

### Cover Picture: Climbing a Mountain

As we were walking in the mountains one day, our thoughts were directed to the statement in *The Ministry of Healing*, 508.2: "Come up to Me into the mount."

The path we were following was stony and steep, but it had been so well prepared by others that the going was easy. The path on which we can go to God is our Lord Jesus (see *John* 14:6). The fact that the path had been so thoroughly prepared helped us to see that in the spiritual realm others have gone before us so that our path would be easier. Jesus Himself is the best example of this, but prophets, reformers, and messengers also go ahead to prepare the way for us.

As we came to a fork on the path, a notice advised us to stay on the path and not take any shortcuts as that would damage the environment. In the same way, we should also remain on the path of righteousness and not try to take any shortcuts which would transgress the law, because these lead only to the destruction of ourselves, others, and our surroundings.

When we finally reached the summit, all our efforts were rewarded by the wonderful view that lay before us. Our toil was forgotten. We felt like staying forever at the top of the mountain, where all was quiet and restful, and from where we could look at the countryside below us from a completely different perspective.

In the same way, God wants to draw us to Himself in the mount because He can come much closer to us there, in the seclusion of prayer and study, than in the bustle of daily life. While we linger in His presence He gives us a blessed survey of His ways, which are as much higher than our ways as the heavens are higher than the earth (see *Isaiah* 55:9). We need these times of solitude with God in the mount to gather strength and courage to continue with the life of faith. As long as we live on this earth we will always have to return to the valley so that we can fulfill our responsibilities in this world, but we can go with new courage and revived strength because we have been empowered by God's presence.

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# Gospel Order

## Chapter 6

### The Treasure in an Earthen Vessel

When Jesus lived on this earth most people did not recognize His divine nature—some did not want to acknowledge it and others were unable to see it. Once we have realized this, the question naturally arises as to why so few recognize the treasure within the earthen vessel.

We often judge the value of something according to the vessel in which it is presented. For example, no one would expect to find a valuable gift wrapped up in plain paper, or in banana leaves. And when the exterior wrapping is particularly ostentatious we assume that it contains something precious. But God does not work according to this principle. He deliberately chooses plain and simple vessels in which to hide His treasure.

Another illustration is that of a talented musician who plays an instrument to show his skill. Such an artist would choose the best instrument available for this purpose. It is difficult to imagine a famous musician using a cheap instrument when performing at a large concert. But this is just what God has done. He is the greatest of all artists, and the instrument that He uses is not that of a glorious angel but sinful, human flesh.

### The Language of the Bible

In order to understand the process of revelation in greater depth we need to grasp this aspect of God's way of working. The message has a

## The Treasure in the Earthen Vessel: The Revelation



**The treasure:  
The divine thought**

**The message**

**The earthen vessel:  
Human language**

**The imperfect, limited, human language is the vessel for the perfect, infinite thought of God. If we look only to the imperfect language used without seeing the divine thought behind it we will not be able to understand what revelation is.**

divine origin and therefore it is perfect and glorious, but the language in which it is given to humanity, and passed on to others, is weak and imperfect. This applies to the original language which the Bible was written in as well as to the various translations. The thoughts contained in the Bible were inspired by the Spirit of God, but the words were not.

Critics of the Bible often refer to the mistakes in grammar and style, as well as errors in copying the texts, as proof that it cannot be inspired. But anyone who presents such arguments only shows that they do not understand the mystery of God.

Of course, by human logic alone we cannot grasp the fact that imperfect language can express a perfect thought. This is indeed a miracle of God's working. God is a Master Artist, and He is capable of per-

forming a perfect work with an inferior instrument. He chooses His instrument Himself, and uses it in such a way that the divine thought reaches us reliably. Whoever desires to do so can understand the divine thoughts behind the words. But if we concentrate only on the vessel we will soon lose sight of the treasure.

