

Treasure In Jars of Clay

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[0:00] Amen. Before we hear God's words preached, let's remain standing and read from 2 Corinthians chapter 4. It will also be on the overhead behind me, 2 Corinthians chapter 4, and I'll read from verses 1 through to verse 12.

! But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways.

We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Christ, Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

[1:20] But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our bodies.

For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Amen. You may be seated. So Paul says, we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed, perplexed, but not driven to despair, persecuted, but not forsaken, struck down, but not destroyed.

There's something seemingly paradoxical about that, but it's been a reality for Christians throughout all of church history. And I'm guessing that we've all experienced it to some degree or another.

Our labors within the kingdom of God and for the kingdom of God often come with great moments of joy and encouragement. But those joys are often mingled with trials and discouragements.

[2:48] It seems we can't have the wheat without a few tares. Jonathan Edwards, for example, was used mightily by God in his little town of Northampton, Massachusetts, with a population of only a thousand people.

Roughly 300 people were converted to Christ and saved under Edwards' preaching in about six months. However, the same church that exploded under Edwards' pastoral care and leadership would, just a few years later, remove him as pastor.

Why? Well, he insisted that only genuine believers should partake in the Lord's Supper. In other words, he was rejected because he stood upon the authority of Scripture.

Around the same time, George Whitefield was successfully preaching to thousands in both England and America. Countless people were led to Christ, but that didn't stop some people from opposing him.

He would often preach in open fields, and his detractors would show up and hurl rotten vegetables at him, and stones, and even dead animals.

[4:15] I've had people openly protest during sermons before. I've had a few people walk out on me. But I've never had to duck because someone threw a dead cat at me.

A few years after Whitefield, Charles Simeon became the pastor of a church in Cambridge, but some of the congregation did not want him there. So they not only refused to come to worship, but they chained up the pews so that others could not sit in their place.

And this went on for ten years. But the Lord sustained Simeon. The Lord gave him the resolve to press on, and he remained pastor of that church for more than 50 years.

And we could certainly go on with example after example, but you see, if you've ever been discouraged, like your own service to Christ has done little, if you've ever wondered, what have I actually accomplished?

If you've ever thought, can God really use someone like me? If you've ever felt like Christian ministry was two steps forward and one step back, well, you're in very good company.

[5:28] In fact, you're in some of the best company, because that's precisely what the Apostle Paul is talking about in this letter to the Corinthians. This letter is unique among Paul's letters in the New Testament.

It's hardly systematic, like Romans or Ephesians or Galatians, and that's because it's a very personal letter. It's quite raw in some respects.

It's somewhat heartbreaking for reasons I'll talk about in a moment. And once we know the circumstances under which it was written, its structure, or lack thereof, makes a lot of sense.

This letter is largely a candid autobiography. It's really the story of Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church. So let me back up and tell you the story up to this point.

It all begins in Acts chapter 18, if you want to turn there for a moment. So in Acts 18, Paul visits the city of Corinth for the first time, and he did what he usually did.

[6:37] He went to the Jewish synagogue. He started his ministry in Corinth among the Jews. Verse 4 says, He reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.

So Paul ministers in the synagogue week after week. He preaches the gospel. He tries to persuade the people that the long-awaited Messiah has already come.

Verse 5 says, Paul was occupied with the word, testifying to the Jews that the Christ was Jesus. You missed him. You're still waiting for the one who has already come.

He died. He rose again. Jesus is the Christ. But they wouldn't listen. Verse 6, They opposed and reviled him.

So Paul leaves the synagogue. He moves on and begins ministering among the Gentiles of the city. He doesn't move far, mind you. He moves right next door, which I'm sure irritated more than a few people.

[7:44] In fact, the ruler of the synagogue is converted. Verse 8, Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed in the Lord together with his entire household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing Paul, believed and were baptized.

Despite the opposition, the Lord is blessing Paul's ministry here. He is witnessing the salvation of sinners. There's tangible fruit from his labors almost immediately.

This is wonderful. And yet, the Lord comes to him one night and says, Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent, for I am with you and no one will attack you to harm you.

For I have many in the city who are my people. Well, that seems almost strange. Things are going so well. Many of the Corinthians believed and were baptized.

I mean, the Lord's message reads as though Paul might have been tempted to leave Corinth. Why would he leave when his ministry is having such success?

[8:53] Well, notice how the Lord encourages him. No one will attack you to harm you, he says. Like all of life, this is not a black or white situation.

