

## POTS FULL OF TREASURE

(2 Cor 4:7-12)

**A. The gospel of Jesus Christ is the only means by which God will restore what we lost in the beginning, after the sin.**

**B. Paul referred to the gospel as a “treasure in jars of clay” (ESV, 2 Cor 4:7).**

1. And you wouldn't put a treasure in a jar - or a piece of pottery - unless you knew it was in a safe place.

### **1 Peter 1:3-5**

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 ***who are kept by the power of God*** (believe in the gospel, Rom 1:16) ***through faith for salvation*** ready to be revealed in the last time.

### **2 Timothy 1:12**

12 For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that ***He is able to keep*** what I have committed to Him until that Day.

2. As we well know, this treasure was not meant to be hoarded, but shared so that others can see its value (Rom 10:14-15).

**C. In our text, twice Paul says “we do not lose heart” (4:1, 16).**

1. Paul had plenty of reasons to lose heart, so why didn't he...?
  - a. Paul recognized that he had A TREASURE in Jesus Christ!
  - b. So instead of complaining..., he rejoiced.

## **I. PAUL HAD A GLORIOUS MINISTRY (2 Cor 4:6)**

**A. The way we view our “calling” into the Lord's kingdom is going to determine how well we fulfill our service to Him.**

1. If we see it as drudgery, we'll give minimal effort. If we see it as glorious, we'll give it all we have.

**B. Paul's positive attitude had some practical consequences in his life.**

**1. *It took away the temptation to quit* (v. 1).**

- a. His trials were so severe that at one point he thought he would die, or maybe that he wished he would die (2 Cor 1:8).
- b. But quitting was a different story for Paul; he wasn't a quitter.
- c. But his authority & gifts didn't protect him from human weakness.
  - There's an old story about a discouraged preacher wrote to another preacher to ask if he should quit his preaching. The response: ***"Never think of giving up your preaching! The angels around the throne envy you your great work!"***
  - I don't imagine Paul cared about making the angels envious; I think he cared about the treasure in the earthen vessel.

[The second practical consequence of Paul positive attitude....]

**2. *It took away the temptation for personal gain* (vv. 2-4).**

- a. Paul alluded to Judaizers & other false teachers.
- b. Paul didn't use his ministry for personal advantage, either in what he had accomplished as a Jew, or in what he did accomplish as an apostle.

**Phil 3:7-8**

But ***what things were gain to me***, these I have counted loss for Christ. 8 Yet indeed ***I also count all things loss*** for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ

[Paul had no interest in gaining anything except the knowledge of Jesus Christ the Lord, & in sharing that knowledge with anyone who would listen.]

**II. We Have A Valuable Treasure (2 Cor. 4:7)**

- A. Paul was talking about his ministry as an apostle, but each of us is simply a "jar of clay" (earthen vessel; a piece of pottery).**

1. Some ...new, old, smooth, rough, sturdy, cracked, thick, thin -- But all of us have one thing in common: FRAGILITY! (Whether mom's beautiful native American pottery, or a flower pot)
2. The point being - it is the TREASURE that gives the vessel its value.

**Acts 9:15-16**

15 "But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is *a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name* before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. 16 For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

3. Paul was valuable; we are valuable, but only to the extent that we are filled with the treasure & ready to "bear the Name" of our Lord to a lost & dying world.

**B. Secondly, we should not despair over how we (the piece of pottery) are made.**

1. What we think is a lack of gifts or abilities; what we think are limitations or handicaps - are most likely be our strength.

**Psalms 139:13-16**

13 *For You formed my inward parts*; You covered me in my mother's womb. 14 I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. 15 My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. 16 Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them.

- a. Our genetic make-up was in God's hands.
- b. So each of us can dispense the TREASURE (the gospel) within us (the clay pot) according to our unique traits & abilities.
- c. Paul was a unique man: (tradition says he small in stature), highly educated, yet weak in speech.
- d. Timothy was a unique man: educated NOT in the great schools of the day BUT in private conference with Paul & Silas.
- e. You are unique too; there's not another one like you, & you are a perfect fit for your personal service to the Lord.

[You can share His treasure in accordance with your unique traits & in your unique circumstances without relying on a "program of work" or without the assistance of an "organization" that might tend to confuse the pottery for the treasure.

Many are the widows & widowers who have shared as much heavenly treasure from their small dwellings as 1000 preachers from the pulpit or 100,000 pamphlets left at the front door.]

**C. Let's make a few points, in closing, about the clay pot we are.**

**1. A clay pot always begins clean, empty & ready for its service.**

- a. Channels Only (verse 2) - *"Emptied that thou shouldst fill me, a clean vessel in Thy hand; with no power but as Thou givest graciously with each command."*
- b. Our clay pots cannot be filled with different kinds of treasures & still be effective for the Lord's purpose (2 Tim 2:20-21).

**2. A clay pot may be entrusted with a treasure, but it's not the treasure.**

**1 Timothy 6:20**

20 O Timothy! **Guard what was committed to your trust**, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge — (1:11).

- a. Paul didn't warn Timothy to guard his image or his "turn", but to guard the message Paul gave him to preach.

**3. A clay pot doesn't serve its own purpose; it serves the purpose of its Owner.**

- a. God may permit our vessels (lives) to be jarred around, but invariable when that happens some of the treasure we're holding will spill out & others will be able to see that Christ living in us.
- b. "We are vessels that God might use us. We are earthen vessels that we might depend on God's power & not our own ability.
- c. That's what Paul was driving at in that series of paradoxes he gave (vv. 8-12).

[Whatever the Christian may have to suffer; whatever challenge we may have to face ... it's not just a reminder of how weak we are, it's an opportunity for the treasure to be seen in us.]

**CLOSING**

- A. "From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks [brands] of the Lord Jesus" (Gal 6:17). What marks do we bear?