

SERIES: II CORINTHIANS: THE HEART AND HUMILITY OF A MAN OF GOD, WEEK 15

TITLE: TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY

TEXT: II CORINTHIANS 4:7-9

INTRODUCTION: (1) CLAY POTS OR JARS OF CLAY WERE THE THROWAWAY CONTAINERS OF THE ANCIENT WORLD.

* THEY WERE MADE OF BAKED CLAY, CHEAP IN PRICE, THEREFORE THEY WERE VERY COMMON, BREAKABLE, EASILY REPLACEABLE AND VIRTUALLY VALUELESS IN AND OF THEMSELVES.

** JARS OF CLAY OR CLAY POTS WERE AN ANONYMOUS PART OF EVERYDAY LIVING IN THE ANCIENT WORLD AND HAD A WIDE VARIETY OF USES.

*** FOR EXAMPLE, OCCASIONALLY THEY WERE USED TO HIDE VALUABLES SUCH AS GOLD, SILVER AND JEWELRY. THE REASON FOR THAT, MOST BURGLARS DID NOT EXPECT VALUABLES TO BE STORED IN SUCH CHEAP CONTAINERS.

**** BUT ALSO CLAY POTS CONTAINING SUCH VALUABLE THINGS WOULD SOMETIMES BE BURIED IN THE GROUND.

(2) IN FACT, IT HAS BEEN SUGGESTED THAT THE MAN IN JESUS' PARABLE IN MATTHEW 13:44 WHO FOUND THE TREASURE HIDDEN IN A FIELD, MIGHT HAVE DISCOVERED IT WHEN HIS PLOW BROKE A BURIED CLAY POT.

* BEYOND THAT, THE DEAD SEA SCROLLS WERE FOUND IN CLAY POTS AFTER BEING HIDDEN FOR NINETEEN PLUS CENTURIES.

** AND ROMAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION SITES HAVE PRODUCED MANY JARS OF CLAY, OSTRACA, FROM THE GREEK WORD FOR POTTERY, AGAIN FOR THEY WERE SO COMMON AND A PART OF EVERYDAY LIFE.

*** HOWEVER, JARS OF CLAY WERE MOST FREQUENTLY USED FOR BASE, LOWLY, EVERYDAY PURPOSES, LIKE STORING AND TRANSPORTING WATER, OLIVE OIL, GRAIN, AND GET THIS, EVEN HUMAN WASTE AND GARBAGE, AS VESSELS OF DISHONOR TALKED ABOUT IN II TIMOTHY 2:20. (QUOTE IT).

**** NOW THE BOTTOM LINE IS, JARS OF CLAY WERE VERY COMMON AND FOR MOST PEOPLE JUST A COMMON CONTAINER THAT HELD SOMETHING.

(3) THEY WERE USED FOR CONVENIENCE AND HAD NO INTRINSIC VALUE.

* THEREFORE IT WAS NO GREAT TRAGEDY WHEN SUCH VESSELS WERE BROKEN. THEY WERE CHEAP AND EASY TO REPLACE.

** THEIR ONLY WORTH CAME FROM THE VALUABLES THEY CONTAINED OR THE SERVICE THEY PERFORMED.

*** NOW PAUL TALKS ABOUT CLAY POTS IN OUR TEXT TODAY. AND HE USES THESE CONTAINERS AS A METAPHOR TO TALK ABOUT CHRISTIANS LIKE HIMSELF AND HIS ASSOCIATES WHO PROCLAIMED THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST, THE LIGHT HE TALKED ABOUT EARLIER IN THE CHAPTER, THE MESSAGE OF SALVATION, THE TREASURE OF THE GOSPEL.

**** AND PAUL DECLARED THAT THE PRICELESS TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL IS HELD IN HUMBLE CONTAINERS, CLAY POTS, JARS OF CLAY, SPEAKING OF HIMSELF AND HIS ASSOCIATES AND IN REALITY ALL CHRISTIANS.

