

Your Jar of Clay

by Jim Cymbala

As Christians, we are jars of clay, fragile and vulnerable, but containing the treasure of the Holy Spirit, and it is through our weakness that God's power and strength can be seen.

Duration: 24:40

Scripture: Psalm 95:6, Psalm 119:11, Isaiah 40:31, Matthew 6:33, 2 Corinthians 4:7, 2 Corinthians 4:16, 1 Peter 5:7

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the negative effects of focusing solely on the physical world. He mentions that this can lead to anger and anxiety, as well as a preoccupation with criminal behavior and injustice. The preacher emphasizes the importance of looking beyond the visible and focusing on the invisible, spiritual aspects of life. He uses the analogy of a jar of clay to illustrate that although we may face challenges and hardships, we are not completely crushed or without hope. The preacher encourages the audience to maintain their faith and trust in God, even in difficult times.

Transcript

I want to continue on this series I'm doing of Vital Truth. It's a different approach to preaching instead of expository preaching, which none of the New Testament sermons have of the Old Testament, nor did Jesus give expository when he wrote to the seven churches. But I'm learning now more over the last year that what people need, like when we go to a doctor, is that analysis and prescription to help us where we live, what we're dealing with.

Jesus spoke to each church to give them what they needed to hear. He didn't give them a study in the life of Elijah. He gave them, this is what the bright and morning star, etc., is saying.

So I want to give you a very, very vital truth. And it's about a gift that you don't need for Christmas. Whatever somebody gives you, what they don't need to give you is a jar of clay.

Everybody say, jar of clay. Jar of clay. Why don't they need to give you that? Because we all already have our jar of clay.

Our body is called, specifically in one part of the scripture, a jar of clay. And in that phrase, we have a very important vital truth, which has a couple little sides to it. I want to address it briefly, but I really want us to please listen to this.

This will help you. It's helped me so much as I have learned more and more about this truth. It's found in 2 Corinthians 4. Paul is saying about his ministry, and he's defending himself in 2 Corinthians because some real con artists, fake preachers have come in after him into Corinth and try to put him down and try to win the favor of the people.

And on top of that, these fake ministers abuse the people, take advantage of them, rob them of their money, slap them, insult them. And Paul is just perplexed because they seem to love it. They love when ministers beat them down and take advantage of them.

Paul has a heart like a mother or a father, and they have a hard time accepting him. That's a very strange thing about the human condition. So Paul is talking about his ministry, and he says, but we have this treasure.

What treasure? The treasure of Christ living in us, the Holy Spirit living in us. If you're a born-again Christian, you have the Spirit living within you. If you don't have the Spirit living within you, you're not a Christian, no matter what church you go to, including this one.

What makes us a Christian is we're born again, and we become people who the Holy Spirit, i.e. the Spirit of Christ, dwell inside of. But he says we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. There's a power inside of us, but it's inside of a jar of clay.

We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed, hemmed in, but not totally without some ability to move. We're perplexed, but not in despair. We're not sure always what's going on, but yet we're not without hope.

We don't give up our hope. We're persecuted, but we're not abandoned. We're chased all over the place, but yet we still have some freedom of movement.

We're struck down, but not destroyed. One translation has it this way. We're knocked down, but we're not knocked out.

I like that, right? We're knocked down. Have you ever been knocked down, but you weren't knocked out, right? Because you got up again through the grace of God. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

In other words, we follow him. We're susceptible to all these things because we have a jar of clay, but we do that so that his life might be seen in us. We carry that death to our own comfort and our way.

We live for the will of God so that his life might be seen in us. Then later on, therefore we do not lose heart, though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day, for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes, or we look not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

So from that passage, I just want to give you a couple of things about your jar of clay. First of all, I want you to notice how absolutely transparent Paul is about the vulnerable condition we all have. This would not be like many testimonies you would hear today because we live in a country of mental positivism.

Put on your smile, put on your best face, and tell everyone if you want to sell them something that if you buy my product, you're in fat city, you're on easy street, you're going to have a really great life and there'll never be problems. Paul tells us about the peace and the joy and the salvation that we have in Christ, but who like him would be so transparent to talk about the vulnerability of his condition? He says we have this treasure in earthen vessels, jars of clay. We're hemmed in, we're persecuted, we're knocked down, we're susceptible to people's hatred, we're susceptible to being thrown in jail.

Get out of America and your thinking here for a second and think of the whole world and think of what Christians are going through. We live in a bubble, an illusory world. We're susceptible to being bewildered.

Paul says in the same letter, we're sorrowful but always rejoicing. How can you be sorrowful but rejoicing? You can be. On the outside, you're sorrowful.

