

THEME: “Distinguishing Who You Are” #8

Passage: II Corinthians 4: 6-18

**Last Week: “The Encouragement of Christian Ministry”
4:1-7**

- **Our Message is clear v1,2**
- **Spiritual blindness is an ever-present reality v3, 4**
- **Only God can cause people to “see the light” v5,6**
- **We just honor the Truth v7**

Introduction:

What you are is far more important than what people perceive you to be! What a life holds is most precious when it contains salvation through the gospel!

The most intense moments in life have a way of revealing who you are and the values that you possess. The true treasure is the glory of God in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, as presented and proclaimed by the gospel.

Christians are merely “clay pots,” while the gospel is the treasure. Earthen vessels (clay pots) are common and cheap, ones like those red flowerpots we can buy today for very little money. Earthen vessels are also fragile and easily broken. I have broken a significant number of clay pots. Earthen vessels are “earthy” and “earthly”; they are

of this world. (Remember that we were made of the dust of the earth—(Genesis 2:7). Earthen vessels are fashioned by the potter, who creates them for his own purposes (Romans 9:20-21). Clay pots have nothing in which to boast; they have no basis for feeling superior. The treasure gains nothing from the pots; if anything, the pots gain from the glory of the treasure. (Bob Dillenbaugh).

The Lord uses “jars of clay”, v7 to accomplish his purposes “to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” Here Paul describes how “clay jars” accomplish this, what God’s purpose in allowing it is, and why this should give us **great confidence**.

I. THE RESILIENCE OF SAINTLY VESSELS V7-9

John MacArthur, “The amazing contrast between the ‘glory of God in the face of Christ’ (2 Cor. 4:6) and the feeble, imperfect, homely containers in which it is carried is the heart of this passage.”

A. Earthen containers were used for a wide variety of purposes; as, their value was found only in their *utility*.

1. They could carry refuse as well as treasures; clay lamps, little pots with wicks, were commonly used for lighting. *Note: brave 300 army!*

2. They were used to carry captured gold and silver and the Dead Sea Scrolls were preserved in clay jars.

3. They were very common and plenteous; a great number have been unearthed in archeological digs.

B. As clay jars, we can never take the credit for what God is doing through us; “We do not proclaim ourselves,” **v5**.

C. This contrasts with the arrogance of the “super-apostles” who disdained Paul while promoting themselves. See **2 Corinthians 10:10; 11:5-6**.

John MacArthur, “Rather than deny the false apostles’ allegations that he was weak and imperfect, he embraced them . . . his weaknesses, far from being reasons to reject him, were among his most convincing apostolic credentials.”

D. In **v8-9**, Paul describes what we might call “stress cracks” that should have shattered jars of clay but instead allow the glory of Christ to be revealed through them.” Note the Present tense—an ongoing reality.

1. “Hard-pressed in every direction yet not crushed” (“cornered”). Merrill Tenney, “Squeezed but not squashed.” Note: pressing upon the Lord by the crowds

2. “Perplexed but not in despair.” “puzzled but never in despair;” Merrill Tenney, “bewildered but not befuddled.” Note: Herod’s *inner turmoil* with Paul.

3. “Persecuted [*diôkô*, pursued] but not forsaken.”
\Steven at death

4. “Struck down but not destroyed;” “we may be knocked down but we are never knocked out!”

E. The resilience of Paul (and all Christians) to such stresses works to reveal the glory of the Gospel through us! The glory shines through the cracks!

II. THE PURPOSE OF SAINTLY VESSELS V10-12

A. Note “always” and the Present tense verbs, “carrying about” and “delivered.” Paul’s life was one of dying daily (**1 Corinthians 15:31**).

B. The word for “dying” is not the usual word for death, as in **v11, 12**, but rather a word, which speaks of the *process* of dying. - “the death of living tissue.”

C. Verse **11** describes how this is true—Paul lived in constant danger of death, from enemies, robbers, travel, health, etc.

1. Philip Hughes, “Martyrdom for Paul, was not confined to the hour of his death in Rome; it was expressed daily and constantly it is dying—living existence.”

2. Ref. **2 Corinthians 11:23-26**

3. Paul was regularly being “handed over,” death!
A daily cross!

4. This was “for Jesus’ sake,” - in pursuit of his will. **Romans 8:36**, “As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.’”

D. Note the “that’s” in **v10, 11**. Paul’s “dying” was designed to demonstrate the reality of his life in Christ so that the Corinthians could partake of that life as well. (Life = resurrection life.)

1. Verse **10**, NET, “so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our body.” So also in **v11**. Ref. the martyrdom of Stephen and its impact on Saul!

2. “Mortal,” **v11**, from the Latin word for death, speaks of that which is subject to death. Our “jars” are easily broken! Ref. **2 Cor 12.9-10**.

III. THE CONFIDENCE OF SAINTLY VESSELS V13-15

A. Paul quotes **Psalm 116:10**, penned by David at a time in his life when he despaired of life itself but trusted in God to deliver him.

^{ESV} Psalm 116:10 I believed, even when I spoke, "I am greatly afflicted";

B. He is confident that he, with the Corinthians, will one day be raised up and will be presented before the presence of God. Ref. **Ephesians 5:27**, “so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without

spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.” **Colossians 1:21-22**, “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.”

C. All that had happened to Paul in his ministry to the Corinthians was ordained by God for their good and His glory, **v16**.

Note **v16a**; Ref. **v1**. Paul was not discouraged for he saw the “big picture” of suffering, what we might call “evangelistic tribulation!”

Kent Hughes, “What a word for the church today—with our human idolatries and our exaltation of human beings. The power of the gospel comes in our weakness, not in our strength, not in our greatness, but in the fact that we are clay pots— **and crack ones at that!**”

Everyone has stress and misfortune but no one in their right mind asks for it or enjoys it. Yet, when Christians respond biblically at such times, is a witness that all the spoken language in the world cannot match! May we be vessels “for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work,” **2 Timothy 2:21**.