

Treasure in Clay Pots

2 Corinthians 4:7-15

Preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 11-7-2021

Introduction: Why does God allow persecution to happen?

Every week I get reports from around the world of Christians who are fired from jobs, kidnapped, tortured, imprisoned, or executed. Open Doors states that an average of 13 Christians are martyred every day. In the first four months of this year there was an uptick in deaths in Nigeria, with 1400 Christians being killed, but generally speaking, about 13 a day. Christianity is advancing so quickly in many of these countries that Satan is doing everything he can to lash out against the church. We can understand why *demons* and humans *moved* by demons might be motivated to persecute the church, but why does *God* allow such sufferings? If God is all powerful (which He is), and if His providence covers everything in life including the wills of men (which it does), and if God deeply loves His people (which He does), why does God allow their suffering and persecution?

This past week I did a rough outline of 24 Biblical reasons why God allows the church to suffer and be persecuted.¹ And each of these reasons is totally consistent with God's love

¹ The following is a summary of the rough list I put together:

1. To promote maturity (James 1:2-4)
2. To promote endurance - the ability to turn adversity into spiritual prosperity (James 1:2-4).
3. To promote wisdom - the ability to relate truth to experience (James 1:5-8).
4. To produce humility (James 1:9-11)
5. To provide the opportunity for rewards (James 1:12; Matt. 5:10-12)
6. To prove the genuineness of our faith (1 Pet. 1:6-8).
7. To manifest the fruit of the Spirit (2 Cor. 4:11; Gal. 5:22-23)
8. To provide opportunities to witness for Christ (1 Pet. 3:15; Phil 1:12)
9. To learn contentment (Phil 4:11).
10. To help others who suffer (2 Cor. 1:3-24)
11. To rebuke believers guilty of pride and spiritual cowardice (1 Cor. 4:9-16).
12. To demonstrate the power of God in our lives (2 Cor. 11:24-33; John 9:2).
13. To learn obedience to the will of God (Heb. 5:8).
14. To vindicate the character of God before Satan (Job 1:6-12).
15. To vindicate Job before Satan (Job 1:6-12).
16. To instruct the believer in the holiness of God's character (Job 42:5-6).
17. We live in a sin-cursed world (Rom. 8:22; Gen. 3)
18. Others possess a sinful nature (Rom. 7:7-25)
19. We are identified with Christ and are therefore hated by Satan and the world system (John 15:18-19; 1 Pet. 5:8; Col. 1:24)
20. We are identified with other members of the body who hurt (1 Cor. 12:26)

for us. James 1 says that God uses these things to promote maturity, endurance, wisdom, humility, and opportunities for eternal rewards. In fact, the rewards in heaven are so great that many in the early church hoped they would be martyred. By the time I had finished meditating on all 24 reasons, I could see why the theology of suffering that has developed in the underground church in China is much more Biblical than the Western view of suffering. We in the West try to do everything that we can to avoid suffering. We unduly shield our children from suffering. And I hope today to give you a tiny peak (just one reason) into why this may not be the best thing to do.

Now, I will hasten to say that the fact that God uses persecution for our good does not mean we should be passive about it. Far from it. God even authorizes us to pray the imprecatory Psalms against our persecutors. Our church has been anything but passive.

I. Central theme is verse 7

But this morning we are going to look at a very interesting reason for why God allows persecution. It is given in the passage we just read, and we will begin with the theme verse, which is verse 7. It says,

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

A. The treasure (v. 7a) of light (v. 6)

There is debate among scholars on what the treasure consists of, but most think that the word “this” in the phrase “this treasure” settles the question. I agree. Paul is referring back to a treasure he has just talked about in verse 6. Verse 6 says,

For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The same God who said in Genesis 1, “Let there be light” and there was light, has shone the light of His Gospel into our dark hearts. That means that our new life is just as miraculous a work of God as the creation of light in Genesis 1. And that grace which brings light enables us to know God and to be repeatedly ushered into face to face fellowship with Jesus. That Gospel light is a treasure of infinite value. Everyone one of you has got that treasure inside of you.

