

Text: 2 Corinthians 4:7 - 5:10

Date Preached: 27 December 2020

Venue: Living Hope Baptist Church

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Series: Topical

Title: My Life as a Clay Pot

Four Glorious Treasures in the Clay Pot of Your Earthly Life

1. God's power through your intense suffering
(4:7-11)
2. Persistent faith in your temporary weakness
(4:12-18)
3. Heavenly guarantee for earthly dying
(5:1-5)
4. Courageous living until divine reward
(5:6-10)

[Notice: These notes are not as complete as they normally are]

Having a Biblical World-view makes sense of all of life.

- Genesis - see God's good hand in this sin-cursed world
- Job - witness how to trust God in this suffering-filled life
- Psalm - relate to those who worship God in both the downs and ups of life
- Proverbs - understand the wisdom in fearing the Lord in this world filled with fools
- Eccl - perceive the purpose in this futile life
- James - learn how to have joy as a minority in this trial-filled life

Having a Biblical World-view makes sense of all of life.

But perhaps the best image used of a Christian's life in this world, is given to us in 2 Cor 4:7 "we have this treasure in jars of clay".

Jar/Pot—value only in that it can hold something valuable

Clay—cannot be repaired if broken (glass, metal), but is good only as long as it is whole, and then is discarded, in fact, it is there high rate of being discarded in each generation that makes clay pots so valuable in dating ancient artefacts in archaeology.

The Biblical image of a Christian's life is this one of "treasure in clay pot".

The treasure is explained simply in READ 2 Cor 4:5-6. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the treasure. Jesus is Lord; we are His worshipping slaves. God made the light of the Gospel enlighten our hearts. God gave us the knowledge of how Jesus Christ is indeed the glory of God.

Then, in verse 7 the focus shifts from the Gospel to ourselves, from the treasure to the clay pot. READ v7a.

From 4:7 to 5:10 Paul uses his own life as a Christian, to illustrate what is true of us all—clay pots, with the real value of our lives being the treasure we have. Our earthly bodies are really rather pathetic structures, so affected by the curse of sin that it eventually fades into nothing and dies. And yet, we as Christians all affirm from all our heroes who have gone before us, to the heroes of our faith who have passed away even this past week, that as the pitiful demise of our earthly bodies takes place, the treasure we have seems to shine through us all the brighter.

From 4:7 to 5:10 our earthly bodies, clay pots, are described in discouraging accuracy. But, as a golden thread through it all, the treasure in the clay pot is revealed to us in edifying, exhilarating, excelling glory.

You can give many titles to this passage of Scripture: "A theology of dying", "The purpose of a Christian's body", or, as I have it today "My life as a clay pot".

A speed-study through these 22 verses, gives us ...

Four Glorious Treasures in the Clay Pot of Your Earthly Life.

Our body is a temporary clay pot to hold a truly magnificent treasure. This treasure is entitled "Jesus Christ as Lord". But there are these four treasures that bring out some of Jesus' perfections as Lord, especially in contrast to ourselves as nothing more than His worshipping slaves. You could say that these four treasures are four purposes of every Christian's earthly body.

The ***first* glorious treasure in the clay pot of your earthly life** is that of ...

GOD'S POWER THROUGH YOUR INTENSE SUFFERING (4:7-11)

Verse 7 is the heading; verses 8-9 the practical experience; verses 10-11 the objective perspective.

READ 4:7-11.

Our earthly bodies go through affliction, perplexity, persecution, and even death; but the power of God is evident, because though we are afflicted in various ways, we are never crushed beyond recovery; though we are perplexed by so many things

in life, we are never driven to the point of hopelessness, though we are even persecuted in our bodies for our faith, we are never forsaken by the Lord, yes, even if we are struck down and our bodies are killed, we are not destroyed, for death is merely the stepping stone to freedom from all intense bodily suffering.

So, v10 says, our earthly bodies are echoes of Jesus' earthly body, but that means that our bodies will also one day echo in a visible way the resurrected life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Back to earthly life though, verse 11 is indeed our perspective: our bodies are freely given in service to our Lord Jesus Christ, so that all who see our lives here on earth, will understand that as Jesus lived, we live; as Jesus died, we die; as Jesus lives, we will live.

Never forget v5: Every Christian's body, including the intense suffering it experiences at times, is like a simple clay pot, holding the treasure of God's omnipotent strength, to sustain us in spite of all suffering, and to preserve us even through death.

The ***second* glorious treasure in the clay pot of your earthly life** is that of ...

PERSISTENT FAITH IN YOUR TEMPORARY WEAKNESS (4:12-18)

READ 4:12-18

STORY of 'little faith' accusation against suffering Christians — it is the exact opposite! Consider Job! Consider countless Christians you and I know who have suffered incalculable suffering, even prolonged sickness and death, and even when they couldn't read the Bible themselves or even pray

themselves still shone brightly with undiminished, persistent faith!

So here, Paul's own experiences in ministry match the experience of every Christian whose bodies are weakened, increasing weakened.

