</sup> We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. <sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

If you had saved up a large amount of money and did not trust the banks, where would you find a safe place to put it? I hope that you would not do what one elderly woman did in Israel. She took the money she had accumulated in a lifetime of hard work and investing, and stuffed it in her mattress. One day her daughter decided to surprise her by replacing her old mattress with a new one. She took the old mattress and threw it into a dumpster only to find out later from her mother that the mattress was stuffed with money, almost a million dollars in shekels and various denominations of the US dollar. Frantically they searched for the mattress in four garbage dumps outside of Jerusalem.

If you had a large sum of cash in your home, how would you hide it? Would you place it in an envelope in your drawer, or a roll of bathroom paper hidden under the sink, or a brown paper sack in the pantry of your kitchen? Would you place valuable gold coins in an old jar or nail can in your garage?

Today we hear the Apostle Paul tell us that the greatest treasure in the world is placed into the lives of ordinary people like you and me. He calls us jars of clay. We are cracked pots, fragile, cracked earthenware pots. Yet we have within us the greatest treasure in the world. As Paul reminds we bear about in our bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only hope of eternal life for people lost in their sin. We have this treasure in jars of clay. We cannot even begin to understand why the Lord would entrust this treasure to us. Why did he not choose his holy angels to be the glorious vessels that carry the gospel into the world?

### **The treasure is received**

The Apostle Paul never lost his wonder and amazement at how the treasure of the gospel came into his life totally undeserved. He writes, "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." Paul was brought to the great treasure of believing Jesus was his Lord and God who came into this earth in human flesh. Jesus once described our relationship to him as branch attached to a vine. We were

once dead, like this old stick, without life and without believing Jesus is our Lord and God. But then the Holy Spirit brought us to faith, made us alive in Christ and attached us to him. With every fiber of our being we have come to believe with our hearts and proclaim with our lips that Jesus is who he said was: the Son of God, our Lord and God.

A woman once purchased a used Scrabble game from a thrift store. She took it home and set it aside. One day as she was going through her things, she picked up the Scrabble game and examined the contents more closely. Much to her surprise, tucked away in one of the compartments was \$7000 in cash. What an amazing surprise this was? We might say that she was sure lucky. It is not by luck or chance that you confess with Paul that Jesus is your Lord and God. This was carefully planned for you from all eternity. Ephesians 1 says that we are "blessed in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

Notice how it was God who caused this light to shine in our hearts so we could see these treasures we have in Jesus. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." We once groped around the darkness thinking there was something worthwhile inside of us that made us worthy of being loved by God. But then the light came on in our lives. The Holy Spirit showed us how empty and hopeless our lives were without Jesus. The light shined in our hearts and led us to see the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. With our physical eyes we can see the glory of God in a sunset, in a flower, in the mountains, in the stars and in our human bodies. It is only with the eyes of faith that we can see the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus.

Listen to what John said in the first part of his gospel. "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth." Jesus said, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." Our eyes of faith allow us to see Jesus and believe he is Lord and God. Think about Thomas who saw Jesus a week after he rose from the dead, and actually put his finger into the nail marks in his hands. Look at the joy on his face as he sees Jesus and proclaims: "My Lord and my God." That same joy has come into your life and mine.

About a week ago a young man in Winner, South Dakota named Neal Wanless cashed in a winning lottery ticket that provided him with winnings over 232 million dollars, about 88 million dollars after taxes. He lived with his mom and dad on the family farm barely eking out an existence by selling a few cattle and collecting junk. This week he had to remove his name from Facebook because of all the requests for help that were coming into him. For some winning the lottery or having a large amount of money is the greatest treasure in the world. Jesus said, "A man's life does not consist in the abundance of things he possesses." The book of Proverbs tells us that riches sprout wings and fly away. Talk to Neal Wanless a few years from now and he will probably tell you it would have been better if he had never won that huge amount of money.

Some are not so crass as to seek their treasure in money. They look for their treasures in themselves and their accomplishments. They measure success and worth by the number of friends they have and how much they are loved. The debt of our sin is staggering. Our good deeds cannot take away even one small sin. Only the blood of Jesus provides complete cleansing and pardon allowing us to enjoy God's love here in this life and for all eternity. It is only in Jesus who is Lord and God that we have a treasure that never

changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

## **The treasure is shared**

How sad it would be if we kept this treasure of Jesus to ourselves without sharing it with people who do not know about it or believe in it. The Apostle Paul spoke of himself as a clay jar with a mission to bring this treasure to as many people as possible before he died. It wasn't always easy to bring this treasure to people who did not want to hear about it. Paul writes, "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed." No pit is so deep that Christ is not deeper. The love that we have in Jesus never changes. Romans 8 reminds us: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

How strange it is that the Lord's plan is to put this treasure of Jesus into fragile human beings like us, people who are like clay pots that are easily cracked and broken. "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body." I am holding in my hands a cross that shows the body of Jesus still hanging on the cross. We carry Jesus body on our bodies. When people ask us what we believe we care not ashamed to talk about how God's Son came into the world and died on the cross to make payment for our sin. We are not afraid to tell people what the Bible says about Jesus suffering and death with familiar words such as "All we like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

We also want the life of Jesus to be revealed in our bodies as well. You carry with you the resurrection of Jesus from the dead wherever you go. The night of his resurrection Jesus appeared to the disciples and showed them the nail marks on his hands. Then he told them, "As the Father has sent me, so I have sent you." The early church boldly witnessed to Jesus resurrection. One of the best ways to share the treasure you have in Jesus is share with people the miracle of his resurrection and what it means for you to know that you will someday be raised to life again after you die.

Because of this treasure we have in Jesus, we are willing to let other parts of our lives die in order that we might live for Christ. "For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life might be revealed in our mortal body." Every day we wake up we can say, "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it." Part of that joyful new life involves seeing parts of our sinful self die. If I am spending way too much time watching television or surfing the internet, but have very little time to read the Bible and pray, then that part of my life needs to die. If I am always thinking about how bad everything is going, but then failing to rejoice in the treasures I have for Jesus, then that part of me needs to die. In this slow process of dying to ourselves and living for Jesus, the treasure of Jesus perfect life and death is revealed and then brought to people.

Some years ago we held a Bible study in the nursing home. Most of the people were very old except one man who had cerebral palsy and was in a wheel chair. He often wore a t-shirt that said, "I love Jesus." When he joined us in singing the strangest sounds came

from his body, and yet they were such a powerful witness to the treasures that had been given to him in Jesus. He wanted other people to see these treasures he had and share in them.

We aren't here this morning to tell you t to do with the money you are trying to save. We are here to listen to what Paul says about taking the treasures we have in Jesus and bringing them to people, even though our lives may seem like fragile jars of clay. The world may see you as cracked pots fragile and easily broken. They may even call you crackpots for what you believe, but you have the honor of bearing about in your bodies the dying of the Lord Jesus Christ. You have treasures in jars of clay. Amen.