



Text

Second Corinthians 4:7-12

Topic

We may be earthen vessels,
but we contain a great treasure
that sustains us through even the worst of times

Title

“The Treasure’s All Mine”

Apparently a lot of people are looking for COVID19 help and hope from an unexpected source: pandemic feature films.

One entertainment reporter glibly wrote, “With the world falling apart courtesy of the coronavirus, I have prepared a list of enjoyable pandemic movies.”

The Andromeda Strain, Outbreak, World War Z, 12 Monkeys, and The Omega Man are trending.

One article listed 79 pandemic movies to, as they put it, “binge watch during quarantine.”

Contagion is now the second most popular film in the Warner Bros. catalog, up from #270 last year.

1 of 13

Second Corinthians 4:7-12

“The Treasure’s All Mine”



Is it helping? Are people finding hope? It seems not:

- A CDC report reveals what they label a “considerably elevated” mental health toll from COVID19 stresses. “More than 2 in 5 US residents report struggling with mental or behavioral health issues associated with the COVID19 pandemic, including anxiety, depression, increased substance use, and suicidal thoughts.”
- In October, 37% of adults said they felt hopeless more than half of the days in the past week.

The World Health Organization says, “Bereavement, isolation, loss of income, and fear are triggering mental health conditions or exacerbating existing ones. Many people may be facing increased levels of alcohol and drug use, insomnia, and anxiety.”

In April, a survey concluded that two out of five participants reported a decline in mental health since COVID19’s inception. Anxiety, stress, fear of unemployment, being less busy, and working from home were the top five reasons for this decline among the two-thousand individuals surveyed.

COVID19 isn’t the only killer in the pandemic:

- In October abcnews reported that “predictions of more suicides... during COVID19 are coming true.”
- In Japan, more people died from suicide in October than from COVID19 in all of 2020.
- A Hopkins-Bloomberg article said, “The pandemic has created a convergence of suicide risk factors that need a public health response.

Maybe people are looking to the movies because there is no place else to go:



- The World Health Organization is reporting that “the COVID19 pandemic has disrupted or halted critical mental health services in 93% of countries worldwide.”
- The Pan American Health Organization says care for mental health issues is inadequately funded in 27 countries of the Americas.
- That same organization reports that one in five health workers is experiencing symptoms of depression.

Why aren't people flocking to local churches?

Oh, that's right: **The churches were officially closed.** If they were 'allowed' to be open, they were treated like a big-box retailer rather than the temple of God on earth. Limited attendance... Mandated to meet outdoors... No singing allowed... Masks & distancing required.

I'm talking to believers now

We are not exempt from the negative effects of the new not-so-normal. With our love of Christian fellowship, we may be even more impacted, psychologically, than others.

I want to suggest a strategy, from God's Word, by which you both *receive* and *render* help and hope.

The passage is Second Corinthians 4:7-12. The apostle Paul describes those who are in Christ as having a great “treasure” which ought to supply you in any situation, including a global pandemic.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 Inventory The Treasure You Have Received,** and **#2 Invest The Treasure You Have To Render.**

#1 - Inventory The Treasure You Have Received (v7)

3 of 13

Second Corinthians 4:7-12

“The Treasure's All Mine”



Let's start by talking about the church for just a moment. Way back in the beginning of all this, churches were told they could not meet, except with a skeleton crew to produce live-streaming content.

It led to a sort of divide among believers as many promoted not gathering in-person as a positive

"The church has left the building" would be a way to describe their giddiness.

How is that working out? According to Barna:

- One-third of practicing Christians have stopped attending entirely.
- Only 50% say they have live-streamed their church services sometime during a four-week period.
- Another 34% are digital church-hopping. What's wrong with that? We have a tendency to listen to what we want to hear, rather than what God has to say to us.

In late August, the Christian Chronicle reported that "1 in 5 churches are facing permanent closure within 18 months due to COVID19 shutdowns."

Live-streaming is a great resource. It isn't church, however, anymore that watching *Hawaii Five-O* at home in your bathing suit is a vacation.

We shouldn't expect nonbelievers to understand why our gatherings are essential. What we can expect is for them to think we are a COVID19 breeding ground that will undermine efforts to halt the pandemic.

The church is not this, or any other, stick and stucco structure. *We can* gather anywhere. It is wrong, however, to insist that the church is not a building.

When we gather, we collectively 'construct' the temple of God on the earth, as living stones, in a way we are not when we do not gather

4 of 13

Second Corinthians 4:7-12

"The Treasure's All Mine"



- Equipping the saints and exercising our spiritual gifts are just two of the reasons our gathering together is essential.
- Jesus' description of Himself in the Revelation as walking in the midst of the gathered church is a powerful argument for gathering.