As in many other areas, there are two extremes in regard to the question of the inspiration of the Bible. One extreme is that every single word of the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit. In this view the writer is understood to be a kind of secretary who literally copies down what the Spirit of God dictates.

It is easy to show the error in this approach. In the Bible we find several styles of writing, depending on the characteristics of the individual writers. For example, Peter writes that Paul's letters are, in part, difficult to understand. "As also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." *2 Peter* 3:15, 16. Anyone who knows Greek and has attempted to translate the apostle Paul's letters will concur with this statement. It is also easy to see that John has a very different style. The better we understand the nuances of language, the more clearly we see the differences in the styles of the various authors. But if the Holy Ghost had dictated every book of the Bible, there would be only one style throughout the whole volume.

The belief in a word-by-word inspiration of the Bible actually leads to a darkening of the biblical message. The treasure is lost sight of because only the vessel is considered. The same results can be seen when someone believes that Jesus had the perfect nature of Adam before he fell.

The other extreme is seen in those who do not believe in inspiration at all. As already described, they see only the imperfection of the vessel—the human element. They reject the divine origin of the Bible because this treasure is hidden in the weakness and imperfection of human language. In the same way many people have rejected Christ as the Son of God because He was a man who bore the weaknesses of fallen human nature.

The exponents of both extremes agree on one point—they think that inspiration depends on the language in which the Bible was written. In other words, they concentrate on the vessel. But in doing so, they lose sight of the treasure.

"The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the

characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all 'given by inspiration of God' (2 Timothy 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed have themselves embodied the thought in human language.

"The Ten Commandments were spoken by God Himself, and were written by His own hand. They are of divine, and not of human composition. But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.' John 1:14.

"Written in different ages, by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments, the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style, as well as a diversity in the nature of the subjects unfolded. Different forms of expression are employed by different writers; often the same truth is more strikingly presented by one than by another. And as several writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony.

"As presented through different individuals, the truth is brought out in its varied aspects. One writer is more strongly impressed with one phase of the subject; he grasps those points that harmonize with his experience or with his power of perception and appreciation; another seizes upon a different phase; and each, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, presents what is most forcibly impressed upon his own mind—a different aspect of the truth in each, but a perfect harmony through all. And the truths thus revealed unite to form a perfect whole, adapted to meet the wants of men in all the circumstances and experiences of life.

"God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth." *The Great Controversy*, v.3–vi.3.

"Spiritual darkness has covered the earth and gross darkness the people. There are in many churches skepticism and infidelity in the interpretation of the Scriptures. Many, very many, are questioning the verity and truth of the Scriptures. Human reasoning and the imaginings of the human heart are undermining the inspiration of the Word of God, and that which should be received as granted, is surrounded with a cloud of mysticism. Nothing stands out in clear and distinct lines, upon rock bottom. This is one of the marked signs of the last days.

"This Holy Book has withstood the assaults of Satan, who has united with evil men to make everything of divine character shrouded in clouds and darkness. But the Lord has preserved this Holy Book by His own miraculous power in its present shape—a chart or guidebook to the human family to show them the way to heaven.

"But the oracles of God have been so manifestly neglected that there are but few in our world, even of those who profess to explain it to others, who have the divine knowledge of the Scriptures. There are learned men who have a college education, but these shepherds do not feed the flock of God. They do not consider that the excellencies of the Scriptures will be continually unfolding their hidden treasures as precious jewels are discovered by digging for them. . . .

"Some look to us gravely and say, 'Don't you think there might have been some mistake in the copyist or in the translators?' This is all probable, and the mind that is so narrow that it will hesitate and stumble over this possibility or probability would be just as ready to stumble over the mysteries of the Inspired Word, because their feeble minds cannot see through the purposes of God. Yes, they would just as easily stumble over plain facts that the common mind will accept, and discern the Divine, and to which God's utterance is plain and beautiful, full of marrow and fatness. All the mistakes will not cause trouble to one soul, or cause any feet to stumble, that would not manufacture difficulties from the plainest revealed truth.

