This Treasure in Earthen Vessels

**Lamentations 4:2 –** “The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, **how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers**, the work of the hands of the potter!”

II Corinthians 4:7 – “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”

**This treasure in earthen vessels –** In this text (**II Corinthians 4**) the treasure is the gospel (the person and work of Jesus Christ) which has been deposited within a frail child of God.

This treasure is the knowledge of God and His Christ in the heart and soul of the saint. It is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ firmly rooted in our hearts.

**II Corinthians 4:6** – “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, **hath shined in our hearts**, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

**Ephesians 3:8** – “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles **the unsearchable riches of Christ**;”

**Colossians 1:27** – “To whom God would make known what is **the riches** of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is **Christ in you, the hope of glory**:”

**Colossians 2:3** – “In whom are hid **all the treasures** of wisdom and knowledge.”

The gospel is a precious treasure placed within a fragile, weak, and frail earthen vessel.

Because of this God has made known that the great work of salvation wrought in our lives and in the lives of others is completely a work due to His power and not the power of any man.

**Why did Paul describe himself and all other saints in such a manner?**

Perhaps his enemies had pointed to his sorrows, struggles, and trials as a proof that he was not a true minister of Christ.

Perhaps he understood that the tendency is for us and others to think of ourselves too highly.

Perhaps he understood that there would be times in the life of a child of God when he and those around him (both friends and enemies) would recognize that all he was - was a man – a weak, frail, fragile, man.

**Why is the Gospel Message Considered a Treasure?**

**First**: The gospel message is a treasure because it contains an abundance of rich truth given by God for the salvation of sinners. God’s message is a message of truth. It is not a message given by men for men but by God for men. Our great treasure in Truth!

**II Corinthians 4:2** – “But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but **by manifestation of the truth** commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.”

**John 14:6** – “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, **the truth**, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

**I John 5:20** – “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, **that we may know him that is true**, and **we are in him that is true**, even in his Son Jesus Christ. **This is the true God, and eternal life**.”

**Second**: It is a treasure because of the price Jesus Christ paid for the salvation of sinners.

**Psalm 49:6-8** – “(6) They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches; (7) None of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give to God a ransom for him: (8) (For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever:)”

**I Peter 1:18-19** – “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”

**Third**: It is a treasure because it has in it rich blessings - spiritual blessings - the blessings of the New Covenant, of forgiveness of sins, of free justification, of sanctification, and of glorification. The blessings of the gospel are a solid foundation for any soul - especially the weak and sinful soul. They are substantial blessings for those who are poor in spirit, and for those who are frail!

**Ephesians 3:8** – “… I should preach among the Gentiles **the unsearchable riches of Christ**;”

**Ephesians 1:3** – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with **all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ**:”

**Ephesians 1:7** – “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to **the riches of his grace**;”

**Fourth**: It is a treasure because it contains the fulness of the blessings of God and because it consists of the exceeding great and precious promises. The promises of the gospel are of more value than the word of the finest man upon the earth. They are of more worth than thousands of dollars of gold and silver. It is a precious treasure because each promise of the gospel is free, absolute, and unconditional. They are yea and amen in Christ! They come to us out of the fullness of Jesus Christ!

**John 1: 16 –** “And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.”

**II Corinthians 1:20** – “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.”

**Yea -** Shall all be certainly fulfilled – **Amen** - true, faithful, certain!

**Earthen Vessels –** the vessels in which this treasure is deposited are called **earthen vessels**. This is the description of every true Christian and especially every preacher of the word of God.

When we properly understand ourselves to be **earthen vessels** in our own view and esteem – then we will more properly understand the work of God in our salvation and our service.

We are to be viewed as earthen vessels in our own sight.

We are to be viewed as earthen vessels the sight of others.

There is a Hebrews saying which goes something like this: “To what is a disciple of a wise man like, in the esteem of a man of the world? At first he is like to a golden cup; when he has conversed with him, he is like to a silver cup; and when he has received any profit by him, he is like an earthen cup, which, when broken, cannot be repaired again.”

This is true in every personal experience: When looked upon from a distance we are too often considered golden vessels – more than we are in truth and more than we desire to be thought of. At a closer look – we lose some of the glitter and yet are still too often considered of greater value than we are in truth. Finally, when there is close and intimate contact – we are seen to be what we are in truth and what we have always been – an earthen vessel.

The Scriptures are full of such examples:

**Abraham** – The Father of the Faithful lied and was impatient in the promises of God and yet who can read of his life and not be encouraged by it.

