

15 PENTECOST  
AUGUST 27/28, 2016

FIRST, MARSHALL  
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

Psalm 116; 2 Corinthians 4:1-2, 5-15; Matthew 5:14-16

*Treasure in Clay Jars*

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Treasure in clay jars...*



Though the Olympics have ended, our minds' eyes are **still** filled with the **spectacle** of some of the best athletes in the world **pushing** their **bodies** to the limits of endurance, the limits of performance.

We saw a **number** of competitors embrace the *thrill of victory*, even as we watched many **others** wrestle with the *agony of defeat*. But win or lose, there's no **question** that those Olympians put the **treasure** of their **bodies** to **work** in the best way they could.

They took the gift that **God** gave them and put themselves on display for all the world to appreciate – and a **precious** few even managed to come away with those precious medals of bronze, silver or gold.

Speaking of precious medals and precious metals and our **bodies** as a **treasure**...*does anyone have an idea of how much our bodies are worth?...the dollar figure that would be attached to this very earthly treasure? Think about that for amoment...*



On the **one** hand, it kinda depends on how you **assess** the worth of the human body. A man by the name of Nick Berry of DataGenetics says that **one** way is to divide up the body's components and see what they'd be worth on the market. Assuming that everything's **healthy** (bone marrow, heart, lungs, kidneys, etc.), he says that a body **could** be worth up to **\$45 million!!!** Now, that's **quite** a **treasure**...it's just that...you wouldn't be around to **enjoy** all that money you got for all your parts!!!

**Another** way to value a body is to assess the **chemical** and/or **mineral** elements that make-up the human form. According to Berry's blog, he states that 99% of our bodies are made up of the following **six elements**:

**Oxygen, Carbon, Hydrogen, Nitrogen, Calcium, and Phosphorus...**  
nothing too **exciting**, nothing too **expensive**, nothing too **exotic**!!

And though **some** of us may **claim** to have:

-hearts of **gold**,

-**silver** tongues,

-**cast iron** stomachs,

-**platinum** blond hair,

-**bronze** skin,

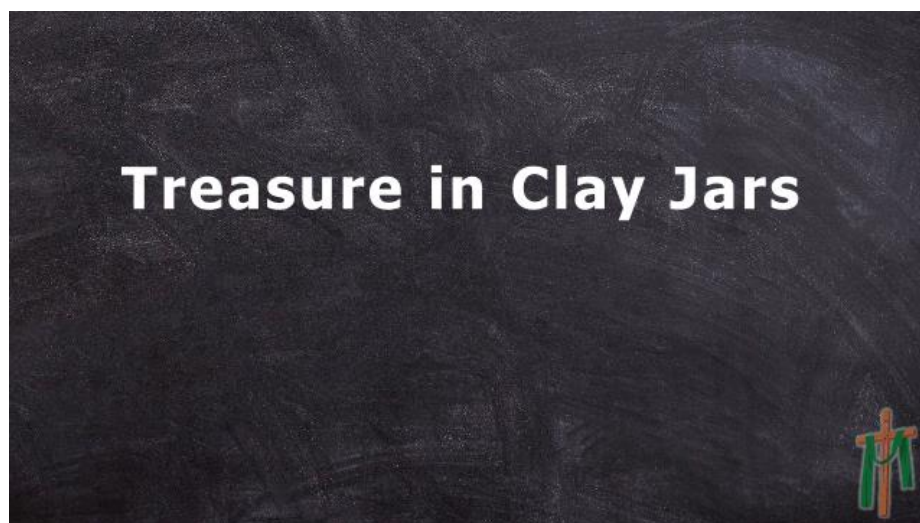
-**lead** feet, or

-**tin** ears...the plain fact of the matter is: the total of **all valuable elements** *combined* doesn't even register on the **scale** of what makes up the human body.

So...one more time - **anyone have a dollar figure in mind to say how much our bodies are worth elementally? Take a guess...**

Berry figures the sum at about...160 bucks...

<http://www.datagenetics.com/blog/april12011/>



What do you suppose Paul means when he says that ***we have this treasure in clay jars???***

Well, **first** of all, let's talk about those **clay jars**... As you heard in the children's sermon, clay jars are **great containers** if treated with care. And when you think back to the time of Jesus, a clay jar was a godsend! How **else** could a person transport enough water for the day from the well to their home – **especially** in a desert environment?

No, clay jars were **vital** to the well-being of a family. But, once broken, they **lost** their value, were deemed **worthless**, became **junk**. So when the Apostle calls our **bodies clay jars**, I think he means two different things: 1) that they are **very valuable**, and 2) that though they can be sturdy, they're also **destined** to be **broken** at some time or another.

Even those Olympians, whose bodies are developed nearly to perfection, are susceptible to: the Zika virus, to cancer, to accidents, to age...

That's what it means to live as *clay jars*.

Now let's try to identify what this **treasure** is that Paul's talking about.

We've already mentioned athleticism. **What are some other attributes that the WORLD appreciates about human beings?** Others include: beauty, brains, artistry, determination, hard work, creativity, the ability to make money, to heal, to rule, to lead...

In **fact**, the **world** will *only* value us if we have something to offer that's **marketable** – or **remarkable** in some way, right? But again, there aren't too many of us:

- who are worth our weight in gold, or
- who can translate our talents into earning gold.
- And we've clearly established that our bodies are **not** made from expensive elements *like* gold... **so then what is it about our earthly experience that can be called a *treasure*? Any ideas?**

As we heard in our passage from 2 Corinthians, it turns out that it's something entirely different from gold, according to the Apostle Paul.