"God committed the preparation of His divinely inspired Word to finite man. This Word, arranged into books, the Old and New Testaments, is the guidebook to the inhabitants of a fallen world, bequeathed to them that, by studying and obeying the directions, not one soul would lose its way to heaven." *Selected Messages* 1:15.2–16.3.

"The Bible is not given to us in grand superhuman language. Jesus, in order to reach man where he is, took humanity. The Bible must be given in the language of men. Everything that is human is imperfect. Different meanings are expressed by the same word; there is not one word for each distinct idea. The Bible was given for practical purposes.



"The stamps of minds are different. All do not understand expressions and statements alike. Some understand the statements of the Scriptures to suit their own particular minds and cases. Preconceptions, prejudices, and passions have a strong influence to darken the understanding and confuse the mind even in reading the words of Holy Writ. . . .

"The Bible is written by inspired men, but it is not God's mode of thought and expression. It is that of humanity. God, as a writer, is not represented. Men will often say such an expression is not like God. But God has not put Himself in words, in logic, in rhetoric, on trial in the Bible. The writers of the Bible were God's penmen, not His pen. Look at the different writers.

"It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired, but the men that were inspired. Inspiration acts not on the man's words or his expressions but on the man himself, who, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, is imbued with thoughts. But the words receive the impress of the individual mind. The divine mind is diffused. The divine mind and will is combined with the human mind and will; thus the utterances of the man are the word of God. . . .

"The Lord speaks to human beings in imperfect speech, in order that the degenerate senses, the dull, earthly perception, of earthly beings may comprehend His words. Thus is shown God's condescension. He meets fallen human beings where they are. The Bible, perfect as it is in its simplicity, does not answer to the great ideas of God; for infinite ideas cannot be perfectly embodied in finite vehicles of thought. Instead of the expressions of the Bible being exaggerated, as many people suppose, the strong expressions break down before the magnificence of the thought, though the penman selected the most expressive language through which to convey the truths of higher education. Sinful beings can only bear to look upon a shadow of the brightness of heaven's glory." *Selected Messages* 1:20.3–22.3.

### The Parables

The parables in which Christ imparted spiritual truths also show how the treasure is embodied within an earthen vessel. In this we clearly see the process of revelation, which is the mystery of God.

A parable uses an earthen vessel which humanity is acquainted with, it is a story taken from daily life. And it was in stories like these that Jesus laid a treasure—a lesson—which was intended to be imparted through the parable.

"In Christ's parable teaching the same principle is seen as in His own mission to the world. That we might become acquainted with His

divine character and life, Christ took our nature and dwelt among us. Divinity was revealed in humanity; the invisible glory in the visible human form. Men could learn of the unknown through the known; heavenly things were revealed through the earthly; God was made manifest in the likeness of men. So it was in Christ's teaching: the unknown was illustrated by the known; divine truths by earthly things with which the people were most familiar.

"... Natural things were the medium for the spiritual; the things of nature and the life-experience of His hearers were connected with the truths of the written word. Leading thus from the natural to the spiritual kingdom, Christ's parables are links in the chain of truth that unites man with God and earth with heaven." *Christ's Object Lessons*, 17.1, 2.

A parable is merely an earthen vessel, and therefore it is weak and imperfect. Jesus commented on this weakness in the following words: "To what shall we liken the kingdom of God? Or with what parable shall we picture it?" *Mark* 4:30. With these words Jesus intimated that no earthly comparison can represent the glory and perfection of the kingdom of God.

The imperfection of the earthen vessel is very apparent in the parable where the righteous God is compared with the unrighteous judge. "Then the Lord said, 'Hear what the unjust judge said.'" *Luke* 18:6. If we were to concentrate on the vessel without seeing that there is a treasure hidden within it, we would immediately come to the conclusion that the Lord of heaven is an unjust judge. Perhaps we would also question as to whether this parable came from Christ at all, because He would surely not compare His Father with an unrighteous judge!

