

June 2, 2024

Texts: Psalm 81:1-10; 2 Corinthians 4:5-12

Title: "Treasure Hidden in a Clay Jar"

A couple in Lander, Wyoming went to the city dump to get rid of some junk. As they were disposing of their junk, the wife noticed a rather ornate but worn out looking wooden bed headboard. She suggested they take it home and try to restore it.

As they were loading this rather heavy and bulky item onto their truck, a cap on one of the posts came off and out pour old gold coins from the late 1800's. Both legs of this old headboard had been hollowed out and filled with a fortune in gold coins. Treasure hidden inside what appears to be of little value. You may be thinking: why doesn't that happen to me?

Today, I'm inviting you on the greatest treasure hunt of all; a hunt for the most valuable treasure that can ever be found although people don't always recognize it because it's hidden in a plain and somewhat fragile clay jar. And what's this treasure that the apostle Paul's talking about? He calls it "the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." And where does that light shine? It shines "in our hearts." And what are the jars of clay about? They represent you and me, those who follow Jesus.

Any of you who have ever owned anything made of clay know that it's not an expensive material unlike ivory, glass, marble, or brass. And it's not all that strong. In fact, it's fragile and vulnerable; often cracked or chipped. Why the clay jar as a metaphor for you and me? Paul says it's "to show that the power is from

God and not from us...”

Now, **this treasure that Paul’s talking about doesn’t lie somewhere “out there.”** I say that because a lot of us tend to focus on finding meaning and purpose outside of ourselves. A better job, a nicer neighborhood, a trimmer body, travel abroad, designer clothes, nice car, beach front condo, or a new relationship. But when Paul says we have this treasure in jars of clay, he’s saying that it isn’t to be found “out there.” Either we have it within our own hearts or not at all.

You may’ve heard people say, “happiness is an inside job.” And there’s truth to that. The greatest treasure is within our own hearts.

**And if we have this treasure in our hearts, we can handle whatever comes to us from without.** When we’re young, we often fail to see a need for God. Perhaps we haven’t yet experienced enough pain yet. Paul writes, “We’re hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed...” Life can be cruel, we know that, and for a few...it’s amazingly cruel, but if we have this treasure. We need to utilize it.

We are told that success in living comes from making the right choices. But what about those things that happen that we didn’t choose? We need something to sustain us so we can deal with them, and sometimes live with them, when they come--something that Paul had to do. I look out at all of you, knowing some of the adversity you’ve been through and you’re still standing. Where would you be without the treasure; the Spirit of Christ in you and the power of prayer. These are

lessons that have to be learned by experience sometimes but not everyone learns them.

I was looking for books this week by people who have been through adversity and was surprised to come across one by well-known preacher David Jeremiah. He wrote a book called, *A Bend in the Road*, in which he describes his experience following a diagnosis of cancer. Twice he was diagnosed with lymphoma. He had surgery and underwent stem cell transplant therapy.

He wrote about the physical and emotional toll of this treatment. He speaks candidly of his battle with pain, nausea, and deep depression. At the present time his cancer is in remission but of course there are no guarantees of whether or not it will come back.

“The book’s title comes from his observation that sooner or later we’ll all come to a ‘bend in the road’ that we didn’t expect, couldn’t have foreseen, didn’t want, didn’t ask for, and you can’t stop it. We’ve got our life lined up and things are going in the right direction, and then one day everything changes and now life is moving in a different (and unwanted) direction.”

If we don’t have those spiritual resources built up over a lifetime of partnership with God, we’re lost. Paul knew about times like that but he had that treasure--the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ--that would allow him to always be a conqueror even though he faced never ending pain and problems.

You won’t find the treasure by looking outward to get things from life. No, it

comes by looking in...**or more correctly perhaps I should say, “looking up;”**  
**looking up** to God who’s our source of life, our power for living. Sounds simple  
and it is but how often do we ignore the spiritual in our everyday search for  
significance and happiness. “We have this treasure in jars of clay,” writes Paul,  
“to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us...” I don’t  
know about you but I need that power. Amen.