**Moses** – The Law-giver did not give God the glory due His name as he struck the stone more than once and yet who can read the first five books of the Bible and not find great profit in them?

**David** – The man after God’s heart committed adultery and murder and yet who can read his psalms and not be blessed? Who can read Psalms 51 and not profit?

**Solomon** – The wisest man who ever lived found his heart turned by his wives so that he made them idols and yet who can read the Song of Solomon or Ecclesiastes and not profit?

**Jonah** – The prophet who became the example used by our Lord concerning the resurrection – the prophet who saw what was probably the greatest revival in biblical times -- rebelled and refused to obey the will of God for a time.

**Jeremiah** – The weeping prophet became discouraged and even felt like forsaking his calling and leaving the ministry.

**The Apostles** – The great apostles who, after the resurrection, were used to take the gospel into the known world during the first century were men of like passion as we are. They were men who lacked faith – men who argued among themselves as to who would be the greatest – men who did not understand their calling (wanting to call down fire out of heaven).

Often God allows us to be a **broken earthen vessel** in the eyes of those to whom we minister. The reason is clear. It is not to humiliate us – not to cast a doubt upon the gospel – but to prove the truth of the Scriptures that if there is any good in us – if we possess the blessings of the gospel to share with others it is not because we are better than others – indeed it is only because God has had mercy upon us!

**I Corinthians 1:26-31** – “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: **That no flesh should glory in his presence**. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”

 **Note:** Because the Gospel is deposited into earthen vessels it is a glorious light to some, whilst it remains hidden to others.

It is a glorious light to those who are first benefited by it. The sinner converted to Christ who bears in his heart the gospel of Christ knows the glory of it in his own heart. They know the peace of forgiveness – the rest of justification by faith – the hope of eternal glory.

It is a glorious light to those who are benefited by the ministry of the one who has been genuinely converted. Those who hear the gospel from the lips of one who is a earthen vessel – and by the grace of God are converted – find that Jesus Christ is a great treasure!

But, it is no light at all to those who find fault with the Christian and see no value in the message he carries because of his failures and because of the things he suffers for that gospel.

**That the excellency of the power may be of God, not of us:**

**God has put His gospel in earthen vessels that it might appear that the true Christian is not one by his own efforts or works** – we are not a Christian because of our natural inclinations to be religious – we are not a Christian because of our diligence, labor, or any merit at all – we are not a Christian because of the instructions we have received from others – we are not a Christian because of anything in ourselves.

We are Christians solely due to the mercy and grace of God alone!

**God has put His gospel in earthen vessels that it may** appear that the true preacher is not one of his own making – his own calling – his own preparations – but by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit of God in his soul and heart.

**God has put His gospel in earthen vessels so that** any success which attends his labors – either in the conversion of sinners or the building up of saints, or the organizing of churches – it can only be ascribed to the exceeding greatness of divine power.

**God has put His gospel in earthen vessels that** any perseverance in the gospel or the ministry of Jesus Christ is owed to the sustaining grace of God working in us and in our work. If we have stood under the onslaught of persecutions, and stood while there has been intense opposition to us individually or collectively as a church – it can only be attributed to the power of God – the sustaining power of His marvelous grace.

In this text Paul gives us the great and glorious reason as to why the Lord Jesus Christ allows His servants to be afflicted.

**What is the reason?**

He says, that all men may perceive that we do not stand by our own power nor by the power of any man, church, or organization, but by the power of God. If there be a thousand attempts to destroy God’s servants still they can never perish because God upholds them! They are God’s and He preserves them until He takes them home.

But what about you dear sinner? What do you see when you see those who, though weak, profess to be Christians? Do you see nothing but an earthen vessels?

Look again. There is a treasure buried deep within them.

Will you miss the treasure because you despise the vessel which holds it? Will you miss the fruit because the tree is scarred and ugly?

Look away from them to the Lord Jesus Christ! Is there anything in Him that attracts you? Is there anything in Him that draws your heart? Will you refuse to drink of the water because the vessel is not to your liking? Will you refuse eternal life because the vessel is ugly and you do not esteem it as having any value?

Look again Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords! He is seated upon His throne and says to you repent or perish! (**Luke 13:3**) Believe and you will have eternal life. (**John 3:16**)

Look past those of us in this room who profess to be Christians. Look past yourself. Look to the Saviour and be saved. (**John 3:14-15**)

Dear saint, though we strive for perfection, yet the best we will ever be is an earthen vessel. Look past yourself to the One who has saved you.

Glory in Him and not in yourself!