For Paul, it's not as though things were bad and now things are good. No, he now has reasons to be greatly encouraged for sure, but there's still this looming threat.

There are still many people who want to get rid of him, and God graciously reassures him that he'll be okay. Do not be afraid, but go on speaking.

And he does. Verse 11, He stayed a year and six months teaching the Word of God among them. And up to this point in Paul's ministry, this is the longest he's stayed with any church.

And we could speculate as to why he stayed that long, but if we know anything about the heart of Paul, we can safely assume that he cared deeply for these people.

[9:59] Regarding the church in Ephesus, just to give you a survey of how Paul felt about the churches. Regarding the church in Ephesus, he said, For three years I did not cease, night or day, to admonish everyone with tears.

To the Thessalonians, he wrote, We were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. We were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God, but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

To the Philippians, he said, For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And concerning the church in Corinth.

He says in his first letter, I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel.

And here in 2 Corinthians, he adds this, chapter 12, verse 15, I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls.

[11:18] Paul was a man who spent himself for the sake of those churches he planted and ministered among.

He considered himself both a mother and a father to them. He labored with them as long as necessary, shedding tears for them and yearning for them when they were apart.

And we see here in Acts 18, he was willing to even work a double shift, if you will, to support himself with tent making while also laboring in the ministry. Why? Well, he says in his first letter to the Corinthians that he would rather die than have anyone deprive him of his ground for boasting.

In other words, he could boast that he was not preaching for personal financial gain and would gladly give up his right to be supported by the church for the church's sake.

As he would later write to the Thessalonians, our appeal does not spring from impurity or any attempt to deceive. In short, Paul sincerely loved people.

[12:33] He loved them enough to put himself at risk time and time again so that they might know Christ and be saved. Let's not forget what he said concerning unbelieving Israel.

He said, I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart for I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen, according to the flesh.

So you can imagine the pain he must have felt when less than two years later he receives a tragic report about the church in Corinth.

He had written to them a letter warning them about commingling with the world. He told them not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler.

But then he learns the church is in a bit of a mess. They're divided. There's a scandal involving incest. Brothers in the church are filing lawsuits against one another.

[13:47] People are abusing the Lord's Supper. And here we find that the church is acting a lot like the world. So Paul sends Timothy to help them.

And then he sends Titus. And the reports keep coming back negative. So he returns to Corinth himself in what he later describes as a painful visit.

In 2 Corinthians 13 he seems to indicate that he had a confrontation there with some men in the church and no one rose to his defense. Despite everything he had done for them.

Despite the way he had spent himself for them and loved them and shed tears over them. No one came to his defense. So he returns to Ephesus.

And there he writes another letter. His third that we have record of. In chapter 2 he says I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.

[14:58] Then in chapter 7 he adds for even if I made you grieve with my letter I do not regret it though I did regret it. For I see that that letter grieved you though only for a while.

As it is I rejoice. Not because you were grieved but because you were grieved into repenting. Evidently it must have been a harsh letter but Paul knew he had to write it.

Like a parent disciplining a child. It was painful but necessary and ultimately for the good. And then after all of this some new teachers show up in Corinth.

Paul sarcastically refers to them in chapter 11 as super apostles. He goes on to call them false apostles.

Deceitful workmen disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. Now the details are relatively scarce about these men but we do know they were Jewish and they were teaching another Jesus and a different gospel.

[16:11] those are Paul's words. And we also know they did everything they could to undermine Paul and his apostolic authority and his entire ministry really.

And here's the worst part. The Corinthians Paul's spiritual children believed them. Now what do you think they said about him?

What do you think they said about Paul? How did they manage to destroy his credibility after he labored so earnestly! And for so long what could they possibly say to shake the Corinthians' confidence in him?

Well after a close examination of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians which was really his fourth in which he is defending himself we find at least six points of their attack.

first they mocked Paul as a poor speaker and unimpressive in his appearance. Well sure Paul said it himself he did not speak with eloquence and tradition tells us he was a short balding man no doubt scarred by his many beatings.

[17:33] Second they claimed Paul wasn't a true apostle. I don't know what their evidence was but Paul defends himself this way saying the signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience with signs and wonders in mighty works.

Third they said his refusal to accept money from the church was actually proof that he wasn't a true apostle.

So Paul says or asks did I commit a sin in humbling myself so that you might be exalted because I preached God's gospel to you free of charge?

