

Something within Me

May 30, 2021

2nd Corinthians 4: 5-12

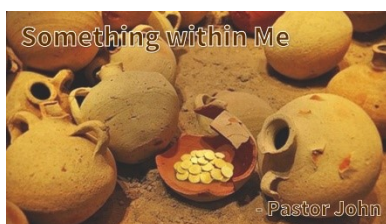
⁵ For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷ But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. ⁸ We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

¹¹ For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Romans 8: 12-17

¹² So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — ¹³ for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.

When we cry, "Abba! Father!"¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷ and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ — if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

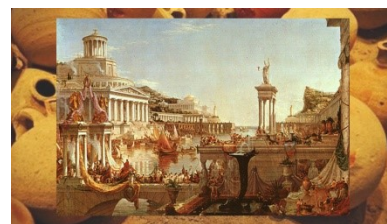


Today we begin a new worship series called "More Than Meets the Eye". During this series, which will run through the end of June, we will explore the ways in

which God shows up in unusual and surprising ways. The longer we walk with God, the more we realize that faith, power, transformation, and salvation show up in ways we do not expect. We also come to understand that faith sometimes requires a deeper dive in order to perceive how God might be at work in and through us. God often works behind the scenes and below the surface – and often beyond our expectations. This morning we look at "Something within Me" as we use our passages from 2nd Corinthians 4 and Romans 8 to reveal the ways that God's power often works through imperfect vessels like you and me. As we begin this morning, let us begin with a word of prayer...

Looking at the graphic for this morning, what comes to mind when you see this image?... In the scriptures this morning it speaks of this *"treasure in clay jars"* and of the reality that we are *"heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ"*. I chose this image because it also reflects the affliction and persecution that we can sometimes experience in our faith.

Our first passage for today comes from 2nd Corinthians. Before we delve too deep into the passage itself, let us consider the original audience. Paul was writing to the church in Corinth. On his second missionary journey, from 49 to 52 AD, Paul spent about a year and a half in the city, winning converts to the faith, building up the body of believers, and establishing a church. This was hard work. The city of Corinth was one of the larger cities in the Roman empire. The seaport city was a center for trade and commerce. It was cosmopolitan – composed of people from all walks of life, from many different ethnicities, from varied religious backgrounds. Corinth was known for a robust slave trade as well as abundant sexual perversion and other immoral behaviors. What a perfect place to plant a new church!



Continuing on in his missionary work, Paul left Corinth. Paul wrote the first letter to the Corinthians in about 55 AD, during his third missionary journey. News of difficulties in the young church was not totally surprising. The church was made up of new believers that came from varied backgrounds and experiences, each with their own social norms and values. To form a community with common beliefs and practices would be a challenge in any place, never mind in the cosmopolitan city of Corinth. Paul's first letter to the church discussed the quarrelling and the sins that had grown in the church during the three-plus years since Paul had departed. The first letters also contained a discussion of the gifts of the Spirit – with love being named as the greatest gift of all. The faith and general situation in the church community improved. Second Corinthians is a letter of encouragement and comfort amidst the affliction and trial that most Christians in Corinth were experiencing.

This second letter acknowledges the tensions and challenges to living a life of faith in the world. Two weeks ago, I spoke of living in the world but not being of the world. This was the reality for those first believers in the Corinthian church.



Turn with me to 2nd Corinthians 4. Paul begins with a great reminder: "*We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as slaves for*

Jesus' sake". Imagine living in Corinth, a city with a robust slave trade, and hearing Paul asking you to proclaim that you are a slave to Jesus Christ. Image living in Corinth, an important city in the Roman empire, and hearing Paul asking you to proclaim Jesus as Lord. Not Caesar, Jesus. The focus for Paul and the needed focus for the church was Jesus Christ. Knowing and proclaiming that Jesus is Lord allows one to deal with the tensions from different values, cultures, and so on. This is true both for the church in Corinth and for the church today. In the next verse, verse six, Paul acknowledges the tension, saying, "*Let light shine out of darkness*". Being the light in the darkness of the world was a common metaphor then, just as it is now. To be truth and light and love in the immoral and pagan world of Corinth was difficult. Paul was asking the community of faith to stand out, to live those "highly questionable" lives that we have been talking about for the past few months.

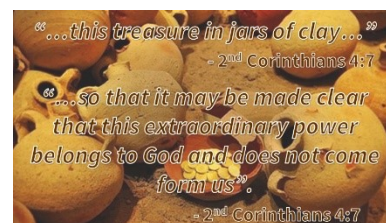
In verse seven Paul refers to "*this treasure in jars of clay*". Paul was very intentional in choosing this imagery. Clay was the simplest, most common storage vessel. Everyone would have clay jars. Today Paul would say we have this treasure in Zip-lock bags. They are cheap, disposable, easily replaced.



Just as the thought of putting your finest jewelry, your precious family photos and other heirlooms, and so forth in plastic baggies is ridiculous, so too was the idea of placing treasure in clay jars ridiculous to the Corinthians. Our treasures are stored away in safes and in other vessels that do not easily crack or break.

So then, why does Paul choose this imagery? The first reason is clearly

theological. In this same verse, Paul writes, *"so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us"*. The power



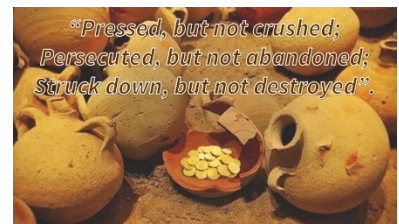
that fuels and drives the church, the ability to walk out their faith in such a hostile and challenging environment – this power comes from God, not from within any of the believers. Yes, they are channels or conduits of God's power, but the source of the power is found in and through Jesus Christ. The source is not in these fragile, common human beings that make up the church. This remains true today. You and I can do nothing on our own. Only when the power of Christ is alive and living within and through us, only then are we the new temple of God, only then is the light and love enfleshed in us and expressed daily in the world through us.

