

**"GOD WORKS WITH CLAY JARS LIKE US!"**

2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Fellow Vessels of God's Treasures,

Permit me to begin my message with a mental exercise. *Don't let that scare you – this is easy, I think.* Think of something you consider a valuable treasure in your life. It can't be human or animal – it must be non-living. It can't be spiritual like your Lord or your faith or God's Word (*which we'd all answer first*). It must be an object, something tangible. It may be monetarily valuable or emotionally valuable.

Got the answer? Now, where is it? How do you care for it? Where do you store it and in what? Is it displayed out in the open or is it hidden somewhere? Do you toss it in a corner of the garage or basement or is it meticulously placed in a very specific part of your home?

Whatever you got in your mind right now is a treasure to you. I suspect you are **very fussy** with it, **very particular** how you use it. Treasures need good storage. Treasures need to be taken care of that they might retain their value, remain intact, and remain in our possession. We don't want them abused, stolen, mishandled, or lost.

Today we take a look at what God says about His treasure and its storage. God's way of thinking is a whole lot different from ours. He has the greatest treasure there could ever be. But He's decided to work with this treasure in ways we would never consider. Hear St. Paul tell us how:

**"GOD WORKS WITH CLAY JARS LIKE US!"**

1. To make His light shine
2. To make His life spread

## 1

At this time, Paul was up against certain men in Corinth who considered themselves "**super-apostles**". They criticized Paul and his ministry because he wasn't the most eloquent of speakers. They turned believers away from a gospel of pure grace to a system of **pure works**. These wolves in sheep's clothing boasted of their own righteousness as a cooperative effort with Christ's righteousness. Paul was very concerned that this bad yeast would spread through the whole dough of the church. In Chapter 11, he wrote: **I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your mind may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ....** {2 Cor 11:3}

Paul knew God called him to ministry. **Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.** Paul experienced that mercy first hand in his conversion from being **the persecuting terrorist** to becoming the pastoring teacher. He tasted that sweet Gospel of Jesus and his love for him in forgiving his past and calling him to service. God **placed these treasures of His grace** into Paul and he never forgot **how Jesus' called him to make His light shine.**

You thought of your treasure. Now what is God's? Paul begins to answer that when he says: **5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.**

What's there to preach about ourselves? You and I were conceived from sinful parents with the curse of death and damnation upon us before our birthdays. We were **lost** in sin, **condemned** to hell, **enemies** of God, **blind** to his love, and spiritually **dead** in our hearts. **We were hopelessly in spiritual darkness** forever doomed with an eternal sentence of punishment. Our sinful natures haunt our every move, thought, word, and action and anger God to the fullest. **The wages of sin is still death** and we earn top dollar! So we can't be the greatest gift.

God offers the greatest gift in the Gospel – the good news about Jesus, His Son. That's a costly treasure. It's worth the price of Jesus' blood. You can't put a price tag or a barcode on it. All the gold, silver, money, stocks/bonds, real estate, jewels, wealth put together **do not stack up** to the value of God's treasure. (**Estimates of world's wealth: \$200-600 trillion**) The Bible says in Psalm 49: **7 No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him-- 8 the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough.** {Ps 49:7-8} Only **the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.** {1 Jn 1:7} Only Jesus' blood was offered as the final answer to the problems that we face and the messes in our lives. Only Jesus' blood is the payment for sin and has the power that has conquered the devil and open heaven. Peter wrote: **You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed...but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.** {1 Peter 1:18-19}

God's treasure has had a profound effect in our lives. **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.** The difference is as extreme as being hopelessly lost in a cold, pitch-black cave for days and then being rescued & brought into the bright sunshine of a warm day. God removes the veil of our spiritual darkness to see the light of His forgiveness, peace, and hope. That light now shines in us!

That's the treasure. We hear it every week in our services. Do we view this message the same way God does? Or do we carelessly toss it in the corner and look for something better? Do we stop and rejoice that God would even give us such a treasure to shine in us do we take it for granted and actually think we deserve it? These thoughts which creep into our minds and heart diminish the value of God's treasure. But again and again, the Lord reminds us that the best we should expect from God is eternal punishment. Without His light shining in us, we would still be hopelessly blind and spiritually dead with no heavenly light at the end of the tunnel of life.

But God **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.** He loved us to give us His greatest treasure, because He wanted to.

## 2

When we see God's treasure as our treasure, then we'll marvel even more that **GOD WORKS WITH CLAY JARS LIKE US to make His life spread.**

Lest Paul begin to boast as to how privileged he was or how great he became as an apostle, God made sure that anyone looking at him would give him the credit for his accomplishments. God did that by using a fragile, homely, vessel like Paul who says in our text: **<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.**

I can still see it in my Mom's lower right cupboard in the same place for over 40 years. It was solid dark blue ceramic jar, round in the middle, narrow at the top (about this big). It had a matching cover which simply rested on the opening. I don't know who made it. I don't remember when we got. I don't know what happened to it after Mom died. But I sure would like to have it back again. It was a plain ceramic jar with no bright colors or decorations. It was chipped & cracked. But that jar was a treasure to me and my kids because it contained Grandma's chocolate chip cookies or ginger snaps. They knew exactly where to look to find those homemade treasures. That blue jar was a treasure not because of the outside, but because of what was inside. And if you ask them about it today, they'd all remember that blue, ceramic jar.

Clay jars are the same thing. They're brittle and crack easily. That's what I am: a clay jar. I'm sinful, easily brought down & discouraged, afraid of what is going to happen. I'm weak, sick, and going to die. I'm like an old beat up, chipped, cracked piece of clay pottery and so is every one of you! We know better than anyone how weak and brittle we are. But **God works with clay jars like us to make his life spread.** He entrusts His most valued treasure into the hands of His people to take it and spread it with others. Remember your answer to my opening question? Whatever it was, would you give it to me to keep, use, or handle? I'd probably drop it, lose it, or break it.

When God works with clay jars, the results are miraculous! **<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.** The reason God put His treasure into clay jars is to show that the power is God's, not ours. God wants us to see how His work is done by him and not us. He wants us to see that He gets his work done in spite of us, not because of us. Today we are here because God worked with a clay jar called our parents or Grandparents, a pastor/teacher/SS teacher or a friend to bring that treasure into our lives. And He keeps working with clay jars to do the same thing today.

Paul was glad to make Jesus' light shine and His life spread. He drew His strength from that precious treasure-The Gospel. He was only the vessel through whom God worked. **By God's grace, so are you.** What a blessing that God gives you this treasure. What a privilege to know that he's put that treasure into your hearts and hands in spite of who you are, and not because of it.

May we focus our faith on **Jesus, our Priceless Treasure...Fount of purest pleasure, Truest friend to me!** May we worship Him all summer and not have a "summer slump". May we consider how to serve him with our gifts in VBS, Sunday JAM, K2L, or just at home to **make Jesus' light shine and His life spread.** And it'll be **amazing to see** what God accomplishes...**working with clay jars like us! AMEN**