That's a strange one but that's the claim these super apostles made no doubt lying the groundwork for them receiving money from the church.

Fourth they accused Paul of being fickle. At one point he had changed his travel plans so these false teachers said that must have been a sign of his unreliability.

[18:42] Fifth they said he lacked the experience of having spiritual heavenly visions which is why Paul reluctantly talks about his vision of the third heaven in chapter 12.

He says I must go on boasting. though there is nothing to be gained by it I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

Then he describes what he saw. And sixth Paul's opponents argued that he wasn't Jewish enough.

So in response he says whatever anyone else dares to boast of I am speaking as a fool I also dare to boast of that.

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ?

[19:40] I am a better one. I am talking like a madman. With far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Notice those interjections.

I am speaking as a fool. I am talking like a madman. Clearly Paul feels a little silly, needy to defend himself against some of these accusations. Frankly, he doesn't want to boast about his visions or his Jewish background or really anything else.

In fact, he really doesn't make that much effort to defend himself until the end of the letter, primarily chapters 11 and 12, and even then he does not go into great detail.

And the only reason he does so is not because he's worried about his personal reputation, but because undermining his apostolic authority and his sincerity possibly undermines the message itself.

And that's crucial. In chapter five he says, we are ambassadors for Christ. You see, apostles, pastors, Christians in general, we derive the significance of our mission from the message we carry and the one who appointed us to carry that message.

[21:07] And Paul understands this. He knows that if the false teachers are successful in causing the Corinthians to distrust him, they might distrust the message.

That is the gospel. And he also knows that if they are successful in causing the Corinthians to trust them, the Corinthians might be prone to trust and believe in their message, a message of another Jesus and a different gospel, as Paul said.

So, these super apostles, they are essentially telling the Corinthians, who are you going to believe? Paul?

A pitiful looking, unimpressive, ineloquent tent maker, whose greatest skill appears to be getting himself into trouble wherever he goes, or us?

polished, eloquent, credentialed. You see how they're appealing to the flesh? Who are you going to follow?

[22 : 18] An ugly, broken down man like Paul? With those unimpressive rhetorical skills? Or us? Who can talk circles around him?

And look at these handsome faces we have. Wouldn't they look great on a book cover? Well, to dismiss Paul is to dismiss the gospel itself.

And that's why Paul writes this letter. That's why he opens up his heart in this letter perhaps more than any other. That's why he shares more than his theology here. He shares his tears.

He bears his scars. He writes as a spiritual father begging his children not to be led away by these smooth talking imposters. Instead, he expresses his willingness to forgive them.

And he expresses his desire for reconciliation for the sake of the gospel above all else. And it's within this letter that he writes, returning now to 2 Corinthians chapter 4, therefore, having this ministry, by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart.

[23 : 33] heart. Now, by saying we do not lose heart, Paul is alluding to the fact that he does have reasons or at least temptations to lose heart, to become utterly weary.

Of course he does. After all he's been through with and for the believers in Corinth, many people, if we're being honest with ourselves, would have given up on them long ago.

They would have walked away. Many would have said, if this is what Christian ministry is, forget it. It's not worth it. What am I doing with my life? But Paul, he surveys his experiences, the good and the bad, and he says, we do not lose heart.

Why not? Paul has not quit this dangerous, often discouraging mission of preaching the gospel and edifying the saints and building up the church because he remembers that this ministry is by the mercy of God.

Yes, he has tasted a lot of bitterness along the way, but he says it's all been by the sweet mercy, yes, mercy, of God.

[24 : 52] Do you remember who Paul was before he was an apostle? Acts 9, Saul, Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the way, that is the way of Christ, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Paul was once an evil man, and an evil man, not merely following his own sinful passions, you know, keeping to himself. He's a murderous man, determined to destroy Christianity, to eradicate it once and for all.

And what changed him? What saved him? It was the mercy of God. It was only by the mercy of God.

God. And it was the mercy of God who then made him an instrument by which many, many others would be saved. The Lord said to him, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to anoint you as a servant and witness, delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles to whom I am sending you to open their eyes.

so that they may turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

[26 : 36] You see, Paul knows the weight of what he's been given by the mercy of God and only by the mercy of God. He has been given eternal life in Christ Jesus.

He knows he didn't deserve it. He knows he couldn't earn it. He wasn't seeking it. He wasn't thinking about it.

He was trying to destroy the very notion that we could be saved through Christ. And yet, the Lord saved him, snatched him right out of that murderous mission he was on.