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- 21. We sometimes need discipline for our sins (1 Cor. 11:28-34; Heb. 12:4-11)
 - 22. To showcase the supernatural power of God’s grace and therefore glorify God (2 Cor. 4:7-15; 1 Peter 2:12; 4:12-14)
 - 23. To spread the Gospel (Acts 8:1-8)
 - 24. To make the church more like Christ (Rom. 8:29; John 15:20-21)

B. A treasure of light hidden

And commentators point out that this brilliant light of verse 6 only shines *inside* of our hearts initially. It is hidden. It can't be seen unless the lid of the clay pot is taken off or unless there are cracks in the pot to let the light shine through. When others notice the power and light that transforms us, they won't credit the changes to us. After all, all we are is a clay pot. Instead, they will credit those changes to God. But let's focus first on the fact that the light is hidden in a clay pot.

When people want to hide a key to their house for guests to find, they try to hide it in an unlikely place - perhaps even a grungy place like under the door mat, in the rain spout, or in the dog house. Of course, burglars know all those so-called "unlikely" spots. But people don't hide their house key for the burglars, do they? No. They hide their key so that their *guests* can get in. In the same way, three times in this passage God says that His grace comes out of the pots in such a way that His elect will see it and come into possession of the same grace - or as verse 15 words it, so that the grace will spread to others. The light comes out of one clay pot and invades another and another and another clay pot.

C. We are clay pots (v. 7b)

What does it mean that we are earthen vessels (or as some translate it, clay pots)? The Amplified Bible draws out the meaning of verse 7 this way:

However, we possess this precious treasure [the divine Light of the Gospel] in [frail, human] vessels of earth, that the grandeur and exceeding greatness of the power may be shown to be from God and not from ourselves.

Our frailty is symbolized by calling us "earthen vessels" or clay pots. Clay pots that are not very impressive. Clay pots are drab, fragile, and easily broken. They have no life or strength of their own. They simply contain the light and power of God. And calling us earthen vessels is a beautiful metaphor of Christ's statement that without Christ we can do nothing.

D. God's purpose of hiding treasure in clay pots was to focus glory on God's grace (v. 7c)

But verse 7 goes on to say that God did it this way so that people would eventually glory in the treasure, not the pot. If you found a pot like that you would be impressed with the treasure inside, not with the pot, right? And in the same way, when others see us (when they see the pot) glowing from grace, or when they see His transforming power in our lives, God alone will get the glory. The NKJV of verse 7 says, "that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us." That's a key phrase - God wants others to see that the power that has changed us is *of God and not of us*. How we handle suffering is *of God and not of us*. How we handle blessings is *of God and not of us*.

Here's the thing: People don't tend to notice the treasure that is in the clay pot unless the lid is open (in other words, unless we boldly and verbally declare the Gospel) or unless there are cracks in the jar (in other words, something that showcases God's supernatural grace without words). Paul was an open book since he spoke about the Gospel all the time.

He was always taking the lid off the jar. That is one way that the glorious light of his Gospel is made known. But in this passage he is going to list a number of other ways in which the reality of our Christianity is going to shine through the cracks of our frailty.

This was the theme of the Sermon on the Mount - Christ called us to live in such a way that people could see *God* when they see our good works and therefore glorify our Father in heaven. When they see us loving our enemies, they know that no mere human could do that - that there had to be something authentic about our message of the Gospel. How else could they explain that these Christians bless when they are cursed? How else could they explain that these Christians are willing to die rather than to deny Jesus? The non-elect cannot understand it. All they see is a clay pot. But when clay pots shine forth God's treasure into the lives of the as-yet-unsaved-elect, it impacts them; it draws them; it makes them hunger for the same. And God has willed to use the sufferings brought on the church in a way that none of those sufferings will be wasted.

II. Supporting points

So with that as background, let's look at his supporting points for the theme given in verse 7. He gives nine supporting points before reiterating his main theme in verse 15.

