

CLAY POTS WITH PRICELESS TREASURE

I. 2 Corinthians 4:1-18

A. Like my Mother, my daughter--Nicole and niece--Kelsey are both artisans. No matter what they do in life, whether it's grandiose or mundane, those two young ladies will always wax creative. Kelsey's in college and will likely teach art in the near future. Nicole's currently in a pottery class where she's been making a unique vase which will soon hold flowers or plants. When finished, I wonder if eyes will be drawn to the vase or to its contents? In ancient days people hid treasure in earthen pottery to protect it. Hidden treasure where you'd least expect it!

B. I also possess an artistic artifact by another family member from when they were in high school art class. I promise you this piece was not crafted by Mom or Daughter or Niece. We might wonder what its value is. It would be hard to put a price on it! But if I were to fill this vase with diamonds, rubies, and precious stones, its value would skyrocket. He who has ears let him hear... On to our text...

C. 2 Corinthians 4:1-18 (ESV) is about clay pots holding priceless Treasure...

1) **V1: 1** *Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.* (Paul & Co. were proclaimers of the Good News and suffered greatly for it. They had to deal with wolves in sheep's clothing, false prophets, those who distorted God's Word, who pedaled the gospel in order to profit, and such was the case in Corinth. And yet with all this, Paul did not lose heart!)

2) **V2-3: 2** *But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, ('**Tamper**' was a wine merchant's term used by those who watered down their wine to cheat their customers.) but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. 3* *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. (Without shame, Paul & Co put the truth of the Gospel out there. Some received it; others did not. Those who are living & dying without Jesus, are unable to SEE the Light of this Good News.)*

3) **V4: 4** *In their case the god of this world (**Satan**) has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (There's a difference between acknowledging facts vs seeing the Light. **Hebrews. 1:3a** (ESV) says: "He (**Christ Jesus**) is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power." Some SEE the radiant Light and some don't. If that Light has not yet dawned on you or your loved ones, pray the veil would be lifted, that the eyes of hearts will be opened!)*

4) **V5-6: 5** *For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6* *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. (In Genesis, at creation, God spoke light into existence: "Let there be light!" God likewise causes dark hearts throughout our dark world to be flooded with the Light of Christ! Weren't our hearts too once darkened before God mercifully illuminated us with the Light & Love of Jesus?!)*

5) V7: 7 *But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. (The clay jars, earthen vessels, the cracked pots are us! The priceless Treasure is the the Gospel of Jesus Christ! This Treasure makes the blind to see! This Treasure makes the poor rich! This Treasure saves from death! But sharing this Treasure can be costly!)*

6) V8-12: Paul shares the cost: 8 *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 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. 12 So death is at work in us, but life in you. (Ah yes the victorious Christian life!)*

7) V13-15: 13 *Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," (Psalm 116:10) we also believe, and so we also speak, 14 knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into His presence. 15 For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. (We call this, the sure and certain Hope of resurrection unto eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord! It'll all prove worth it!)*

8) V16-18: Like Paul, we've only got so much time to shine. While the earthly benefits of being stewards of this Treasure are limited, the eternal benefits are unlimited: 16 *So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. (Temporary lightweight affliction presently vs tons of heavyweight never-ending glory to come! Pretty good trade off!)*

D. So here are some takeaways...

1) We are not the ones who open people's hearts to respond. We are not the ones who cause the lights to come on. We are not the ones who cleverly cause a heart to be cut to the quick. We are not called to flimflam or manipulate or bamboozle or make false promises beyond the True Promises. Not called to scare souls into shallow decisions. And yet we do have our God given role in making Christ known throughout our respective spheres. Is there a cost? Typically, yes!

2) You might say, "I'm not good enough--there's too many cracks in my pot!" Perhaps fear is holding you back. Or maybe a sense of unworthiness. But remember it's a former Jewish terrorist writing this! Remember Peter denied Jesus 3 times but was forgiven and restored! Doubting Thomas died for his faith! Jesus' brother James was a skeptic who died for his faith too! The former slave-ship captain who became a pastor and hymn writer, John Newton wrote: "Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me; I once was lost but now I'm found, I was blind but now I see..." (Newton was given eyes to see! Us too!)

3) Who in your family is waiting to hear this from you? Who in your workplace? What classmate or teammate? Do you consider them to be more fractured than what you were when you first heard? *'But they won't listen to me!'* Have you tried writing them? How often do you pray for them? What if their end comes suddenly? How grieved would you be then that you withheld this Treasure?

F. Let's review Verse 7 just to make sure we've all heard it loud and clear...

1) **2 Cor. 4:7 (AMPC)** *7 However, we possess this precious treasure [the divine Light of the Gospel] in [frail, human] vessels of earth, that the grandeur and exceeding greatness of the power may be shown to be from God and not from ourselves.*

2) **2 Cor. 4:7 (Wuest Expanded Translation)** *7 But we have this treasure [the reflection of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ] in earthenware containers, in order that the super-excellence of the power might be from God as a source and not from us.*

3) **John Piper exhorts like this:** "Too many people say, 'I'm so ordinary, so average and undistinguished. I can't do anything significant.' 2 Corinthians 4:7 shows that this argument is wrong and why. It says, 'We have this treasure in earthen vessels (or clay pots!) to show us that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us.' God's concept of ministry is so different from the world's concept. The world stresses the classy container, not the glory of God in human weakness."

