

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:7–15

Preacher: Rev. John Kim

An American woman was traveling in Paris and ended up shopping. There she saw a very beautiful necklace. It was the necklace she had always wanted, so she texted her husband. “Honey, I found the necklace I’ve been looking for. It’s so beautiful. It’s only \$7,500. Please let me buy it.” Then her husband texted back, “No, price is too high.” It means “don’t buy it.” But the wife didn’t see the comma after “No” and read it like this: “No price is too high.” So she bought it. That’s right. The grace God has given us is grace that is too expensive. But He gave it to us unconditionally, without the comma. This is grace. What is the precious grace you have received from the Lord?

When humans were created, two elements were present. Humans were formed from the dust of the ground. Therefore, when they die, they return to the dust. Dust is the material element of humans. Because humans possess a material element, they have material needs. Thus, people must eat to live. They must eat bread. They need money and a place to live. Yet the Bible teaches that we cannot live by bread alone. It teaches that we cannot live by money alone. This is because humans are spiritual beings as well as material beings. When God created humans, He breathed His breath into us, and the soul that entered us resides within. Therefore, since humans are both material and spiritual beings, their spiritual needs must also be fulfilled. Last Sunday during the sermon, I mentioned that there is a space within us that only God can fill. Because that space remains unfilled, even when material things fill us, we are always empty. For example, no matter how comfortable the bed is, if your heart is empty, you cannot sleep well. As we celebrate Thanksgiving and take stock of this year, while it is important to count our material blessings, we must also ask ourselves how much our souls have matured. If the soul is getting along well, will not all things go well with you and enjoy good health?

Animals are happy if they can eat and sleep. A dog clutching a dried-up bone is happiness itself. (Photo.) A dog sleeping with a bone in its mouth has the best life. It doesn’t worry even as the hottest days of summer approach. Sometimes there are dogs that pray. (Video.) These dogs are trained dogs. They don’t truly pray to God the Father.

The sad story of the Foolish Rich Man? (Luke 12:16–21) He said “I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy: eat, drink and be merry.’” Material things bring happiness to our body. Eating delicious food makes us happy; buying desired items brings joy. But material things cannot bring happiness to our soul. That is why humans remain unsatisfied even after acquiring wealth. The space only God can fill remains unfilled. Yet this foolish rich man was mistaken.

Even among Christians, some are more interested in the bread held in Jesus’ hands. When first believing in Jesus, that’s normal. Believing in Jesus brings good things, heals sickness—we come to faith expecting such things. But if, after time passes, one remains focused only on the bread, that’s problematic. Imagine a father bringing home a gift. When you’re young, the gift itself matters... But once you’re grown, you shouldn’t just expect gifts or pocket money. You should love the person giving the gift; loving only the gift makes you an immature child. As I

mentioned last Sunday, loving and liking are different. A cat likes mice but doesn't love them. It likes them because they benefit me. If the benefit disappears and I must sacrifice instead, yet I still like them—that is love. If you like your dad because of the gifts, that isn't loving your dad: it's loving the gifts.

No bride marries a ring just because she receives a diamond ring worth tens of millions of won. She marries the groom who gives the ring and trusts the person giving it. But what if you have no interest in the giver at all, only in the diamond? What if you only care about the bread, and when given bread, demand meat? When given meat, demand dessert? What if you just keep demanding things, and when not given, get angry and indifferent? Wouldn't God say, "I'll give you the bread, so show me some interest in me"?

The king gave ten elephants to a minister he disliked! People envied him, but the minister went bankrupt within a year. Why? He went bankrupt trying to feed and care for the voracious elephants. Since the king had given them, he couldn't kill them or sell them off.

The devil gives us many useless things and makes us scramble to protect them. This prevents us from doing what truly matters. As you look back on the past of this year, what have you been valuing in life?

Money, power, popularity, and fame are necessary, but do not place value on them. As I said last Sunday, the devil has put fake price tags on them. He has placed expensive price tags on worthless things and cheap price tags on things of true value. Focus on true value.

Paul met Jesus. After that, Paul didn't become materially wealthy, nor did he enjoy any worldly riches or glory. Paul is said to have been short and unattractive. Believing in Jesus didn't make him taller or more handsome. If believing in Jesus made you handsome or beautiful, then...???... Look at yourself. "Am I a Christian?"

Even when you believe in Jesus, outwardly nothing changes, but a transformation occurs at the core of your soul, at the center of your life. It is a change in purpose, a change in values, a change in worldview. What was meaningless becomes meaningful.

Believing in Jesus changes your perspective. What you find meaningful changes. What was worthless is now valued, and what was valued is now seen as worthless.