The second reason is to encourage. The treasure is in no way diminished by the container. The clay jar is unassuming and unexpected, just as flawed, imperfect, sinful creatures like you and me, just as those believers in Corinth are chosen as temples for God's Holy Spirit. It is of great encouragement that God chose us to be the vessels of the gospel or good news of Jesus Christ. In the same way, these words of Paul were of great encouragement to a people struggling to the church in world of Corinth.

Just like the church today, the early believers came to faith with baggage, with checkered pasts, with cultural and ethnic differences – all the while trying to build and sustain a Christian community within the wild and immoral culture of Corinth.

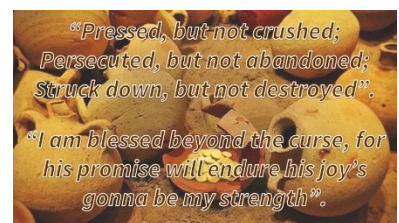
Continuing on in verses eight and nine, Paul writes of the actual challenges or difficulties faced by the believers in the Corinthian church. We will sing these

words in our closing song. In the words of "Trading My Sorrows", believers then and now are: *"Pressed, but not crushed; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed"*. Paul does not deny the hardships

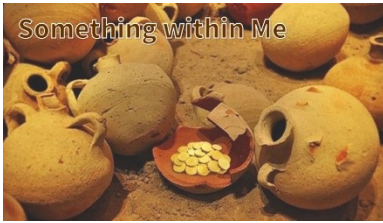


and difficulties of being the church of God in the world. Instead of denying these realities, he acknowledges them and then pushes on past them to also shine a light on the greater reality that pushes back against and ultimately overcomes these challenges. In verses ten through twelve Paul reminds the believers that they carry the living Christ within them. In the words of Darrell Evans, *"I am*

blessed beyond the curse, for his promise will endure; his joy's gonna be my strength". Although we are hard pressed at times, although we suffer for our faith at times, although we although we are struck down once



in a while, we have that treasure, that joy, that hope within our hearts. Even though we are *"always being given up to death for Jesus' sake"* we have *"the life of Jesus made visible in our mortal flesh"*. To use Paul's words, we live as slaves to the gospel, yes. But in doing so, in dying to self and to the things of this world, the light and love of Christ is made visible in and through us. It shines into the darkness of the world.

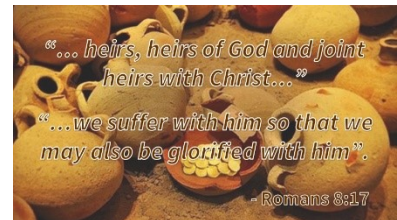
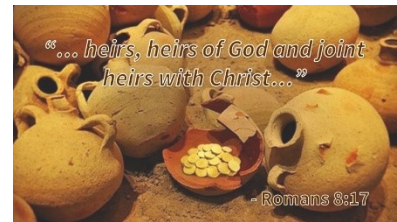


Turn with me to our second passage, to Romans 8. In our second passage for today we hear Paul encouraging us to live as the children of God. Addressing the same challenges faced by the church in Corinth and by us

today – to live not *"according to the flesh"* but by the Spirit instead – Paul calls us to *"put to death the deeds of the body"*. These words echo Paul's words in 2nd Corinthians – *"being given up to death for Jesus' sake"*. In dying to the things of this world, in dying to the pleasures and lures of the flesh, we are freed and are then enabled to live in the way of Christ. In verse fourteen Paul writes, *"All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God"*. When we live as a child of God, we do not live in fear, but we live out our adoption into the family of God.

Because we are adopted into the family, we live as *"heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ"*.

Continuing on in verse seventeen, Paul ties back into the realities, the challenges, being experienced by the church in Corinth and by most Christians living in the world. Here he writes, *"we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him"*. Now, remember, we



may be hard pressed, we may suffer, we may be struck down. But. But. But we have that treasure, that joy, that hope within our hearts. As Christians we will face hardship and trial, but as heirs of God and as joint heirs with Christ, we know that we will one day be glorified. This is the hope that Paul clings to. This is the hope that keeps Paul living out is faith day by day. The hope of eternal life is our enduring promise.



As Christians, we are not promised an easy or comfortable life. Just as was the case with the church in Corinth, we live in a world hostile to faith. And just as the church in Corinth chose to live faithfully, we too

must choose to live with God's presence in our lives. The indwelling presence of God is that something within me. It is that something within you. The abiding presence within each of us gives hope and joy, peace, and strength in the day to day of life.

That something within me and that something within you empowers us to live out our faith. Knowing that Christ's power lies within us, strengthening us for all that lies ahead, maintaining a hope for the life to come, may we receive the charge to manifest Christ in the world. In that power, with that promise, and with that charge may we go forth to be Christ's light and love in the world. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. As you reflect on the "treasures" within you (peace, hope, joy, love, strength...), where has Christ been at work in you, developing your faith recently? Who in your life could use some of this treasure?
- 2) *Pray*. Where is the Spirit leading you to make the light more visible? To what darkness is Christ calling your light? Seek God's guidance in prayer.
- 3) *Study*. Read Romans 8: 18-25. How do these words of Paul build your hope in future glory? How do they speak to you concerning your place in the family of God?