However, if we understand the mystery of God, we will search for, and find, the treasure in this vessel. And indeed, God's character is clearly depicted in this parable. The unjust judge finally helped the widow who brought her request to him, just as God helps us, although He is of course not unjust. Of Him we read, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." *James* 1:17. How much more then, will our sympathizing Father help His children who bring Him their requests! The comparison given is by contrast, not by similarity. What confidence this parable gives to the children of God! "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" *Luke* 18:7, 8.

Some other examples of "contrasting parables" which clearly elucidate the principle of the treasure in an earthly vessel are the parable

## The Treasure in the Earthen Vessel: The Parable of the Unjust Judge in *Luke 18:1-8*.



The treasure:  
The character of God

The message

The earthen vessel:  
The parable of the  
unjust judge

**In this parable the character of God is clearly represented to all who want to understand it. If the unjust judge was willing to help the widow, how much more is God willing to do so. God is eager to help us: "I tell you that He will avenge them speedily." If we look at the vessel alone, we will not recognize the treasure in this parable.**

of the unjust steward in *Luke 16:1-9*, and of the rich man and poor Lazarus in *Luke 16:19-31*. If we look only at the vessel, it is difficult to understand these parables. But the Lord has hidden a treasure in them, and that is what we need to see. In fact if we take a closer look at all the parables of Jesus then we will see that each one demonstrates this principle of the treasure in an earthen vessel.

### Why an Earthen Vessel?

Why does the Lord hide His treasure in an earthen vessel? Would there not be less misunderstandings and rejection of the truth if God would show the treasure to the people right from the start? This was

exactly what Jesus' critics thought when they came to Him with the challenge: "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." *Matthew 12:38*. But Jesus did not give them what they wanted because it would not have been good for them. If He had given it to them, they still would not have understood, as He Himself said, "Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand." *Matthew 13:13*.

It is impossible for humanity, living in this sinful world, to see the full glory of the treasure. Therefore, in His love for us, God hides in an earthen vessel that which He cannot give us directly. In this way He can bring the treasure really close to us, until our weak eyes become accustomed to the sight.

"So it was in Christ's teaching: the unknown was illustrated by the known; divine truths by earthly things with which the people were most familiar." *Christ's Object Lessons*, 17.1.

The word of God has been given for readers living at different times and coming from different nationalities. In order to come as close as possible to each person, the treasure has been wrapped in diverse earthen vessels. For example, Luke publicly declared that there were already several representations in written form of the life of the Lord Jesus. He writes, "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which have been fulfilled among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word delivered them to us." *Luke 1:1, 2*. But the Holy Spirit obviously directed him to add another report to those already existing. "It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write to you an orderly account, most excellent Theophilus." *Luke 1:3*.

It was obviously necessary for Theophilus to receive another report, especially written for him, as Luke says, "that you may know the certainty of those things in which you were instructed." *Luke 1:4*. The Spirit of God not only decided for Theophilus but also for many others who had a similar need, that there should be another vessel in which the treasure was to be hidden.

"There is variety in a tree, there are scarcely two leaves just alike. Yet this variety adds to the perfection of the tree as a whole.

"In our Bible, we might ask, Why need Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the Gospels, why need the Acts of the Apostles, and the variety of writers in the Epistles, go over the same thing?

"The Lord gave His word in just the way He wanted it to come. He gave it through different writers, each having his own individuality, though going over the same history. Their testimonies are brought

together in one Book, and are like the testimonies in a social meeting. They do not represent things in just the same style. Each has an experience of his own, and this diversity broadens and deepens the knowledge that is brought out to meet the necessities of varied minds. The thoughts expressed have not a set uniformity, as if cast in an iron mold, making the very hearing monotonous. In such uniformity there would be a loss of grace and distinctive beauty." *Select-ed Messages* 1:21.3-5.

