

Theme: Treasure in Clay Jars

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:5-12 (EHV)

⁵ Indeed, we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For the God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," is the same one who made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ. ⁷ We hold this treasure in clay jars to show that its extraordinary power is from God and not from us. ⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed, yet not despairing; ⁹ persecuted, yet not forsaken; struck down, yet not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of the Lord Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ To be sure, while we are living we are continually being handed over to death because of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our mortal flesh. ¹² So then, death is working in us, but life is working in you.

When a business is trying to get its products delivered to its customers it is going to look for the most efficient and reliable ways to do so. The more valuable the product the more important it is to make sure that your delivery system will get the product where it needs to go. If it's not, the results could be devastating—even catastrophic—to the company. No company in their right mind would chose to use a delivery system that was consistently inefficient and unreliable.

Think about the incredibly valuable "product" that God has delivered to mankind: His Holy Word. In this Word is the "Good News" (Gospel) message that all mankind has been saved through God's Son Jesus Christ and His life, death, and resurrection. Our text rightly describes this Word as a **"treasure" (v. 7)**.

How would you choose to deliver this "product," this soul-saving message, this **"treasure"**? Would you use one of God's powerful angels, or perhaps a legion of powerful angels, like the host of angels God used to announce the birth of His Son Jesus, the Savior, to the shepherds near Bethlehem (**cf. Luke 2**)? Would you write this message in fiery letters in the sky so that everyone can see it perhaps? Or maybe God should just come down in all His glory and astounding majesty and tell everyone Himself?

Well, let me ask you this: Would you, in your wildest dreams, have guessed that God would have used a **"clay jar"** to deliver the message of mankind's salvation? Probably not, right? Yet, in a sense, that is exactly what God has chosen to use to deliver the most powerful, most important, and most essential message ever written! "What on earth are you talking about, pastor?!" Let me explain.

In our text for today, the Apostle Paul refers to himself—and in fact, all Christians—as **"clay jars" (v. 7)**. Not the most flattering of illustrations, is it? However, Paul's point is a very valid one: We are **"clay jars"** whose true value and strength comes, not from ourselves but from the **"treasure" (v. 7)** that is contained inside of us! That **"treasure"** is the Word and power of God; the message of forgiveness of sins and eternal life in Jesus Christ. There is truly no greater or more valuable **"treasure!"**

Whenever I read this text I can't help but think of how one of my seminary professors further described us **"clay jars"** as "Cracked and leaky pots just hoping to splash some of God's 'water of life' on others." We are just the containers and distributors of Christ's life-giving Gospel—and we're an inefficient and unreliable delivery system at that!

So why is it that we can so easily be tempted to think that we're the priceless **"treasure"** and that we've got the strength in and of ourselves? We can easily begin to fool ourselves into thinking that we are the **"treasure"** instead of the **"clay jars"** that we really are. It is easy to begin making the people at church—the pastor or the teacher or our fellow members—the reason we are attending worship and Bible studies

instead of what it is that is actually preached and taught. In other words, putting the “**clay jar**” in front of the “**treasure**” of God’s saving Word!

Now, let’s make sure we are clear: Our fellowship, our Christian friendships, and having a harmonious relationship with our pastor, our teachers, and fellow members are incredible blessings, and should not be taken for granted! These blessings help us tremendously as we serve together in the kingdom of God and, truthfully, are one of the biggest reasons I enjoy serving the Lord and am happy that God has called me to be a pastor. But if we are valuing our pastors or our teachers or our fellow members ahead of the Lord and His Word—valuing the “**clay jars**” over the “**treasure**” that God has given us—then we’ve got it all wrong and we are headed for spiritual trouble and possibly even disaster!

Well, we might ask the question then, “Why does God even use us ‘clay pots’ anyway?” Paul gives us the answer in the last half of verse seven, “**to show that its extraordinary power is from God and not from us**” (v. 7b). Spend some time serving in the Lord’s church whether it’s as a pastor, or teacher, or staff member in our Christian Day School, or on the Board of Education, or as an elder or church officer, or on the Women’s Auxiliary, or in just about any other volunteer capacity within the church and you will find that it is a very humbling experience. If we do an honest assessment of ourselves and our work for the Lord we will realize very quickly just how unfit we are to be used in the service of the Lord—how “leaky and cracked” we “**clay jars**” are.