(4) IT IS TO SAY, THE SUPREMELY VALUABLE MESSAGE OF SALVATION IN JESUS CHRIST HAS BEEN PUT BY GOD INTO FRAIL AND FALLIBLE HUMAN BEINGS, JARS OF CLAY, US.

* GOD PLACES HIS GLORIOUS TREASURE, THE MESSAGE THAT SAVES PEOPLE FROM SIN, IN FRAGILE, CHEAP AND ORDINARY CLAY JARS.

** AND THE CONTAINER (HUMAN BEINGS) IS NOT WHAT IS VALUABLE, NO THE TREASURE IN CLAY POTS, THE JARS OF CLAY IS WHAT IS SO VALUABLE.

*** HENCE, THE QUESTION CAN BE ASKED, WHY PUT TREASURE IN A CLAY POT AND DIVINE TREASURE AT THAT?

**** WELL, THE REASON FOR THAT IS, SO THERE WILL BE NO MISTAKE ABOUT WHERE THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL COMES FROM, IT'S NOT THE POT, AND EVEN CRACKED POTS AT THAT, NO THE POWER COMES FROM THE GOSPEL MESSAGE, NOT THE MESSENGER.

(5) AND BY USING FRAIL, FALLIBLE PEOPLE, THE LORD GOD MAKES IT CLEAR THAT THE POWER LIES NOT IN HUMAN MESSENGERS, BUT IN THE DIVINE MESSAGE.

* THEREFORE GOD'S POWER TRANSCENDS THE LIMITATIONS OF THE JARS OF CLAY, THE CLAY POTS. AND IT IS PRECISELY THOSE LIMITATIONS THAT ALLOW BELIEVERS TO EXPERIENCE THE GREATEST DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S POWER.

** IN OTHER WORDS, WE AS CLAY POTS WITH NOT A LOT OF VALUE IN AND OF OURSELVES, ARE USED GREATLY BY GOD WHEN WE REALIZE WE ARE NOT THE TREASURE, BUT THAT THE GOSPEL IS THE TREASURE.

*** AND WHEN WE HAVE PROPER PERSPECTIVE AND HUMBLY SEE OURSELVES AS VESSELS, GOD USES US IN A GREATER WAY AS HIS MESSENGERS.

**** THE RESULT IS THAT NO ONE MAY BOAST BEFORE GOD, I CORINTHIANS 1:29 AND FOR PAUL TO SILENCE HIS ENEMIES WHO WERE BOASTING AND PROUD ABOUT THEIR MINISTRY AND PUTTING HIM DOWN AS A WEAK LOWLY FALSE APOSTLES, WHILE THEY WERE REALLY FALSE APOSTLES.

(6) BUT RATHER THAN DENY THE FALSE APOSTLES' ALLEGATIONS THAT HE WAS WEAK AND IMPERFECT, PAUL EMBRACED THEM.

* PAUL DECLARED THAT THE PRICELESS TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL WAS HELD IN A HUMBLE CONTAINER, IN A CRACKED CLAY POT LIKE HIMSELF.

** THEREFORE I'VE TITLED OUR MESSAGE FOR TODAY, "TREASURE IN JARS OF CLAY."

*** AND UNDER THAT TITLE AND THEME, WE'LL LOOK AT JUST TWO POINTS.

** NO. 1 THE CONTAINERS, V. 7 AND NO. 2 THE CONTRASTS, 4 OF THEM PAUL WILL MAKE IN VV. 8&9.

(7) AND WITH THAT OUTLINE AS OUR SPIRITUAL ROADMAP, LOOK AT V. 7 PLEASE WHERE WE'LL SEE OUR FIRST POINT, THE CONTAINER.

I. THE CONTAINER, (READ V. 7)

A. NOW THE FIRST WORD IN V. 7, THE CONJUNCTION BUT, INTRODUCES A STARTLING DOUBLE CONTRAST.

* FIRST, THE TREASURE OF GOSPEL LIGHT, THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL IN V. 6 AND WORTHLESS CLAY POTS OR JARS OF CLAY IN V. 7 AND THE NEXT CONTRAST, GOD'S SUPERNATURAL POWER TO CREATE LIGHT IN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS TO SAVE US IN V. 6 AND HUMAN WEAKNESS IN V. 7.