G. Two weeks ago we had this amazing potluck with all that great food. And what did we serve it on? Paper bowls, plates, styrofoam cups and plastic utensils. Did any of you go home raving about the paper-ware? No! You went home raving about the soups, sides and desserts! How about this: *"We hold this Priceless Treasure in Dixie cups!"*

H. The Light of the Gospel is the celestial floodlight shining on the cross where God's glory was displayed in His Son. There, our destruction was stopped and God's love was vividly revealed! There, life replaced death! There, mankind's broken relationship with our Creator was restored! No matter how cracked and fissured and broken these vessels of our lives are now, they're meant to radiate this awesome news that blazes brighter than a thousand suns! All glory to God in the highest!

* **Charles Wesley** penned the song, *"And Can it Be that I Should Gain"* in 1738. It's an oldie but a goodie! Part of it is his testimonial. Listen to a few lines:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee...

* **Hank Williams, Sr, sang:** "I wandered so aimless, life filled with sin; I wouldn't let my dear Savior in. Then Jesus came like a stranger in the night, praise the Lord, I saw the light! I saw the light! I saw the light! No more darkness! No more night! Now I'm so happy, no sorrow in sight, praise the Lord, I saw the light!" **(May this be the testimony of us all!)** * **Close with Prayer.**

Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff

2 Corinthians 4:1-18 (ESV)

1 Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. **2** But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. **3** And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. **4** In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. **5** For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. **6** 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. **7** But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. **8** We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; **9** persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; **10** always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. **11** 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. **12** So death is at work in us, but life in you. **13** Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, "I believed, and so I spoke," we also believe, and so we also speak, **14** knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into His presence. **15** For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. **16** So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. **17** For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, **18** as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:7 (Amplified)

7 However, we possess this precious treasure [the divine Light of the Gospel] in [frail, human] vessels of earth, that the grandeur and exceeding greatness of the power may be shown to be from God and not from ourselves.

2 Corinthians 4:7 (Wuest Expanded Translation)

7 But we have this treasure [the reflection of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ] in earthenware containers, in order that the super-excellence of the power might be from God as a source and not from us.

Quote by John Piper

"Too many people say, "I'm so ordinary, so average and undistinguished. I can't do anything significant." 2 Corinthians 4:7 shows that this argument is wrong and why. It says, "*We have this treasure in earthen vessels (or clay pots!) to show us that the*

transcendent power belongs to God and not to us." God's concept of ministry is so different from the world's concept. The world stresses the classy container, not the glory of God in human weakness.

- John Piper, sermon titled, "*Calling All Clay Pots*," September 12, 1982.

Lyrics by Charles Wesley

http://www.hymnary.org/text/and_can_it_be_that_i_should_gain

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

- From Charles Wesley's Hymn, "*And Can It Be That I Should Gain*" Circa 1738.

I Saw The Light

Words and Music by Hank Williams, Sr.

I wandered so aimless, life filled with sin,
I wouldn't let my dear Saviour in,
Then Jesus came like a stranger in the night,
Praise the Lord, I saw the light!

Chorus:

I saw the light! I saw the light!
No more darkness! No more night!
Now I'm so happy, no sorrow in sight,
Praise the Lord, I saw the light!

Just like a blind man, I wandered alone,
Worries and fears, I claimed for my own,
Then like the blind man that God gave back his sight,
Praise the Lord, I saw the light! (Repeat Chorus)

I was a fool to wander and stray,
Straight is the gate and narrow the way,
Now I have traded the wrong for the right,
Praise the Lord, I saw the light! (Repeat Chorus)

Scriptures, Videos, & Bonus Stuff

"And Can It Be" by Charles Wesley - Performed by Hadyn & Merran Jones

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kHaFM1Jx088>

"I Saw The Light" - Josh Turner (Live at Gaither Studios)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vhpKME_k7vE

"Shine" - Newsboys (Oldie but a Goodie)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=givCI1M9Rh0>

"Blind" Hidden Song: "Four Seven" - Jars of Clay

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0jTYifSdjwk>

Artist at Work - Ryan Delgado

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_zCWbfSx1K4

Isaiah 40:9 (ESV)

9 Go on up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good news; lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, herald of good news; lift it up, fear not; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!"

Romans 1:16 (ESV)

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

2 Corinthians 5:1-10 (NLT)

1 For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God Himself and not by human hands. **2** We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. **3** For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies. **4** While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life. **5** God Himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee He has given us His Holy Spirit. **6** So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord. **7** For we live by believing and not by seeing. **8** Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord. **9** So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please Him. **10** For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.

Quote by William Barclay

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the power which surpasses all things may be seen to be of God and not of us."

