

“Death = Life”

2 Corinthians 4:7-12

8/9/09

We are clay jars in a tough world, but only so the power of God can shine through.

This morning we start a four week sermon series, one that anyone who lives on this planet can and will relate to. In this world we deal with adversity. Difficult times come our way in one way or another.

And so we are going to hear about “Living Abundantly in Adversity”.

This morning we start by hearing the basic truth, that death is at work in our bodies, but Christ is alive and well and His life is what fills us to shine.

Next week we hear about God’s comfort—enough for us that it overflows so we can comfort others.

The third week is how God’s grace produces generosity within us, even when it may seem that we have nothing to give.

And finally, in all things and no matter what, when we are at our weakest is when we are the strongest because it is then that we fully rely on God.

So, living abundantly means what? Well, I’ll tell you that it’s not automatically what we hear sometimes, that abundance equals physical wealth and riches. We get conditioned to think that that is all abundance means. Have enough faith, or perhaps the “right kind of faith”, and God will “bless you”. In other words, you’ll get a lot of money.

(By the way, as a side note, did you ever realize that you only ever hear that kind of thinking from people who are already rich? You don’t often hear a poor person on the street proclaiming that if he has enough faith God will give him a million dollars.)

Anyway. No,

Abundance with Jesus Christ means something far greater and deeper than earthly riches.

And so we begin to explore that a little this morning.

Let me share again briefly about a woman I know in PA named Alice. Alice was stricken with a debilitating disease when she was a young adult. Every year she gets weaker. She has almost died many times. She lives in an apartment, many months not able to go anywhere at all.

She would tell me of her low moments, when it was difficult to stay in good spirits. But every time I visited with her, without fail and fully from the heart, she always said how grateful she is to God for the faith He has blessed her with. She talks about how richly blessed she is and my eyes always tell the same message that she knows well: Alice, I pray that I would have a faith like you have if ever I deal with something like this.

Inside her completely broken down body is a spiritual giant, who is a living example of what we are talking about this morning, that abundant living is possible even amidst adversity in our lives.

God’s upside down Kingdom is alive and well. We hear it with Jesus as He talks about loving your enemies, praying for those who persecute you, living humbly and simply in a success-driven world.

In the Beatitudes we hear that those who mourn are blessed, for they will be comforted, that the poor in spirit are blessed, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

And now this morning we hear more from the Apostle Paul, words God gave to him to share with the early Corinthian church struggling to understand it's identity as the church and dealing with the challenges of their day.

2 Corinthians 4:7-12

Treasure in clay jars.

Death equals life.

God continues to make it clear that the world's way is not His way.

Our understanding cannot be limited to what we think is possible.

And something that is made perfectly clear in God's Word is that in this life there will be trouble. Adversity will come your way. It rains on the just and the unjust, the good and the bad. No one is exempt.

As Corinthians says,

We are clay jars in a tough world.

I know I often picture a heavy crock, thick and sturdy when I hear about being clay jars. But this image Paul uses is different. Earthenware back then was fragile and cheap. If you drop it, it breaks. If you hit it with a big stick, it will smash to pieces.

But then we hear something extraordinary. These jars of clay don't break.

Afflicted? Perplexed? Persecuted? Struck down?

Well, God says none of those are the end. You will experience it and the pain that comes with it. You can't escape it. But we are promised that there is nothing in this world that can completely destroy you when you are in God's hands.

Because inside those fragile containers lives something that is more powerful than anything in all creation. It is the treasure that Paul refers to. What is it?

Let's step back a verse. Verse 6 says, *"For it is the God who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*

The glory of God in Jesus Christ, it is He who lives in us. It is He that overcame the darkness and death. It is He that all powers in the world are under. And so

These clay jars become the vessels for something extraordinary: The Resurrection power of Jesus Christ.

Not only are you not destroyed, but through some of the cracks which form in these jars shines that brilliant light of Christ.

[Kaysa Meeks]

We have a role, in that we can choose to put our lives in God's hands or not.

And when we do our faith is a gift from God.

We sometimes make it to sound like it all comes from us and our strength, that we must have a "strong enough faith" to persevere. But that is why Paul says that this treasure is in clay jars, so that we know this extraordinary power is not from us. Yet it is with God that we must be sure we are filling ourselves.

God said, when nothing as yet existed, "Let there be light", and there was light. And the darkness did not nor ever will overcome His light.

In the clay jar of a simple baby one night came that light of the world, Jesus. He forgave sin. He healed. He reached the lost. He calmed the storm. He fed the thousands. He took the entire shame of the human race upon His shoulders and was

killed. Struck down, but not destroyed, because He was raised by God's glorious power to new life. And ensured by His resurrection that all who seek Him have that same power living with them.

The light of Christ shines through these earthen vessels, so that in what seems to be a hopeless moment, something amazing comes forth.

So what will you do this week?

Think about what we are: CLAY

Call upon God that He fill you with His unbreakable, extraordinary power.

I don't know exactly how God will come to you or speak to you. But I do know this, because I have experienced it for myself and it says it right here in Romans 10:13:

"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Look at the examples of others around you who have been through this.

There are examples of faith listed in Hebrews: Noah, Moses, Rahab, the prophets. But all you have to do is look around: Kaysa, and a room full of folks who have dealt with just about everything in life. Talk to them. Team up with one another.

Accept your limitations, and trust God who is limitless.

I know, this is a tough one. But we are clay jars. We have limits as to what we can do. Our bodies fail. We mess up. We don't have the capacity to love from within. But God is not limited. We simply need to trust that what we need will be given, and then take that and use it as we are called to do.

You are eternal: this moment, as extremely difficult as it can be, is temporary.

This is not the final destination, thank God!

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Amen.