But on the inside, deeper underneath the sorrow, is you're rejoicing in God, your salvation. But you can be sorrowful. Christians cry.

Christians get hurt. Christians get rejected by their own family members. Christians get bosses acting nasty to them because the boss could possibly pick up, you are a Christian.

So now I'm going to tighten the screws on you. So the idea of some triumphalism for believers where we just walk around and never have a problem, never cry, never are susceptible to pain or to trouble and all of that. Perplexed? I'm not sure exactly how it's going to work out, but I know God's going to work it out.

How many have had that attitude many times in life? You know, it was like David when Saul started chasing him. He was God's anointed. If you're God's anointed, how could the king chase you and want to kill you? Because that's what happens to the anointed sometimes.

Right? Paul was let down over the wall in one city in a basket just to escape the authorities. I mean, if you're a mighty apostle, what are they putting you in a basket for? Because he wanted to save his life. That's why he did.

And David, when he was being chased by King Saul, had to bring his parents to some people and say, hold on to my parents and watch them until I see what God will do for me. Well, what is God going to do for you? I'm not sure. That's why I'm asking you to take care of my parents.

I know surely goodness and mercy will follow me, but I don't know how this whole thing will work out. And that's what life is as a Christian. So we should never be like negative or despondent about the fact that we're vulnerable.

We are vulnerable. We are vulnerable. We can cry.

We can be hurt. We cannot know what's going to happen next. We can be hemmed in, but not totally without some wiggle room.

That's what Paul is saying. And we have been fed a dose of the hyper-faith movement and all that. It's invaded almost all churches so that it's hard to even be honest with people.

Paul would talk like this and some churches would take the mic from him. We don't want to hear about that stuff you went through. I didn't come to church on Sunday to hear about the possibility this could happen to me.

I want to hear I'm going to drive in a Ford. No, I'm going to have a BMW soon. Praise God.

I claim that stretch limo. I claim it. So Paul is always being honest like Jesus.

The word of God is always honest. It tells you what is not what you want to hear. What I want to hear.

It's totally transparent to Paul that we are in jars of clay. We're vulnerable. But here's the beautiful thing about it.

So don't be despondent when you go through the changes of life. But he says we have this treasure in earthen vessels. So when they're cracked and broken and their vulnerability and humanness comes through.

The light inside can shine even brighter. It has nothing to do with your condition or my condition. It has to do with the treasure that's inside of us.

It has nothing to do with how strong you feel or what your emotional state is at this moment. The great thing we should rejoice in inside of me is the glory of God. Is the presence of Jesus.

I have a treasure from God living inside of me and so do you. If you believe that let's put our hands together and affirm it. But and this is where not too many Christians understand this.

For the glory to be seen. For the light to show forth. For the power to be made manifest.

The jar of clay has to be broken or you won't see what's inside of it. So this is why God permits all these vicissitudes of life. These ups and downs and pain and changes.

Why? So that the glory of God can be seen. Not Jim Cymbala who's inside Jim Cymbala. Not my stiff upper lip and not how strong I am.

But people can see wow he's nothing and yet he has everything. He's weak but he's strong. Didn't Paul say the same writer say when I am weak then I am strong.

The strength comes out when you're left with no human resources. We're always fighting for human resources and to stay in our comfort zone. But God is saying no I'm the treasure.

You're not the treasure. I'm the treasure and I want to shine forth. But the only way I can shine forth is when you're broken.

Because when you're broken oh wow now look at the light. Come on let's praise God for that. It's like in the story of Gideon in the book of Judges.

You know at night they had all these lights covered by jars. And to surprise and intimidate the enemy at the right moment the order was given break the jars. And when the jar that covered the light was broken.

Now the enemy saw all these lights all around and they panicked. They thought you know an army of a half a million was coming against them. And that's how it is in our lives.

I didn't know that. You think I knew that even when I first went in the ministry? We're all trying to stay whole unbroken. We don't want our weakness to be seen.

We want to be together. But God is saying no I put my treasure in an earthen vessel. You ain't all that.

But by your weakness my strength will be made manifest. In your being perplexed I'll come through and people will know. Look what God did for them.

But how can God do it till we don't know what we're doing? Praise the Lord. Let's lift our hands and just praise him. Just out loud praise him.

Just thank him. That he works in our weakness. He works in our powerlessness.

He works in our perplexity. He guides when we don't know where to go. If I could just give one personal note before I close this.

You know when I went into the ministry I hadn't been trained as I've mentioned you. I didn't go to seminary Bible school. I was a basketball player.

Went to college playing hoops. I would go into ministry. Not here yet in Brooklyn but over in Newark New Jersey where Carol and I began.

