

Chronicles of Diversity



Source of the Jordan River, Israel

Your leadership weekly

Christmas - Earthen Vessels

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2 Corinthians 4:6,7

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

Only, about every seven years as a publisher do you have the opportunity to have your weekly periodical publishing date fall on a memorable day. I tend not to usually interrupt the normal flow of things, unless I feel this interruption should be noted by inspiration and not by perspiration.

For the last couple of weeks, I have been thinking of these verses in 2 Corinthians as somewhat of an unusual rendering of what is usually described as the Christmas message.

Immanuel, God with us, as the prophet Isaiah proclaimed. The birth of the Son of God changed the course of history, but as somebody pointed out to me this week, the birthday celebration of Jesus on December 25th in the western world, is a creation of man, originally man as the church.

Paul here is speaking about something much harder to grasp than the birth of Jesus, His life, death, and resurrection. Paul speaks of the oneness of treasure. Not only treasure, but treasure in a common pot.

When we think of earthen vessels especially in the context of a Bible passage, we think of some sort of clay, or ceramic container. But only extracting it a little more, we see that every container on this earth is an earthen vessel.

If we were to take Paul to REI and show him a titanium cooking pot that is now readily available, he would be amazed at its toughness and light weight. But I would also assume that he would believe that there was a more important use of the treasure of human enterprise, than to have the lightest possible pot to boil water a few days a year.

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Stainless steel, aluminum, cast iron, copper, glass, other ceramics, and various plastics are other forms of earth that have been refined in our age. A friable clay pot, is really only of decorative use in our modern society. They break too easy to be of much utilitarian value. There is a deeper message here, but we won't ,or can't look at this implication. So the fragile pot just adds to the kitsch of our abundance.

Saints and sinners, all have pots and pans, glasses and jars. They are vessels all humanity shares in common. But Paul proclaims to the Corinthian church that their pots contain treasure. He is of course moving beyond the physical vessels that carry and cook our food into the earthen vessels, filled with life and water, which are our bodies. But again we all have the glory of God residing in the wonder of our lives. For try as we may, man still has not created for himself a better story for his existence, than the wonder of God.

Paul however, differentiates the treasure of the common life, for the treasure of the totality of Jesus Christ. This excellence of the gospel he places in context from Chapter 2:14-7:4. I also found Paul's contrast of his treasure with worldly life, apparent in his preaching in Athens in Acts 17:16-34.

Treasure is one word that means something extremely valuable that either is accumulated or acquired. But from this esoteric symbolism we still have a problem with, "What is Paul really trying to say?"

Now, luckily none of my readers have ever ask that question about my writing. It's a Christmas joke, actually I do get that comment on extremely rare occasions. My response is normally, "I haven't got a much better idea than you, what do you think it means?" But in the case with Paul writing in this second epistle to the church in Corinth, we (I) still need, "Give me another word Paul, something I can really understand."

"What is the specific treasure of the unsearchable richness of Jesus Christ would you like to be better able to understand this Christmas season?" Or perhaps the better question would be, "What specific piece of His valuable treasure would you like to share with the world you know this Christmas?"

As I stated earlier, I have been thinking about this treasure thing for a couple of weeks, but this morning, Christmas Eve morning, I finally came up with one word I would like to share with you this Christmas. That one word is acceptance.

The preachers in the crowd, will quickly think of acceptance with God. Don't get me wrong that probably is the ultimate treasure in this earthen vessel. It is just this earthen vessel has a more difficult problem with "acceptance with God" than I do with "treasure." I have trouble relating to these higher non common things.

The acceptance I am speaking about this Christmas, is that the gospel of Jesus Christ allows you to accept yourself, plain and naked. What an incomparable priceless gift, compared to all the stuff under the Christmas tree, and don't forget the hassle of putting it there.

So, do you accept yourself, bare and naked, with all your faults? Who would you like to impress with your real self this Christmas season? Are they strong enough, or do they love you enough to accept the real you? Tough questions! Tough answers!

Vessels, from high tech titanium through weak and aging humanity are all created to contain something. Much of the time containers are filled with some form of water. Sometimes they appear empty, sometimes they overflow, sometimes they boil over.

The gift of personal acceptance that God's living water produces, is that while it does make a difference in some esoteric way, like the term treasure, the state of the water, ice, liquid, or vapor, does not change the gospel of God's accepting love. You have not personal acceptance on Christmas, or any other day for that matter, because you really don't what to be blessed, holding within yourself your pride of self rejection, not understanding that God has taken care of His problem with you. Within that rich treasure, flows the power to accept yourself and be blessed in your personal humanity.

Have a blessed Christmas!