*** AND UNDERSTAND, THERE COULD BE NO COMPARISON MORE STRIKING THAN THAT BETWEEN THE TREASURE OF THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL AND THE FRAILTY AND UNWORTHINESS OF THE VESSEL IN WHICH

IT DWELLS AND THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE POWER OF GOD AND HUMAN WEAKNESS.

**** AND THAT THE PRICELESS DIVINE TREASURE OF THE GOSPEL IS CONTAINED IN A LOWLY HUMAN CONTAINER IS A HUMBLING PERSPECTIVE.

1. FOR PAUL SAYS: “BUT WE HAVE THIS TREASURE IN EARTHEN VESSELS.”

* NOW THE TREASURE DESCRIBES THE GLORIOUS GOSPEL MESSAGE THAT THE ETERNAL GOD CAME INTO THE WORLD IN THE PERSON OF JESUS CHRIST AND DIED ON THE CROSS AND ROSE AGAIN TO PURCHASE FORGIVENESS OF SIN AND ETERNAL LIFE FOR SINNERS HE WILL RESCUE.

** AND THIS TREASURE IS OF GREAT INCALCULABLE WORTH. THE TREASURE IS PRICELESS. IT IS WORTH MORE THAN ALL THE RICHES AND MONEY IN THE WORLD.

*** YET AMAZINGLY, THAT PRICELESS TREASURE OF THE GOSPEL IS PUT IN HUMAN CONTAINERS, IN SIMPLE EARTHEN VESSELS LIKE PAUL AND HIS ASSOCIATES, THE WE OF V. 7 AND ULTIMATELY IN ALL BELIEVERS.

**** WE ARE THE CONTAINERS, THE CLAY POTS, THE JARS OF CLAY, THE EARTHEN VESSELS THAT GOD SOVEREIGNLY PLACES HIS TREASURE IN.

2. AND THAT IS AMAZING, ABSOLUTELY INCREDIBLE. FOR CLAY POTS AGAIN HAD NO INTRINSIC VALUE, THEIR ONLY WORTH CAME FROM THE VALUABLES THEY CONTAINED OR THE SERVICE THEY PERFORMED.

* AND CONTEXTUALLY FOR PAUL, FAR FROM DISPUTING FALSE APOSTLES AND FALSE TEACHERS DISPARAGING UNKIND REMARKS ABOUT HIM, HE EMBRACED THEM AND TURNED THEM INTO AN AFFIRMATION OF HIS AUTHENTICITY AS AN APOSTLE OF CHRIST AND MESSENGER OF THE TRUE GOSPEL.

**** NOW A QUESTION CAN BE ASKED AT THIS POINT OF OUR STUDY, WHY HAS GOD ORDAINED THAT THIS TREASURE SHOULD BE IN CLAY POTS LIKE PAUL AND US?

3. WELL, THE ANSWER IS FOUND IN THE REST OF V. 7, SO THAT, A HINA PURPOSE CLAUSE IN THE GREEK, FOR WHAT PURPOSE? “SO THAT THE SURPASSING GREATNESS OF THE POWER WILL BE OF GOD AND NOT FROM OURSELVES.”

* MEANING: BY GOD USING FALLIBLE, FRAIL, WEAK PEOPLE, HE MAKES IT CLEAR THAT THE POWER LIES NOT IN HUMAN MESSENGERS – THE CONTAINER, BUT IN THE DIVINE MESSAGE.

** TO SAY IT ANOTHER WAY, GOD'S POWER TRANSCENDS THE LIMITATIONS AND FRAILTY OF THE CLAY POT. AND IT IS THOSE LIMITATIONS THAT ALLOW BELIEVERS TO EXPERIENCE THE GREATEST DEMONSTRATIONS OF GOD'S POWER.

*** AND ULTIMATELY, THE CREATOR OF LIGHT IN THE SOUL OF BLIND PEOPLE, BLINDED BY THEIR SIN AND THE GOD OF THIS WORLD CONTEXTUALLY IN VV. 3&4&6 OF II CORINTHIANS 4, THIS CREATOR OF LIGHT GETS ALL THE GLORY AND NOT THE CREATION.