The existence of a variety of vessels which contain the word of God clearly indicates the love of God, for He wants to come as close as possible to every person. In this way the gospel is not only preached to one generation, or one nation, but to every generation and every nation. "Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach to those who dwell on the earth—to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people." *Revelation* 14:6.

#### **"... yet without sin"**

Some people go so far as to say that we must sin in order to reach sinners. But nothing could be more opposed to the word of God! It is only as we are freed from sin that we can help those who are held captive to it.

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin." *Hebrews* 4:15.

This Bible verse clearly describes both the treasure and the vessel. Christ, the High Priest, is the treasure, and our weakness—human nature—is the vessel. Christ can sympathize with us because He has borne our weakness. This verse ends with the equally important assertion: "... yet without sin."

God Himself chooses the vessel that can come as close as possible to us. Therefore, it must come from a sinful environment. But the Lord has nothing to do with sin. The mystery of God is the revelation of Himself in sinful flesh, but without sin. This is clearly expressed in the following verse: "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh." *Romans* 8:3. This means that although Christ bore our mortal, weak, sinful flesh He did not yield to sin, even by so much as a thought. He lived a life entirely without sin.

It would not have been possible for Christ to represent the mystery of God if He had sinned, because sin is, by definition, separation from

God. When Christ bore our sins on the cross of Calvary He felt the separation from His heavenly Father. This caused Him to cry out: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" *Matthew* 27:46.

God cannot reveal Himself through sin because "every good gift and every perfect gift" comes from Him. And with Him "there is no variation or shadow of turning." *James* 1:17. Therefore, whoever claims that the mystery of God is revealed by sin is a liar.

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them." *Matthew* 7:15-20.

"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil.

#### **The Vessel Without the Divine Treasure**



**The treasure:  
The divine nature**

**The earthly vessel:  
Sin**

**The divine cannot be hidden within sin because sin is separation from God. The treasure cannot be found in this vessel.**



For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." *Luke* 6:45.

"A fool's wrath is known at once, but a prudent man covers shame." *Proverbs* 12:16.

Evil speaking betrays the fact that we are not dealing with a good treasure but with an evil content. Such a person is not inspired by the Spirit of God but by their own sins.

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." *James* 1:13–15.

As we apply these principles to the process of revelation we notice that God gives the treasure of His divine message through the agency of imperfect human language. But in doing so no bad words, doubtful suggestions, or even swearing, is used. The speech chosen to convey God's message will be polite and honest. In other words, it is a pure speech.

### Evil Contents Within the Vessel



The "treasure":  
The evil heart

Bad language

The earthen vessel:  
Human nature

**"An evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." *Luke* 6:45.**

"Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things." *Philippians* 4:8

"The chief requisite of language is that it be pure and kind and true—the outward expression of an inward grace." *Education*, 235.1.

The contemporaries of Christ were greatly impressed with His language. Even His opponents said, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" *John* 7:46.

"He made truth beautiful by presenting it in the most direct and simple way. His language was pure, refined, and clear as a running stream. His voice was as music to those who had listened to the monotonous tones of the rabbis." *The Desire of Ages*, 253.5.

The speech of Jesus' disciples was also pure. Christ's influence on their words was noticeable. "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus." *Acts* 4:13.

"The disciples of Jesus were noted for the purity of their language." *The Desire of Ages*, 712.3.

"Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, 'Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?' " *Acts* 2:7, 8.

"The apostles and their associates were unlettered men, yet through the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, their speech, whether in their own or a foreign language, became pure, simple, and accurate, both in word and in accent." *The Desire of Ages*, 821.4.

Even when the followers of Christ are challenged, their speech will be calm and impartial. They will not defend self, and are ready to have their stand put to the test.

When the disciples preached the message in the power of the Holy Spirit, they were challenged in a very prejudiced way. "Others mocking said, 'They are full of new wine.'" *Acts* 2:13. But Peter answered this provocation calmly and objectively. "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel." *Acts* 2:14–16.