Before we came to the then Brooklyn Tabernacle on Atlantic Avenue. I was so insecure because first of all I didn't know how to preach. People were becoming Buddhists from some of my sermons.

I mean they were just like whatever. The way I am is if I worship God and praise him and think of his goodness. I'm very liable to this moment to break down and weep.

Anybody here like me? Say amen. But I realize I can't weep in front of the people. They're going to think I'm having a nervous breakdown.

What kind of minister gets up and cries in front of people? I don't want to tell you for real. So I would try to act like a minister. Stand like a minister.

Talk like a minister. That's impossible for me. I can't speak any other way but conversationally.

I'm not an orator. I don't have a great speaking voice. I had all this stuff.

All this weakness. All this jar of clay stuff. So I was going through these motions trying to preach whatever I was doing.

It was sad. So one day going home. I hadn't been to ministry three months.

I'm driving with my wife and I said to her. She was ahead of me because she's a pastor's wife. It has musical gifting although she hasn't been trained.

So I said to her. So how do you think I'm doing? And she said the truth. When your wife says that fasten your seat belt right then.

Just put it on tight. I said yeah the truth. She said terrible.

I said why terrible? She said because that's not you. You're trying to be a minister. You're not a minister.

You're Jim Cymbala. So be who you are. But you see I was trying to cover up my jar of clay.

I wanted to show something shiny and nice. But you can't be who you're not. So I want to encourage all of you.

That's how God brings about his glory being seen in us. By breaking the jar of clay. By letting the jar of clay feel its weakness so that we can depend on his strength.

How many ministers and churches and people are held back because they're trying to be strong in themselves when God says no be weak in yourself. So that I can be strong in you. We both can't be strong at the same time.

When I'm weak he is strong. When I am strong he is weak in us. How many want God to be strong in you and through you? The light to shine.

When you're broken and perplexed you don't have to hide it. You can be vulnerable. I think one of the hardest things is for all of us is to be vulnerable and speak what we're really going through.

It's very hard for us because we're taught the image we have of how people see us. And we want to keep maintaining that. I got to come across as cool or whatever the your goal is.

Instead of just being able to say like Paul. Yeah I was knocked down many times. But yo I was not knocked out.

Yeah knocked down. Yeah I've been knocked down. But I keep getting up.

Look at me. Yeah on my back. You want to see the scars I got from the beatings I took for Jesus? Yeah I have those scars.

But guess what? I'm still alive and kicking. They can beat my back. They can't beat my inside.

Then he says finally and this is so important for our jar of clay lesson. So how do you keep rolling? How do you keep doing that? He says though outwardly my body is perishing. We heard a few weeks ago all the stuff he went through.

Beaten 39 lashes five times. Three times beaten with rods on the bottom of his feet. Spent an open night and day in the open sea.

I mean he got he just got all these problems. He says though my outward person is perishing. The reason I keep on serving Jesus and the way I keep strong is because every day I get renewed.

Though my outward man perishes my inner person is renewed day by day. Everybody concentrate. There's in this case two parts of us.

There's our outward body. Our strength. Vitamin B12.

All that stuff. Eat kale. All that stuff.

There's that. And then your spirit. Your inner person.

Which is where Christ dwells. He doesn't live in your hand. He lives in your heart.

He affects the whole of our person. But he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit with the Lord. Holy Spirit living in my spirit and your spirit.

So Paul says the only way I can do this. Keep going through all the changes of life. My jar of clay keeps going because although it's falling apart at times.

My inward person is being renewed every day. You can't renew your outward person. Or you can keep in shape.

But look in two weeks my mom's going to be here. We're going to bring her here for her birthday. 103 years old.

So listen. Yeah she's 103 years old. It's amazing.

Wait till you see her. She's still pretty. I can't believe that.

Amazing. But look she can hardly get around. She's bedridden.

Why? She's 103. Stop. She's 103.

Her body's 103. But her inward person. Now that's another thing.

That can be renewed day by day. So Paul says if you just concentrate on your body. Your spirit won't be strong.

If you just concentrate on money and friends and texting and phones. And all the pleasures of life. And all the responsibilities of life.

You don't pay attention to the real Jim Cymbala. You're going to not be able to keep doing God's will. You're going to lose your peace and your joy.

Why? Because outwardly you're doing great. You just came back from Blink. And you were working out.

Whoa. Yeah. Come on.

More reps. More. More.

More. But your insides. Oh.

They have to be renewed every day. And they can become fresh and strong. Day by day though.

You can only do it day by day. You can't have one meeting with God or a time with God that will keep you for a week. Forget that.

Paul said outwardly I'm falling apart. But daily. Every day.

He renews me. He strengthens me. Ooh.