A. Hard pressed, but not crushed (v. 8a)

First, in verse 8 he says, "We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed." That is a testimony to grace. Paul might have preferred not to be hard-pressed on every side, but God allowed it in order to showcase the reality of the Gospel's transformation of Paul. And because people could see that Paul was the real deal, they believed the Gospel despite the danger of associating with a man who was being hammered on every side by opposition.

And down through history there have been many people who have been hard pressed, yet the Gospel leaked out of them so powerfully that God used them to reach many. I'll just give one example. I could have used Ethiopia, where I grew up, but you've already heard a lot of those stories, so I'll use the country of Nepal.

In 1960 there were only 25 Christians in Nepal. Today it is estimated that there is somewhere between 2 million and 3 million Christians in that country. That's astounding. In 61 years the church has grown from 25 people to 2-3 million people. And God has used very creative means to accomplish this - often the direct result of persecution. The blood of the martyrs truly is the seed of the church. You might not think that persecution will grow the church, but it does - and Nepal is a beautiful testimony of all the points in this sermon - people seeing beyond the clay pots to the power of God's grace - a treasure that they too can experience.

I'll just tell one strand of that story of Nepal. An unbeliever from Nepal was studying in a university in the states and was converted and discipled before he went back to his country. When this man went back to Nepal he planted a church and was immediately imprisoned for his faith along with his tiny congregation. The conditions in the prison were enough to drive some people insane. If you think that American prisons are bad (and they

are), they are paradise compared to Nepal's prisons. But though this man was hard pressed by difficulties every day (including persecution from fellow-inmates), God's grace kept him from having a crushed spirit and it made fellow-prisoners wonder what was different about him. They could see God's grace leaking through the cracks, but when they asked him a reason of the hope that was in him. Why do you have hope in this hopeless place? Well, he opened the lid of his clay pot and preached the Gospel so that they could see it clearly. And numerous prisoners became Christians and were transformed. A church was formed in that prison. Well, the prison officials could see that he was trouble, so they transferred him. And during the time that he was imprisoned, he was transferred to 14 different prisons and planted 14 churches representing every language and ethnic group in Nepal. When those prisoners were released from prison, they too were clay pots showcasing the marvelous treasure of God's grace in ways that made the Gospel spread like crazy. Anyway, after 14 prisons could not crush his spirits (which is what demons try to do), this man was finally sent to an insane asylum. Talk about being hard pressed on every side! But he was not crushed. During his time in the insane asylum the Lord used him to cast out many demons and to heal many diseases. And as a result, another church was planted.

What happens with *you* when *you* are hard pressed? Is it only a clay pot that shows? Or do people see the light of the Gospel when your shell is cracked and you are pushed around? How you react to the pressures of life showcases whether you are merely a clay pot or whether you are a clay pot with priceless treasure of God's powerful grace within you. Do we exhibit the supernatural?

B. Perplexed, but not in despair (v. 8b)

Another crack in Paul's clay pot that allowed people to get a glimpse of the treasure within him was that Paul didn't respond to difficult providences with despair. He was puzzled and perplexed by what God was doing, but it never made him lose His trust. This too showcased the fact that Paul lived by grace rather than by his fleshly abilities. He says that he was "perplexed, but not in despair."

William Carey was a missionary who had numerous setbacks and yet handled them in faith. We don't know if his great fire was started by arson or some other means. He had plenty of enemies. But whatever the source, that fire could have led him to despair because years and years of work went up in flames. You see, Carey was not only a missionary but was also an extremely skilled linguist. He had worked for years on translation work in India. He had various Indian translations which were ready to print. He had the Kanarese New Testament, two large Old Testament books in Sanskrit. He had made a Bengali dictionary, a Telugu Grammar, a Punjabi grammar, and the magnum opus of his linguistic life - a well advanced Dictionary of Sanskrit. And he had brought together all of these manuscripts to have them type cast. And on March 12, 1812 all of that was burned up in a fire along with the newly developed Tamil and Chinese type. They didn't have copy machines in those days, so even the originals were lost. Carey said, "Nothing was saved but the presses. This is a heavy blow, as it will stop our printing the Scriptures for a long time." Now, does that make any sense? Why would God allow years of work by a skilled linguist to be burned up? Doesn't God care about missions? Doesn't God care about the wasted years of effort? Well,

Carey was convinced that when God takes things away, it is for the best, and He submitted. He was *perplexed* by God's providence, but He did not despair.

