

Title: “This Light of Mine. Let it Shine”

Chris Ryan

2 Cor. 4:7-12

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Service Readings: Deut. 5:12–15, 2 Cor. 4:5–12, Mark 2:23–28 (3:1–6)

God's very Word brought light into existence, casting out the darkness. This very Word, with this same power, does the same to us. It casts out the darkness of our own sinful lives and shines the light of salvation within us.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

“Remember you are dust and to dust you will return.” These are the words at the entrance into the season of Lent and they are words that strike at our very identity. Everything that serves to elevate how we see ourselves is ripped away and we are left bare, facing the true reality of our identity. We are dust and dust has no value. And into Lent we travel, in search of some explanation, some meaning, *some answer* to the question that presents itself before us: if we truly are dust, and if we truly have no value, then what? If we are unable to create from within ourselves any kind of value, are we destined to a life lived for no reason, for no purpose? Lent is a dark road, and when traveled with eyes open, a deeply introspective and heavy-laden journey.

In the letter to the Corinthians, Paul seems to continue this same thread as he compares mankind to simple jars of clay. In his day these items were of very little value because of how they were made. The clay, so prevalent, could be molded into these items with little effort. They were used to hold things of value, but they had very little of it themselves. And if broken, they released any small value that they possessed, for unlike glass or metal, clay couldn't be reused to form a replacement. It couldn't be melted down and recast; it could only be discarded, abandoned. And so clay jars were only useful as vessels to what they held. And so you can see how the church might have been discouraged to hear Paul identify them as such. But just like Lent, Paul doesn't leave them in despair. Instead, he points them to the cross of Jesus where they come face to face with the true reality of their identity and the true measure of their worth. He writes:

⁷But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. ⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. ¹¹For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Paul speaks of his life at the cross. It is a life of affliction, of despair, and persecution. It is a life that will eventually end with his martyrdom. And though the life of the congregation may be different, and our lives may be as well, it is still a life that is lived at the cross – the same cross where we find the source of our value, where we find the meaning to our lives.

Yes. It is true that we are jars of clay. It is true that we are dust. And it is true that into the earth we will return. But it is not true that dust is where we will remain. And it is not true that our value will be lost when we find ourselves broken. Quite the contrary. For through Jesus, these vessels have been given immense value. God sent his only Son into our flesh. He permitted him to be born in a simple stable, in a lowly village. He came as a jar of clay but one that contained the most divine and priceless treasure, God's own presence of grace. We would expect a treasure so ultimate, more valuable than gold and precious stone, to be placed into something more worthy. Should not God have created something more dignified for him to reside in than this? And yet into the form of man he came. And that flesh, that vessel, became worthy, holy, and valuable because of the one who resided in it.

But the world did not understand or acknowledge him. They cast him aside, broke him into pieces, and left him in the ground to return to dust. But to dust he did not return. The world could not strip him of his value. Death could not restrain him to the ground. Sin had been defeated and Satan's power to empty mankind of its value had been overcome. What Satan declared worthless was proven worthy to house the God of all creation. And this vessel, broken and discarded was resurrected as proof of this victory. Jesus lives as a testament to the true value of God's creation and to the true worth of all mankind.

And this was Paul's message to the church. God's purpose for us, his created, is to make us worthy, to make us valuable. And he does this through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Through him we find our value and become vessels that are worthy to house the living God. We find value not in ourselves, not from the world, but from him.

During Lent we are reminded of who we are outside of Jesus. We enter into a time of dark introspection. But the darkness does not remain, for on Easter morning the light of Jesus overtakes it and replaces it with the brightness of his earned salvation.

It casts out the darkness of our own sinful lives and shines the light of salvation within us. And in this way we no longer remain just a vessel, we become part of the *very body* of the *very God* who made us valuable. We become attached to Jesus, we become a part of him. We no longer are a container, we are a part of the contents. We are part of his light. His light shines through us to illuminate the world around us. His power runs through us to bring others into this same relationship, to point others to this same source of power that will transform them from worthless jars of clay to priceless vessels.

The world we live in is dark, indeed. And the world will tell us that we are dust. And the world will try to tell us that our intrinsic value is found only within ourselves. And when we adopt this belief the world will throw us to the ground and break us into pieces. And to dust we will return.

But this is not who we are. We are not just jars. We are temples of the living God. And we know that "he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us... into his presence." And while we wait for this day, we let the light of Jesus shine in our hearts for all the world to see.

We know that this is not easy but we draw on the strength from the Holy Spirit to live each day as a beacon for others. We allow the Christian persecutions and sufferings of this world to afflict but do

so as a testament for others. Death is at work in us, so that the saving life of Jesus can be at work in them.

May the light of Jesus shine in me so that it might shine in others. And may it do the same for you.

Please pray with me.

Almighty God, we thank you for the reminder that we are but vessels of clay. Yet, in your grace, you fill us with your precious treasure – the presence of your Son, Jesus Christ.

May we never forget the immense value you have placed upon us. Help us to live lives that reflect your light in the world. Shine through us, so that others may see your love and come to know you, as we do.

Amen.