**Treasure in jars of clay**

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Key Verse: 7

**“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.”**

What do we live for? In general people tend to live for eating, drinking, studying, working, buying a house or car, marriage or money. These become their life purposes and make them happy or worried. When people gather, they talk about what they have thinking that these things identify who they are. Likewise, if we do not have Christian identity and life purpose, it is easy to follow this worldly trend. It also makes us see ourselves based on what we have and see the work of God with this godless view. In today's passage Paul shares how he carried out his glorious ministry. Who is Paul? Once he was the enemy of God. He persecuted the church of God and involved in stoning Stephen to death. However, after meeting the risen Jesus, his life was dramatically changed. His spiritual eyes were opened. He put his hope in the kingdom of God and lived for Christ. Many people hope to live like Apostle Paul who had served the work of God powerfully and sacrificially. However, in fact, not many of them live such a life, because they are not certain of Jesus in them. Many people suffer from an inferior complex and raise questions, “Why am I so weak? Why am I not smart? Why can I pray deeply? Why am I so vulnerable?” They focus on “I” with deep sigh. We often times tend to nag our children at home. Why do we do that? It is because they are like us. We can see our weaknesses through them. We are actually angry at ourselves. But when we meditate on today’s passage, in fact, we come to know that our shortcomings are not the real problem because God created us like that. Then how can we live a fruitful and influential life like Apostle Paul regardless our weaknesses?

Look at Verse 7. “**But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us**”. Here we learn that God created us as jars of clay. If we accept this truth, we have no problem. But we don’t accept it and are busy to hide our weaknesses and cover our sinful nature with a fancy title like Pharisee in Jesus’ time. Then what is “jars of clay”? Clay jars are containers created by skilled potters who took raw clay, shaped and molded it as they desired. Pottery jars can be beautiful or purely functional, but they have one thing in common: they were breakable. Contents could not be forever in jars of clay. Clay jars are temporary holding objects. This means that our physical bodies are like those jars. We are made from clay. Our bodies come in all shapes and sizes, each designed by the Heavenly Potter for whatever purpose he desired. Our bodies are temporal, functional, weak and breakable. We should accept that we are like jars of clay who is weak and fragile. Our shortcomings and weaknesses are not our real life problems. The real problem is that we do not recognize that we have a treasure in our body. What is a treasure? A treasure is very valuable because it is rare and unchanging like gold and diamond. The treasure Paul mentions is the gospel, Jesus himself.

Why did he call the gospel, Jesus the treasure? In what respect is Jesus the treasure? John 1:4 says**, "In him was life, and that life was the light of men."** Jesus is the Author of life. To thirsty souls, Jesus is the living water which quenches (Jn 4:14). To the hungry, Jesus is the bread of life which satisfies (Jn 6:35). To the blind, Jesus is sight (Jn 9:5). To those who are wandering, Jesus is the way to God (Jn 14:6). To those suffering from the sting of death, Jesus is the resurrection and the life (Jn 11:25-26). In Jesus there is no darkness, no sorrow and no death, but only life and light and love and peace and joy (Rev 21:4). In Jesus are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3).

Do you know why people are living in deep despair and fatalism? Some say that they have tried to be a better person. But this is not a matter of try or hard-working but of looking at Jesus. Our own will and struggling cannot change ourselves because we are nothing but weak and fragile jars of clay. We should focus on our treasure, Jesus living in us. We human beings are like invaluable jars of clay. However, God breathed into our nostrils the breath of life, the image of God in which we are of great value (Gen 1:27). Sin robs us of this treasure. But when Jesus comes into our hearts, he restores all that was lost. Jesus is God living in us. He fills us with the Holy Spirit and restores the image of God in us. Jesus changes any kind of wretched sinner into a prince or a princess of the heavenly kingdom.

If we know and accept these truths, we have to come to Jesus through our daily devotion. We should not underestimate our prayer, spiritual daily bread taking and reflection writing. Through these we can communicate with Jesus and build our love relationship with him. Some say it is hard to establish a love relationship with Jesus. It is because they tend to come to Jesus according to their feeling, desire and needs. It does not make any sense to ask someone who has never played music instruments to play the piano. Likewise as we come to God every day and look at him through our personal devotion, God will open our spiritual eyes to see our treasure, Jesus Christ and stir us to live with him. I pray that all of us may turn our eyes from ourselves to Jesus Christ and build a love relationship with him so that the grace and love of Jesus may be revealed through us. 1 Cor 1:27-29 say “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.” Let us believe and accept these words of God and share this treasure to our neighbors, coworkers and campus students.