On the day of the fire Carey wrote. "God will no doubt bring good out of this evil and make it promote our interests." It was a devastating blow, yet he had faith in God's Providence. On the same day Carey's colleague, Marshman, wrote:

...[this is] "another leaf in the ways of Providence, calling for the exercise of faith in Him whose Word, firm as the pillars of heaven, has decreed that all things shall work together for good to them that love God. Be strong therefore in the Lord. He will never forsake the work of His hands."

He much later discovered God's reason for this perplexing providence. This fire so saddened and stirred the hearts of scholars and others in England that the whole of Britain focused on their missionary efforts in the newspapers and magazines, and money and workers began to pour into India. And the translation work multiplied far faster than it would have without the fire. Carey was in total submission to God's will. He knew that God didn't need his labors anyway. But this man, though perplexed by God's providence, had faith and got right back to work. The fact that Satan couldn't get any reaction out of Carey other than perplexity and renewed faith must have been a disappointment to Satan. Like Paul, Carey showcased the fact that it was the treasure of the true Gospel at work in his life.

C. Persecuted, but not forsaken (v. 9a)

In verse 9 Paul goes on to say, "persecuted, but not forsaken." One of my close friends (in an underground country that I won't name) sensed a special measure of God's presence as the bones in his feet were being broken one by one by the police, and that night as he was standing with his arms stretched above him to a pole and his body arched forward to make his back ache and he was shivering in the freezing rain, he prayed to God, and he said that it felt as if God was lifting him and warming him and he had a great night's rest. There were other times when he didn't sense God's *miraculous* presence, but he knew by faith that God was indeed with him. And that knowledge of His presence comforted him. And he saw God's invisible hand at work in so many ways during his stay in prison. He had led his cellmates to Christ but didn't dare baptize them because they were constantly being watched, and he knew that every one of them could be severely beaten for being baptized and he didn't want to jeopardize them at this point. But it was time for him to leave and he told his friends that he wanted to baptize them right then. At that moment the lights went out and the backup generator didn't come on. It gave him a few minutes to baptize everyone, and when the lights came back on they were all back in their places rejoicing in God's invisible hand at work in even the power outage. When you recognize His invisible hand in the small providences around you it can bring encouragement just like this tangible and audible presence did.

But many persecuted and tortured Christians have told me what an encouragement it is to know that the Western Church has not forsaken them, but regularly lifts them up in prayer. We will be having a special prayer focus at the tables to pray for the persecuted church and ask God to sustain them and make them to triumph in life and in death. But I am glad that God has stirred this church up to pray every single week for the persecuted. We may be facing persecution ourselves before we know it.

D. Struck down, but not destroyed (v. 9b)

In the next phrase in verse 9 Paul says, “struck down, but not destroyed.” The word for “struck down” can refer to being laid low by the blow of a weapon. Paul had been beaten with rods three times (that would lay you low), had been scourged with 39 lashes on five different occasions, and was stoned once. Chapter 11 gives all kinds of other horrendous experiences that had struck him down. He was definitely a testimony to the fact that being beaten to the ground does not mean you are defeated or destroyed. And countless Christians have proven their unbeatable spirits in the face of torture.

If you read Foxe’s book of Martyrs you will see numerous accounts of people being struck down and even martyred, yet through it all manifesting the victory of Jesus Christ, forgiveness of their persecutors, and love triumphing over hate. Richard Wurmbrand related how his tormentors tried endlessly to shake his faith while he was in prison. But through the tortures they saw an unbroken spirit that continued to love them and pray for their salvation. The supernatural treasure shines through the clay pots in so many ways under persecution.