**** SO THE TREASURE ITSELF IS IMPORTANT AND NOT THE CONTAINER IT IS PUT IN, AND WHAT IS OF VALUE IS THE GOSPEL, NOT THE CLAY POT IT IS PUT IN.

4. AND BELOVED THIS IS AN IMPORTANT SIMPLE TRUTH THAT WE FAIL TO GET MORE FREQUENTLY THAN WE LIKE TO ADMIT.

* AND IT IS, GOD DELIGHTS IN USING HUMBLE, COMMON PEOPLE, THOSE WHO ARE OVERLOOKED BY CULTURE AND SOCIETY. AND HE PLACES IN SUCH JARS OF CLAY THE CROWN JEWELS OF THE GOSPEL.

** AND THE MORE THE CLAY POT IS MARRED AND CRACKED, THE MORE LIGHT IS SEEN THROUGH THE CRACKS OF THE JAR OF CLAY, GOD USES CRACKED POTS.

*** NOT CRACKED BY UNREPENTANT SIN, BUT CRACKED BY BEING BRITTLE, FRAIL, WORTHLESS IN ITSELF KNOWING THAT IT IS CLAY AND THAT THE POTTER FORMS IT AND USES IT FOR HIS PURPOSES.

**** AND WHAT I'M TRYING TO SAY IS, IT BOILS DOWN TO PROPER PERSPECTIVE, THE PERSPECTIVE OF GOD AS THE POTTER AND WE ARE THE CLAY VESSEL MOLDED BY HIS HANDS WITH OUR HANDICAPS, OUR LACK OF HUMAN ABILITY AND OUR CRACKS.

5. I MEAN ADAM WAS FORMED BY GOD FROM THE DUST OF THE GROUND, QUOTE GENESIS 2:7.

* SO THE TRUTH IS GOD IS THE CREATOR, WE ARE THE CREATURE, WE ARE THE CLAY CRACKED POTS. BUT GOD USES CRACKED WEAK JARS OF CLAY.

** AND THE EXTENT OF GOD'S POWER IS SUCH THAT IT OVERCOMES AND TRANSCENDS ALL OUR WEAKNESSES.

*** AND BY USING COMMON CRACKED CLAY POTS GOD GETS ALL THE GLORY, THE ONE WHOM IS WORTHY, THE

SOVEREIGN SAVIOR. QUOTE I CORINTHIANS 1:26-29 & 31.
ALSO QUOTE ROMANS 11:33-36.

**** AND BELOVED THIS PERSPECTIVE AND UNDERSTANDING IS ESSENTIAL TO BE USED BY GOD, GOD DOES NOT USE THE PROUD, BUT THE HUMBLE, THOSE OF US THAT SEE OURSELVES FOR WHAT WE REALLY ARE AND TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ALL THE GLORY FOR OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS BELONG TO GOD, WHO PLACED THE TREASURE IN US.

6. AND JOHN MACARTHUR HAD THIS TO SAY ABOUT THIS IN HIS COMMENTARY ON II CORINTHIANS AND I QUOTE:

* "THE WORLD IS FILLED WITH PEOPLE TOO ENAMORED WITH THEIR OWN CLEVERNESS, IMPORTANCE AND ABILITY TO BE USED BY GOD. BUT WHEN GOD CHOSE THE MEN THROUGH WHOM HE WOULD GIVE HIS WORD TO MANKIND, HE DID NOT USE THE LEARNED SCHOLARS OF ALEXANDRIA, THE DISTINGUISHED PHILOSOPHERS OF ATHENS, THE ELOQUENT ORATORS OF ROME, OR THE SELF-RIGHTEOUS RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF ISRAEL. HE PASSED THEM ALL BY IN FAVOR OF SIMPLE GALILEAN

FISHERMAN LIKE PETER, JOHN, JAMES AND ANDREW, DESPISED TRAITORS LIKE MATTHEW THE TAX COLLECTOR AND OBSCURE MEN LIKE PHILIP, MARK AND NATHANIEL.” (END QUOTE)