But on the positive side, you also very quickly realize that it is the power and providence of God Himself that is working for you and through you. I can’t tell you how many times in my ministry that it has been made very clear to me that the Lord’s ministry really isn’t about me or about us; it’s about Him! There have been many times where I have felt my weakness—just how “leaky and cracked” a pot I really am, and yet God lifted me up, pulled me through and caused His precious water of life to still be poured out through me. At the same time there have been occasions where our congregations have been blessed in one way or another and I’ve gotten to witness first hand just how little those whole situations actually had to do with me or even with my involvement. Maybe you’ve had similar experiences in your life? I hope you have and pray that you and I will continue to have them!

That is why Paul writes in the first verse of our text, “**Indeed, we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.** ⁶ **For the God who said, “Light will shine out of darkness,” is the same one who made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.**” (v. 5-6). We are not the “show;” we are not the “**treasure,**” therefore “**we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord**” (v. 5). We are, as Paul says, “**servants**” of our fellow believers and all mankind “**for Jesus’ sake**” (v. 5). That’s what the word *minister* means, “servant.” We are not the “**treasure;**” we have been given the “**treasure**” when God “**made [His] light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ**” (v. 6). He has put this “**treasure**” in us lowly “**clay jars**” that we might pour it out and share it with others and to show us, and the world around us “**that its extraordinary power is from God and not from us**” (v. 7b).

The Apostle Paul, the very man who wrote this text, was perhaps the greatest example of this. He was quite possibly the greatest Christian missionary ever, but he apparently was disabled! Even he was a “cracked and leaky” pot! He writes in this same letter to the Corinthians about a “**thorn in the flesh,**” some kind of physical infirmity that the Lord refused to take away to keep Paul humble and to constantly remind him of where his true strength came from. After praying three times for the Lord to take it away God said to Paul, “**My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness**” “My power and My “**treasure**” are shown to be perfect in a weak and frail ‘clay jar!’” Paul’s reply: “**Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong**” (2 Corinthians 12:7, 9-10).

Paul understood where his true value came from; where his true strength came from. He wrote in the chapter just before our sermon text, **“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant” (2 Corinthians 3:5-6).**

Think of how important—how essential—this attitude is to our Christian life: Realizing that we are neither the **“treasure”** nor the **“power”** in and of ourselves. After all, would you rather put your trust in this fragile, breakable “clay” (ourselves), or on the solid **“Rock”** (Jesus Christ)?

So, ask yourself, “What are you here for?” Why do you come to St. Stephen? Why do you show up here on Sundays for worship and Bible Study? Are you here because of the **“clay jar”** or the **“treasure”** that’s inside it? Are you here because of a man, or because of your fellow members, or are you here because of the Message? We must always remember to put Christ and His Word, the **“treasure,”** first, because no pastor or teacher will be here forever! But Jesus and His soul-saving, faith-strengthening Word will! In the same way, no matter how much I love and care for you, no matter how much I enjoy serving as your pastor here at St. Stephen you will not be here forever either! But our Savior Jesus will be—no matter where we are.

So, I ask again the question I asked near the beginning of our sermon: If you were God how would you have your Holy, powerful, message of mankind’s salvation delivered? Well, the answer as we were reminded of in our sermon for today is that He chose to use **“clay jars,”** human beings, to carry and spread this priceless, powerful **“treasure.”**

But let’s not forget the ultimate way God delivered this message to all people; the ultimate way He showed His love: God Himself came down to deliver His message of salvation, but He came down—not in His full brightness, splendor, and glory, but as a **“clay pot”** Himself (albeit, a perfect one!) when He sent His Son, Jesus, the Word who was made man to live among us—to live a perfect life for us, and to give up His life for us to pay for the sins we committed, and to live again for us that we too would live forever with Him! The **“potter” (Isaiah 64:8)** the One who was and is the **“treasure”** Himself came down and made Himself one of His own “pots” to save us “cracked, leaking” and lost vessels through the most unlikely of means: the cross! This incredible message is why, as Paul says in our text, **“...we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake ... We hold this treasure in clay jars to show that its extraordinary power is from God and not from us” (2 Corinthians 4:5, 7).** What a message! What a **“treasure!”** Amen.