

Pentecost 2
June 7, 2015

"Treasures in Jars of Clay"

2 CORINTHIANS 4:5-12

For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ 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. ⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ 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. ¹² So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

It happened in the Gold Country of Northern California in February of 2013. A man and his wife were walking their dog on their property when they saw the cover of a small, rusty tin canister beneath an oak tree. They dug up it up and then opened it at home. It was filled with gold coins minted in the 1800's. They went back and found more canisters under the tree, 1400 gold coins in all, worth over ten million dollars. Why would someone hide valuable gold coins in tin canisters under an oak tree?

Do you want to hear something even more strange to our human way of thinking? God in his love and mercy entrusts the greatest treasure in the world, his love for us in Jesus his Son, to people like you and me. The Apostle Paul calls us jars of clay. My dear Christian friends, brothers and sisters in Christ, we are broken people, people broken by sin, broken by troubles in life, broken by our anguish over not living the lives the Lord has called us to life. Yet, even though we are broken and cracked jars of clay that should be cast aside, we possess the greatest treasure in the world. We have Jesus. Yes we are jars of clay, special jars of clay because the treasure of Christ has come to us and the treasure of Christ is passed on through us.

The treasure of Christ has come to us

Usually people find treasure but the treasure you have in Christ Jesus your Savior is different. This treasure finds you. Paul says, "We do not preach ourselves, Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." Paul did not preach and brag and boast about himself. He did not try to thrill the crowds with how he found the greatest treasure in the world by accepting Jesus into his heart. It was all about Jesus Christ being his Lord and God who came to him and found him. In a previous letter to the Corinthians he said, "For I resolved to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." In one of our hymns, we sing, "Oh the height of Jesus' love, Higher than the heavens above, Deeper than the depths of sea, Lasting as eternity, Love that found me-wondrous thought! Found me when I sought him not."

Paul was certainly not boasting about himself when he says in verse 7, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." Jars of clay. That's how Paul saw himself and that is how we see ourselves. We cannot boast about being some beautiful Ming Dynasty vase that deserves to put up on the shelf and admired by other people and even by our God. Our lives are broken by sin just as a hammer can break this pot I am holding in my hand.

Oh, to be sure, there was a time when Paul thought he was a beautiful vase highly admired by his God because he followed rules and regulations of Jewish law meticulously. But then Jesus came to him and showed him how shattered and broken he was and how far short he fell of God's glory. This past week in our Lompoc Bible Class we read a verse from Romans 7 where Paul confessed that he did not know what sin was and how broken he was until he realized that coveting or even the desire to do something wrong made him unacceptable to God.

What do you do with a piece of pottery that is broken and cracked? You throw it away. What does the Lord our God do with jars of clay that are broken and cracked by sin? He gives them the greatest treasure in the world. He gives us his Son Jesus so we can be beautiful not because of who we are but because of the treasure that has been given to us.

How did this treasure come to you? Listen to what Paul says, "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." Remember the first day of creation. First God created the heavens and the earth, but it was formless and empty and dark. Then miraculously he said, "Let there be light" and there was light. Something similar has happened in your life and mine. Into this world of darkness into which we were born totally clueless to the greatest treasure in the world, God brings light and shows us his glory in the face of Christ.

We were born into this world looking inside of ourselves for some ray of light and some ray of goodness by which we could make ourselves acceptable to God. There was no hope in that darkness as Ephesians says, "We were without God and without hope." Isaiah tells us, "Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like men without eyes."

But then God shined in our hearts. He showed us the light of his glory in the face of Jesus. He lets us see with our eyes of faith the face of Jesus and it all becomes so real to us. A few weeks ago on Pentecost Sunday, the children in our Sunday school made eyes that have tongues of fire in them to show how the Holy Spirit gives us faith eyes. 1 Corinthians 2 says, "However, as it is written, 'No eye has seen, now ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit."

The greatest treasure in the world is to have this light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. Your eyes see Jesus. You look into a manger in Bethlehem and believe with all your heart that a tiny baby is Lord and God from all eternity. Your eyes see Jesus loving and respecting his parents, showing kindness to people, and loving them in a way you have never been able to love people. Your eyes look at his face as hangs on the cross and cries out, "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" You see him

suffering dying for the curse of your sin. You see Jesus' without that joyful face on the night of resurrection appearing to the disciples and to you and saying, "Peace be to you." You know that someday when Jesus returns you will see him face to face in all his glory. Even though your physical eyes do not see him, you see him in faith as your Shepherd who holds you in his loving arms. You know that nothing will ever separate you from his life.

There are days when our lives seem so cracked and broken. We have this treasure in jars of clay. "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed." In the most difficult days we ever face in life, the treasure we have in Christ shines brightest. That was sure the case with Job. In the darkest days of life when he lashed out in anger against God, he bursts forth with the triumphant words, "I know that my Redeemer lives." He wanted the words carved in stone so all could see. He wanted people to see him not as "poor Job" but as the man who possessed the greatest treasure in the world, a Redeemer who lives. During his many low moments of life Martin Luther encouraged himself with the one Latin word "Vivit" which means he lives.

My friends, there is a huge difference between being a crackpot and been a cracked pot. A crackpot is someone who is crazy, loony and eccentric. A cracked pot is a broken piece of pottery. We are cracked pots. We are broken people. But by the miracle of God's grace we possess the greatest treasure in the world. We have the riches of forgiveness and peace with God and the hope of eternal life found only in Christ. We have this treasures in jars of clay not just to cherish but pass on to other people.

The treasure of Christ is passed on through us

Listen now to these words of Paul and think of the high honor and privilege that is given to you and me. "We always carry around in our bodies the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body." If I were God I think I would have chosen more beautiful creatures to bring the treasures in Christ to the world. Why limit the angels to just announcing Jesus birth or his resurrection from the dead? Why not have an angel step into this pulpit and bring you the treasures you have in Christ? Why not have an angel visit your cousin who has given up believing these treasures? Let God's holy angel shake up his world and warn him about the judgment to come and then show him again the glory of God in the face of Jesus, the Jesus he once valued so highly?

Why does God use jars of clay to bring the treasures of Christ to our dying world? It is simply because he loves us so much. He loved us by bringing these treasures to us, and he loves us by asking us to pass these treasures on to other people.

Listen more to what Paul says as he speaks about his privilege and the privilege also given to 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. So the death is at work in us, but life is at work in you." You have seen the treasures you have in Jesus and your life has never been the same since. You are alive. You are constantly giving yourself over to death. That seems like a contradiction but it is not. Because you are alive in Christ you want to see sin die in your life. The life and death and resurrection of Jesus shows itself in how you handle sin when it pops up in your life. You want to see it die, just as you want some dangerous

bacteria to die instead of infecting your body.

I think of a young man with cerebral palsy, with a twisted body, sitting in a nursing home, wearing a T-shirt that said, "I love Jesus" and singing songs like "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." The words that came from his mouth sounded strange but they were not. That twisted body, like an old clay pot, cracked and broken, witnessed boldly to the treasures he had in Jesus. Jars of clay. Cracked pots. We struggle every day to live for Jesus. As we struggle people watch. If they will look into this jar of clay they will see the greatest treasure in the world. Jars of clay. That is what we are, jars of clay with greatest treasure in the world. Amen.