** AND THEN A MAN NAMED JOWETT SUMMARIZES THIS TRUTH BY SAYING AND I QUOTE:

*** “THERE IS SOMETHING WRONG WHEN THE VESSEL ROBS THE TREASURE OF ITS GLORY, WHEN THE CASKET ATTRACTS MORE ATTENTION THAT THE JEWEL WHICH IT BEARS. THERE IS A VERY PERVERSE EMPHASIS WHEN THE PICTURE TAKES SECOND PLACE TO THE FRAME AND WHEN THE WARE WHICH IS USED AT THE FEAST BECOMES A SUBSTITUTE FOR THE MEAL. THERE IS SOMETHING DEADLY IN CHRISTIAN SERVICE WHEN THE ‘EXCELLENCY OF THE POWER’ IS OF US AND NOT OF GOD. SUCH EXCELLENCY IS OF A VERY FLEETING KIND, AND IT WILL SPEEDILY WITHER AS THE GREEN HERB AND PASS INTO OBLIVION.” (END QUOTE)

**** AND THEN THIS TRUTH OF II CORINTHIANS 4:7 IS APPLIED BY A MAN NAMED HOUGHTON WHO SAID AND I QUOTE:

7. IT IS A SECRET JOY TO FIND

THE TASK ASSIGNED BEYOND OUR POWERS;
FOR THUS, IF OUGHT OF GOOD BE WROUGHT,
CLEARLY THE PRAISE IS HIS, NOT OURS.

* AND BELOVED, WE HAVE THE TREASURE OF THE
GOSPEL IN EARTHEN VESSELS, SO THAT, FOR THE
PURPOSE THAT THE SURPASSING GREATNESS OF THE
POWER WILL BE OF GOD AND NOT FROM OURSELVES.
II CORINTHIANS 4:7.

** AND WITH THE TRUTH OF V. 7 SHINING BEFORE US,
LOOK AT VERSE 8 WHERE WE'LL START TO SEE OUR 2^D
AND LAST POINT TODAY, THE CONTRASTS. LOOK AT V. 8
PLEASE.

II. THE CONTRASTS, (READ V. 8)

A. NOW IN VERSES 8 AND 9, PAUL WILL GIVE US 4
CONTRASTING PARALLELS, 4 VIVID ANTITHESIS, 4 PAIR OF
PARTICIPLES, OR SIMPLY PUT 4 PARALLEL PARADOXES
THAT ALL ILLUSTRATE HIS EXPERIENCE OF THE JARS OF
CLAY TRUTH IN HIS OWN LIFE, SPECIFICALLY THAT
WEAKNESS INVITES STRENGTH.

* AND THE PARADOXES ARE COMMENTARIES OF PAUL'S
OWN EXPERIENCE; THEY COME FROM PAUL'S LIFE AND
THE HARDSHIP OF HIS OWN EXPERIENCES.

** AND PAUL'S CONCERN IS TO SHOW HOW THE GRACE OF GOD IS MAGNIFIED WHEN HIS HUMAN CONTAINERS OR VESSELS OR INSTRUMENTS ARE AT THEIR WEAKEST TIMES.

*** AND THESE 4 CONTRASTS OF WEAKNESS DID NOT CRIPPLE OR DESTROY PAUL, BUT INSTEAD STRENGTHENED HIM.

**** PAUL FOUND STRENGTH IN HIS FRAILTY AS A CRACKED JAR OF CLAY BECAUSE THE POWER OF GOD FLOWED UNHINDERED THROUGH HIM.

1. AND GET THIS, FAR FROM BEING A LIABILITY OR HINDRANCE TO HIS MINISTRY AND THE GOSPEL, THEY WERE HIS GREATEST ASSET, FOR WHEN HE WAS WEAK, HE WAS STRONG BECAUSE HE WAS MORE DEPENDENT, QUOTE II CORINTHIANS 12:10.

* AND BELOVED UNDERSTAND, PAUL'S STRENGTH CAME THROUGH HIS WEAKNESS, HIS TRIALS, HIS HEARTACHE, HIS AFFLICTION.

