

# Broken Jars

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] following the fire in Notre Dame Cathedral the other week the French Minister for Culture was reported by the BBC for saying that the most precious treasures belonging to the church have been saved the most precious treasures of the church that phrase reminded me of a story that took place approximately 1,000 years before Notre Dame Cathedral was built it was the year 258 and the Roman Emperor Valerian was busy persecuting the Christian church he ordered that all clergy be put to death and gave order to the imperial treasury that they had power to confiscate all money and possessions that belonged to the church the Pope Sixtus II had just ordained a young Spanish theologian by the name of Lawrence and he had appointed him Archdeacon of Rome this put Lawrence in charge of the church's property and responsibility for its outreach well it was August the 6th the year 258 and Valerian the Emperor captured the Pope during a worship service and had him beheaded then he set his sights on the young Lawrence who had been appointed as the Archdeacon of Rome the Emperor demanded that Lawrence turned over all the treasures of the church and he gave him three days to round all the treasures together

Lawrence knew that he had to act swiftly he managed to round up all the chalices and vessels and pieces of silver communion plates all of those sort of things as quickly as he could everything he could lay his hands on he sold the lot and distributed the money among the most vulnerable and the poorest people that he could find that third day came and he approached the Emperor's Palace he walked in through the door completely empty handed the Emperor demanded the treasure of the church at which point Lawrence gestured beyond the door that he had just walked through and pointed outside where he had gathered crowds and crowds of ordinary broken people these he said to the Emperor are the treasures of the church the church is truly rich far richer

Emperor than you will ever be the Emperor didn't like that very much and he gave instruction to have him burned alive that same day but it's a story that reminds us very powerfully that the church in the widest broadest sense is unfathomably rich but not in the way that the Emperor and just about everybody outside of the church since the Emperor might think Paul puts it like this we have this treasure in jars of clay we're wasting away we are broken people every single one of us we're dying we're on the course to die we're weak we're frail we're broken but there is something inside that is priceless we are all broken we're wasting away everything is broken that phrase broken home even the phrase broken marriage broken family those those are phrases that ought not to be singled out for a particular situation they apply to everyone every person is broken every marriage is broken every home is broken every family is broken every business is broken every church is broken every society is broken now that's not being bleak it's not being morbid that's reality the wonder of the gospel is that it tells us how in our brokenness in our weakness whatever that looks like the spirit of God who is eternal chooses to live within us very often

Christianity is talked about as though it were a belief system you believe this that and the other a set of theological propositions doctrinal claims and that's what makes you a Christian or maybe as a kind of pattern of behaviour the things that you do if you live a morally good life if you're engaged with a church if you're an active member of a church if you live your faith out in those practical ways that's that's Christianity all of those things kind of get sort of close to what being a Christian is but they miss the thing that is at the very heart and it is this that to be a Christian is not so much just what you believe or even what you do it is a state of being a state of being which which means that the spirit of the living God actually lives inside you treasure inside a jar of clay elsewhere

Paul says that our bodies are like temples for God's Holy Spirit God himself lives in us John Wesley the founder of the Methodist church was fond of saying that his favourite definition of a Christian was actually the title of a book written by Henry Schubler in 1691 the life of God in the soul of man that's a breathtaking thought God the author of the universe actually has a living presence not just around about you but in you I recently re-read what is considered by many to be something of a classic of the 20th century a book by Dr

[ 7 : 52 ] Martin Lloyd Jones called Spiritual Depression Martin Lloyd Jones was a medical GP he went on to become a pastor at Westminster Chapel in London for over three decades that book that he wrote Spiritual Depression was written nearly half a century ago now and putting aside some of the language that he uses honestly it could have been written today because it speaks into the realities of life and its struggles and its brokenness and its pains today as much as in any age his key idea was this that no matter how we as human beings might feel in other words whatever our circumstances may be whatever our state of mind our emotional state might be whatever that might be going on inside us whether we're talking depression as the title of his book or anxiety or fear or exhaustion whatever that might be that our feelings would say to us he says that as a

Christian you have a different identity because God is in you the spirit you have within you is not a spirit of fear it is something radically different and we need to be reminded of that you are a child of God and God himself lives in you that treasure in a jar of clay and he goes on to say at length if you are a Christian you need to be reminded of this and remind yourself of it time and time again because the reality is very different to what your feelings will tell you and what your culture and what your circumstances will tell you in a sense you are no longer ordinary if you are a Christian believer well you are ordinary but he who lives within you is not now that doesn't always correspond with the way we are feeling emotionally mentally psychologically and that is all the reason said Lloyd

Jones why we need to remind ourselves that we have this very peculiar relationship with God that God isn't just believed in God lives within us and so he goes on to say that we spend too much time listening to ourselves instead we need to preach to ourselves ourselves rather than paying too much attention to what our feelings our thoughts our emotions our circumstances are saying to us we need to preach to ourselves he said this we must not think of ourselves as ordinary people we are not natural men and women we are born again God has given his holy spirit and he is the spirit of power and love and of a sound mind therefore to those who are particularly prone to spiritual depression through timorous fear of the future

I say in the name of God and in the words of the apostle stir up the gift talk to yourself remind yourself of what is true of you instead of allowing the future and thoughts of it to grip you talk to yourself remind yourself of who you are and what you are and of what spirit is within you and having reminded yourself of the character of the spirit you will be able to go steadily forward fearing nothing living in the present ready for the future with one desire only to glorify him who gave his all for you next week as a church we begin a series that will be running through May June and July called the fruitful life we're going to be looking at discipleship and the fruit of the spirit what it means to pay very careful attention to that treasure that is within us it's not inward looking it's not spiritual navel gazing it's putting at the very centre of our thoughts that which is most precious the fact that the living God chooses to come and live within our brokenness is the very thing that transforms lives and makes mission happen and changes and transforms the world around us and over these coming weeks that's what we're going to be thinking about the treasure of the church this treasure that is in jars of clay we're right we're we're going to get out to us we're we're we're