

“Dust of the Earth” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 2 – June 2, 2024

- I. **2 Corinthians 4:7** – “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.”
- II. **I love the imagery of today’s Scripture lesson from Paul.**
 - a. We are jars of clay with a treasure inside.
 - b. Paul is writing a letter to the Church in Corinth.
 - i. Corinth was a port city with ships coming and going from all over the Mediterranean Sea.
 - ii. People from every walk of life lived there, and the members of that church were influenced by all kinds of idol worship and foreign gods, along with the allure of making money from all the wealthy trade going on.
 - iii. Paul addressed many of these issues in his first letter, but also wants to stop false teachers from influencing the members there.
 1. They had accused Paul and his helpers of having troubles because of their lack of faith.
 2. In other words, if you only had enough faith and obeyed God better, bad things wouldn’t keep happening to you and your friends.
 - iv. The false teachers and accusers in Corinth were trying to make Paul look bad because he was suffering... “how can a man who’s blessed by God go through all those trials?”
 1. An age-old problem for believers is the suffering we face in life, along with the suffering we face for believing in Jesus as our Savior.
 2. For these false teachers in Corinth, they were using this problem as ammunition to strike at the missionary who brought them the Gospel in the first place... St. Paul.
 - c. Paul’s response is the visual of a jar of clay filled with treasure.
 - i. Our bodies are feeble and weak, but the power of God resides within.
 - ii. The clay pot is able to do some things – hold liquids or dry goods – but it’s fragile and easily chipped, cracked, or broken.
 1. Many of you already know about my clay jar that I bought when I went to the Holy Land.
 2. We went to a gift shop in the city of Jericho, and I intentionally bought the ugliest looking clay jar in the store.
 - a. I’m sure the shopkeeper was happy to get this thing off his shelf... but for me, the uglier the better.
 - b. It’s now broken and glued back together – and it won’t really hold much.
 - c. It’s been through a lot of brokenness and trouble – kind of like all of us.

- III. **It is false teaching to say that we suffer more because of a lack of faith.**
- a. Time and time again we hear Jesus tell us to take up our cross and follow Him (nowhere have I found the verse that says, “Take up your Lazy Boy recliner” or “Trust in Jesus and you will never suffer any trial.”)
 - i. We can count on troubles, trials, and affliction as we live in this world – whether we are Christians or not – but we Christians may face additional trials because of our faith (not fewer).
 - ii. Jesus says blessed are the persecuted (Matthew 5:10-12), and Peter says we should not be surprised by trials for our faith. (1 Peter 4:12)
 - b. Yet, sometimes we wonder... what if... what if I am more faithful to God... what if I try really hard to follow His commandments to love Him and others... doesn't that count for a little less suffering?
 - i. Won't God deliver me from trials because I love Him and try to do His will?
 - ii. Or, on the flip side, we think that suffering and trials are because God is punishing us for not being faithful.
 - c. Jesus addresses this by saying that no one is without guilt and sin, and all must repent and turn back home to Him. (Luke 13:2-5)
 - i. We may be tempted to believe that our suffering comes from a lack of faith.
 - ii. We might believe that trusting in God with all our heart will bring blessings in the form of less suffering or more prosperity.
 - iii. We might see the suffering in others and wonder what they have done to deserve this from God.
 - iv. All of this is human reason trying to figure out why things happen – but we are not God... we are jars of clay created by Him to shine the light of Jesus no matter how beat up we get.
- IV. **In the beginning, God created all things.**
- a. The Genesis story is part of our reading today, as Paul says that God said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” (vs 6).
 - i. Paul means that if God could bring light from nothing at the beginning of creation, He can certainly bring light from us.
 - b. Yet, we can also go back read in the creation story that “the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” (Genesis 2:7)
 - i. The Prophet Isaiah says, “But now, O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You are our potter; we are all the work of Your hand.” (Isaiah 64:8)
 - ii. So, we know that we are the dust of the earth, brought forth by God's creative hand to become earthen vessels...
 - 1. We are fragile, clay pots, but because we are a vessel, it means that we Christians carry something wonderful inside.

- 2. The glory of Jesus Christ shines forth even when the outside is chipped, broken, and cracked.
- c. Paul declares, “⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed,” (vss. 8-9)
 - i. Our weak, earthen vessel is not the end of the story... for us, it is just the beginning.
 - ii. The brokenness that comes from living life in a sinful world may cause damage, but it will never define us nor destroy us.
 - iii. We are God’s... and nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:39)
- d. The weakness we experience is not greater than the weakness of body that our Savior experienced when He came to rescue us.
 - i. I often wonder how someone can believe they should never suffer because of their strong faith, when Jesus, God Himself suffered!
 - 1. Are we to believe that our happiness and prosperity matter more than living like Jesus... the Suffering Servant?
- e. Yes, Jesus suffered more than any of us, but in the same jar of clay as us.
 - i. The God of the universe came to earth as a man, as the Creator became a part of His creation.
 - ii. Jesus received all the cracks, chips, and dings that satan and world could dish out.
 - 1. The goal was for satan to crush Him – and for a little while, Jesus was dead and buried – but on the third day, the glory of the Father shone through His risen Son.
 - 2. A new and glorified body came forth that would never face earthly trials again.
 - 3. The dust and clay of the body was transformed... and that is our future as well.
 - iii. Our faith in Jesus means that we will follow in His footsteps... first in suffering and trials for a time... but in death we will be transformed.
 - 1. The power of sin, death, and the devil are no match for the power of Jesus that resides within... In Jesus, we win!

V. **The power of Christ Jesus enables us to endure anything.**

- a. Even in the weakest and most feeble of states, a faith-filled Christian is the brightest light in the room.
- b. We’ve all seen it, a person who has endured all kinds of trials and struggles, but they exude Christ... they essentially minister to us because they are so confident in the midst of chaos.
- c. In many ways it’s like the old clay pot that has so many dings, cracks, and holes that it doesn’t seem to have a purpose.... Yet...
 - i. ...the more trouble it’s been through, the more light that shines forth.

- ii. Each of us were made from the dust of the earth, but through God's gift of grace, these jars of clay are filled with Christ.
- iii. Remember, His light shines forth from us through the brokenness, until we receive our new and glorious body in the life to come. Amen.