** PAUL WAS A MERCILESSLY BATTERED JAR OF CLAY, WHOSE MANY ENEMIES SOUGHT TO SHATTER HIM.

*** AND BY A SERIES OF FOUR CONTRASTS, PAUL DEMONSTRATED THAT HIS INABILITIES DID NOT CRIPPLE OR HINDER HIS ABILITY TO SERVE AND PROCLAIM THE TREASURE OF THE GOSPEL.

**** AND THE FIRST CONTRAST IS FOUND IN V. 8A, "WE ARE AFFLICTED IN EVERY WAY BUT NOT CRUSHED."

1. NOW THE VERB AFFLICTED, TRANSLATED HARD PRESSED IN THE NIV AND NKJV AND TROUBLED IN THE KJV LIT. MEANS TO BE UNDER PRESSURE, TO PRESS, TO PRESS HARD UPON LIKE YOU WOULD CRUSH A GRAPE.

* AND PAUL WAS UNDER CONSTANT SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL PRESSURE. PAUL WAS CONSTANTLY PRESSED BY ADVERSARIES AND DIFFICULTIES.

** THE EARTHEN VESSEL OF PAUL'S LIFE WAS AFFLICTED IN THE RADICAL SENSE OF BEING PRESSURED, SQUEEZED.

*** BUT, BUT, BUT NOT CRUSHED, THE NEXT PHRASE IN V. 8. IT IS TO SAY HE WAS SQUEEZED BUT NOT SQUASHED, HE WAS HEMMED IN BUT NOT HAMSTRUNG, HARD PRESSED, BUT NEVER CORNERED.

**** PAUL WAS NOT CRUSHED THROUGH THESE GREAT PRESSURES BECAUSE OF GOD'S STRENGTH AND POWER. AND IT'S INTERESTING THIS GREEK VERB, NOT CRUSHED, IS FROM A WORD WHICH REFERS TO BEING CONFINED TO A NARROW PLACE, A TIGHT PLACE.

- BUT THE PRESSURE PAUL FACED COULD NOT KEEP THE TREASURE HIDDEN, PAUL'S MINISTRY WAS NOT BOTTLED.

* AND KEEP IN MIND THE CONTRASTS REMIND US THAT HUMAN WEAKNESS AND PROBLEMS CAN LEAD TO MORE OF GOD'S POWER USING US.

** WE SEE THE EARTHINESS OF THE CLAY POT, BUT THE EXCELLENCY OF GOD'S POWER.

2. NOW MOVING ON, THE SECOND CONTRAST IS FOUND AT THE END OF V. 8, "PERPLEXED BUT NOT DESPAIRING."

* AND THE GREEK VERB PERPLEXED MEANS TO BE AT LOSS, TO BE WITHOUT RESOURCES, TO BE LEFT WANTING.

** BUT, BUT THROUGH DIVINE ENABLEMENT IN GOD'S POWER, HE WAS NOT DESPAIRING, HE WAS NOT IN DESPAIR, LIT. TO NOT BE UTTERLY AT LOSS, TO NOT BE AT A TOTAL LOSS.

*** AND OTHER WAYS THAT OTHERS HAVE TRANSLATED THIS IS IN DESPONDENCY, YET NOT IN DESPAIR; BEWILDERED BUT NOT BEFUDDLED; AT A LOSS, BUT NOT AT A LOSS; AT HIS WIT'S END, BUT THERE WAS STILL A WAY OUT; AT THE BRINK OF DEFEAT, BUT NOT DEFEATED; BEING AT A LOSS, BUT NOT HAVING LOST OUT.

**** USING A FOOTBALL ANALOGY OF A RUNNING BACK, THERE WAS NO HOLE TO RUN THROUGH, BUT HE FOUND ONE.

3. AND AGAIN THESE CONTRASTING PHRASES EMPHASIZE HUMAN INABILITY OFFSET BY DIVINE ENABLEMENT.

* AND PAUL WAS AT HIS WIT'S END AT TIMES, HUMANLY SPEAKING, BUT THROUGH GOD'S STRENGTHENING GRACE, THERE WAS STILL A WAY OUT, HE WAS ON THE BRINK OF DEFEAT, BUT NOT DEFEATED.