Don't misunderstand me. We are *not* saying that you *must* attend a gathering. COVID19, and the seasonal flu for that matter, are serious health concerns. It's up to you to attend or not, depending on your circumstances. It's your decision.

Whatever a Christian decides to do, however, it should be with the understanding that our meetings are essential. Like a pirate, we should be "Disinclined to acquiesce to our Governor's requests."

Let's get into our text.

2Co 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us.

"But we have this treasure." It is referring back to verses one through six, where Paul describes his ministry of preaching the Gospel. Albert Barnes summarizes most commentators when he writes, "The treasure [is] the Gospel; the rich and invaluable truths which they were called to preach to others."

When I hear the word "treasure," I'm always reminded of J.R.R. Tolkien's description of the dwarf treasure upon which slept the mighty dragon, Smaug. "There he lay, a vast red-golden **dragon**, fast asleep... Beneath him, under all his limbs and his huge coiled tail, and about him on all sides stretching away across the unseen floors, lay countless piles of precious things, gold wrought and unwrought, gems and jewels, and silver red-stained in the ruddy light."



The Gospel can seem like that - a vast "treasure" in general. We need to break it down - to inventory it, so to speak.

Paul gave us an inventory in another letter

The passage is in chapter one of Ephesians. You can turn there if you'd like; I'm going to list them one at a time. There are at least 10. They are called "blessings," and we can think of them as the particulars of our treasure.

#1 You are "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love" (v4). Don't get sidetracked by the Doctrine of Election and thereby miss your treasure. Before sin entered the world, God had a plan for saving you. It includes completing the work He starts in you.

In a big-picture sense, God remains in charge. His plan for the world remains intact.

More importantly, His plan for you remains intact

#2 You are "predestined to adoption" (v5). Don't get tripped-up by "predestination." It means that *after* you receive Jesus, you are destined to be like Him. The treasure here is your "adoption." You have become like a son or a daughter to God the Father. You have full, immediate access to God.

Quarantines... Closures... Lockdowns. None of them affect you being able to immediately approach your Heavenly Father. You're never alone.

#3 We are "accepted in the Beloved" (v6). When the Father looks at you, He sees you in Christ. He loves you exactly the way He loves His only begotten Son.

If being loved is important for your mental state, then, Wow!

6 of 13

Second Corinthians 4:7-12

"The Treasure's All Mine"



#4 You have “redemption through His blood” (v7). You were a slave to sin and deserved eternal death. You couldn’t buy or earn your way out of it. The price for your freedom was the precious blood of Jesus.

You were saved to serve. The measures that have been, and still are, being implemented to combat the spread of COVID19 tend to get you focused on yourself. By new-nature, you are others oriented.

#5 You have “forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (v7). You still sin, but forgiveness is assured by grace. You shouldn’t sin that grace might abound; but when you sin, grace does abound.

Sin is a greater ‘pandemic,’ affecting every man, woman, and child. Your sins are forgiven, and you can declare to others, with authority, that if they receive Jesus, their sins will be forgiven.

#6 You have an abundance of “wisdom and prudence [understanding]” (v8). You have a new, heavenly perspective on earthly matters. You understand that human wisdom is foolish, while the foolishness of God is wisdom.

There’s a LOT to talk about during this pandemic. You have the Gospel to talk about. Bring Jesus into your conversations.

#7 You know “the mystery of His will” (v9). People like to blame God by saying, “God moves in mysterious ways.” In the Bible, a “mystery” is something God has revealed. One commentator said, “In a fallen world of war, suffering and disease; a sinful world where bad things happen to good people; God has revealed His solution to us.”

What is the solution? God is longsuffering, not willing any should perish without eternal life in Christ.



#8 You have “obtained an eternal inheritance” (v11). First Corinthians 2:9 reads, “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.” Some of those preparations can be seen in the last two chapters of the Bible.

Your hope is in the future - written in advance by God. When we’re talking about a disease that kills, the afterlife is on the table.

#9 You are “sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise” (v13). In Bible times, ownership was proven by sealing something with a wax imprint. When you are saved, God the Holy Spirit came to reside in you. He “seals” you as belonging to God. You are secure in your salvation.

#10 You have “the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*” (v19). The power of God that raised Jesus from the dead is the power you have through the indwelling Holy Spirit to “do all things through Christ Who strengthens you.” You are enabled, powerfully, to obey God.

There are a few other treasures in the first chapter of Ephesians. You might list them for yourself. And the list there is certainly not exhaustive. Treasure is scattered throughout the Bible for you to discover.

The current pandemic is a good time to make withdrawals from your treasure. Take all you need, because it is unlimited.

Loneliness... Depression... Anxiety... Worry... Fear... Suicidal ideations. All these and other mental effects of the quarantines, the lockdowns, the restrictions, are ‘treated’ by your spiritual blessings in the heavenlies.