And then, the Lord sent him. Open the people's eyes, God said to them. Tell them of my mercy and you will witness my mercy in their lives.

They will turn from darkness to light, from Satan to God. They will receive forgiveness of their sins through faith. Would it be easy? Absolutely not.

[27:44] But Paul could not forget the great mercy he had been shown and he could not stop sharing it with others. For necessity is laid upon me, he said.

Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel. If that effort comes with trials and heartbreak, so be it. Is the servant greater than his master who also suffered?

For the glory of Christ, for the salvation of sinners, I will not lose heart. God's love. And not only that, but Paul also refused to water down or change his message.

Verse 2, we have renounced disgraceful underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

God's love. Maybe if he had been willing to compromise, he wouldn't have suffered so much. Maybe if he had required circumcision back during his first trip to Corinth, more of the Jews would have accepted him.

[29:01] Maybe if he hadn't been so morally and ethically strict with the Corinthians, they wouldn't have embraced these deceptive super-apostles. Maybe, just maybe, if he had tweaked the truth just a little, the entire message would have been more palatable to everyone, and Paul could have spared himself tremendous pain and suffering.

But what good would that do? Paul's life would theoretically be easier. He would probably be more popular.

but what about his integrity? And what about the Corinthians? What good would that have done them?

Notice what Paul says next. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

What's Paul getting at here? Well, someone's unbelief has nothing to do with Paul's lack of speaking abilities, or the scars on his body, or any other unattractive feature of his person.

[30:26] No, they refuse to believe and are perishing in their sins because God has given them over to their heart and hearts. The God of this world, the devil has blinded their minds.

It has nothing to do with Paul's inabilities or lack of credentials. Nothing. Then he says in verse 5, for what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord with ourselves as your servants for Jesus sake.

This is really an indictment of those super apostles. Paul says he preaches Christ, not himself.

He never inserted himself into the gospel as perhaps those false teachers did. I mean, have you ever thought about how false teachers and even cult leaders manage to persuade people to depart sometimes from the truth of God's word to often radical ends?

Jesus. I mean, how did Jim Jones convince a church full of people to follow him to South America and drink poisonous Kool-Aid? Well, step number one, hook them on your personality.

[31:47] Use your charisma. Use your speaking abilities. Maybe use your good looks to get people to trust you. That's aim number one. They have to trust you. And then you highlight the flaws of everyone who opposes you.

Give them reasons not to trust them. And then slowly but surely water down the truth until people are believing your lies.

I once had someone ask me about a popular, well-known prosperity preacher. He asked, what do you think of him? So I asked, why?

What do you think of him? And he said, well, I'm starting to really like him. You know, he's always so positive. And I find that refreshing.

Well, I can understand why he would feel that way. I can even understand why he would be attracted to this man's teachings. But as I reminded him, even Satan disguises himself as an angel of life.

[32 : 56] that's precisely what Paul says in this very letter. Never mind how a man appears on the surface. You have to look beyond his rhetoric or his attractive smiling face.

What is he really saying? Are his teachings lining up with God breathed scripture? Is he proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord?

Who is at the center of his preaching? Is it Jesus? Jesus? Or is it man? Paul says, of course, I'm there.

Of course, you see my face. You see my broken body. You see all of my flaws. I'm the one proclaiming. But you have to understand, I'm merely a servant of Jesus.

As he previously told the Corinthians, for I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And Paul completes his argument in verse 6 saying, for God who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

[34 : 15] Christ. The same God who said, let there be light, and there was light, is the same God who shines in the hearts of once dead, hard-hearted sinners to know the glory of God in Jesus Christ.

And Paul and the other apostles and every pastor and minister since, and frankly, every Christian called to make disciples of all nations are merely instruments in the hand of God himself as God removes the veil and causes sinners to see the truth of their sinfulness and that their salvation is in Christ alone.

It is of God. And knowing all of this, knowing that he was faithfully doing what God called him to do and that God would save those he purposed to save by his own will and mercy, Paul is encouraged to not lose heart.

And I love what Paul says next. But, this is an admission here, we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

God says, so when the super apostles, they look at Paul and they say, you're a weak, scarred, short, bumbling, unimpressive man whom no one in their right mind should think highly of.

[35 : 59] Paul replies, you're absolutely right. God forbid anyone be impressed by me.

I'm a nobody. Of all the sinners in this world, I am the foremost. I am the chief of sinners. I persecuted Christ himself by persecuting his disciples.

