

**Date: June 3, 2018**

**Scripture: II Corinthians 4:5-12**

**Title: LOOKING FOR TREASURE, LOOK UP!**

A few years ago, a brother and a sister in west London found an old vase while cleaning out their parents' home. They thought it might have some value. Subsequently they hired Bainbridge, an auction house, to sell it. They discovered it was valued at nearly \$2 million. But, get this: after 30 minutes of spirited bidding at the auction, this vase, which turned out to be an 18th century Qing [pron. cheeng] Dynasty vase went to a buyer from China for more than 69 million dollars, the most ever paid at auction for a Chinese antiquity. A Bainbridge spokeswoman said, "They had no idea what they had." When the final bid was official, "they had to go out of the room and have a breath of fresh air."

It's like a couple in Lander, Wyoming who went to the city dump to dispose of some yard trash. As they were ditching their junk, their eyes caught a rather ornate, but worn, old wooden headboard. The wife suggested they take it home and try to restore it. As they were loading this rather heavy and bulky item onto their truck, a cap on one of the posts came off and out began to pour dozens of old gold coins from the late 1800's. Both legs of this old headboard had been hollowed out and filled with a fortune in gold coins.

I know what you're thinking: why can't something like that happen to me? Everybody loves a good story of a successful treasure hunt. Such stories give us hope, that someday, we will be that fortunate.

Today, I want to invite you on the greatest treasure hunt of all. It's a hunt for the treasure that surpasses all others. People don't recognize, that it's the most desirable treasure of all, because it's hidden in an innocuous and somewhat fragile clay jar. Why is it hidden in a clay jar, and not displayed in, for example, a jewelry case? Well, there's a reason. See if you can figure it out, from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians.

Paul writes, "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us . . ."

O.K., what's this treasure Paul's describing? It's "the light of the knowledge of God's glory, displayed in the face of Christ." Jesus called it the pearl of great price. It's so valuable that when a merchant finds it, he sells everything else that he owns and goes and buys that pearl. This is to say, that there's a treasure worth far more than the crown jewels of England, or any other treasure on this earth, and it can be the possession of the humblest believer. And where does that light shine? It shines "in our hearts."

Now, what's the jar of clay? It's whoever believes in Christ. Paul writes, "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God, and not from us . . ." So let's break down this lesson and make it practical for our lives.

**First, we need to note that the treasure which Paul speaks about, doesn't lie somewhere "out there."** Many of us are obsessed with finding meaning and purpose outside of ourselves. A better job, a nicer neighborhood, a trimmer body, travel abroad, designer clothes, a prestigious automobile, a beach front condo. The list goes on and on. We buy self-help books, get in on the latest fad, take a peek at our horoscope, wait to meet Mr. Right, believing all the time that somewhere, sometime, somehow, if we position ourselves just right for a moment, we will be fulfilled.

When Paul says we have this treasure in jars of clay, he's saying that meaning and purpose and, yes, happiness do not reside "out there." Either we have them within our own hearts or we don't have them at all.

There was an entertaining motion picture back in the 1990s titled *Cool Runnings*. It was a comedy, loosely based on the true story of the Jamaica national bobsled team's debut, during the 1988 Winter Olympics in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. John Candy played a former American gold medalist, who becomes a coach to the Jamaican team.

But, later in the story, it's revealed that Candy's character had disgraced himself by breaking Olympic rules, while seeking his two gold medals. He was disqualified from further competition for cheating and retired in disgrace to Jamaica. He was leading an impoverished life as a bookie, when he was recruited to coach the Jamaican team. His past sins almost result in the Jamaican team being disqualified as well.

One of the Jamaican bobsledders couldn't understand why anyone who had already won a gold medal, would cheat. Finally he nervously asked the coach to explain. Candy said, "I had to win and I've learned something. If you're not happy without a gold medal, you won't be happy with it."

As someone has said, happiness is an inside job. If you don't have meaning and purpose and happiness and peace on the inside, it doesn't matter what you have on the outside. Wealth and fame will satisfy some of your cravings, but they will not give you a feeling of contentment and satisfaction. As someone else has said, "it's not what you own; it's what owns you that counts." In other words, happiness and contentment are an inside job. Paul says that the greatest treasure is within our own hearts.

