

This Treasure in Earthen Vessels

Lesson Text: **2 Corinthians 4:1-7**

INTRODUCTION:

- A. The city of Corinth was an ancient and celebrated city of Greece located on the isthmus of Corinth, and about 40 miles west of Athens.
 1. It was a great business center and had much celebrated wealth. Its inhabitants were given over to vice of all kind, and the worship of Venus was attended with shameful licentiousness.
 2. In this city, Paul found himself in his second missionary journey.
 - a. At first he was met with some opposition, but being not discouraged thereby he continued to preach and “many of the Corinthians hearing believed and were baptized ” (**Acts 18:8**).
 2. Thus, these Corinthians became the 9th of ten cases of conversion recorded in the Book of Acts.
 3. Those that thus responded became the nucleus of the Lord’s church there, which church was the recipient of two letters from the noted Apostle Paul. From the second of those letters our lesson text is lifted.
- B. **2 Corinthians 4:1-7** – “Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God. But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. For it is the God who commanded light to 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. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.”
 1. In this quotation from Paul, he refers to his message both as the “gospel” and a “treasure”.
 2. The recipients then and for all time with each of us included, should rejoice exceedingly because of the immeasurable value therein found.
 3. The “gospel”, which is the “good news”, is, according to **Romans 1:16**, “the power of God to save.”
 4. The “treasure: our response thereto, is the only investment we can make here that will be our riches hereafter.
 5. The “Wonderful story of love”, God’s interest in humanity from the garden of Eden to the island of Patmos, even in it’s stages of patriarchy and that of the Law of Moses prevailed the guiding hand of Divinity that brought us to the “fullness of time” and the dispensing of His saving grace on that Day of Pentecost _____ years ago!

THE APOSTLES WERE MEN . . . AND MEN ARE EARTHERN VESSELS

- A. Now this special “treasure” of which Paul speaks is to be found in” **earthen vessels**”. Paul was an “earthen vessel”.
1. The power that he exhibited emanated not from the messenger, but from the message.
 2. Writing to Corinthians Christians in **1 Corinthians 2:9-10, 13**, Paul said: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him. But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.”
 3. Further, Paul states in **1 Corinthians 14:37**: “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.”
 - a. Here we have recorded proof of the verbal inspiration of the Bible.
 - b. Paul became a” chosen vessel” for this treasure as the Lord so informed Ananias in **Acts 9:15**: “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.”
- B. The twelve apostles were all earthen vessels.
1. To them was the “Great Commission” given (Matthew 29:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-48; John 20:22-23).
 2. But they were to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high (Luke 24:49).
 3. On that Pentecost Day, these vessels were filled with the treasure and they went forth to enrich all who would believe and obey!
 4. While our Savior was upon the earth He said in **John 9:5** – “As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”
 5. But in the Sermon on the Mount, anticipating their work, He said to the apostles in **Matthew 5:14** - “You are the light of the world.” The priceless message they carried would open the eyes of sinners . . . turn them from darkness to light . . . and from the

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EARTHERN VESSEL IN CONVERSION

- A. Understanding that the treasure was placed in earthen vessels, it is then no problem to see why in every case of conversion under the great Commission the treasure (gospel) was dispensed by an earthen vessel (man) and salvation was enjoyed when the hearers properly responded thereto.
1. Listening friends, this leaves no place for different “plans”, special revelations, better-felt-than-told experiences or any other program other than “I am the way, the truth and the life; no man comes to the Father, but by me” (**John 14:6**).
 2. God substituted Christ for our Sins, and there is nothing we can substitute for Christ and still please God.