The weakness is evident in these verses: v. 12 my body is dying, but other Christians are thriving, v. 16 my physical body is wasting away, the list of sickness conditions are increasing, the form for prescription medicine doesn't have enough spaces for all the stickers.

But, faith is resilient against it all, in fact, it would appear that physical well-being and faith have an opposite relationship, as the health decreases, the faith abounds all the more.

v. 12 again, death in me, but ministry fruit in you. v. 13 the faith to simply take God at his Word, believe it with all my heart, and to speak of it to others. v. 14 faith that God *will* raise us up, and *will* bring us, with all the other Christians, into His own presence. v. 15, again, the persistent faith needed to persist in serving others, knowing that as my ministry continues, God's grace is being given to more people, and therefore more people will be giving thanks, and God will be glorified more obviously.

Do you sense the strength of faith in this verse?? A Christian, talking about God's Word, especially while suffering, produces thanksgiving—yes, it is a paradox. It is not that the listener goes home and says "Thank you God that so-and-so is suffering", but rather that when so-and-so is suffering, it creates opportunities to speak of God, and if their faith is

strong, that is exactly what so-and-so will do. Those spoken words will be heard by others, and because it is the word of God spoken with such firm faith, it becomes a gesture of God's grace to that person. That person, then, is obligated to thank God for His grace, and to acknowledge that indeed God is gloriously wonderful.

But that only happens, if the suffering Christian has a strong, firm, persistent, faith in God and His Word. If the suffering Christian can, as the next verse, verse 16, say "I have courage, for though my bodily functions are disappearing, the testimony of my persistent faith is obviously evident." We admire people like that.

How can you be sure that one day, when your turn comes, that you can be like that—having the resilient faith to not lose heart, but have an increasingly renewed faith as you get older, more frail, less able to do what you normally do, more dependent on others for basic assistance? How can you be like our heroes of the faith? The answer is "Start now". Start now with a strong, persistent faith. Make the perspective of the next two verses your daily perspective. READ vv. 17-18.

When you get a minor injury, remember that it is minor compared to the glory of heaven. When you later get a major injury, remember that, by comparison, it is still minor compared to the glory of heaven. When a small inconvenience in life discourages you, renew your thinking that the inconvenience is so petty compared to heavenly glory. And then when an extreme life-changing inconvenience comes, your faith will still be able to put it in the category of "light momentary affliction". In fact, put every single physical unpleasantness in the category

of "light" compared to the weight of Divine glory, in the category of "momentary" compared to heaven.

This is what Jesus did right? Heb 12:2 "looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."

"light momentary affliction" is always a good price to pay for "eternal weight of glory". Consider every weakness and affliction that your body experiences to be a small down-payment for an eternal weight of glory. Hey, if you are willing to save R1000 in a savings account with less than 10% interest, then surely you can accept the inevitable suffering of your body to obtain the glory of heaven! All suffering in life for a Christian is "light momentary affliction", that gets reworked to prepare for us "an eternal weight of glory", and that is still, an unfair comparison. Because, our earthly bodies, are simply clay pots, holding the treasure of a faith that increases by the minute.

The **next glorious treasure in the clay pot of your earthly life** is that of ...

HEAVENLY GUARANTEE FOR EARTHLY DYING (5:1-5)

This is once again where a picture almost says it all.

READ 5:1-5.

Your earthly body is a tent; your heavenly body is a "building from God". Your earthly body is a temporary dwelling; your heavenly body is "eternal". And verse 2 is perhaps one of the

most realistic verses in all of Scripture READ 5:2. This life isn't that great; just count the complaints, sighs, and tears of each day, and compare them to the amount of thanksgiving, joy, and laughter each day. "We groan, hoping to convert all the sorrows to joy, all the complaints to praise, all the hurt to pleasures forevermore"

But there is a not-so-subtle warning in verses 3-4. The picture here is of clothing, but it works well for the tent-building imagery too. When you, at death, get out of this body, get undressed, as it were, or, exit the tent, you do not want to be found naked. By leaving the tent, you want to enter another structure, and not be left homeless. By undressing this earthly body, you want to receive a new body, and not be left as a nothing. In simple terms, when you die, you don't want to be left dead. You want something else, something better! When you give up the tent, you want a proper building; when you give up this suffering earthly body, you want a glorious heavenly body. That is why verse 4 ends with the most paradoxical realities of death "that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life", "that what is dying may be overwhelmed by living". Death kills earthly life, but heavenly life kills death.

Earthly dying, for every single Christian, ensures heavenly living. It is one of the basic tenets of our faith. This is what Christianity is all about. This is the design of the God of the universe. This is what God promised to all who love Him. This is why God gave us His Holy Spirit, so now already you can see what the Spirit is capable of. And that is what verse 5 affirms. READ 5:5.