E. Showcasing Christ’s suffering that His life might also shine (v. 10)

Verse 10 says, “always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” The word for “dying” is not the normal word for death (thanatos), but is nekrosis (νέκρωσις), and refers to the decaying *process* of dying. All of his sufferings were contributing to the deterioration of his body and his eventual death. But what is cool about this expression is that in both death and life Paul is identifying with Jesus, and He experiences his union with Jesus not just in his spirit, but *also in his body*. Let me break this apart.

Paul says that this supernatural display of Jesus was “always” experienced by Paul, not just once in awhile. That means that when we suffer, we too can always experience our sufferings via union with Jesus if we are committed to living by faith.

Second, he carried about Christ’s dying in his own body as well as carrying about Christ’s resurrection power in his own body. Note that he experienced this in his body, not just his spirit.

Third, the first clause refers to going through suffering with Christ’s presence and power. The second clause refers to the times he was strengthened and healed by Christ’s resurrection power. This means that both the suffering and the healing manifested the treasure of Christ’s grace to himself and to others. People could see the treasure - the supernatural light of God’s grace in *both* suffering and healing. People love the first part of Philippians 3:10, which says, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.” Yes, yes, yes. We want to know the power of His resurrection at work in us. But that is only half the equation. The full text of Philippians 3:10 says, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, *and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death.*” If he was going to suffer, he wanted to be able to experience the fellowship of Christ in his

sufferings. And he did. Knowing Jesus while dying and knowing Jesus in His resurrection power when healed - either way, it is experiencing life through union with Jesus. His doctrine of grace was not theoretical - it was *manifested* in his body.

And this too is the constant experience of persecuted people. Esther was a teenager kidnapped not too long ago by the Boko Haram branch of Isis in the country of Cameroon. She was gang raped and abused. Her life with ISIS was horrible. Many unbelievers commit suicide in those circumstances. As an unbeliever, *she too* had no hope. But somehow she managed to escape after she became pregnant. But when she came back to the village that she had been kidnapped from, she was a pariah. The other non-Christian villagers didn't trust her or accept her or accept her child. So she was all alone in the world - until she found Christ and was able to face her torments by Christ's power. It didn't happen instantly, but there was healing she experienced in her conversion with a constantly growing sense of Christ's grace sustaining her and changing her.

They had a cool ceremony for her at her conversion. They had her very literally write on pieces of paper her shame, suffering, sorrows, anger, pain, and doubts and then pin those pages to the bottom of a cross. That represented Jesus having suffered on her behalf and taking those things away. The elders then took the papers and burned them as part of their process of visually helping her to find peace with God. And she did. Even though her villagers continued to ostracize her, even though the outward torment had not ceased, the villagers began to notice that something had completely changed in her. As Open Doors stated in a recent posting,

This teenage mother who had endured unspeakable agony at the hands of a brutal regime was surprisingly—impossibly—at peace. “Some of those people who used to mock me now ask me my secret,” Esther says. “I tell them, ‘I forgave my enemies and now trust God to take vengeance in His time.’”

And I like the fact that she didn't ignore the need for vengeance, but she left that in God's hands. She asked *Him* to be her avenger. That freed her up to love. In any case, hers is another illustration of the light of that inward treasure being let out in two ways: 1) verbal testimony, 2) and a changed life. God's light was shining through the cracks of this clay pot.

F. Being delivered to death that Christ's life might be seen (v. 11)

In verse 11 Paul says, “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.” There it is again - in the flesh; in the clay pot. The clay pot is being cracked so that the treasure of Jesus might be manifested there. This is definitely not a Joel Osteen message of happiness, prosperity, and everything going well.

The “we” refers to all of us who live in Christ. Satan and his demonic hosts are always seeking our destruction and if they can use humans to achieve it, they will. Jesus said that if the world hated Him, it will hate us. So we ought not to be surprised by persecution from civil government, work, neighbors, and even unsaved family. Identification with Christ means identification with the One Whom the world, the flesh, and the devil are at war with. When they see the treasure, they are going to hate it.