Once I heard one pastor’s confession how God changed his worldly view to godly view. In his early ministry he had an inferior complex because of his way of slow and soft speech. His first ministry was delivering the word of God to teenagers. While he was delivering the message, he was very much discouraged because the teenagers imitated his slow speech and did not pay attention to him. He thought even teenager did not like his message then how he could deliver the word of God to adults. He thought that he had no talent to preach the word of God to others. These experiences gradually planted negative thinking to him and he was not confident whenever he delivered the word of God. When he heard the powerful word of God from other pastor he became distressed and depressed. However, in the darkest moment, God healed his heart through his words which was 1 Cor 1:27-29. At the beginning he could not accept the words of God. However, after struggling with these words of God for many days he realized that this was not a matter of understanding but a matter of believing or not. He finally confessed that he believed this from his heart with tears. He recognized his sin of human ambition in his ministry and inferior complex. He also realized that his way of slow and soft speech was not a real matter. He came to know that he just needed to deliver what God wanted him to share and began to deliver the word of God humbly. He did not pay attention to his weaknesses but share his treasure Jesus Christ to others. Since that time on he became an influential massager of God’s word. Like him as jars of clay we should think what we can do instead of what we cannot do. As we recognize that we are God’s instruments, our treasure, Jesus will be revealed through our lives and we are able to live a blessed life in Christ.

We should also see others with the godly view. We should see our family members, brothers and sisters in Church, and our bible students with the hope of God. It is easy for us to say, “Why do those people not change and not believe in God?” if we see only their weakness which is the nature of jars of clay. We cannot change them. They also cannot change themselves. Only Jesus Christ can change people when they come to him and see the living Jesus Christ in them. For me, it was very difficult to love and forgive my father who had lived an irresponsible life to his family. However, through the word of Jesus I could recognize my terrible sins and the love of Jesus through the cross. As I realized the love of Jesus and accepted him into my heart personally, I was able to see my father differently and forgive him and decided to love him. As I did so, Jesus gradually changed my heart toward him and enabled me to pray for him. Then Jesus worked in his life and helped him to come back to Jesus. Do you know anyone who is vulnerable and weak because of their sins and shortcomings? Let us see Jesus Christ who is already in them regardless their sins and weaknesses and pray for them with the hope that they may see Jesus Christ and come back to him.

In verses 8-15, Paul testified that he won victories over many hardships through Jesus Christ. Look at verse 8 and 9. "We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed". Usually if people are hard pressed on every side, they get stressed out; they give up; they become mentally ill; they are crushed; and they even commit suicide. It is because they have no inner power to overcome the hard pressure. But Paul was different; he had Jesus in his heart. He said in verse 10, "We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body." Paul wanted to experience Christ's resurrection power. He said, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings..." (Php 3:10). When Paul shared Jesus' sufferings, he also shared Jesus' resurrection power and became a blessing to the Corinthians (12). It is easy for gospel workers to say that their environment is challenging or unfavorable to the gospel, due to persecution, pressure or perplexing difficulties. However, the real problem is not outward, but inward. If we have Jesus in our hearts, we can overcome all hardships and create a new history. Paul's situation was difficult. The book of Acts tells us that Paul was often persecuted and misunderstood. But Paul never despaired, never gave up, and was never crushed. He had a never-giving-up spirit. It was because he always trusted Jesus and overcame hardships by the all-surpassing power of God. In this way he lived a victorious life, and so can we.

In verses 13-14, we see that Paul had resurrection faith. He believed that God who raised Jesus from the dead would also raise him with Jesus. He believed that God is living and God is Almighty God; God raises the dead, and nothing is impossible with God. Through Paul's sufferings and victory, the Corinthians could witness the power of the Risen Christ and understand the blessing given to them. Then they could give thanks to God and give glory to God (15).

Look at verse 16. "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." Paul's conclusion was that because Jesus was in his heart he did not lose heart. Outwardly his body was wasting away, as is true for all of us. As we get older, we cannot move as fast as we once did. Gray hair begins to appear on our scalps even though we dye every day. Our eyesight becomes dim. We lose strength in our bodies. As time goes by, we suffer from all kinds of maladies that come from aging such as arthritis, back pain, memory loss, and eventually we die. We are wasting away gradually. It is very natural and no one can stop it. But those who live by faith are being renewed inwardly day by day. How is it possible? Jesus living in our hearts heals us and restores the image of God in us day by day. Instead of getting older, we get newer and newer every day until the full image of Christ is restored in our inner beings. When we meditate on the word of God, the word of God controls our mind and heart and enables us to live powerful lives. When we hold on to Jesus, inwardly we can be renewed day by day. As time goes by, we become more and more spiritual. But many people will waste away as time goes by, not only outwardly but inwardly. They lose their first love. They lose their vision. They lose pioneering spirit and become powerless like old wineskins. We should be renewed inwardly even though we are wasting away outwardly. Let's pray that we may be renewed inwardly by meditating on the words of God.

Look at verses 17-18. "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." Paul realized that his troubles were light and momentary. However, they help us to achieve eternal glory. We can receive eternal glory through sufferings. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. We fix our eyes not on the things of the world but on the kingdom of God. When we do so we can live a victorious life in this world.

In conclusion, we are facing a difficult situation because of COVID 19 pandemic. Until now we are proud of our advanced technology and medical systems. However, these days we realize that what we hold on is an illusion and we are merely human and are crippled by viruses. Now it is good time to think who we are and how we overcome this pandemic situation. Through today's passage we learn how to live a victorious life. It is by the power of Jesus. Let's remember that we are like jars of clay. We are fragile and vulnerable to Satan's temptations. We have weak to overcome difficulties that confront us. But when we have our treasure Jesus in our hearts, we can overcome all kinds of hardships and live a victorious life. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus Christ who lives in us and let us live with him.