

1 Corinthians 4.6–10

True Treasure

Amington (Online)

Sunday 22 November 2020

Treasure [3]

Treasure

This isn't the passage I planned to speak on this week. We're doing a mini series on 'Treasure', which is intended to help us think about Christian giving. Today was supposed to be about generosity, but God wouldn't let me speak about that – and I know that because I couldn't get this verse out of my head:

We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

2 Corinthians 4.7 (NIV)

I wonder what the most *valuable* thing in your house is? And to all you Smart Alecs out there, I don't mean the house itself. The most valuable thing *we* own is probably my car. Inside the house, it's either my laptop or Jess's engagement ring.

But what about the most *precious* thing in your house? Obviously the most precious thing in *my* house is my wife – but in terms of *things* I reckon this *hold up Bible* is the thing I'd be the most gutted to lose in a fire. It's not worth much, if anything – but it's precious.

This is my first Bible because it was a baptism gift, given when I wasn't even two months old. My parents wrote in it on that day, and then again ten years later when I gave my heart to Jesus for the first time. I'll never forget that day. I would read what they wrote but it would probably make me cry because it did earlier when I read through it. I rarely use this particular Bible these days because I've used it so now much the binding started to go, you can see the box has been mended several times, and I don't want it to fall apart!

What are the most *valuable* and the most *precious* things in your house?

Comprehension

Cast your minds back if you will (and can) to your school days and in particular to your English lessons – do you remember *comprehension*? We'd be given a passage from a book and asked questions about it – partly to make sure we read it, but mostly to ensure we understood – or *comprehended* – it.

So here's the first verse from our reading today:

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.

2 Corinthians 4.6 (NIV)

I'll leave the verse there while we do some comprehension:

- Who speaks? (It's not a trick question by the way!)
God.
- Whose light shines?
God's.
- Where does God's light shine?
It's a two-part answer: out of darkness / in our hearts.
- What does the light give?
Knowledge of God's glory.
- Where do we see that glory?
Displayed in the face of Christ.

Friends, *this* is the greatest miracle that could happen in your life: the miracle of *revelation*, God revealing himself to you in Jesus.

The Gift (6)

And the first thing to notice about this miracle? It's a **gift**:

God 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.

2 Corinthians 4.6 (NIV)

1 It's a gift: it's not something we already have

Normally when we give someone a gift, we don't give something they already have – unless it's by accident. Here are my two copies of *Casino Royale*, both very generously given to me for Christmas a few years ago. Hopefully I won't get another copy this year!

The light God shines so we can see Jesus – this is not something we already have; we are not born with it; we must be *given* it. It's not like using a torch to search in the dark for something that's already there. No – God gives us his light, not so we can see something within ourselves, but so we can see Jesus. And when we see Jesus, we see the glory of God.

And this is a gift: it's not something we already have, it's something only God can give us.

2 *It's a gift: it's free, and we haven't earned it*

When I unwrapped these DVDs, there wasn't an invoice included saying, 'Please pay within 28 days'!

Gifts are given freely, out of love. They aren't earned – we call *that* a salary, or wages, not a gift. God doesn't shine his light into our hearts to give us the knowledge of his glory in the face of Christ *because we've earned it* – it's a free gift, a gift of love.

3 *It's a gift: it's intended to be used*

Now, I don't know about you, but when I give people a gift, I want them to *use* it. How would you feel if you gave someone a present, they smiled, said thank you, and then tossed it straight into the bin? If someone did that, would you think they *meant* it when they said, 'thank you'? Of course not!

When God gives us light, he intends us to use it to *see* Jesus, and to *follow* Jesus. God's light is like headlights, lighting the way, and a beacon on a hill, showing the right way. It's no good ignoring it – you'll just get even more lost! So let's use it!

God's gift (1) is not something we already have, (2) it's free and we haven't earned it, and (3) it's intended to be used. And (4), this gift is True Treasure.

The Pirates

The captain of a pirate ship was sailing the seven seas when his first mate shouted, ‘There’s an enemy ship on the horizon, armed with 10 cannons and 100 men!’ The captain replied, ‘Arr, bring me my red shirt and prepare for battle!’ The pirates fought and won the battle, making off with all the treasure in the enemy ship.

