

Text: II Corinthians 4:5-12

Theme: Treasure In Jars of Clay

June 3, 2018

What can you tell me about clay flower pots? They're functional; they do the job. However, they're also fragile, easily chipped, cracked, or broken. With careful handling, they were useful, but if you were a bit careless, they were useless. In our text, Paul talks about a treasure in clay jars. At first glance, the imagery sounds out of place, yet, with more careful thought, we realize that we are those clay jars into which God has placed His greatest treasure, the gift of life and faith.

I. In His infinite wisdom, our God has given us a priceless treasure in our jars of clay. A. But we sometimes fail to realize the treasure. 1. We fail to recognize the treasure because we forget its value. How much is a million dollars worth to you? Now, "How much is forgiveness worth to you? If you could pay for it, how much would you be willing to pay? If it were for sale on the auction block, how much would you give if you could buy eternal life? What about the presence and work of God? What's it worth to you? Maybe not intentionally, but sometimes we forget the value of our treasure and when it has little value, it's easy to forget that it even exists.

2. We fail to recognize our treasure because we think we are self-sufficient. As you watch Brewers baseball, how many times do you think to yourself, "I can do better than that. How could he miss that pitch? I could have caught that with my eyes closed." Yet, if the coach actually put you in the game, you couldn't do it. Suddenly, you'd realize that you aren't as independent and self-sufficient as you once thought. Today, we hear it all around us, "Do you own thing. You gotta live your own life. Be free and do it your way!" Maybe our world thinks that will work, but, as Christians, dependency is what leads us to recognize our treasure.

3. We fail to recognize our treasure because we don't see ourselves as His servants. Paul writes, "For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." Servants - who wants to be a servant if they can be the master? Who wants to be the employee if you can be the boss? We don't live in a servant-minded world. Because we're constantly surrounded by competition, by the scratching and pecking to get to the top, we forget. We forget that we are servants of our Lord, those called to humbly carry out His work in our corrupted world. Until we learn our place as servants, our treasure looks worthless.

B. What treasure do we find in our jars of clay? 1. We find the treasure of our weakness. "But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." Elsewhere, Paul writes, "When I am weak, then I am strong. For God's strength is made perfect in my weakness." We may view weakness as a sign of well, weakness. Yet, our God needs us to admit our weakness, to realize our lack of strength because, as we do, our dependency on God increases dramatically. And when we are entirely dependent on God, when we realize how fragile we are, we understand the value of His treasure.

2. We find the assurance that all power belongs to God. What if God only had a little power, only some power, only most power, but not all power? In our fragile clay jars, we find the fulness of God's power. We are fragile, but not God. We are weak, but not God. We are weary, but not God. We are frustrated, but not God.

We are helpless, but not God. This incredible power belongs to God and how great it is to know that He has all power. If we had some power and God has some power, we'd have everything all messed up. In our weakness, within our clay pots, God has chosen to place His power, to work His amazing work through simple people like us.

3. We find that we are afflicted, but not crushed. At first glance, we say, "But I don't want to face tough times. I want the good life." Yet, as we look at the comparisons found in our text, we realize that difficulties are a reality, but when those challenges arrive, we have what others lack. We have the confidence, the promise that, although we are afflicted, God will not allow us to be crushed. We may feel or it may appear that God has turned the other way one too many times and allowed us to be crushed, but His promise always remains, always overshadows our feelings. Our treasure is secure. God will not allow us to be crushed.

4. We find that when we are perplexed, we are not in despair. How many months, day, hours, or minutes has it been since you had a perplexing thought? How many of you are living in a perplexing situation? Life is confusing. Paul knew that and Paul reminds us that that's a given. Being a servant of Christ won't eliminate life's perplexity. But, it will do something far more important. The treasure in our clay jars is God's promise that no matter how perplexing and how long the perplexing lasts, it will not drive us to despair so long as we lean on and trust in Jesus. It's another piece of that precious treasure from God.

5. We find that we are persecuted, but not forsaken. As we hear the word "persecuted," our minds almost automatically think of the persecutions that are occurring in other countries today. But, we, too, face persecution. Perhaps it's more subtle, but it's still damaging. Our persecutions tend to be the nagging kind, the little digs, the under their breath comments, the look of disdain when someone realizes that you're a Christian, that you go to church on Sunday morning. No matter how they occur, our treasure is found in the confidence that God will never, ever, for any reason forsake us. Come what may, He will be at our side.

6. We find that we are struck down, but not destroyed. How many of you have ever faced an illness, an accident, an unexplainable health issue, an unexpected loss, anything that has created some type of pain? As we consider that list, we say, "Yep, count me in. I've been there or I'm still there." When we're in the trenches, it's easy to feel like God has forgotten, that God isn't going to show up, that God is simply going to allow it to destroy us. But nothing is farther from the truth. Because of our treasure, we have hope; we have the confidence, the promise that never will our God allow us to be destroyed. What a priceless treasure that is.

7. We may know something about clay jars, but what matters most, isn't what we know about the jars. It's what we know about the treasure, the incredible treasure God has placed into your fragile clay jar. Amen.