I'm going to keep on trucking here for Jesus. I'm going to keep on praising him. How do you praise him with all that going on? Because he renews me and he keeps me with my joy and my peace.

Come on. Let's say amen to that. Every day.

Every day. That's why you can go to some church in another part of the country that has a great Bible teacher. But it produces weak Christians.

Why? Because a Sunday sermon can't renew you every day. You have to be renewed. Christianity is not about walking with a pastor.

It's about walking with the Lord. Not about a church membership. It's about a fellowship with Jesus.

So now listen. Every day I get renewed. Many people liken that to the quiet time that we're supposed to have with the Lord and his word.

Faith comes by hearing. Hearing by the word. You got to make time.

Put your phones away. Get up a little extra earlier. Do without something.

Discipline yourself. Ask God to help us. I got to get renewed today.

I got to get strengthened. I got to. Or else my body will be strong.

But my inner person will be weak. Then I'll cave. I'll give in to temptation.

I'll give in to leaving God's will for something easier. I won't be that good soldier he wants me to be. Why? Not because my body's weak.

But because my spirit wasn't renewed. Think of all the people today that are strong in their body. And their spirits are flabby.

They're in life support. Their spirits. Their body might be strong.

So God is interested in that part of us which can be renewed every day. And what's the result of it? You pray. Spend time with God.

You have fellowship with Christians. You meditate on God's word. Which means you chew on it.

You analyze it. What? Where? Who? When? Why? How much? How long? Who was this spoken to you? God, speak to me through your word. God, speak to me.

God, I want to worship you for a while. I'm going to praise you. I'm going to worship you today.

God, I want to give you the burdens that I have today. Not yesterday's burdens. That's gone.

Not tomorrow what I'm facing. I don't know if I'll see tomorrow. Just today.

God, I want to give you what I'm doing today. I want to give you that. And that's how God works in us to renew us.

But here's the point we have to get to. Paul says something interesting at the end here. Which is what we have to do.

He said outwardly we're perishing. But inwardly we're being renewed every day. While we look not at things that are seen.

But at things that are not seen. Because the things that are seen can be picked up by the five senses. Are temporary.

But the things that you can see with the eyes of your heart. When your spirit is renewed. They're eternal.

My mind is on heaven. I know. But look what you're going through.

It's just for a season. Look what's waiting for me. Praise God.

I got my heart set on heaven. Oh, but look what he thinks or she thinks. I don't care.

I know what Jesus thinks. I just spend time with them. He loves me.

He's for me today. Yeah, I know. But you know that family.

They're talking about you. And I don't let them talk about me. The angels are talking about me in heaven.

I just spend time in the word of God as with the Lord. So look. Here's what it is.

It's like a refocus. We all naturally just look at the world. The things around us.

And Paul says, look, they're temporary. They're like this. They're gone.

I know it doesn't seem like that to us. But in the big picture, Paul says, trust me, God is telling us life is just a vapor. Gone.

But, ooh, eternal things. That's why he says I suffer. But what I'm suffering is nothing compared to what he's going to give me for all eternity.

How could I complain? How could I complain? I'm going through a little something. It ain't all that. But look what's waiting for me.

You know, I've got to keep my eyes on the goal. So how we get renewed every day is that we refocus our vision away from physical senses. And we get our heart conscious and starting to move among those invisible spiritual things that are eternal.

If you just have your eyes and your heart on the physical world, you know what you're going to have? Let's just take our world today. You're going to have the double A, not Alcoholics Anonymous. You're going to have anger and anxiety.

You're going to hear and read about stuff, women being taken advantage. You're going to talk of criminal behavior that's not punished. You're going to think all the things that are going on, people ripping off the system, people taking advantage of this, that, the other.

You're going to, if you just study all of that and get engrossed with it, you're going to get just flat out angry. Or you're going to hear about North Korea and they have a missile. And when they send it, it takes 34 minutes and 30 seconds.

I saw it this week to hit New York. If they had one and they could put a nuclear device on it. They said, so they send it.

They got 34 minutes, 35 seconds, and they'll hit New York. That's a great way to go through the day, right? Like, wow, I wonder if they just sent it now. I got about 30 minutes here.

Let me, what should I do? Of course, you're going to have anxiety. But if you're singing, surely goodness, surely mercy. Now you're walking around in your praise, God.

Don't you see the paper? Don't you know what's going on yet? Surely goodness. See why? Because you're looking at things that are invisible. Oh, that's escapism.

No, it's reality. The world is escapism. You're trying to escape the inevitable of dying and spending eternity somewhere.

And how you're trying to dull your senses. You're not using Percocet. You're using materialism to escape what you know is going to end.

Naked, we came into this world. And naked, we're going to leave.

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