Quote by John MacArthur

"Very often when I sign a Bible this week or when I sign a book I put under my name "*2 Corinthians 4:5-7*" because this is a passage in which I really find my life defined and

my ministry defined. Verse 5 says, *"For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For God who said light shall shine out of darkness is the one who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ, but we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves."* It is that really startling and extreme contrast that is the heart of this passage, the amazing contrast between the shining glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and the feeble imperfect fragile ugly containers by which this glorious gospel is carried and delivered to people.

- John MacArthur, sermon titled, *"Clay Pots and the Secret to Serving God,"* March 11, 2001.

Quote by Charles H. Spurgeon

"There is nothing remarkable in us, we are in ourselves poor, frail fragile creatures, like earthen vessels of no particular value, yet this we do not regret, for there is a good reason for it: The most earnest and faithful minister of the gospel must ever remember that humbling truth. He has this precious treasure of the gospel entrusted to his charge; he knows he has it, and he means to keep it safely, but, still, he is nothing but an earthen vessel, easily broken, soon marred, a poor depository for such priceless truth. Yet God has a good reason for putting this treasure into earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. If angels had been commissioned to preach the gospel, we might have attributed some of its power to their superior intelligence, and if only those had been called to preach the gospel who were men of great intellect and of profound learning, we might have considered that the talent of man was the essential qualification for a preacher. But when God selects, as He often does, nay, as He always does--earthen vessels, and some that seem more manifestly earthen than others, then the excellency of the power is unquestionably seen to be of God, and not of us."

- Charles H. Spurgeon, *Expositional Notes on 2 Corinthians 4.*

Quote by Oswald Chambers

"God can achieve His purpose either through the absence of human power and resources, or the abandonment of reliance on them. All through history God has chosen and used nobodies, because their unusual dependence on Him made possible the unique display of His power and grace. He chose and used somebodies only when they renounced dependence on their natural abilities and resources."

Devotional by David C. Egner

Our Daily Bread

THESE bodies of ours truly are "earthen vessels" (2 Corinthians 4:7). They are fragile and weak and susceptible to injury and disease. But physical limitations need not limit the spirit. Many believers have learned that to be "struck down" does not mean "destroyed."

Leon Wood exemplified this truth during the closing years of his life. While this brilliant Old Testament scholar was in his prime as an author and as the dean of a seminary, he

contracted amyotrophic lateral sclerosis—Lou Gehrig's disease. Bit by bit, it struck down Wood's body. When he could no longer run, he had to give up tennis. Walking became difficult as he grew weaker and weaker. Finally he was confined to his bed. But as his body weakened, his faith and resolve strengthened. He continued to study, to teach, and to write. Some of his most significant books were written in the latter stages of his illness. The last seminary class he taught met at his bedside. His spirit remained strong to the end. He was not destroyed.

When we are struck down by disease or stopped by some serious setback, we need not allow it to destroy us. We can choose instead to hold fast to God's goodness. As we trust and obey Him through difficulty, we demonstrate the power of God and we encourage others. In so doing, we strengthen the very thing Satan is trying to destroy. - -
- D.C. Egner, Our Daily Bread Ministries. Author Bio: <http://odb.org/author/davidcegner/>

Theological Note on 2 Corinthians 4:18

NIV Study Bible

"So we fix our eyes on not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." - 2 Corinthians 4:18 (NIV)

4:18 *what is seen... what is unseen.* The experiences and circumstances of the present life, often painful and perplexing, are what is visible to the Christian; but these are merely phenomena in the passing parade of our fallen age and therefore temporary and fleeting. To fix our eyes on these visible things would cause us to lose heart (v.v 1,16). By contrast the unseen realities, which are no less real for being invisible (cf. Heb. 11:1,6, 26-27), are eternal and imperishable. Accordingly, we look up and away from impermanent appearances of this present world scene (see Php. 3:20; Heb. 12:2).

- Theological Note on 2 Corinthians 4:18, *NIV Study Bible*, Zondervan, p. 2241.

Glory on Display

Sermon Illustration by Greg Breazeale

On January 9th, 2007, Joshua Bell sold out Boston's Symphony Hall. Seats were nearly \$100 each. Bell plays a violin worth more than \$3 million and is one of the best musicians in the world. Three days later he entered a metro station in Washington, D.C. wearing casual clothing and a ball cap. He opened his case and played his violin for 45 minutes. Only six people stopped, 20 gave money (a total of \$32), but no one recognized him.

Today, when it comes to the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ, many are blind. They do not see His beauty and majesty, and therefore do not ascribe to Him the honor and worth He deserves. As Christians, we want to do all we can to spread Christ's glory in the world. In 2 Corinthians 4:1–6 the Apostle Paul addressed how difficult this can be. We may become discouraged and desire to quit (v.1), but we have good reasons to press on.

- Greg Breazeale, illustration from sermon titled, *"Glory on Display."* To read the full sermon, go to:

http://www.lifeway.com/Article/sermon-glory-on-display-2-jesus-light-corinthians-4#author_bio_0