In contrast, when the as-yet-unsaved-elect see that treasure, they yearn for it, are drawn to it, and desire to have the same supernatural attributes of the Holy Spirit that they see in us. So Paul says that this being delivered over to death is allowed by God so “that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.” You can’t spiritualize that. It is referring to seeing Christ’s life in our mortal flesh. This could refer to the healings and/or restored strength that he experienced, or it could simply be that God allows suffering so that others will see Christ in us.

I think a very vivid example of seeing Christ in those being delivered to death occurred in 2015. In this case they weren’t rescued (at least from one perspective), but they entered the glories of heaven (which is a far better kind of rescue). So it depends on how you look at it. But I want to focus upon *how* they faced death with joy, peace, and confidence. Their demeanor was a testimony to millions. You may remember the video which exhibited a parade of 21 terrorists dressed in black leading 21 Egyptian Christians dressed in orange jump suits along a beach to have their throats slit in Libya. The peace with which those men faced death ended up being a powerful witness to millions. And it was ISIS who recorded it and spread it. Within 36 hours of the executions, the Egyptian Bible Society put out a tract, “Two Rows by the Sea,” contrasting the two rows of men. Along with the Gospel message and the love of Christ being displayed, there was a poem celebrating these martyrs. Over 1.5 million copies were distributed throughout Egypt and had a major impact. Here is the poem at the end of the tract:

Two Rows by the Sea

Two rows of men walked the shore of the sea, On a day when the world’s tears would run free, One a row of assassins, who thought they did right, The other of innocents, true sons of the light, One holding knives in hands held high, The other with hands empty, defenceless and tied, One row of slits to conceal glaring-dead eyes, The other with living eyes raised to the skies, One row stood steady, pall-bearers of death, The other knelt ready, welcoming heaven’s breath, One row spewed wretched, contemptible threats, The other spread God-given peace and rest. A Question... Who fears the other? The row in orange, watching paradise open? Or the row in black, with minds evil and broken?

That’s a good question? Who fears whom? We need not fear martyrdom, but demons definitely fear fearless men like those 21 martyrs because demons know the priceless treasure and brilliant light that was in at least some of those clay pots.

G. Paul’s dying produces life in others (v. 12)

Verse 12 says, “So then death is working in us, but life in you.” In other words, the direct result of Paul’s dying was producing life in other people. Who wouldn’t want to die if you knew it would result in the salvation of others? Who wouldn’t want to suffer if the same result was achieved? Yes, people are being imprisoned and executed in Iran, Afghanistan, and other Muslim countries. But the stark contrast that the world witnesses between the followers of Allah (who have no hope, peace, joy, or supernatural love) and the followers of Jesus (who have it in spades) has made many *long* for the Gospel. Even secular researchers are estimating around 1 million believers in Iran, with many Christians who work there saying it is much higher.

Likewise, huge numbers of Muslims in Afghanistan are becoming believers for the same reason - they want to face death with the same confidence that believers do. They want the joy that believers have. I read about a recent young Afghan who had been watching a Christian program on Sat7 satellite TV. MissionBox says,

One viewer in Afghanistan — sick of the terror and fear imposed by radicals — called the ministry's counseling team, asking to meet Jesus in person.

"A week later, he called again — this time, with 25 young men crammed into his apartment, some having to stand in the bathroom because there was no other space, all eager to know more about Jesus," ...

The following week, there were 50 people jammed into the apartment, desperate to hear more.

Yes persecution was producing death in many Afghani Christians, but it was producing life in so many more. The cracks ISIS was making in the clay pots was exposing the glorious treasure of God's grace.

H. Faith in Jesus can't be shut up (v. 13)

Verse 13 shows another way in which the treasure shows through clay pots - boldness in witness; a faith in Jesus that simply cannot be shut up. It says,

And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak...

Are you a believer? Paul says, if you are, "therefore speak." Tell people about it. Share the good news. Faith in Christ drives these people to speak. Do we speak? That's actually taking the lid off the clay pot and being more bold.

