

## 2 Corinthians 4:5-12

<sup>5</sup>Indeed, we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup>For the God who said, "Light will shine out of darkness," is the same one who made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

<sup>7</sup>We hold this treasure in clay jars to show that its extraordinary power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup>We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed, yet not despairing; <sup>9</sup>persecuted, yet not forsaken; struck down, yet not destroyed. <sup>10</sup>We always carry around in our body the death of the Lord Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. <sup>11</sup>To be sure, while we are living we are continually being handed over to death because of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our mortal flesh. <sup>12</sup>So then, death is working in us, but life is working in you.

## Treasure in a Clay Jar

### I.

Paul might have had some stories in mind as he was writing his Second Letter to the Corinthians. Spoiler alert—the treasure is the light. Here's the story I think Paul had in mind.

It was back in the days of the Judges of Israel. The judges were prominent leaders raised up by the Lord to deliver his people. In each case, God had to raise up that leader to deliver the people because the people had first turned away from him.

So, in our story, (see Judges 6-7) Israel had once again been disobedient to the Lord and had begun to worship false gods. God had allowed a pagan nation called Midian to oppress the Israelites. Eventually Israel cried out to God for relief.

The man God chose to bring that relief to his people was a man named Gideon. Here's how it went when God called him: "But Lord," Gideon asked, "how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." <sup>16</sup> The LORD answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together" (Judges 6:15-16, NIV84).

Like many good leaders, Gideon was a humble man. Still, he trusted in God and his power to protect him and accomplish what God wanted and promised.

Eventually it was time to confront the Midianites. Military strategy dictates that a commander will want his forces to outnumber the enemy by a large margin to ensure victory.

Gideon gathered his army. While they were encamped, the Lord spoke to Gideon and said: "You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands" (Judges 7:2, NIV84). The Lord wanted to make sure Israel understood that victory over the Midianites was won by *God*, and not by the numerical superiority of Israel's forces. Gideon was to instruct the men that if any were afraid, they should go home. 22,000 of the 32,000 who had gathered for battle turned and left.

"The LORD said to Gideon, "There are still too many men. Take them down to the water, and I will sift them for you there. If I say, "This one shall go with you," he shall go; but if I say, "This one shall not go with you," he shall not go" (Judges 7:4, NIV84). Even with 10,000, if Israel were to defeat Midian, some among the people might be led to believe that it was possible because of their own superior tactics.

After God was finished with his sifting, 300 men remained in Israel's forces to defeat Midian. No logical human being would believe that 300 could defeat an army of thousands. A victory would show very clearly that it was the Lord, not Gideon or the men.

The 300 were divided into three equal companies of 100 men. Each man in the army was to hold a torch covered by a clay pot in one hand, and a trumpet in the other. There was no third hand for a sword or a bow. At Gideon's signal, the 300 blew their trumpets. Then they smashed the jars covering the torches. They shouted and blew the trumpets again.

"When the three hundred trumpets sounded, the LORD caused the men throughout the camp to turn on each other with their swords" (Judges 7:22, NIV84). The result was clear. It was the *Lord*, and his power, who had won the victory.

Remember the spoiler alert? I said that the treasure is the light. To defeat the army of Midian, God used light covered by a clay pot.

## II.

Paul said: "We hold this treasure in clay jars to show that its extraordinary power is from God and not from us" (2 Corinthians 4:7, EHV). Look back one verse to see what that treasure is: "For the God who said, 'Light will shine out of darkness,' is the same one who made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6, EHV).

From Gideon and his clay jars Paul looks back to the very beginning of Bible history. "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>The earth was undeveloped and empty. Darkness covered the surface of the deep" (Genesis 1:1-2, EHV). Imagine the darkness of that undeveloped and empty world. God had not yet created light of any kind. There were no pinpricks of starlight to break up the monotony of darkness. It was into this undeveloped and empty world that God spoke: "Let there be light" (Genesis 1:3, EHV).

"For the God who said, 'Light will shine out of darkness,' is the same one who made light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the person of Jesus Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6, EHV).

The God of creation is the same God who gave victory to Gideon with a bunch of clay jars covering torches, Paul says. *That* God, the all-powerful Creator God is the God of salvation. He is the God who made "light shine in our hearts."

Remember the children's song "This little light of mine"? That little light is faith in the gospel message of salvation in Jesus Christ. That little light is the treasure—the light of the gospel that burns brightly inside the heart of every believer. That little light is the faith that believes all the things Jesus has done to win our salvation.

Proclaimers of the gospel—both those who have been called to proclaim Jesus full-time, and those who are part of the priesthood of all believers—carry the light of the gospel in their own clay jar.

## III.

Fragile though we may appear on the outside, it is the power of God that sustains us. "We hold this treasure in clay jars to show that its extraordinary power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup>We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed, yet not despairing; <sup>9</sup>persecuted, yet not forsaken; struck down, yet not destroyed" (2 Corinthians 4:7-8, EHV).

"Hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed." What Christian has not felt the pressure of the world? The word for "hard pressed" was used to refer to crushing grapes. Paul had to face the kind of pressure every believer faces—pressure to renounce Christ, to turn his back on what Jesus had done. Paul had severe pressure applied to him—*crushing* pressure—yet he was *not* be crushed by it.

“Perplexed, yet not despairing.” At times Paul must have wondered what God’s plan was in his life. He was perplexed by things that happened to him or that he had to endure. At the same time, however, these perplexing things did not lead him to despair. He knew and understood that God was in control. God had given him the treasure of the light.

“Persecuted, yet not forsaken.” Later in his Letter Paul listed many persecutions he had already faced as a follower of Christ. There would be more that he would face before his life was over. Notice that word “forsaken.” It is the same word, in both Greek and English, that the Bible used when Jesus hung on the cross and cried out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46, EHV). Because Jesus was forsaken on the cross by the Heavenly Father, none of those who belong to Jesus will *ever* be abandoned by God.

“We hold this treasure in clay jars to show that its extraordinary power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup>We are hard pressed on every side, yet not crushed; perplexed, yet not despairing; <sup>9</sup>persecuted, yet not forsaken; struck down, yet not destroyed” (2 Corinthians 4:7-8, EHV). Not crushed. Not despairing. Not forsaken. Not destroyed. The treasure of our gospel light is still there—still burning brightly. Yet...it isn’t because of any strength or power we have. Just like Gideon and his 300, it’s all because of God’s power and might.

#### IV.

“We always carry around in our body the death of the Lord Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. <sup>11</sup>To be sure, while we are living we are continually being handed over to death because of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our mortal flesh” (2 Corinthians 4:10-11, EHV).

When people looked at Paul—or when they look at any believer—we hope and pray they don’t pay a lot of attention to us individually. Paul has long-since died and gone to heaven. Every one of us will die some day—sooner than we might think. Believers are nothing but clay jars, carrying around the treasure of the gospel-light. What we want others to focus on is that Light—the life of Christ that lives in us.

Jesus identified himself as “The Way and the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6, EHV). When our gospel lights shine forth, the real Way, Truth and Life are identified for others to see.

What a rush it must have been to be among the 300 with Gideon watching the Midianite army destroy themselves in fear as the godly Israelites stood there with nothing but torches and trumpets in their hands! They knew it was really *God* who was winning the victory.

What a rush it is to stand as a clay jar with the treasure of the light of the gospel and blow your horn with the message of salvation! God hasn’t tasked you with winning the victory, any more than he gave that task to the 300. All you are to do is hold up your gospel light and trumpet the message of the Light whenever and wherever you have the opportunity to do so. *God* will do the real work.

Let your light shine. Let it shine. All the time. Amen.