

Displaying the Gospel  
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2 Corinthians 4:5-18

Opening Question: **Why did people sometimes hide cash in a cookie jar?**

A cookie jar or a shoebox might be the least likely place you would expect to find something of value. We might also say the least likely place for God to “store” the immeasurable power of the gospel would be in sinful, flawed humans – yet that’s what He has chosen to do.

- To give us some context for this passage, Paul’s enemies (false teachers who wanted the spotlight) were “throwing stones” at his ministry:
  - *“If Paul is God’s man, why is he so ‘rough around the edges’?”*
  - *“If Paul has God’s hand on him why does he seem to have so many problems and run into so much conflict?”*
- The church in Corinth was buying into this criticism and questioning Paul’s ministry, so Paul was writing to defend his calling. This passage speaks to the realities of being persecuted and suffering for the cause of Christ.
- We can also apply this passage to our own lives as followers of Jesus.
- Like Paul’s enemies, our enemy (Satan) whispers lies of doubt in our ears:
  - *“I thought serving Jesus was supposed to improve your life. To be a child of God, you sure seem to have a lot of problems. Maybe you got it wrong when you trusted Him with your whole life.”*
  - *“If Jesus really loved you things wouldn’t be this hard, right?”*
  - *“Maybe it’s YOUR fault. Maybe you’re just not good enough and Jesus is punishing you for being such a loser. Or maybe He has abandoned you.”*

- Sometimes Satan even uses false teachers masquerading as ministers of the gospel and teaching the heresy that Jesus wants you to be healthy, wealthy, and living in “perpetual sunshine.” If you’ll just buy their book and send a donation you can learn how to live a trouble-free life.
- That kind of false teaching turns people against God when troubles come.
- Jesus said: <sup>33</sup> *I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.*” John 16:33 (NLT)
- Paul wrote to the Corinthians about suffering for Jesus’ sake.
- In verse five Paul is explained why his preaching was solid and sound:

2 Corinthians 4:5–18 (NLT)

<sup>5</sup> You see, we don’t go around preaching about ourselves. We preach that Jesus Christ is Lord, and we ourselves are your servants for Jesus’ sake.

- **How can that verse help us spot a false teacher?**
- The confession “Jesus Christ is Lord” was the baptismal confession of the early church. Jesus, the “God-man” who died and rose from the dead, is both Savior and Lord; Messiah and Master.
- Fact: Anyone claiming to share the gospel who doesn’t point everything back to Jesus Christ as Lord, isn’t sharing the gospel at all!

<sup>6</sup> For God, who said, “Let there be light in the darkness,” has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

- Just as God created light when He created the world, He has given every believer the “light of the world” in our hearts.
- What’s in our hearts will show up in our lives.

John wrote of Jesus: <sup>4</sup> *In him was life, and the life was the light of men.* <sup>5</sup> *The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.* John 1:4–5 (ESV)

Jesus said: <sup>22</sup> *“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light,* <sup>23</sup> *but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!* Matthew 6:22–23 (ESV)

<sup>7</sup> We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

- Clay jars were cheap, breakable, disposable, and were used for many purposes from nasty tasks we won't discuss to hiding treasured items.
- God chose to put the unbelievably valuable power of the gospel in the most unlikely place: flawed, fragile, common people.
- **Why does Paul say God did this?**
- The false teachers were saying surely God would entrust His gospel message to a refined, polished, and eloquent person – not some plain, rough tentmaker like Paul! Has Satan ever whispered something like that in your ear about YOU?
- The Life Application Study Bible: *“Paul’s focus...was not on the perishable container but on its priceless contents—God’s power dwelling in us. Though we are “earthen vessels,” God uses us to spread his gospel, and he gives us power to do his work. Knowing that the power is his, not ours, should keep us from pride and motivate us to keep daily contact with God, our power source. Our responsibility is to let people see God through us.”*<sup>i</sup>
- Isn't it liberating to know that sharing the good news of Christ doesn't depend on how polished, refined, or clever we are? Isn't it comforting to know that we don't have to strive to be good enough on our own?
- He is the source of the power we need to serve Him and He puts that power into old clay pots like you and me!
- Wiersbe: *“The important thing about a vessel is that it be clean, empty, and available for service.”*<sup>ii</sup>

- Plain old clay pots were never handled like fragile china. They got banged around and abused as they were used. Sometimes they got a chip or two.

