

**“Jars of Clay”**  
2 Corinthians 4:5-12

I have shared with you on any NUMBER of occasions some of my favorite titles. For instance, in more ‘religious’ reading, probably my #1 would be a book by John Ortberg: “If You Want to Walk on Water, You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat.” In secular titles, one from back in the 70’s tops the charts: by ‘Broadway Joe’ Namath... “I Can’t Wait til Tomorrow, ‘Cause I Get Better Looking Every Day” From the world of music, tho’ it’s not strictly because of the title, one by Carly Simon, “You’re So Vain.” This one because of the justification for vanity is that ‘you probably think this song is about you... you’re so vain.’ Well, DUH, it IS about them! And as for a Group Title? Probably ‘Motley Crue.’ Not because of their music, but that it describes so well some of the folks I spent some of my youth with...

And in the category of Christian music, my favorite title belongs to a group whose name comes from one of the verses we just read: **“We have this treasure in... “Jars of Clay.”** (2 Cor. 4:7) So, just WHY would this group’s name be my fav? Well, it’s not really because of their music. In fact, I know very few of their songs. Do I have some connection with one or more of the group members? No, before I looked them up this week, I didn’t know any of their names. I guess one of the main reasons I like their name so much is that it comes straight out of Scripture. Which tells me of how important it is to them to be **biblically-based.**

And then there’s their particular choice of verse. One that reminds Jesus’ followers that no matter how much reason we may have to boast about being in Christ, we must not forget just how human... and flawed... we can be. Their choice of Biblical subject matter, to me, indicates a healthy sense of **humility.**

As I sought to learn a little about them, I was even more convinced of the humble, ‘down-to-earth’ nature of their walk with the Lord. When asked about the relatively subtle religious content of their music, Vocalist Dan Hazeltine said that “our songs are not really there to explain our faith... but written about our life that is affected by our faith.”

It is just such 'real-ness'... a faith that is not so much *explained*, but *lived*... that should speak to us from the passage for today. God's Words of wisdom of how we are to bear witness to Christ: not so much for others to HEAR how God wants THEM to live ... but so that others may SEE how OUR lives have been affected by our faith.

First, Paul challenges us to **"Proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord."** He ALONE is meant to **SHINE** in our lives. Let me ask you this: when you got up this morning, did you feel like 'shining?' Did you look in the mirror and 'proclaim Jesus as Lord?' I don't know about you, but the first 'love language' spoken in OUR house in the morning is spelled 'C-O-F-F-E-E.' And even AFTER 'intelligible communication' can begin to take place, it's sometimes hard to 'let our lights shine'... with all of the 'good news' of the day we face IN our homes, and the trials that await us OUTSIDE of them. We may **proclaim** with our **lips** that **"Jesus is the Lord"** whom we **love**, but our **hearts** can sure be **enslaved** and **hardened** by a world which '**lords**' its control over us.

But Paul reminds us that the same Creator God who proclaimed over the foundations of our world **"Let light shine out of the darkness"** desires for that same 'light' to overcome the 'darkness' in our lives TODAY! It is that same God of 'new beginnings' who 'shines in your heart' **"to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."** When you and I look in the mirror in the morning, all we may see is our human imperfections; all we may feel in our human frailties and fears. But what we should see is the image of our Creator: **"God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ."** The face of Christ who is looking back at you, saying 'I will not leave your side this day. Whatever trials you take on, we will 'face' them together.' As we trust in our brother Jesus to stand with us, we **'let God's light shine out of our darkness.'** As we live out that old children's song... *"this little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine"*... you and I do indeed **"proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord."**

There are indeed many 'little lights' shining brightly in this room today. Lights that continue to shine as you leave this place of 're-charging.' But may we never lose sight of where that 'light' comes from. It's NOT ABOUT US! Whatever skills, personalities, abilities, blessings we have, we must be mindful of Paul's words: **"this extraordinary** ('all-surpassing') **power belongs to God... and does NOT come from us."**

Earlier we read some 'character traits' that Paul declared followers of Christ >> to have: ***"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair;<sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed."*** (2 Cor. 4:8-9) Who ARE these people? You know... those folks who 'have it all together.' The ones who like to quote another similar verse, 'God will never give you more than you can handle.' (Which is NOT really what the Bible says. Actually relates to 'temptation.' But that's for another day...)

But regardless, when we grapple with afflictions, persecution, feeling perplexed and struck down, how do we keep from being 'crushed,' 'driven to despair,' or 'destroyed?' How can we believe that what we are dealing with is NOT 'more than we can handle'? Most certainly, NOT by our own strength. And when we come to the realization of our own weakness, we MUST call on strength greater than our own... that ***"extraordinary, all-surpassing power that belongs to God... and does not come from us."*** (2 Corinthians 4: 7)

You and I carry around in these 'jars of clay' a great treasure: the 'extraordinary, all-surpassing power that belongs to God.' Power that did not come FROM us, but, has been given TO us... for the purpose of working THROUGH us. Light that shines out of our darkness to give to others the knowledge of the glory of god in the face of Jesus Christ. A face that shines through our own...

I leave you with two thoughts about 'jars of clay'... both common noun and proper noun. **'Jars of clay'**... lower case 'j' and 'c'... are made from a pliable material of the earth, that can be hardened by high temperatures to form an impervious vessel to hold liquids... like oil or water... as well as be a thing of beauty. It can last for hundreds, even thousands of years... and at the same time, be quite fragile. Some of those pieces of clay have greatly grown in value over the years.

We share much in our 'common ancestry' with clay jars. We too have been formed from the earth... 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust.' We too can be hardened, toughened, by intense conditions to become both a thing of beauty, and a vessel from which to pour refreshment on another. We too are of great value... and at times, quite fragile.

**'Jars of Clay,'** the Christian band... capital 'J' and 'C'... made the conscious decision to use more common, everyday language to communicate the truths of the Gospel. In their

words, the group wanted to *“shy away from traditional religious language... to be more accessible to those put off by religion.”* To be biblically-based, while remaining humble, relevant... REAL.

May we... those human ‘jars of clay’ formed for God’s purposes in the here and now... continue to ‘proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord,’ as we also ‘make clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.’ Lives based on Scriptural truths, while staying humble and REAL. Like our ‘common’ and ‘proper’ counterparts, may we know ourselves to be of great value to God... in spite of, and because of, our ‘brokenness’... and that we serve a purpose of pouring ‘refreshment’ on others... particularly those who are ‘put off by religion’ (Remember... ‘religion’ is a human construct; FAITH is from God.) All that we do is possible only through another ‘J.C.’... the ‘Living Water’ of Jesus Christ. Through Him, WE ‘jars of clay’ will truly last for ‘years and years’... indeed, we will ‘last’ into eternity. To God, and God alone, be all glory and honor, dominion and power, now and forevermore. AMEN!