In 1555, two Protestant pastors, Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley were burned at the stake together in Oxford. As they were dying, Latimer said to Ridley: "Be of good cheer, Master Ridley; and play the man. We shall this day, by God's grace, light up such a candle in England, as I trust, will never be put out." And it lit more than a candle; it lit the spreading bonfires of the Reformation in that nation.

Did people sometimes fear to speak and even recant their faith? Did they do the opposite of what Paul said in this verse? Yes. Thomas Cranmer was a case in point. He was a very important leader in the Reformation, and when the Roman Catholic Queen Mary (known as Bloody Mary) came to power, he was imprisoned. Under enormous pressure he caved in and signed a recantation of his faith, hoping to save his life. But he hugely regretted it. Mary wanted him dead anyway despite his recantation, and on the day he was to be burned at the stake he was given an opportunity to speak at St. Mary's Church, in Oxford. Everyone expected him to speak of his recantation and how sorry he was for leaving Rome. But he did the opposite. After confessing his sins to God and exhorting the people, he recanted his recantation and said that since his right hand had signed the recantation, he wanted his right hand to be burned first.

So Cranmer was burned at the stake on the same spot that Latimer and Ridley were, and as he was burning, he repeatedly thrust his right hand into the fire, saying, "This unworthy hand." And he boldly testified to the grace of Christ. As a clay pot filled with true treasure, he could not help but fulfill verse 13:

And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, “I believed and therefore I spoke,” we also believe and therefore speak...

Romans 10:9 gives one of the evidences of our salvation. It says,

that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

Treasure within eventually comes out of the mouth. After suffering in the flames, but before he died, Cranmer prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” John Foxe says that Cranmer, like Samson, overthrew more enemies in his death than in his life.

Why does God sometimes allow martyrdoms? To showcase a supernatural faith that cannot be shut up.

I. Even the death of the body is not final (v. 14)

Verse 14 ends these series of supporting points by stating that martyrdom can be a testimony to everyone that we know death is not final. We can face death with courage and boldness. In Ethiopia, where I grew up, more people came to faith through funerals than they did through any other form of outreach. The stark contrast between the despair of the wailing unbelieving Ethiopians (who cut themselves to express their hopelessness) and the joy and hope of believers who sang praises powerfully impacted people. It is another country that in one century has grown a huge church.

Anyway, I’m jumping ahead of myself. Verse 14 says, “knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.” Life after death and a glorious resurrection. Those who are convinced of that have died with cheerfulness, joy, and hope.

I think of Margaret Wilson, an 18-year-old Covenanter in the Scottish Reformation. She and an older lady by the name of Margaret McLachlan were sentenced to death by drowning in the rising tide near Wigtown. Both women were promised deliverance if they would say “God save the King” and take an oath - which really amounted to renouncing their faith. They refused and were tied to stakes in the harbor, awaiting the tide to come in and drown them. In order to intimidate the younger girl and perhaps save her, they put the older woman farther out so that as she slowly drowned it would frighten the younger Margaret. But it had none of that effect. I am reading from the book, *The Sufferings of the Church of Scotland*, by Robert Wodrow. He says,

When the water was overflowing her fellow-martyr, some about Margaret Wilson asked her, what she thought of the other now struggling with the pangs of death. She answered, what do I see but Christ (in one of his members) wrestling there. Think you that we are the sufferers? No, it is Christ in us, for he sends none a warfare upon their own charges.

When Margaret Wilson was at the stake, she sang the 25th Psalm from verse 7th, downward a good way, and read the 8th chapter to the Romans with a great deal of cheerfulness, and then prayed. While at prayer, the water covered her: but before she was quite dead, they pulled her up, and held her out of the water till she was recovered, and able to speak; and then by major Windram’s orders, she was asked, if she would pray for the king. She answered, ‘She wished the salvation of all men, and the damnation of none.’ One deeply affected with the death of the other and her case, said, ‘Dear Margaret, say God save

the king, say God save the king.' She answered in the greatest steadiness and composure, 'God save him, if he will, for it is his salvation I desire.' Whereupon some of her relations near by, desirous to have her life spared, if possible, called out to major Windram, 'Sir, she hath said it, she hath said it.' Whereupon the major came near, and offered her the abjuration, charging her instantly to swear it, otherwise return to the water. Most deliberately she refused, and said, 'I will not, I am one of Christ's children, let me go.' Upon which she was thrust down again into the water, where she finished her course with joy."