"The servants of God who teach the truth should be men of judgment. They should be men who can bear opposition and not get excited; for those who oppose the truth will pick at those who teach it, and

every objection that can be produced, will be brought in its worst form to bear against the truth. The servants of God who bear the message must be prepared to remove these objections, with calmness and meekness, by the light of truth. Frequently opposers talk to ministers of God in a provoking manner, to call out something from them of the same nature, that they can make as much of it as possible and declare to others that the teachers of the commandments have a bitter spirit and are harsh, as has been reported. I saw that we must be prepared for objections, and with patience, judgment, and meekness, let them have the weight they deserve, not throw them away or dispose of them by positive assertions, and then bear down upon the objector, and manifest a hard spirit toward him; but give the objections their weight, then bring forth the light and the power of the truth, and let it outweigh and remove the errors. Thus a good impression will be made, and honest opposers will acknowledge that they have been deceived and that the commandment keepers are not what they have been represented to be." *Early Writings*, 102.1.

In the example of preaching the gospel we see very clearly that the earthen vessel may be simple, imperfect, and weak, and yet it still reveals an inward purity.

### Practical Consequences

What practical consequences arise for gospel order from this principle of placing the treasure in an earthen vessel?

The Jews rejected the Son of God because He came in a vessel that they did not expect—they wanted a vessel that would be more acceptable to them. Because Christ did not meet their expectations they rejected the Treasure and the vessel. We should learn from their experience that it is not our task to choose the vessel, but God's alone. No one can influence God's choice. When some of the Pharisees tried to do this very thing Jesus said to them, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out." *Luke* 19:40. In other words, If you are bothered about praise coming from such simple vessels as these children, then how surprised you would be if it should come from mere stones. I can choose whatever messengers I wish.

The Lord does not choose what we would normally choose. "For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are de-

spised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are." *1 Corinthians* 1:26–28. "For My strength is made perfect in weakness." *2 Corinthians* 12:9.

### The Treasure in the Field

No matter which vessel the Lord chooses, we must accept it for the sake of the treasure within. Jesus explained this principle in a parable.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." *Matthew* 13:44.

During earlier times when there was no banking system, people often secured their treasure by burying it. If no one else knew of the hiding place, when the owner of the valuables died the treasure remained hidden until someone discovered it. A man who had rented a field found just such a treasure as he was plowing the earth. His friends must have thought him crazy when he sold everything he had to buy the field, without giving any explanation. But the man knew what he was doing. He bought the field because of the treasure it contained.<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, we too should accept the vessel with all our hearts for the sake of the treasure, and this means that we must surrender our own opinions and concepts. Whoever accepts the vessel in this way also accepts the treasure. Whoever rejects the vessel also rejects the treasure hidden within it. Whoever accepts the messenger accepts him for Christ's sake, and whoever rejects him rejects Christ.

"He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward. And he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly, I say to you, he shall by no means lose his reward." *Matthew* 10:40–42.

"If you reject Christ's delegated messengers, you reject Christ." *Testimonies to Ministers*, 97.1.

"We look upon the Jews as inexcusable because they rejected and crucified Christ. But today the messages that the Lord sends are often received in a manner similar to the way in which the Jews received Christ's message. If the instruction of the Lord does not harmonize with the opinions of men, anger takes control of reason, and men play

<sup>1</sup> See *Christ's Object Lessons*, chapter 8: "Hidden Treasure."



## The Treasure in an Earthen Vessel



The treasure  
hidden in the field

The revelation  
of the treasure

The earthen vessel:  
The field

**The man had to buy the field in order to bring the treasure into his possession. Likewise, we must give up our own concepts and accept the earthen vessel to gain the treasure—Christ.**

into the enemy's hands by opposing the message that God sends. Satan uses them as sharp instruments to oppose the progress of truth." *The S.D.A. Bible Commentary* 5:1089.5.

