**2 CORINTHIANS 4:5-12**

**TREASURE OF LIGHT**

“They feast on the abundance of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your delights. For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light do we see light. Oh, continue Your steadfast love to those who know You, and Your righteousness to the upright of heart!” – Psalm 36:8-10.

 In our text Paul refers to God saying, “Let light shine out of darkness” (v 6). He’s referring to Genesis 1:3, where “God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.” Before there was light there was darkness. In one sense darkness is just the absence of light, but in another sense darkness is evil. Was darkness evil in the beginning? Did God create the world and us out of an evil substance? No, of course not. That’s not what Paul or the book of Genesis is saying, and we have to dismiss such nonsense right from the start because there are many people who think this way.

 And yet because many people have come to associate darkness with evil, that’s now what Paul talks about when he refers to our hearts. God shines His good light into our hearts of evil darkness. Going back to the book of Genesis we see how quickly our hearts turned from the purity with which God created us to evil. “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” – Genesis 6:5; (Genesis 8:21).

 Go back just one verse from our text and we read that it’s Satan who blinds the minds of unbelievers so that they don’t see the light of Christ and they perish. Then our text starts and Paul writes about a cure that has been found for the evil darkness within our hearts and our blind minds. We begin our reading with that cure to make it clear that this teaching is about hope, and not about condemnation.

 Our reading begins saying, “For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.” (v 5). Jesus is the primary content of this message, not ourselves. Yes, our hearts are evil, have evil within them, but the good news is that God shines the light of Jesus into our hearts, and in the face of Christ we see the glory of God. The apostle John described this revelation of Jesus and God to us by saying, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14).

 Thus to encourage us after his mention about darkness and evil in our hearts Paul turns to referring to us as jars of clay that hold this treasure of the glory of God the Father and Jesus His only Son. How do jars hold onto light? Usually not very well. Light usually escapes from jars.

 So Jesus tells us what we’re not to do with His light that He shines into our hearts, and then what we should do with His light when he says: “No one after lighting a lamp covers it with a jar or puts it under a bed, but puts it on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light” (Luke 8:16). He says ‘no one does this’, knowing in fact that this is what we do, we hide the light of Christ. And then He says what people do, so that we know what to do with His light. He talks like this, as many people talk like this, so that we may respond: ‘Of course I don’t hide Jesus’ light in this jar of clay, but rather I let Jesus’ light shine so that others may see it.’

 You may have encountered this way of persuading people to think a certain way when people say things like, ‘No one in their right might would think that, …’ Now, whatever ‘that’ may be, if you’ve been thinking that way, now you wouldn’t dare speak up and say that, because you don’t want to be in that group of ‘no one’s’. And that’s Jesus’ hope too, that we wouldn’t want to be in the group of ‘no one’s’ who hide His light under jars of clay.

 However, if you still like to hide Jesus’ light in your jar of clay, well God has an answer for that behaviour as well. Read Jeremiah 18 to see what God does with jars of clay that don’t function as God wishes. One section reads, “The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do. Then the word of the Lord came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the Lord. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel” (4-6).

 A few weeks ago we looked at Jesus describing us as branches on His vine, and the bad branches that didn’t bear fruit were cut off and tossed into the fire. Here we look at ourselves as jars of clay carrying the treasure of the light of Jesus, and a jar that doesn’t function properly shining Jesus’ light, but rather hiding Jesus’ light is just clay in God’s hands, and God may rework you so that you do function properly.

 Now that doesn’t mean that you may be reworked to be a beautiful Ming vase shinning for all to see. No, this isn’t about others seeing and admiring you, but rather about others seeing and admiring Jesus. As Paul says this is done to show that the power belongs to God, and not to us.

 So this is where Paul turns to next – our reworking. He uses words like ‘afflicted, perplexed, persecuted, and struck down’, but he says we’re not crushed, not driven to despair, forsaken or destroyed.’ This jar of clay, our bodies, is meant to be used to carry and shine forth the light of Christ. Yet, as Paul goes on, at first it’s not light that God puts into our reworked bodies of clay. It sounds like the opposite of light.

 The first thing that Paul says that God is going to place into your jar of clay, that He has reworked, is the death of Jesus. Now you may be clamouring in your thoughts wishing to have the light of Jesus back within you, rather than death. But you’re now a reworked jar of clay, and God needs to start over again, and the first thing that God has to put into you is Jesus’ death.

 Jesus died upon the cross to pay for your sins, your evil hearts of darkness. You should die because of your evil hearts, but Jesus chose to take your place, and then He invited you to come along with Him on His journey into death. That doesn’t sound very nice, however, we have to face this death of Jesus in order to see the light again. We have to carry the death of Jesus within us so that, as Paul says, “the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies”.

 How is it possible for us to carry the death of Jesus within us so that life may be manifested in our bodies? Paul answers that question in the book of Romans. He asks you, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we shall certainly be united with Him in a resurrection like His” (6:3-5).

 Through Baptism you’re joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ “so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in your mortal flesh.” Did you see that when I read it earlier? The life of Jesus is to be manifested in your **mortal** flesh, and not just in your **immortal** flesh. You don’t get to say that you’ll behave like a Christian when you get to heaven, and behave differently now. If that’s our attitude then your jar of clay may need to go through some more reworking, the sufferings of this life.

 Your jar of clay isn’t meant to be glorious, but it is meant to shine forth the light of your glorious Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Jesus “is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:15-20).

Lord Jesus Christ, may You always shine forth the treasure of Your light to the world through us no matter how cracked our jars of clay become. Amen.