** NOW WITH THOSE TWO CONTRASTS IN V. 8 BEFORE US, LOOK AT V. 9 PLEASE WHERE WE'LL SEE OUR LAST TWO CONTRASTS.

B. READ V. 9. NOW THE GREEK VERB FOR PERSECUTED LIT. MEANS TO PURSUE, TO BE HUNTED, TO BE HOUNDED AND PAUL'S ADVERSARIES HUNTED HIM DAY AND NIGHT.

* PAUL WAS A MARKED MAN, A MAN HOUNDED BY THOSE WHO HATED HIM.

** HOWEVER THOUGH PAUL WAS HUNTED BY MEN HE WAS NEVER ABANDONED BY GOD.

*** FOR THOUGH HE WAS PERSECUTED, PAUL WAS NOT FORSAKEN BY HIS GOD WHICH MEANS: THE LORD NEVER DESERTED HIM, THE LORD NEVER ABANDONED HIM, THE LORD ALWAYS STOOD WITH HIM.

**** FOR PAUL SAID IN HIS LAST EPISTLE IN II TIMOTHY 4:16&17 –

V. 16 – AT MY FIRST DEFENSE NO ONE SUPPORTED ME, BUT ALL DESERTED ME; MAY IT NOT BE COUNTED AGAINST THEM.

V. 17 – BUT THE LORD STOOD WITH ME AND STRENGTHENED ME, SO THAT THROUGH ME THE PROCLAMATION MIGHT BE FULLY ACCOMPLISHED, AND THAT ALL THE GENTILES MIGHT HEAR; AND I WAS RESCUED OUT OF THE LION'S MOUTH.

1. AND BELOVED UNDERSTAND PAUL'S LORD NEVER LEFT HIM TO FACE AN IMPOSSIBLE DIFFICULTY ON HIS OWN. AS THE WRITER OF HEBREWS SAID IN HEBREWS 13:5&6 (QUOTE THEM)

* SO WE MAY FEEL LIKE WE ARE ALONE, IN A TRIAL OR PERSECUTION, BUT WE ARE NEVER ALONE, THE LORD GOES THROUGH THE FIRE WITH US AS HE DID WITH DANIEL IN THE LIONS DEN AND THE 3 HEBREWS CHILDREN IN THE FIERY FURNACE.

** THEN FINALLY, CONTRAST NO. 4 IS "STRUCK DOWN BUT NOT DESTROYED."

*** AND THE GREEK VERB TRANSLATED STRUCK DOWN LIT. MEANS KNOCKED DOWN BY A WEAPON, WHACKED OR TO BE THROWN DOWN AS IN A WRESTLING MATCH.

**** FURTHER IT MEANS LAID LOW, BULLIED, CAST OFF, REJECTED.

2. BUT THE WORD BUT IS USED AGAIN, BUT NOT DESTROYED. AND THE VERB DESTROYED IN THE GREEK LIT. MEANS LOST, KNOCKED OUT, RUINED OR KILLED.

* AND TO USE A BOXING ANALOGY, PAUL WAS KNOCKED DOWN, BUT NOT KNOCKED OUT. TO USE A WRESTLING ANALOGY, HE WAS PRESSED BUT NOT PINNED. TO USE A RUNNING ANALOGY, HE WAS FALLING BEHIND, BUT NOT LEFT BEHIND.

** WE COULD SAY HE WAS OFTEN FELLED, BUT NEVER FINISHED.

*** PAUL HAD VICTORY, NOT BY ESCAPING ADVERSITY, BUT BY ENDURING IT BY GOD'S POWER AND STRENGTH.

3. IT WAS NEVER PAUL'S STRENGTH, IT WAS GOD'S, FOR PAUL'S WEAKNESS WAS THE OCCASION FOR GOD'S POWER.

* PAUL REMAINED A CLAY POT AND A CRACKED POT AT THAT, AS HIS CRUMBLING FLESH ALLOWED THE POWER OF GOD TO SHINE SO BRIGHTLY.