After the ascension of Christ the disciples bitterly accused themselves of not having really appreciated the treasure in the field during their three and a half years with Jesus. Today we too need to ask ourselves, Do we appreciate Him as we should?

### The Parable of the Sower

The question of our appreciation of the treasure is also dealt with in the parable of the sower.

"Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immedi-

ately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up and choked them. But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" *Matthew* 13:3-9.

In this parable the treasure is the seed—the preaching of the truth. The sower sows the seed. In other words, the sower is the messenger, the vessel that is used to bring the seed to the listeners. But another vessel is mentioned here as well—the people who hear the truth. This parable shows in a convincing way what the appreciation of the treasure means: to give up everything so that we can be useful vessels in which the treasure of truth can grow.

"When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand it, then the wicked one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside." *Matthew* 13:19.

If we do not understand a message we should not blame the messenger, but ask ourselves whether the cause might be that our own hearts are not ready for the treasure. The disciples did not understand the truth that Jesus preached because they had a hard-trodden path of wrong concepts. But instead of allowing the birds to peck the seeds away, they came to Jesus because they wanted to understand. "Then His disciples asked Him, saying, 'What does this parable mean?'" *Luke* 8:9. In other words, the disciples appreciated the treasure so much that they were willing for the vessel—their own understanding—to be worked upon.

Unfortunately, very few people react in such a way. Many react very superficially and immediately reject what they in reality do not understand, because it does not fit into their preconceived ideas. They prefer to criticize the messenger rather than their own understanding, and in this way everything that the Holy Spirit brings to them is pecked away.

"But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles." *Matthew* 13:20, 21.

The stony ground is a vessel that does not keep the seed of truth for long. If we depend on our own strength instead of the grace gained through communion with the Saviour, we will not retain the impression that the truth made for long. The stones are self—our own works.

At first the treasure of the truth is received with joy. People are as impressed with it as Simon Magus was.<sup>2</sup> But it is not the love of truth that makes them so glad as much as the desire to use it, for instance to gain prestige and fame through the truth. When the opposite occurs then it soon becomes apparent that the treasure is not really appreciated.

"Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful." *Mark* 4:18, 19.

When the vessel is already full, there is no room for the treasure. The weeds and thorns prevent the true treasure from taking root. Therefore the vessel must first be emptied. We can give the cares of this world to the Saviour, and we should give up the deception of riches by giving our means for the support of God's work. The desire for pleasure, that damages the vessel, must be uprooted. Even when we receive the treasure of truth with a pure heart we still need to take care that bad seeds, which would corrupt the treasure, do not find their way in again.

Since we are vessels for the holy truth, and our bodies are a temple for the Holy Spirit, we will take good care of this temple if we really appreciate the treasure. "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." *1 Corinthians* 6:19, 20. This includes adopting a healthy lifestyle in regard to diet, dress, and many other things. Basically, gospel order is an appreciation of the treasure that God has given.

### Caring for the Vessel

As a Man, our Saviour also gave an example of caring for the vessel. Not only was His speech pure, but His clothing, His body, and everything that He was responsible for were also pure. This was so characteristic of Him that His disciples even recognized Him by it.

On the resurrection morning, before the disciples knew what had happened to the body of their Lord, they did not remember His words concerning His resurrection, and therefore they supposed that thieves had stolen His body. But John realized that Jesus had risen because of a certain feature. It was only a minor thing, but it was a sign that

<sup>2</sup> See *Acts* 8:4–24.

Jesus honored the vessel for the sake of the treasure. His graveclothes had not been carelessly thrown into a corner but had been neatly folded together.

"Now on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, 'They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him.' Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed." *John* 20:1–8.