The second thing we need to see is, **if we have this treasure Paul speaks of within, we can handle whatever comes to us from without.** It's easy to see that we can't find happiness "out there." But what happens if misfortune finds us? Listen again to the words of Paul as he describes the effect of this treasure: "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed . . ." Life can be cruel to us, Paul is saying to us, but if we have this treasure, adversity cannot conquer us.

We're told that success in living comes from making the right choices. But what about those things that happen to us that are not of our choosing? We need something to sustain us when things get rough on the outside, something that Paul had.

Some of you may be familiar with best-selling author, pastor, and radio speaker David Jeremiah. He has written a book titled *A Bend in the Road*. The book tells how in the midst of a growing ministry, he was diagnosed with cancer. In 1994 and again in 1998, Jeremiah was diagnosed with lymphoma. In 1999, a nodule was surgically removed from his neck and he underwent stem cell transplant therapy.

Jeremiah writes about the physical and emotional toll of this treatment. He speaks candidly of his battle with pain, nausea, and deep depression. At the present time his cancer is in remission, but the doctors have told him that there are no guarantees. The cancer could come back, or it might not, but there's no way to be sure.

"The book's title comes from his observation that sooner or later we will all come to a 'bend in the road' that we didn't expect, couldn't have foreseen, didn't want, didn't ask for, and can't postpone. We've got our life lined up and things are going in the right direction, and then one day everything changes and suddenly we have come to a bend in the road. Now life is moving in a different (and unwanted) direction."

At such times, if we don't have sufficient resources within, we are lost. Paul knew about times like that. "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed . . ." Paul had sufficient resources to overcome an array of difficulties. He had that treasure, the light of the knowledge of God's glory, displayed in the face of Christ, that would allow him to always be a conqueror.

This brings us to the last thing to be said. First, meaning and purpose are not something we find "out there." Either you have it within or you don't. Secondly, this is a treasure that will help us keep going, when the going is difficult. **Finally, we need to understand that this treasure is not to be found by looking "in," so much as it is, looking "up."**

When we say that happiness comes from within, we don't mean that the way to personal contentment is to begin by looking within yourself. The path begins not by looking within but by looking up, to the One who is the source of life. The path to inner peace is not simply a matter of getting in touch with our feelings, but getting in touch with our Heavenly Father. The answer isn't meditation, but an encounter with the Master of the universe. True happiness is not a matter of "good vibrations," but soul searching prayer. It comes by knowing that the emptiness you feel within, can be filled by Someone who loved you before you were ever born.

William Frey, a retired Episcopal bishop from Colorado, once told a story from his younger years about a time when he volunteered to read to a degree student named John who was blind. One day Frey asked John how he happened to lose his sight.

John said, “A chemical explosion, at the age of thirteen.” Frey asked him, “How did that make you feel?” John responded, “Life was over. I felt helpless. I hated God. For the first six months, I did nothing to improve my lot in life. I would eat all my meals alone in my room. One day my father entered my room and said, ‘John, winter’s coming and the storm windows need to be up. That’s your job. I want those hung by the time I get back this evening or else!’ Then he turned, walked out of the room and slammed the door. John said, “I got so angry. I thought, ‘Who does he think I am? I’m blind!’ I was so angry I decided to do it, that is, put up the windows. I felt my way to the garage, found the windows, located the necessary tools, found the ladder, all the while muttering under my breath, ‘I’ll show them. I’ll fall, then they’ll have a blind and paralyzed son!’”

John continued, “I got the windows up.” Then he finishes his testimony with these powerful and helpful words, “I found out later that never at any moment was my father more than four or five feet away from my side.”

How do we find this treasure that surpasses all other treasures in this world? First, we recognize that there’s nothing in this world on the outside of us that can give us what we truly crave. Secondly, we understand that one thing that makes this treasure so valuable is that, though we are fragile jars of clay, if we have this treasure within, we can cope with any adverse condition which life gives us. And finally, we recognize that to have this treasure, we look not inwardly or outwardly. We look to God, who is always with us, regardless of our circumstances or our worthiness. So, Trust, Believe, and have an Active Faith in God making disciples of Jesus Christ in the transformation of the world. Amen.