

READING

2 Corinthians 4:1-18

SERMON

Treasures in Clay Jars (2 Corinthians 4)

“...we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” (2 Corinthians 4:7 NIV)

What treasure? It is the treasure spoken of in verse 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.” (2 Corinthians 4:6 NIV)

This is the treasure spoken of in chapter 3:8 when Paul writes

“will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts!” (2 Corinthians 3:8-11 NIV)

In chapter 3, Paul talks about the treasure that we all have if the Spirit of God lives within us – this surpassing glory!

But why keep the treasure, the greatest treasure of all, eternal life, because that is what we carry around with us when the Spirit lives within? We carry around this wonderful precious treasure in jars that are so fragile, so cheap to make and with no real value.

Why. Again look at verse 7.

“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” (2 Corinthians 4:7 NIV)

It can be summed up in one word – pride. If we were to be expensive, great to look at, then we would begin to get proud and not give glory to God. It is too easy as one rises to the top in any profession or in an area that pride comes in.

In Cover-To-Cover at the moment the Judeans are not having a good time of it. Israel had already fallen, and Jerusalem has just fallen and been pillaged and burned, including the Temple. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were pride of having the Temple there and assumed that God will protect them because they had the Temple – they were proud of the Temple instead of being proud of God.

We too can so easily slip into that. I know a man who became a deacon of a Baptist Church very much so that it would look good on his CV and also he could go around to other Christian gatherings saying that he was a deacon of the Baptist Church.

For some people whom God blesses with the gift of healing, when one sees them, one wonders who has the glory, God or the person doing the healing.

So why are we treasures of Clay?

- Firstly **to show the glory of God** and not ourselves. As soon as pride of ourselves creeps in, they we have lost the plot.

- **To be available for service** – we can too easily say this. Sue ended our time together this morning by saying, ‘we enter for worship, but leave to serve’. I am sure we all say that and mean it, but what does it mean. It can mean service on our terms, if I do not have to put myself out too much – it does not interfere with our lives too much. Over the years that Sue and I have been married we have had quite a few people stay with us, both short and long term. It usually means some inconvenience for Sue and I, but you make the adjustments. One person was Les who came to stay for 2 weeks because he was in-between houses. He ended up staying for several months. But the Bible tells us to be hospitable, to open up one’s home – to be ready to serve God.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount

“..if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”
(Matthew 5:40-42 NIV)

This was Jesus saying be ready to serve, to serve at cost to oneself at times.

- We also to **depend on God**. Thinking of ourselves as jars of clay means that we will not get above ourselves but realise that we have to depend on God for all things. We will need to go to him, to ask him, to listen to him. This is one of the reasons why I am looking forward to the Labyrinth coming again – another opportunity to be with God and show him that I depend on him and not on myself.
- Also as we are jars of clay, we will have **real problems**. This year at Leading Edge we heard from Kingsley Appiagyei, the President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and who is coming here for our church anniversary. Kingsley said one evening in Venue 1 that the televangelists who talk and preach about life being easy with great health and wealth have got it all wrong. As Paul states here, verse 8

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”
(2 Corinthians 4:8-9 NIV)

This is one of those verses that sticks with me because of a friend of mine. His work meant that he was out on the road most days and used to pray and read his Bible at lunchtime, usually sitting in his car. One day he read the words we have just read

“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”
(2 Corinthians 4:8-9 NIV)

And then he got out of his car, and proceeded to trip over and went day quite heavily on his knees which meant that he was hobbling for a few weeks – he was struck down, but not destroyed. He did say to God that he did not have to demonstrate the verses in quite such a graphic way!

Life is not guaranteed to be easy – it can be hard with emotional and physical pain because people will not take care of jars of clay, as they would of bone china or precious metal. What happened to Paul? Chapter 6:4

“Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: *in great endurance; in troubles, hardships and distresses; in beatings, imprisonments and riots; in hard work, sleepless nights and hunger;* in purity, understanding, patience and kindness; in the Holy Spirit and in sincere love; in truthful speech and in the power of God; with weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left; through glory and *dishonour, bad report and good report;* genuine, yet *regarded as impostors;* known, yet *regarded as unknown;* dying, and yet we live on; *beaten, and yet not killed; sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; poor, yet making many rich; having nothing, and yet possessing everything.*” (2 Corinthians 6:4-10 NIV)

Some say this relates to verse 10 of the chapter we read when Paul says

“We always carry around in our body the *death of Jesus,* so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 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 then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.” (2 Corinthians 4:10-12 NIV)

Life is not promised to be a bed of roses for jars of clay, but we are still carrying the treasure given to us by God – eternal life. We die for Jesus, and maybe literally, so that others can know the life of Jesus.

So we are jars of clay with a great treasure within. But what do we do with the treasure? Do we keep it or give it away? Paul gives us two reasons for giving the treasure away, we are transporting jars, not storage jars. We need to remember that – our treasure is never to be hoarded but shared, given away even. The reasons are an eschatological one and a doxological one

- **Eschatological Reason** – Eschatology is the study of the end times, those times when the end of world is going to happen, and so there is an end time reason for giving away the treasure. Verse 14. Let us go to verse 13

“It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.” (2 Corinthians 4:13-14 NIV)

Jesus is coming again for his own and so we want that to be as many as can be, and that will only happen as we speak about Jesus and our relationship with him – about our treasure, not about the jar it is in. All the Christians will be taken up into heaven, both alive and those who have died, and what a party that will be. But we need to tell people about the party.

- **Doxological Reason** – a doxology is simple a song or words of praise. So Paul says linking verse 13 and 15 together

“It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak,...All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.” (2 Corinthians 4:15 NIV)

There will be more people to praise God as we speak about the treasure, as we give away the treasure and so more people have it. Remember that as we give it away the jar keeps filling up – it will never go empty.

And to finish this evening we look at one phrase, which occurs in verse 1 and verse 16 that ties this together and should help us on our way

“Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.” (2 Corinthians 4:1 NIV)

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” (2 Corinthians 4:16 NIV)

Do not lose heart. We carry the treasure, but it is from God and so God will look after it and what we need to do is depend on him and say along with Paul, verse 17

“For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18 NIV)

On what are you fixing your eyes?