

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, March 5, 2024
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“Treasures in Jars of Clay”

READING: II Corinthians 4:7-12 – But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is a work in us, but life is at work in you.

I came across this particular reading as I was looking for something else in the Bible, and it triggered a thought in me that I want to share with you. Of course St. Paul is not talking about actual clay jars in this passage. He is referring to himself and other evangelists who had the Gospel of life in them but were themselves only mortal men made of clay. They had no particular power to bring life and peace to others of their own accord. It was only the Gospel message within them that when it was shared and explained had the power to give life to all those who believed it.

I do find it ironic that St. Paul had no way of knowing how “Treasurers in Jars of Clay” would play out when the “Dead Sea Scrolls” were discovered and came to light. You may remember that in a ten-year period from 1946-1956, thousands of fragments, portions of whole known books, and nearly an intact scroll of the book of Isaiah were found in the Qumran Caves on the northern shore of the Dead Sea. Nearly 15,000 pieces of parchment, papyrus, and even copper strips were found, most of them contained and secured against the elements by jars of clay!

It took many years for some of the most precious finds to be scientifically opened, preserved, copied, and studied. Due to their age and condition, great care had to be taken not to simply make these precious treasures disintegrate into dust. The scrolls were especially challenging since any attempt to unroll them caused them to crack and break. New methods had to be developed and devised in order to see and record the contents of each one.

Until the scroll of Isaiah could be opened and read, there was a great deal of speculation in the archeological journals as to what they would reveal about the scriptures. This particular scroll was about ONE THOUSAND years OLDER than the oldest copy of Isaiah then known. Many scholars were sure they would find major revisions and textual additions and reductions once the scroll was opened. Many were convinced that the Isaiah we had then was just the latest in a long line of “Isaiahs” – each one changed and amended to meet the needs of the priests and/or the rulers of the Jews in their own particular days. Scholars faithful to the Scriptures had always resisted such an idea. They knew that the priests and scribes of the Biblical era held the texts to be sacred. They took great care to make sure every “jot and tittle” was accurately copied. They had scribes who did nothing but count the words in each book to make sure the word count was the same. They even counted letters in each line to be sure nothing was changed. The thought that they could amend Biblical books to meet their own ends would never have occurred to them, and others would never have stood for such an outrage. Still, the secular scholars awaited the opening of the scroll with bated breath, sure that they would finally have the proof positive to their belief that the Bible is really just a manmade creation.

Well, guess what? When the scroll was finally opened and its contents photographed, translated, and studied, over 98% of it was EXACTLY the same as the text we already had. The only changes were

misspellings, word omissions, and transposition errors where two words were put in a different order. **NONE** of those errors changed one single passage's meaning. As the faithful scholars had argued all along, the priests and scribes believed those words to be God's words, and we still do!

So when St. Paul wrote the words "these treasures in jars of clay" he was using a metaphor. The evangelists and indeed every believer who knows the good news of the Gospel has within their mortal body a true treasure that offers life to anyone who receives it. However, his picture also applies to those pieces of ancient writing that give us insights into the Biblical record. They were preserved inside jars of clay, waiting for the day when Christians would be heartened to know that the Biblical record is accurate and trustworthy. Jesus said, "...for these are they which speak of me." Treasures in jars of clay – absolutely! Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

1) **LENTEN SERVICES** are being offered every Wednesday. Services start at 7:00 PM. Our overall theme is "The Forgiveness Challenge" and the pastors are interviewing various Biblical characters whose lives or stories teach us important truths about the forgiveness of God and the forgiveness we can give to one another. This week the Prodigal Son's Older Brother visits us. Join us as well.