He writes: *It is the God who said, **Let light 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* (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Eugene Peterson puts it like this in *The Message*:

*It started when God said, "Light up the darkness!" and our lives filled up with light as we saw and understood God in the face of Christ.*

In other words, the **treasure** that we clay jars hold in our **hearts**, is nothing less than the *promise of God's gift of grace for all people through Jesus Christ our Lord.*



*Treasure in clay jars...*

In 1947, a Bedouin shepherd came across some old clay jars in a cave near the Dead Sea in Israel. Those old earthen vessels contained what have come to be known as the Dead Sea Scrolls – over 900 O.T. books and Jewish documents that were written mostly before – and up until just after – the time of Christ.

*Obviously, the jars themselves were not so valuable, but for hundreds of years, they served their purpose in protecting and preserving the priceless treasure of God's word.*

(<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2012/02/03/good-grief-final-thoughts/>)

And here's the best news of all – the condition of our clay-jar *bodies-and-hearts* has **no** bearing on our ability to be a **good** vessel for God's **treasure** of grace. I mean – **everyone's** body, **everyone's** spirit, **everyone's** heart *is-or-will-be* **broken** at some time or another.

*Does God let that stand in the way of working through us to bless the world?* **Not at all.** In fact, I think that God takes great **pleasure** in working through us **especially** when we're cracked or broken. And he can do it in a **couple** of ways.

In the first place, God can **use** our brokenness:

The story is told about a man with **two clay pots** which he carried on a pole across his neck to fetch water daily from a stream. One pot was **perfect** while the **other** was marred by a small crack. The perfect pot was **proud** that it always full at the end of the walk, while the **cracked** pot was ashamed because it was **never** more than **half**-full.

One day by the stream, the cracked pot couldn't **stand** it anymore and finally **spoke out** saying, *I am sorry, Sir, and want to apologize.*

*Why?* asked the man. *What are you sorry about?*

Replied the pot, *Because of my flaw, I've never been able to give you what you expected.*

Quietly the man loaded both pots, then said, *As we walk home, look down at the path,* and so it did. Like every other day, the pot ended the journey half empty...and, once again, sad.

When the man put down his pole, he asked, *What did you see?*

The cracked pot said, *I noticed beautiful flowers along our path.*

*You're right,* said the man. *But did you notice that they grow only on one side?*

He went on to explain, *I've **always** known about your flaw and **one** day decided to put it to work. I planted seeds only on **your** side of the path and every day as we walk back from the stream, you water them for me.*

*Because of you, I always have an **abundance** of flowers to **decorate** my home and **share** with my friends. Without your **flaw**, I would **never** have all this **beauty** in my life.*

What a blessing! Not only is God **not** disappointed in our **flaws** – God **delights** in using our brokenness to bring **grace**, and **beauty** and **truth** into our world.

The **other** way that God can work with our brokenness is to **repair** it... with something **precious**.



*Kintsugi*, a word that means *to repair with gold*, is the Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with lacquer, dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum. As a philosophy, it treats **breakage** and **repair** as part of the **history** of an object, rather than something to **disguise**.  
-(<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kintsugi>)

Out there in the big, bad world, an exquisite piece of pottery, once broken, is worth nothing more than a cracked clay jar, right?

And yet **look** at how this piece reflects a **beauty** that runs even deeper than if it were **perfect**. Unbroken, it would be **beautiful**. Repaired with **gold**, it reflects a **beauty** and *depth of character* that is **stunning!**

And here's the good news for us, we who are the holders of God's treasure in these clay jars, broken vessels, cracked pots.



The Lord does not use **gold** to repair the cracks, or breaks, or flaws in our lives – no, God uses something **infinitely** more **valuable** and **essentially** more **beautiful**.

It's called **grace**...

A young bride-to-be was enjoying the challenge of planning her wedding – **some** details fell into place **smoothly**, **others** had to be lassoed, flipped and hog-tied before they'd submit. Though she started out with a head of steam, soon she began to feel **weak** and run-down. She took it easy for a couple of weeks, but things just didn't get any better.

Finally she went to the **doctor**...and after numerous **tests**, lots of **visits**, and **too much time** waiting on pins and needles, she was given a diagnosis. It turned out that her **clay jar** was cracked – the doctor told her that she had MS and nothing could be done to change that.

She was devastated – she'd known some significant disappointments in her young life, but **nothing** had prepared her for such challenging news. So she did what **most** of us might – she decided on her own that something had to change.

She met with her **groom-to-be** and told him that she could **not** go through with the wedding – explaining that it'd be much **better** for **him** if they called it off so that he could find a **healthy** wife to marry...

Later they shared with me what happened. After she'd made her impassioned plea, her beloved sat quietly for a moment, and then asked her one simple question: *would you call off the wedding if our roles were reversed??* She answered **no**, she **lost** the **argument**, and they went ahead with their plans.

Two weeks before the wedding, she was in the hospital. When I went to see her, she had this look of **resolve** on her face. After exchanging pleasantries, she told me: *I know that I'll have MS until the day I die. But I also know that God has **healed** me...in my **heart**.* And then she smiled.

Her goal – to walk down the aisle by herself – was achieved. It took some time, but she made it up to the altar, and when asked *the question* – especially the part about *in sickness and in health* – they both smiled and said, *I do*.

God takes the **broken pieces** of our lives, **fits** them back **together**, then either **uses** the **cracks** – or **seals** the **breaks** with **grace** – **all** so that the good news of Jesus Christ might be shared with the world to make it **beautiful**, to make it **meaningful**, to make it **whole**.

We have this TREASURE in clay jars – and that treasure is **greater** than *all the riches in the world combined*. Thanks be to God. Amen.