Don't let "that great dragon, Satan," keep you from your treasure (Revelation 12:9).

#2 - Invest The Treasure You Have To Render (v8-12)

It's Christmastime. Every gift we give or get ought to remind us of God's "indefinable gift" (First Corinthians 9:15).

Jesus was given by God the Father... Jesus freely gave Himself... After ascending into Heaven, Jesus gave His church the gift of God the Holy Spirit... God the Holy Spirit gives every believer one or more spiritual gift(s).

Do you see a pattern of giving?

There is a two-verse parable that is often misunderstood. It's the Parable of the Pearl.

Mat 13:45 "... the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls,

Mat 13:46 who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

At first hearing, you might conclude that Jesus was the pearl, on account of His preciousness. That would make believers the merchants, giving their all for Him.

As we used to say, "**Not!**" If you are the merchant, you are contributing to your salvation. Salvation is no longer by grace.

You are the pearl of great price

Jesus is the merchant. He gave all - He gave His life - to purchase your salvation.

9 of 13

Second Corinthians 4:7-12

"The Treasure's All Mine"



God **gives**. You are to give, to others, out of your treasure.

That's pretty obvious (although it's good to be reminded). What isn't so obvious is the way you share your treasure. I should say, the way God shares His treasure in you with others.

He does it by your brokenness. Let's see if we can get a handle on what that means. We can start with the words in verse seven we haven't mentioned: "In earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us."

The idea here is that the light is hidden within the clay pot. Almost all Bible commentators believe Paul is thinking about the Old Testament story of Gideon and his victory over the Midianites, recorded in Judges chapter seven.

Outnumbered by about 450 to 1, Gideon's army nevertheless prevailed. Each of Gideon's men had only a trumpet and a clay pot with torches hidden inside the pots.

When they blew the trumpets and broke the pots so that the torches could shine, the Midianite army was routed.

Paul was referencing that history to illustrate that light can only be revealed by us if we are broken.

How are we "broken?"

2Co 4:8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair;

2Co 4:9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed -

You can count on being "pressed," "perplexed," "persecuted," and "pounded" in ways that nonbelievers are not

10 of 13

Second Corinthians 4:7-12

"The Treasure's All Mine"



Definitions are good, but all these terms can have multiple meanings. Just know that in addition to the effects of COVID19 on everyone, *you have additional, unique stressors because the world hates Jesus.*

On account of your treasure, you can overcome being “crushed,” being in “despair,” being “forsaken,” and being “destroyed.” It’s not positive-thinking, or psychotherapy. It is truth for you to believe.

As you are “pressed,” “perplexed,” “persecuted” and “pounded,” nonbelievers will see that you are not “crushed,” “in despair,” “forsaken,” or “destroyed.” Although they are spiritually “blinded” (v4), they are enabled by God to see a light within you - a supernatural source of strength that can only come from God - which keeps and sustains you.

**In the things that break you
the Person Who blesses you is revealed**

There is a prerogative:

2Co 4:10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.

One Bible paraphrase translates this, *“In any and every circumstance where there would normally be a reaction that reveals self, there is instead a reaction that reveals the character of Jesus Christ.”*

E. Stanley Jones said, *“The early Christians did not say, in dismay, ‘Look what the world has come to,’ but, in delight, ‘Look what has come to the world!’”*

It’s really too bad we overused the phrase,

11 of 13

Second Corinthians 4:7-12

“The Treasure’s All Mine”



What Would Jesus Do?

What is “the dying of the Lord Jesus?” I see it as His whole *humility* and *humiliation* in His coming to earth as a the God-man, setting aside the prerogatives of His deity, being the Suffering Servant, doing only what His Father told Him to do, being led by the Holy Spirit, and submitting willingly to His cruel death on the Cross at Calvary.

There is no possible situation you or I could ever be in that would be a worse humiliation than Jesus experienced during His first coming

We CAN respond the way Jesus would, because we have the Holy Spirit within us. When we do, people see Jesus and not us. If you “[bear] about in your body the death of Jesus Christ, [then He will be revealed].”

2Co 4:11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

2Co 4:12 So then death is working in us, but life in you.

Christians who shine through this pandemic baffle the strategy of the god of this age who has blinded nonbelievers. The light of the gospel gets through.

Speaking of pandemics... Do you know why people say, “God bless you,” after someone sneezes? I looked it up on the Google.

One of the symptoms of the bubonic plague was coughing and sneezing. It is believed that Pope Gregory I (Gregory the Great) suggested saying “God bless you” after a person sneezed in hopes that this prayer would protect them from an otherwise certain death.

Truth is, God *has* “blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ” (Ephesians 1:1).



"God's blessed you" is our help, and our hope.

13 of 13

Second Corinthians 4:7-12

"The Treasure's All Mine"

