

CLAY JARS AND CHRISTIANS

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.*

¹³*It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak,*

¹⁴*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.*

¹⁵*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.*

¹⁶*Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.*

¹⁷*For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

¹⁸*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 4:6-17 (NIV)

INTRODUCTION – In this grand text we see:

- The Divine Light
- The Precious Treasure
- The FRAGILE Container
- The Lofty Purpose
- The Eternal Glory

I - THE DIVINE LIGHT

Notice how St. Paul traces the light from creation through the NT to the believer.

Verse 6, *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.* Genesis 1:1-5

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

⁴ God saw that the light was good, and He separated the light from the darkness.

⁵ God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

The New Testament picks up the theme of light.

1 John 1:5, *This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*

John 8:12, When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Matthew 5:14, 15. "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden.
¹⁵Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house.

How did we become that light?

- Through embracing Christ as Lord and Savior

2 Cor. 5:17, Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

- Do you get it? The light that God brought forth in creation is the very light that shines in us and through the Gospel of Jesus Christ!

- Just as the light that God brought forth in creation illuminates all that God had created, so the light of Christ illuminates our lives, and the lives of those around us.

As God's new creation we are creatures of light!

II - THE PRECIOUS TREASURE

⁷*But we have this treasure...*

1. I will be brief. You already know what the precious treasure is:

- The glorious Gospel of Christ
- The precious hope that we have in Christ
- The promise and power of the indwelling Holy Spirit
- The assurance that we belong to God
- The eternal destiny promised in the Holy Scriptures.

2. It is like the hidden treasure (Matthew 13:44), *When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.*

It is like the Pearl of Great Price, (Matt 13:45,46)

...the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

3. So precious is this treasure that Jesus challenged the rich young man to...*go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.*

Matthew 19:21

Now we are getting to the heart of this sermon.

III - THE FRAGILE CONTAINER, ...*We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*

No porcelain, stainless steel, fine china, paper/plastic plates!

- Clay Jars? Ancient people hid their valuables in ordinary things like clay jars to fool thieves and robbers. Who would want to steal a plain old clay jar? (The original cookie jars?)

- This precious hope, that enlightens our souls, is kept in fragile human bodies **to show that it is God's power that sustains us**, not our own strength or wisdom.

- Have you ever picked up a clay jar? They are heavy, made from the "stuff" of the earth, like Adam in the creation, *the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7)*.

- Human life is truly fragile, like clay jars.

- Only the keeping and sustaining power of God keeps us "in one piece."

- Place a candle in the bottom of a clay jar and the wind won't put it out.

Paul Continues

- So we are *hard pressed on every side, but not crushed*

- *Perplexed, but not in despair.*

- *Persecuted, but not abandoned.*

- *Struck down, but not destroyed.*

i.e. Knocked down, but not knocked out!

Illus: Smoking Joe Frazier was a great heavyweight boxer, actually knocked Mohammed Ali down. His son, Marvis Frazier, was fighting a tall, rangy boxer. Like his Dad, Marvis is short and stocky. And like his Dad, he had to get inside in order to have a chance against a taller opponent.

Smoking Joe was in his son's corner. Marvis didn't do well in the first round. Back in his corner he asked his Dad how he was doing. Smoking Joe told him he was doing just fine, then gave him some pointers to improve his performance.

That scene was repeated round after round. "How am I doing, Dad?" "You are doing okay, Son, but you need to work on...."

At the end of a very rough fight, Marvis was declared the winner.

Many believed that Marvis' win was in large part because of who was in his corner. The tall, lanky opponent was really fighting two Fraziers, Marvis, and Smoking Joe.

Who is in your corner? Jesus!

- As you live out your faith you may be knocked down, but you will not be knocked out.

- You will win, because of who is in your corner.

- Why clay jars? Verse 7 of our text: *But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.*

- We are in good hands. It was our Lord Jesus himself who said...*no one can snatch them out of my hand...no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.* (John 10:27-30).

IV - THE LOFTY PURPOSE

1. That our lives, what we are in these jars of clay, will reflect the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Verse 11, *so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.*

-How is Christ being revealed through you?

The lofty purpose:

2. That our words will convey the truth of God's salvation.

Verse 13, *It is written: I believed; therefore I have spoken. With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak.*

Note: faith must always lead to testimony.

You have believed. How are you speaking?

How are you witnessing for Christ?

Illus: My best boyhood friend was Earl Lipham. We entered first grade together, played together, picked strawberries together, etc.

When we were 11 years old, Earl was shot with #6 birdshot by another friend, in a foolish, boyish prank. The other boy never thought the shotgun was loaded. Earl was left blinded and paralyzed on his right side.

We kept in touch over the years. The Florida Council for the Blind helped Earl to open a kiosk in the county courthouse, where he continued for 29 years, earning a good living.

Over the years Earl would say, Lamar, "I wish I could do more for Jesus, like you." I would answer, "Earl, when you do the best you can you are doing all that you can."

Shirley and I visited Earl and wife, Lee, in November of 2007. I sat in his bedroom studio as he broadcast the gospel over ham radio. Over 1,000 persons who had actually signed into the program, and there is no telling how many tuned in each day.

When it was over I said, Earl, you reach more in a day than I do in a month for Christ.

Earl died in August, 2008, after five years of fighting Prostate Cancer.

His motto was the same as St. Pauls:

I have believed, therefore I speak! (v. 13)

- **Faith must always lead to testimony.**

V - THE ETERNAL GLORY

Verses 16, 17 of our text:

*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.***

1. The future for the Christian is glorious, beyond human expression.

1 Corinthians 2:9...*No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.*

- I have seen the breathtaking color of a New England Fall.

- I have studied the great masterpieces of art.

- I have been awed by the tulips in Holland, and the bluebonnets in Texas.

- I have marveled at the severe beauty of the American desert.

- I have seen a humming bird's flight in slow motion.

- I have smiled at a toddler's first steps.

- But, brothers and sisters in Christ, nothing on earth can compare with what God has prepared for his children.

2. Whatever the future holds for the Christian, it will come through Christ's redeeming work.

Now you see why I like this great old hymn so much:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus

Look full in his wonderful face

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim

In the light of his glory and grace.

CONCLUSION - Despite these clay jars, the future is bright for the people of God!