IN WRAP UP: (1) PHILIP HUGHES IN HIS COMMENTARY ON II CORINTHIANS SAID AND I QUOTE: "TO BE AT THE END OF MAN'S RESOURCES IS NOT TO BE AT THE END OF GOD'S RESOURCES; ON THE CONTRARY, IT IS TO BE PRECISELY IN THE POSITION BEST SUITED TO PROVE AND BENEFIT FROM THEM, AND TO EXPERIENCE THE SURPLUS OF THE POWER OF GOD BREAKING THROUGH AND RESOLVING THE HUMAN DILEMMA." (END QUOTE) THAT'S RICH.

* AND THE TRUTH THAT HUGHES COMMUNICATES AND PAUL IN OUR TEXT TODAY IS, HIS TRIALS FOR THE GOSPEL CAUSED CRACKS IN HIM AS AN EARTHEN VESSEL, BUT THE VESSEL ITSELF REMAINED INTACT.

** FOR THE VESSEL IS HELD TOGETHER BY THE POWER OF DIVINE ADHESIVE OR DIVINE SUPER GLUE, BUT THE LIGHT THAT SHINES THROUGH THESE DIVINE CRACKS IS NONE OTHER THAN THE LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL, THE LIGHT OF JESUS CHRIST.

*** BELIEVER, GOD USES CRACKED POTS. WE ARE JARS OF CLAY FOR THE GOSPEL. AND YES WE GET DOWN AT TIMES, WE GET KNOCKED DOWN BUT NOT KNOCKED OUT.

**** AND THE LIFE APPLICATION COMMENTARY ON I AND II CORINTHIANS MAKES A GREAT APPLICATION AT THIS POINT, IT SAYS AND I QUOTE.

2. "PAUL REMINDS US THAT THOUGH WE MAY THINK WE ARE AT THE END OF THE ROPE, WE ARE NEVER AT THE END OF HOPE. OUR PERISHABLE BODIES ARE SUBJECT TO SIN AND SUFFERING, BUT GOD NEVER ABANDONS US. BECAUSE CHRIST HAS WON THE VICTORY OVER DEATH, WE HAVE ETERNAL LIFE. ALL OUR RISKS, HUMILIATIONS, AND TRIALS ARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHRIST TO DEMONSTRATE HIS POWER AND PRESENCE IN AND THROUGH US. WE MUST ASK OURSELVES, "COULD I HANDLE THE SUFFERING AND OPPOSITION THAT PAUL DID?" THE AMERICAN SUCCESS SYNDROME IS A GREAT ENEMY OF EFFECTIVE MINISTRY. FROM AN EARTHLY

PERSPECTIVE, PAUL WAS NOT VERY SUCCESSFUL. LIKE PAUL, WE MUST CARRY OUT OUR MINISTRY, LOOKING TO GOD FOR STRENGTH. WHEN OPPOSITION, SLANDER, OR DISAPPOINTMENT THREATEN TO ROB YOU OF THE VICTORY, REMEMBER THAT NO ONE CAN DESTROY WHAT GOD HAS ACCOMPLISHED THROUGH YOU.”

* FINALLY, OUR WORLD AND OUR CULTURE ARE CRYING OUT FOR BELIEVERS WHO CAN GLORY IN THEIR WEAKNESSES, RATHER THAN CONCLUDE THAT TOUGH TIMES AND HARD TIMES AND TRIALS ARE A SIGN THAT GOD IS TELLING THEM TO GIVE UP. NO, BY GOD’S GRACE WE ARE KNOCKED DOWN, BUT NOT KNOCKED OUT, PRESSED BUT NOT PINNED, FALLING BEHIND, BUT NEVER LEFT BEHIND.

** AND MAY WE SEE OURSELVES AS JARS OF CLAY, CRACKED POTS WITH GREAT TREASURE WITHIN US. MAY WE NOT HIDE THE TREASURE THROUGH THINKING MORE HIGHLY OF OURSELVES. (LET’S PRAY)