2 Timothy 2:20–21. People can be like gold vessels, silver vessels, wooden vessels, or earthen vessels. Since most people make relative evaluations, they often see themselves as earthen vessels. They compare themselves to those they perceive as better. University professors, looking at world-renowned scholars, will likely think of themselves as earthen vessels. Even a small business owner earning a lot of money envies the chairman of a large corporation. When we think of ourselves as earthen vessels like this, our focus shifts to gold and silver vessels. We even perceive the concept of blessing as the transformation from an earthen vessel to a silver or gold vessel. Believing that earthen or wooden vessels are not blessed, we pray to be made into gold or silver vessels.

But look at the text. True blessing does not lie in the vessel's material. It is not a blessing to be a wooden vessel and then become a gold or silver one. What is poured into that vessel is the essence of blessing.

Pastor Kim Nam-jun was holding a meeting in the countryside and spoke with a lay deacon who raises pigs. Typically, pigpens were narrow cages where the pigs couldn't move much, so they gained weight quickly. But they didn't taste good.

This man kept them in spacious pens where they could exercise, and powerful water jets cleaned up the waste they left behind at regular intervals. The lighting system was perfect, letting warm sunlight shine in. They even play classical music, creating an emotionally stable, hotel-like environment. Why? To be slaughtered! If Jesus didn't exist, even if you rode in the finest cars, lived in luxurious mansions, and wielded power on this earth, the outcome would be miserable.

Therefore, the blessing in the text is Jesus Christ Himself. When Jesus Christ dwells within me, the Creator God becomes my Father. I become an heir, and I receive the blessing of eternal life. Not only that, but while living on this earth, I possess God's power to solve problems. [We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; (v. 8)]

Despite having already received such immense blessings, we fixate on the vessel and pray to have it changed. Such people are perpetually dissatisfied. Even if they become silver vessels, they harbor discontent at not being gold vessels. They perceive God as unfair. They mistakenly believe that if they just pray a little more, He will change them into gold vessels.

[Romans 9:20–21 But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? “Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why did you make me like this?’ “Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?”] God is not only unfair but also acts according to His own will. Those who see themselves as wooden vessels or clay pots complain to God, “Why are You so unfair and one-sided?” While God's blessings cannot be measured in money, since our focus is on money, let's consider it in monetary terms. Imagine three people: one was born inheriting 10 billion won, one lives on a monthly salary, and one went bankrupt in business, owing about 1 billion won. It seems unfair. The quality of their lives will clearly differ.

But what if God gave them 5 trillion won each? The first person would have 5.1 trillion won, the second 5 trillion, and the third 4.999 trillion won. It seems pretty similar. Fair, right? Is that unreasonable? It's a parable Jesus told.

In Matthew 18:23–35, we find the parable of the man who owed ten thousand talents. It tells of a servant who owed ten thousand talents to his master, who forgave his debt. But on his way home, he grabbed a fellow servant by the throat demanding payment for a debt of a hundred denarius. One talent is worth 6,000 denarius. One denarius is the daily wage for an adult man. So one denarius is roughly 100,000 won, and one talent is about 500–600 million won.

A talent is worth 5 trillion won, and a denarius is worth 10 million won. The value of the grace we received from God is 5 trillion won, yet we cry over 10 million won, unaware of that joy.

We are already people who possess Jesus Christ as our treasure. Do not focus only on the vessel and complain about it. There is no need to be proud because it is a gold vessel, nor is there any need to be discouraged because it is a wooden vessel.

People say that having a lot of money and a high position means success. That is all well and good, but let us not forget one thing: God has already given us everything. We must recognize the value of the treasure.

Wasn't Paul the one who understood the value of this treasure? Because of Jesus, the value of other things diminished. "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith." (Phil. 3:7-9) He no longer rejoiced or grieved over such things. The man who discovered the treasure hidden in the field sold all his possessions to buy that field.

We must pause our hurried steps and reflect: What am I rushing toward? Why am I running so frantically right now? Time flies swiftly. Just when we feel we might achieve something, our lives draw to a close. "You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you." If we had known this, would the rich man have exerted himself so to pile grain into his storehouses?

Henri Nowen was a Dutch-born Catholic priest. Born in 1932, he taught at Yale University for ten years starting in 1971. He then went to Peru and began missionary work among the poor. After much reflection, he came to Harvard University to teach theology, concluding that this too stemmed from intellectual pride. In 1985, he moved to Canada again and lived for ten years with mentally disabled children at the L'Arche community, a community for people with intellectual disabilities. He passed away in 1996 from a heart attack.

Some people pray for Christian faith and ask to become professors at Harvard or Yale. They pray to secure a good position in the world, expecting God's help. They desire to be golden or silver vessels, thinking that is a blessing. Yet some people give up professorships at Harvard or Yale and set out to find a greater blessing.

We already possess a treasure. That is enough. See what is truly valuable. When is the best time to pick apples from the orchard? Answer is - When the owner is not there -Think simply. We hold precious grace within us. "This is all for your benefit, so that through the thanksgiving of many, grace may abound to the glory of God (verse 15)." When we let go of our desire for vessels and live a life of joy and gratitude for the treasure within us—that grace—grace overflows. It brings glory to God.