- B. Treasures are items of great value. Sometimes many spend great effort and time searching for “buried treasure”.
1. Others work hard to collect and hoard dollars or become owners of a great amount of property.
 2. Jesus said in **Luke 12:33-34** – “. . . Provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”.
- C. Now, since that Pentecost Day the treasure has been committed to earthen vessels. This would disallow any heavenly vessel imparting its message to man.
1. A case in point is found in the tenth chapter of Acts concerning Cornelius, a devout Gentile, God-fearing and prayerful.
 2. Spiritually speaking, he was sailing on a sinking ship. In this special case, God was cognizant of this man's desire to be His servant.
 3. About three o'clock one afternoon, Cornelius had a vision wherein an angel appeared and advised him to send to Joppa and get Peter, an “earthen vessel” to come and “he will tell you what you ought to do.”
 4. Question: Why didn't the angel tell Cornelius what to do?
 - a. The sending to Joppa and waiting for the arrival of Peter would be time consuming, in fact four days worth of time (Acts 10:30), but God is being true to His word.
 - b. The gospel is now in earthen vessels and this example in the Divine Record of the ages demonstrates that God's Word is the last word.
- D. Again students of the Bible are acquainted with one eunuch of Ethiopia who after the Day of Pentecost, made a long round-trip journey from Ethiopia to Jerusalem in obedience to a law that he knew not had been taken out of the way and nailed to the cross.
1. The words of Paul make it clear in **Colossians 2:14** – “Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross”.
 2. First, God employed an angel to advise Philip, an evangelist who was engaged in a great gospel work in Samaria, as recorded in Acts 8, to “. . . Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza. This is desert” (**Acts 8:26**).
 3. Philip promptly responded and soon intersected the road whereon the Eunuch, by chariot, traveled in his homeward journey.
 4. Now the Holy Spirit enters the scene and advised Philip to “Go near and overtake the chariot” (**Acts 8:29**).
 - a. Philip did so and heard the eunuch reading from the Book of Isaiah, the prophet, in what we know to be **Isaiah 53:7-8** – “He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; And as a lamb before its shearer is silent, So He opened not His mouth. In His humiliation His justice was taken away, And who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth”.
 - b. Philip asked in **verse 30** – “. . . Do you understand what you are reading?”
 - c. The eunuch replied in **verse 31**, “How can I unless someone guides me? . . .”

- d. In **verse 34** the eunuch asked Philip this question: “I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of some other man?” Don’t you just love it when someone asks you a Bible question?
- e. **Verse 35** tells us “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to Him”. Listening friends, when from any text Jesus is preached with regard to salvation, the hearers learn to be baptized and to be saved.
- f. The approach to some water elicited this response from the eunuch, “. . . See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?” (**verse 36**).
- g. The only hindrance was a confession of faith in Christ, which hindrance was removed by stating, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (**verse 37**).
- 5. Into the water goes both the preacher and the sinner, and the sinner was “buried with Christ in baptism and was raised to walk in newness of life,” and then continued on his journey homeward to Ethiopia, rejoicing all the while.
- 6. In this example of conversion, the Lord, and angel and the Holy Spirit were involved, but the “earthen vessel” was essential to teach the sinner of the gospel way.
- E. We can add to the forgoing salvation of Cornelius and the Ethiopian eunuch, that of Saul of Tarsus in Acts 9. In each case the earthen vessel delivered the treasure (gospel). For _____ years, salvation has reached sinners in no other way.
 - 1. How great the calling of those who have chosen preaching the gospel as a glorious privilege and those who have responded thereto as they let their Christian light shine to all who walk in darkness that they, also might be influenced to “walk in the footprints of Jesus.”
 - 2. May we all strive to “possess our vessel in sanctification and honor” that we, as the Lord’s church, might be successful in making known the manifold wisdom of to a lost and dying world! Untold millions are dying untold.
 - 3. **Every heart without Christ is a mission field and every heart with Christ is a missionary, an earthen vessel with treasure for all who are lost .**

CONCLUSION:

- A. Friend, if you are still lost, you need this treasure . . . you need this gospel . . . you need to obey its commandments and abide by its precepts.
- B. Friend, if you have already done that, then the treasure that you have you must not deprive others of it. You as an earthen vessel must take that treasure to others.
- C. God’s Plan for Man’s Salvation.