

## A Lode of Gold in a Jar of Clay - 2 Corinthians 4:7

**Introduction:** Everybody loves a title. Everybody wants to have the credentials, and be referred to by them. When I took a math class at Floyd College, I discovered that the professor was my high school geometry teacher. I went up to her to reintroduce myself, but I made the mistake of calling her Mrs. Davis. She let me know right quick, “*Steve, I am Dr. Davis.*” So I said to her, “*That’s wonderful, I am Rev. Skates.*”

Paul was known by many titles, such as Saul the persecutor, Saul, the Pharisee, and later on by Paul the Apostle. But here in 2 Corinthians 4, Paul chooses to not so much make a name for himself, but rather he chooses to humble himself. In vs. 5, he tells his readers, “*For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.*” **2 Cor. 4:5 (NIV)** Then on in vs. 7, he says, “*But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us*” **2 Cor. 4:7 (NIV)**. He identified himself to the saints at Corinth as a jar of clay!

Now, why did he choose this title? Perhaps Paul understood what Isaiah said many years earlier when he wrote, “*Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.*” **Isaiah 64:8 (NIV)**. Obviously Paul understood that when the race had been run and the dust had settled, all that would be left of his body would be a jar of clay - a crumbling piece of mud.

Now Paul wasn’t making light of himself. He didn’t see himself as a worthless piece of junk. Oh no! He added something to this description of himself. He said that while on the outside he was simply a jar of clay; on the inside was a lode of gold. He had a treasure inside him that was fashioned by the very hand of God. And that was what Paul was really thankful for. Paul knew that he had been given a great gift on the inside, and he was constantly thanking God for giving it to him.

Tonight, I want us to examine what Paul meant when he said that he was a treasure in a jar of clay. First, I want to point out:

### 1. The Twist

I am a student of words. Since I was a teenager, I have been fascinated with the use of words. I guess that’s why I enjoy doing crossword puzzles and playing scrabble and coming up with puns like: *If you have to wear glasses, don’t make a spectacle of yourself. Or the best way to make a cigarette lighter is to take the tobacco out.* But one of my fascinations with words is the use of oxymoron’s like: *Genuine imitation - same difference - almost exactly - soft rock - pretty ugly - small crowd - jumbo shrimp - black light - clearly misunderstood - temporary tax increase - definite maybe - working vacation - exact estimate – government intelligence - first runner-up.*

But if you think about it, in this description, Paul is using twist on words, or an oxymoron in the phrase “*this treasure in jars of clay.*” Now his readers knew what he was talking about, because a common practice back then was to keep treasures in clay pots and bury them in the ground for safekeeping. This is what Jesus was referring to in **Matthew 13:44 (NIV)** when He said, “*The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a*

*field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”*

But notice the contrast in this statement, “*this treasure in jars of clay.*” It says that something uncommon is hidden in something common; something of value is hidden in something inexpensive, and something attractive is hidden in something unattractive.

When we look at Paul’s comparison in this way, we can see that God has taken a great risk in us. His new creation – the eternal life that He bestowed on us, which is something that is very unique, very durable, very valuable, and very attractive, He has entrusted to frail, fragile, common human beings.

It’s a lesson in God’s great risk, but it also shows how much He values us. Just as the treasure of His salvation and spiritual gift is within us, it is He who made us as well. We are not afterthoughts with God. We were carefully and individually crafted by the master potter. And just as the potter makes the jar to be used for a purpose, so has God made us. We’re a jar of clay alright, but we’re useful jars of clay. Secondly, notice:

## **2 The Trust**

Years ago, while waiting in a Doctor’s office, I saw a magazine ad for Mercedes-Benz that caught my attention because it was a three page ad. On one page was a picture of Earnest Hemmingway, with the caption “*An Author.*” On the next page was a picture of Beethoven, with the caption “*A Composer*” under it. On the last page was a picture of a Mercedes with the caption “*A Car*” under it. And underneath that was the statement, “*Sometimes words are not enough.*”

That’s the feeling we get when we think of this treasure that belongs to every believer. Sometimes words are not enough. Jesus called it “*the pearl of great price.*” Peter called it “*this precious value.*” James said it was a “*precious gift...from above.*” Paul called it “*...the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men*” and said that it was that “*the light of the gospel*” (2 Cor. 4:4 NIV). This valuable treasure of salvation and eternal life is something that brings light in dark places. When a storm comes up and it knocks the power off, it can be scary thing to suddenly be in the dark. But when the light comes on, and the darkness is chased away, so is the fear.

It’s the same with this precious treasure God has entrusted with us. We carry the message of light that can chase away the darkness of uncertainty and fear within people’s hearts. That’s why Paul told the Romans that he was “*not ashamed of the gospel,*” for it was “*the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...*” (Rom. 1:16 NIV).

The message of salvation by grace through Jesus Christ is a treasure and a sacred trust that has been given to us. Words cannot describe the meaning of that treasure.

Paul held this trust in high esteem. He did not want to disappoint. He didn’t want to fumble the ball. He cried in **Romans 11:33 (NIV)** “*Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!*” We’ve been given a sacred trust to tell folks about the greatest treasure that could ever be found. Finally, I want to say a little about:

### 3. The Trustees

Paul said in **1 Corinthians 4:1 (NIV)** “*So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God.*” That’s us! Paul looked upon himself as both a servant and a steward. We are servants of Christ in that He is our Master. We are but instruments in His hands, to be used for His purposes. Some might look upon themselves as an end in themselves. (“*My ministry*” “*My church*” “*My people*”). But we are not an end in ourselves, we are rather a means to a end.

Someone has said, “*God buries the workmen, but He carries on His work.*” And that it is exactly the point Paul makes when he compares himself to a jar of clay.

He describes us whom God has trusted this great treasure as something that is weak, dispensable, temporary, and fragile. He said in 2 Cor. 4:8-11 (NIV) that as human beings, we are “*hard pressed, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down.*” In other words, we’re prone to decay and vulnerable, and constantly being delivered over to death.

But despite our vulnerabilities and weaknesses we will not be destroyed and should not ever lose hope. God will always be with us because He has entrusted us with the precious treasure of the gospel message. And when we spread the message – the good news of the gospel, we are manifesting the life of Jesus to others. We are showing His strength in our weakness.

That makes our call as servants and stewards a high calling. Paul told the Philippians that he was going to “*press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me*” (Phil 3:14 NIV). He told the Corinthians that we are “*ambassadors for Christ*” (2 Cor 5:20 NIV). We have a high calling, an honorable calling, and a sacred trust to bear the precious treasure in our hearts, and carry it to a lost and dying world.

**Conclusion:** Yes, this is valuable, but we’re not supposed to keep in on the inside. We are to let it out. It’s a sacred trust we have. We are God’s trustees. Don’t guard it, but give it away. Somebody is waiting in a dark place for you to come along with the light.