Think of it this way. When you see a Christian suffering, observe two things. First, observe the suffering, so you can pray for God's strength and glory as we saw earlier in chapter 4. But then also observe the fruit of the Spirit. Because, if a Christian is displaying the fruit of the Spirit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, then you know that the Spirit of God can do amazing things under difficult circumstances. The work of the Holy Spirit is your guarantee, that when that believer finally puts off the tent, that he/she will enter the building from God, because accomplishing glorious feats under difficult circumstances is the Holy Spirit's speciality.

When a clay pot is used for something dishonourable, you know it is OK, because a clay pot isn't very special. But when a clay pot is used to store the glorious treasure of a title deed for a heavenly building, then you know that breaking that pot, to get that guarantee is always worth it. So also, earthly dying, for a Christian, is simply the losing of a tent to get a building, the undressing of rags to be clothed by God, the leaving behind of affliction and suffering to feel the full magnificent weight of God's glorious greatness.

Treasure, in a clay pot; A Heavenly guarantee, in our earthly dying.

The **fourth glorious treasure in the clay pot of your earthly life** is that of ...

COURAGEOUS LIVING UNTIL DIVINE REWARD (5:6-10)

READ 5:6-10.

Every verse is a surge of Christian courage!

v. 6 Courage to know that this life isn't the trophy.

It just isn't! *Jesus* is the trophy, and He isn't walking the earth any more like He did 2000 years ago. To get to Jesus, we need to leave this tent behind, so we have courage, while still in this tent that is our earthly body, to not expect too much from it. We do not strive for the things of this world. We do not set our hearts on this life. For our hope is set on the trophy of being with Jesus, and we know, that while we are here on earth, we are still missing something profound—the presence of Jesus.

v. 7 Courage to walk by faith, and not by sight.

Oh, how we lack this courage. We talk about the weather that we can see; we worship the education and sport that we can achieve, we chase after the salary with a certain figure visible on the payslip. We live by sight, and treat what we can see as more sure than the things we cannot see. But that doesn't take courage. The greatest wimpiest do-nothing imbecile can live by sight—and they do!

Christian courage is to live, not by sight, but by faith. READ 4:18 already told us that! When you become a Christian, you realise that your eyes are by default too short-sighted, so God gives us, by faith, a set of prescription glasses to be able to see

very, very far, in fact, so far, that everything nearby becomes a little blurry. Christians have courage to live beyond what can be seen—to live by faith in God's objective perspective of all things.

On top of that, the next surge of Christian courage is ...

v. 8 Courage to want to be with Jesus more than we want to be on earth.

This is a matter of simple preference—what do you want more? Simple. Not super theological. Not very complicated. It is like ordering your toast at a restaurant—white or brown? We have the courage to face what it might take to be away from the body, so we can be with the Lord.

v. 9 Courage, wherever we are, to do what pleases Jesus.

This makes all of this very practical again. If I live an easy life today, I have the courage to praise the Lord and not boast of myself. If I have a life of suffering today, I have the courage to praise the Lord and not grumble and complain. If I die today, I have the courage to trust God for resurrection. If I am in Heaven today, I have the courage to join the chorus of saints and angels singing His song.

Whatever my earthly body might have to engage in today, I have the courage to exploit it to please God. I can exploit my mouth to say thank you rather than grumble. I can exploit my brain to meditate on God's Word instead of fear the global news. I can exploit my feet to serve my family instead of pace

around in worry. I can exploit my hands to do things for others instead of tap my screen. I can exploit my loud voice to compliment rather than mock. I can exploit my heart to love the saints, and my mind to fellowship with the saints, and my entire body to get into the car, drive to church, and make my body worship the Lord God.

I have the courage, wherever I am, to make it my aim to please Jesus.

And lastly,

v. 10 Courage, to face God's perfect justice.

We know that all our sins have been nailed to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, and all the righteous deeds of Jesus Christ have been added to our file. This takes courage. In life, especially when you are still capable of managing your own body, you can take care of everything you need. But when you die, you need somehow to change God's righteous anger at your sin, into a "not-guilty" verdict. You are going to have to trust Jesus as your advocate. You are going to have trust God the Father as the judge to accept the substitution for punishment that Jesus offers. You are going to have to trust God's perfect justice.

Do you have the courage now already, to trust 1 John 1:9 that "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Just look down further in 2 Cor 5. We as Christians have the courage of READ 5:17. We as Christians have the courage to rely on what happened in READ 5:21.

Therefore, we have the courage, to face God's judgement, knowing that our faith in Jesus Christ, and our live of suffering for Jesus Christ, is indeed the treasure of the clay pot of our earthly lives.

Our earthly body is just a clay pot, but our treasure in that pot, is courageous Christian living until Divine reward on Judgement Day.

Through these 22 verses today, God has embedded a Biblical world-view in each of our hearts. We do not live for this life, but for God.

Even your intense suffering is story of God's power.

Your body's temporary weaknesses is simply a contrast to persistent faith.

Your earthly dying is the opening of a Heavenly guarantee.

The Divine reward is given to you who are always of good courage to please Jesus.

Amen.

BENDICTION: Eph 2:14-19