

The Treasure in Jars of Clay

Proper 4

Pastor Josh Frazee

2 Cor. 4:5-12

Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Martin Luther once stated that we are nothing but beggars showing other beggars where to find food. Luther knew his position. He knew that he was nothing but a servant of God, and that it was not about him. It was all about the Word, which tells us that we are saved by grace through faith in Christ Jesus alone.

Luther had no intention of having a denomination named after him. He wanted his followers to be known as Evangelical, from the Greek *Euangelion*, which is the word for the Gospel. Luther knew that it was not he that mattered but only the proclamation of the Gospel. Sadly others would take the name who did not agree with the Scriptures and Luther, so Luther's name was added and is the one used more often.

The Gospel is indeed bread, and more than that, a treasure. It is the richest treasure anyone can ever have, and no one can take it from them.

But unbelievably enough, this treasure is passed to us from sinners, sinful human beings. Yes, pastors are saints and sinners, just like all other believers, so they are still sinners. The only time the one preaching the Gospel was not a sinner was when Jesus was preaching it because He is the only one in history to have taught it without sin. Otherwise, every person who has ever preached the Gospel has been a sinner, and everyone who ever will preach it will also be saints and, yes, sinners.

But again, it is not about the container—it is not about the person who speaks the Gospel. It is all about the treasure. That's what God tells us through His servant Paul in our Epistle text for today.

Verse 1

“For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”

There were those in Paul's day, just as there are today, who focused their ministry on what they believed *they* were accomplishing, on *their* good works, on what *they* were doing. But we believe and confess that we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, or come to Him, of our own power. That it is solely the work of the Holy Spirit. No pastor has ever or will ever bring someone to Jesus Christ. It may appear that way, but who can see the heart but God alone?

As Paul points out, it was God who made us and all of creation. God commanded the light to come into existence, and it came. It was also God who spoke and we believed. He is the one who sparked the light in each of us, the light of faith. It is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. This is found in the face of Jesus Christ.

We have that treasure, the treasure of the knowledge of the glory of God found in Jesus Christ in us. God spoke it and we received it. Yet the power remains God's alone. The salvation He has given us in His Son Jesus' life, crucifixion, and resurrection far out-shines us. The glory is God's alone.

The glory is God's alone, but we receive the same treatment for speaking it that His Son did.

Verse 2

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”

Pastors and members of every congregation do battle with the spiritual forces. As servants of Christ, we are all afflicted; but especially those who have high positions in the church. Satan strikes hardest against those on the front lines. That has always been his practice. He wants the destruction of the church and will use every way in his arsenal to deceive, ensnare, turn us against one another, and the like. “We are afflicted in every way.”

Even as jars of clay, we find that we are not perfect. We are sinners. Even our very bodies are at war with us against doing what God would have us to do. We may spend many a night “perplexed” by everything happening to us. We might even be “persecuted” or “struck down.” None of these are easy things. Nowhere in this text does God say through Paul that it will be easy or that pastors or members will always have smiles on their faces. If someone claims that it is easy, or that you are not praying hard enough, or anything like that, that person is not telling you God’s Word.

That is not, however, to say that we do not have joy during even those periods. Again, we have the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. We know the truth that Jesus died for our sins and we have received that forgiveness freely. Because of the surpassing greatness of God, while we may be “afflicted” we are not “crushed;” while we may be “perplexed” we are “not driven to despair;” while we may be “persecuted” we are “not forsaken;” while we may be “struck down” we are “not destroyed.” This is because we are “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.”

Verse 3

“For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.”

We are being conformed to the life of Christ every day. We know that whatever happens—whether we are fine physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, or if we are being “given over to death for Jesus’ sake”—God is at work in our lives for our good. But God is also at work in us that there would be “life in you.”

All of us are called to be servants of one another. As we serve and as we are in conflict with Satan and his hosts, our lives are demonstrations of “Jesus...manifested in our mortal flesh.” Several times in the Acts of the Apostles, many came to faith when the apostles were arrested or beaten for their faith. When they were weak and had to trust God most, then they were strong, and their lives showed that.

So long as we live in this sinful, fallen world, there will always be conflict between Satan and the church. There may be times of more conflict or less, but wherever the Gospel is being preached in its full truth and purity and the Sacraments are being administered according to God’s Will, Satan will be attacking. Yet while we may be attacked, we are never defeated in our Lord Jesus.

Our lives are demonstrations—not that we’re so good—we are, after all, simply beggars. They are demonstrations to show that we know where to find food. And we show others where to find the same food, the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: that He has paid the price for our sins. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.