A few days later the first mate again shouted, ‘Cap’n, there are *ten* enemy ships on the horizon, each armed with *100* cannons and 1,000 men!’ The captain replied, ‘Arr, bring me my red shirt and prepare for battle!’ The pirates fought hard, won the battle again, and made off with all the treasure from the enemy ships.

Afterwards his first mate approached and asked, ‘Cap’n, why do you always ask for your red shirt before a battle?’

He replied, ‘I wear my red shirt so that if I’m wounded, you men won’t see the blood and so you carrying on fighting!’

Suddenly, another crew member started shouting, ‘Cap’n! Cap’n! There’s 1,000 enemy ships on the horizon! Each armed to the teeth with cannons and men!’ The captain turned to his first mate, and in a stern voice told him...

‘Bring me my brown trousers!’

Jars of Clay (7-10)

Earlier I showed you my baptism Bible, one of the most precious things I own. It lives in a fire-proof box, with other things like our marriage certificate, our passports, our will, and so on.

Where do you think God keeps *his* precious treasure? In a **jar of clay: we have this treasure** (i.e. **the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ**) **we have this treasure in jars of clay** (7). Those **jars of clay** are you and me; *we* are the **jars of clay** into which God puts his precious **treasure**.

Now I wonder what you picture when you think about these **jars of clay** Paul mentions? Maybe one of those fancy Greek vases, all nicely decorated and glazed? I'm afraid not – the jars Paul was talking about were less fancy and more flowerpot. And what's worse, the most famous clay jars in the Bible end up getting smashed – by Gideon and his army, and by the prophet Jeremiah.

In other words, it's not a compliment to be called a jar of clay. But that's precisely Paul's point. These jars are fragile, breakable, often with cracks and chips in them – exactly like us, exactly like him.

Have you ever looked on the website of a major political leader? They are full of their achievements, their talents, their influence.

Well hear what St Paul would have put on *his* website:

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.

2 Corinthians 4.8-9 (NIV)

The Corinthians wanted the fancy Greek vase, the impressive look of skill and power and wealth. But that's missing the point.

I'm not a Greek vase, Paul said, I'm a cracked, broken, misshapen, good for storing diddly-squat because it has so many holes in it, jar of clay. I'm not a Greek vase – I'm a fragile flowerpot, Paul said, but that doesn't matter, because what matters is the treasure inside.

Last week Lewis Hamilton became the most successful Formula 1 driver ever; he has surpassed all other F1 drivers. But God? His **power** surpasses *all*, well, *everything*. There is no-one ahead of him, no-one more powerful – and his **power** is at work in *us*.

For when God shines his light into our hearts, we see Jesus, we start to be transformed, we are taken out of darkness and brought into the light – the same **all-surpassing power** that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is at work within us, bringing life and light – and the more cracks we have the more the light shines through!

True Treasure

Friends, this is *true* treasure. I hope you have valuable and precious things at home, with important memories that you treasure and look after carefully.

But this, this is different – this is true treasure, because it comes from God and he knows exactly what we need.

You know some people are really good at buying great presents?
That are always thoughtful and generous and just right?

That's God: and this gift is exactly what we need. So the question is, do you want it?

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I'd like us to respond to these words in prayer. I'm going to suggest three areas for you to pray in, and then leave a time of quiet for you to pray at home. There will be a little timer on-screen so you know how long for – and if you need more time to pray, simply pause the video. When the timer hits zero, I'll pop back on-screen and say a closing prayer.

First, we saw how the light God shines into our hearts is a *gift*. It's not something we have, it's not something we can buy: it's a *gift*. So the first thing we can do is say thank you to God.

And remember, saying 'thank-you' doesn't mean tossing the gift straight in the bin, it means unwrapping it, and using it.

Second, this suggests a way to pray for our friends and family who don't yet know Jesus: that God would shine his light into their hearts so they might see the face of Jesus, see him, know him, and follow him.

Third, perhaps you feel the darkness and pain in your heart that Paul mentions. Perhaps you are tired, frustrated with yourself, with your life, with being stuck in a rut. Perhaps you need to know forgiveness, and you want a fresh start. Perhaps you want your life to have meaning beyond all this. Perhaps you long to have peace, perhaps you long to be loved.

My friend, you can only find all that in Jesus – and you *can* find *all* of it in him. If this is you, I encourage you to ask God to shine his light into *your* heart, bringing the power to heal you and transform you, the power of Jesus' life and *light*.

Let's pray.