She knew, as all of us do, that this life is but a fleeting moment in eternity. Our sufferings are but a fleeting moment when compared to an eternity of bliss and joy in heaven. And if all that Paul has been speaking this morning is foreign to you and you do not know that you would go to heaven if you were to die today, tell God that you are a sinner doomed to suffering in hell. Tell Him that you believe Jesus died as your substitute and that you gladly receive His redemption. Tell Him that you repent of your sins and put your faith in Christ alone for your salvation. Tell Him that He is now Lord of your life and you will gladly serve Him and do whatever He tells you to do, and if need be, will gladly lay down your life for Him. He will fill you with His indescribably joy and with the treasures of His grace. The world cannot understand it. It makes absolutely no sense to the world. But those of us who have already been filled with this treasure can understand exactly what Paul is saying.

And if you already *are* a believer who knows Jesus, you are a clay pot filled with treasure, and God has made you desire that share that treasure with others. Don't hold it only for yourself. Let the light of Christ radiate through you. You can do that by taking the lid off the pot and sharing the Gospel. You can also do it without words by showing all who are around you that you handle the sufferings of this world by the power of Christ, not just with a stiff upper lip.

III. Reiteration of the main point (v. 15)

Verse 15 talks about that sharing of this treasure with all those whom you know. It says,

For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

Commentators point out that the "all things" refers to the preceding context of everything we have just gone through. The point is that God allowed Paul to suffer so that the treasure of God's grace would leak out of the clay pots and would spread and spread through many. The result would be many souls thanking God for the same treasure that they now possess and would all redound to God's glory. So verse 15 is reiterating the theme of verse 7 - only in different words.

Do you have a passion to see the treasure of grace that is in your clay pot coming out of you and spreading into the lives of many? If you struggle with saying "Yes," confess that to God and ask Him to help you to have a new appreciation for the treasure that you possess and the boldness to freely share it with others - even if they mock you (one kind of suffering) or reject you (another type of suffering). If you need moral support to share this message, talk to Bill Crilly, Michael Elliott, John Mayes, or one of the others who witness on Friday nights. Or pick another time with another member. But take seriously the reality of verse 13:

And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak.

The believers in Europe were so constant in sharing their faith that the Roman Catholic Inquisitors would often put a tongue screw clamped tight onto a tongue and then put a red-hot iron on the tip of the tongue that hung out so that it would swell up and the clamp would not slip off. They did that to keep them from speaking when being burned at the stake. The one in your outlines was fished out of the ashes of Hans Bret by a fellow pastor after Hans was burned at the stake. But the Roman Catholics were fearful that these people would preach while burning and the treasure of Jesus would attract even more to the Gospel. You could not keep the Christians of that day silent.

The believers in Morocco today know the dangers of speaking about this treasure. They know it very well. Persecution and even death could be the result. But those Christians cannot help but share the message. The past few months have seen some College students going from city to city in Morocco sharing the Gospel with anyone and everyone that they met. One young man showed interest, so they sat down and read half the Gospel of John to him. He was very interested in this message but was afraid to believe because he knew he could be persecuted or killed. Sometime later they met with him again to finish the Gospel of John. By the end of that second meeting, this young man bowed before King Jesus, giving his life to Jesus, knowing full well that it might mean losing his life. Pray for him. I don't have his real name, but we are praying for Abdoul and many others like him who have just had their clay pot filled with treasure - a treasure that they are now burdened to share at great peril to their bodies. May God stir up the whole church of Jesus Christ to have the boldness of those Christians. Amen. Let's pray.