I sought to put them to death, to throw them into prison. I deserve the wrath of God. I deserve an eternity in hell. God forbid anyone be impressed by me. Do you know what I am?

Paul says, at best, I'm a jar of clay. I'm a cheap, brittle container, nothing more. But, as he says in 1 Timothy 1, Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

but I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

- [37 : 17] To the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. Paul says to the believers in Corinth, strength, you're focused on the wrong thing here.

There's no dispute among us about the value of the container. I agree with the false teachers who are trying to ruin my reputation. I am nothing more than a jar of clay.

the question is, what does the container hold? I'll give you a real life example.

Back in the 1940s, a shepherd near the West Bank threw a rock into a cave and heard what sounded like pottery breaking. So, he decided to climb down into the cave to investigate and what did he find?

in brittle, cheap jars of clay, he found by far the oldest surviving manuscripts of the Old Testament.

- [38 : 24] And amazingly, those manuscripts affirmed precisely what we as Christians have always known and believed. They were a priceless discovery because they reaffirmed God's preservation of Scripture through these many years.

and they were held for many, many centuries in pitiful jars of clay. That's amazing to me.

God keeps the treasure of Christ and His gospel in jars of clay. Broken, unimpressive men like Paul, or like me, or no offense, like you.

Why? Well, Paul says, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. God uses us to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ to demonstrate His power and His glory.

glory. And if you think, no, not me. God cannot use someone like me. Then you are not grasping what God is showing us through Paul.

- [39 : 46] Paul. And if you think, I see so little fruit for my efforts, it's just been so hard with so little tangible results.

Again, you're not grasping what God is showing us through Paul. we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus sake so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

Then Paul says in verse 12, so death is at work in us but life in you. So follow his logic here.

- [40 : 56] We are weak jars of clay. but you know who allowed himself, who made himself a weak jar of clay?

Jesus Christ. So when we're afflicted and crushed and driven to despair and so on, we are manifesting Christ himself.

God and this leads to new life in others. They see Christ in us and the Lord shines that light in their hearts.

It's not our impressiveness. It's not our good looks or credentials or rhetorical skills that lead people to Christ. no, it's actually our lowliness.

It's our humility. It's even our suffering that does the most to reveal Christ to others. And since it is God alone who actually creates new life in people, God gets the glory for using these seemingly worthless jars of clay like us to fulfill that mission.

[42 : 12] So, don't be discouraged. Do not lose heart. Press on for Christ's sake.

The Lord could say to us what he said to Paul. Look out here. There are many in this city who are my people. Go tell them of my mercy. I am making my appeal through you.

Implore them on behalf of Christ. Be reconciled to God. And if you're here this morning and you don't know the mercy of God, perhaps you look at the rest of us and you think, this is all foolishness.

These people are crazy. Do you really believe this stuff? I want you to look around this room and I mean really look.

you will certainly see a whole lot of clay pots. Again, no offense. Seemingly worthless on the surface.

[43 : 24] But I want you to look deeper. Get to know us. Examine us. Peer into our hearts. Pull back the layers. If you're willing to ignore what maybe many in the media or many celebrities or perhaps many scientists say about us, if you're willing to let go of that pride and that stubbornness, the same pride and stubbornness we all had at one time, you will find eternal treasure in these clay pots.

Quite possibly, by the mercy of God, you yourself will find mercy. Perhaps you will come to see Christ in us.

Perhaps God will remove the scales from your eyes and cause you to see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. Now, to be clear, when I say look at us, I mean look carefully enough to realize that we are not preaching ourselves, for what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord.

When I say look at us, I mean look at the treasure God has given us. Look at what he has stored in us. Death is at work in us, sure. We're nothing apart from Christ, and we may very well suffer in this world for the sake of Christ, but if death is at work in us, it is so that, God willing, there can be life in you.

In short, don't look to clay pots for hope. You won't find it there. But look through those clay pots to see the treasure of Christ himself.

[45 : 08] let's pray. Father, we can rightfully call you Father, only by your mercy.

It was you who called us out of darkness, delivering us from the power of Satan. It was you who shone the light of the gospel into our hearts. We are but jars of clay, but you have made us vessels of a priceless treasure.

Please, Lord, give us the courage and the resolve to show that treasure to the world. Help us to proclaim Christ without losing heart. Let the life of Jesus be seen in us that others may live.

Keep us from growing weary for your namesake. In Christ we pray. Amen.