

We Have This Treasure

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I enjoy a good adventure story or movie—something about the adrenalin rush that comes with the suspense in the story line. Without realizing it, we pick characters in the story with whom we identify. Hopefully, our hero is the good guy. Often there is a prize that drives the plot of the story, such as the love of a fair maiden, finding a lost person or civilization, freedom from oppression, or even some type of wealth.

Treasure is a prize that also drives much of our lives today, even if that treasure is not gold and silver buried in a sunken pirate ship. Treasure is anything that has value to us. Our career goals can be a form of treasure. Perhaps our possessions, homes, cars, or even families can be what is of value to us.

Paul the Apostle wrote, “We have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). Paul gives several helpful insights in this verse that provide a strong foundation in our ever-shifting world.

First, he mentions a “treasure.” What is this treasure? If we study the surrounding passage, we find back in verse 6 that the treasure is “the glory of God in the face of Christ.” As Paul says earlier in 3:18, our goal in this life is to be transformed into Christ’s likeness, from one degree of glory to the next, through the help of the Holy Spirit. That is a big thought! The treasure we possess is the whole goal of life: that we might live purely, love deeply, and serve unconditionally in the same way the perfect human, Jesus, did.

Who among us can reach that goal? We fall far short of it so often. Our love towards our loved ones and surely towards our enemies is no where close to the way Jesus loved people. We give

in to temptations whereas Jesus overcame every temptation he faced. Paul expresses our experience in his second point: we live in jars of clay. He is speaking especially here of our weak, physical condition. There is truth in the cliché, “I’m only human.” Why does God give us this awesome goal of being Christ-like yet put us in this imperfect world, full of sickness and temptations? Why is not the world perfect, with no sin and no disease? Answering that question will open the way for us to find peace no matter what our physical circumstances may be like.

Paul knew firsthand what suffering is all about. He had often gone without food, been imprisoned, shipwrecked, and even beaten to the point of death. He saw his physical existence wasting away, his stamina deteriorate, and his flesh become weak. Yet, he realized that this imperfect existence is the arena in which we live out the perfect gospel. He writes later in this passage, “Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day” (4:16).

For Paul, there is a big difference between living by our own resources and living by the help of God. Living without God eventually leads to defeat and despair, when our clay jars crack and perhaps even shatter and crumble into a pile of brokenness. Our pots may be more cracked than we are willing to admit.

The reason we live in this kind of situation is expressed as a purpose clause: *in order that* the power to transform our lives can be clearly seen to be from God and not from our own efforts. If we could make our lives better by our own efforts alone, who needs God? The truth is, and experience has proven over and over again, that we need a power source outside of ourselves. There is an innate drive within every human for finding meaning to life and looking beyond our mundane everyday existence. This drive has pushed humanity to look to the stars and to explore the depth of the seas.

The most important things in life are the invisible ones. If you are like me, we like to hold on to the things that we have. We have worked hard for them. In today’s economy, earthly treasures

do not come without some effort. We must focus our lives on the invisible, spiritual qualities deeply planted within each of us, not the temporary things of this world. As cracked pots, we do not hold water very well. The good news is that the very presence of the glorious creator can abide in us. No matter how deep the valley or dark the trail, we do not have to walk it alone. The priceless treasure offers us a source for hope that can never be exhausted.