<sup>8</sup> We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. <sup>9</sup> We are hunted down, but never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed.

- If we don't memorize verses eight and nine, we should at least know where to find them when we need them – and we WILL need them.
- Paul contrasts situations of suffering with promises of power.
- After stating the problem he *“indicated how God demonstrated his power (treasure) in [his children] by sustaining them through the hardships.”<sup>iii</sup>*
- Weakness and suffering doesn't mean defeat. In fact, Paul makes it clear that suffering comes with serving Christ and He will give us the grace to get through suffering then USE the suffering for His glory.
- It should be no surprise that followers of Christ experience suffering. Jesus said: <sup>20</sup> *Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.* John 15:20 (ESV)
- John MacArthur: *“Through Paul’s weakness, Christ was put on display. His suffering, the false apostles said, was evidence that God was not with him and he was a fraud. On the contrary, Paul affirmed that his suffering was the badge of his loyalty to Christ and the source of his power.”<sup>iv</sup>*

<sup>10</sup> Through suffering, our bodies continue to share in the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be seen in our bodies.

<sup>11</sup> Yes, we live under constant danger of death because we serve Jesus, so that the life of Jesus will be evident in our dying bodies.

<sup>12</sup> So we live in the face of death, but this has resulted in eternal life for you.

<sup>13</sup> But we continue to preach because we have the same kind of faith the psalmist had when he said, “I believed in God, so I spoke.” <sup>14</sup> We

know that God, who raised the Lord Jesus, will also raise us with Jesus and present us to himself together with you. <sup>15</sup> All of this is for your benefit. And as God's grace reaches more and more people, there will be great thanksgiving, and God will receive more and more glory.

- We said last week that God never wastes anything including suffering. **How does God use trials in the lives of believers for His glory?**

<sup>16</sup> That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. <sup>17</sup> For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!

- The glory a follower of Christ will one day receive is worth the suffering we endure in this life.
- *"Okay, I get that, but sometimes my troubles are overwhelming!"*
- That's why it's important to read God's word and sit in His presence daily.
- Paul told us we need to refill our "clay jar" so that we will "never give up!"
- We can only overcome the problems on the outside of our "clay jar" by refilling it inside with the power that comes from God.
- If I stare at my troubles they look enormous. If I shift my gaze to the enormity of an eternal, loving, all-powerful Heavenly Father my problems shrink down to their proper proportions relative to Him.
- That's what Paul meant in verse 18:

<sup>18</sup> So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

So, What's the Takeaway?

- God chose to deliver the priceless message of salvation through broken people (clay jars) like you and me. He also

chose to use flawed and fragile people to be “vessels” of His love and mercy.

- You wouldn’t expect a clay flowerpot to look like a Faberge egg or a crystal vase, so we shouldn’t worry about not being refined or polished enough for the job God has given us.
- Any old clay pot will get the job done IF (and only IF) it is filled with the supernatural power that comes from God. The good news is we don’t have to be something we’re not, we just have to focus on staying filled up with the power that comes from His Spirit living in us, and is delivered by time in His word and in His presence.
- We also need to understand that clay pots get banged up, dinged, and chipped in use.
- In other words, trials and suffering are a part of being a vessel for Christ.
- Those troubles seem insurmountable when we’re faced with them. However, when we change our focus from staring at the troubles to gazing at an all-powerful, loving Heavenly Father we get an eternal perspective.
- Compared to the glory we’ll receive one day, these problems are just “light and momentary.” He will give us the grace to get through our trials and He will be glorified by them.
- This week, just be an available clay pot and depend on His power.

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<sup>i</sup> Tyndale. Life Application Study Bible NKJV (LASB: Full Size) (Kindle Locations 172107-172110). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

<sup>ii</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 1, p. 642). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>iii</sup> Pratt, Richard L., Jr.. Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 & 2 Corinthians: 7 (p. 338). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

<sup>iv</sup> MacArthur, John. The MacArthur Study Bible, NASB (Kindle Locations 285018-285021). Thomas Nelson. Kindle Edition.