

Coach House Church BEACONS

JARS OF CLAY

9TH JUNE 2020

Do you have objects that you treasure? They may or may not be worth a lot of money but they are of value to you. Maybe it's a set of coins you've collected. I have some thre'penny bits and sixpences in a tin together with ha'pennies, shillings and half crowns that were given to me as a Christmas present by my Nana. Maybe you have a collection of stamps, football programmes. or family photographs- something of sentimental value to you.

To someone else these treasures are nothing because they can't see the worth, value and they are not attached to a particular memory. How many of you have your treasures in an old tin, a battered old box, a recycled container that sits at the back of the cupboard or on a high shelf? The container isn't the important part, it's just useful and available and functions to hold the contents safely in place.

Back in bible times, clay jars were used to hold a variety of objects – sometimes everyday items and sometimes treasures of value. Every house would have a variety of jars which were made from a basic ingredient, from the clay of the earth. It took skilled craftsmen to shape and mould the clay, baking it until it was hard and maybe adding decoration. The clay jar was a common container, versatile and useful, for storing all sorts of essential things like grain, oil, wine.

Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding as we heard in Jamie's beacon last week. Jesus asked servants to fill 6 stone jars with water – each holding 20-30 gallons. Then he transformed the water into the best wine so that the host would not be humiliated by running out of wine for the wedding celebration. Ordinary containers used to display Jesus' miraculous powers.

In Judges 7 we find Gideon, the youngest of his family being commissioned by God to lead an army. What weapons are used in the attack? - clay jars in which lighted torches are hidden! In the middle of the darkness of night, Gideon's small

army of 300 men surrounded the enemy. On Gideon's command they all declared: A sword for the Lord and for Gideon, while smashing the pots to reveal the torches and blowing on a ram's horn. The unlikely combination of pots, lights and noise caused chaos in the camp and Gideon's army were the victors. Ordinary pots used as part of God's plan, to show what can be achieved by following and trusting in God's directions. Our strength comes from God and not from us. One of the most exciting archaeological finds involving clay jars was the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were discovered in the Qumran caves, at the Northern edge of the Dead Sea, in the Judean desert in 1946-1947. The constant temperature and dry conditions in the desert caves, together with the protection of the clay jar had preserved many fragments and pieces of text, that were the original transcripts of biblical and historical texts. Experts agreed that the Dead Sea Scrolls were indeed a treasure that had been hidden away to protect them. In the New Testament, Paul talks to the church in Corinth in Greece.

2 Corinthians 4:

6 For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. 7 We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

Paul is telling the Corinthians that the spirit of God lives within them, that they know the truth of the good news of Jesus. It is like the light has been switched on and they can understand who Jesus is: the Messiah, the Saviour, the only one who can lead them to God the Father.

At the same time, Paul explains that the treasure they have is God's Holy Spirit living within them, yet their physical bodies are like ordinary clay pots and clay is breakable and clay is fragile. There is a huge contrast between the strength of God's power and the weakness of the container, the human body. In the book of Samuel in the Old Testament, the prophet Samuel has been tasked by God to find a new King of Israel. He visits a family and considers the row of tall, strong looking sons.

But God spoke to Samuel: 1 Samuel 16:7

“Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

With God, it is not the outer appearance, the decoration, the superficial presentation that is the focus. It's the treasure within that is most important, trusting in God and having His holy spirit live inside us.

We are created from the dust of the earth, as it says in Psalm 103:14, and we have temporal bodies however, we also have contained within us the hope of eternal life, the assurance of an eternity with Almighty God. We are just ordinary, weak containers but we have a treasure within us that recognises that Jesus is our Saviour and we have access to our God who is holy, merciful and worthy of all our praise.

Psalm 103

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits— who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his deeds to the people of Israel:

The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children— with those

who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all. Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word.

Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will.

Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion.

Praise the Lord, my soul.



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