"The disciples hurried to the tomb, and found it as Mary had said. They saw the shroud and the napkin, but they did not find their Lord. Yet even here was testimony that He had risen. The graveclothes were not thrown heedlessly aside, but carefully folded, each in a place by itself. John 'saw, and believed.' He did not yet understand the scripture that Christ must rise from the dead; but he now remembered the Saviour's words foretelling His resurrection.

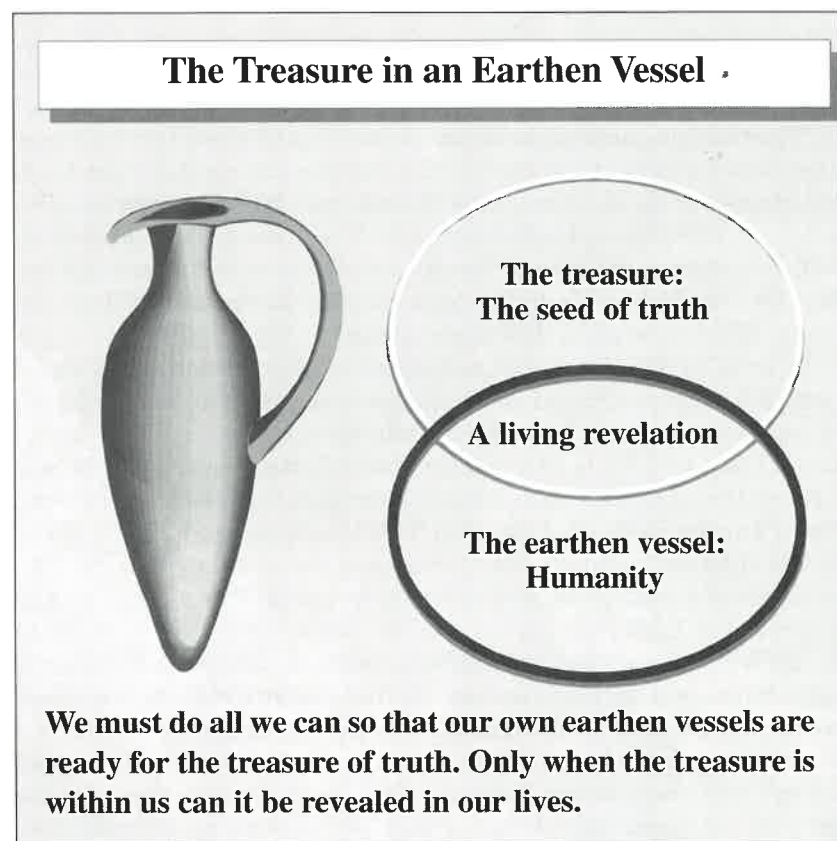
"It was Christ Himself who had placed those graveclothes with such care. When the mighty angel came down to the tomb, he was joined by another, who with his company had been keeping guard over the Lord's body. As the angel from heaven rolled away the stone, the other entered the tomb, and unbound the wrappings from the body of Jesus. But it was the Saviour's hand that folded each, and laid it in its place. In His sight who guides alike the star and the atom, there is nothing unimportant. Order and perfection are seen in all His work." *The Desire of Ages*, 789.2, 3.

In all the examples of the seed that we have looked at, it is apparent that the problems lay neither with the seed nor with the sower. Instead, the problem lay in the vessel—the ground—into which the treasure was intended to enter. We have no influence over the sower, whom God alone chooses. Neither do we have any influence over the truth that is preached. This too is solely God's responsibility. But we do have an influence on the ground that the seed falls onto. It is true that we cannot change ourselves, but we can be willing to be changed. That is our decision.

"But he who received seed on the good ground is he who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and produces: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty." *Matthew* 13:23.

"The good-ground hearer receives the word 'not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.' 1 Thess. 2:13. Only he who receives the Scriptures as the voice of God speaking to himself is a true learner. He trembles at the word; for to him it is a living reality. He opens his understanding and his heart to receive it. Such hearers were Cornelius and his friends, who said to the apostle Peter, 'Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.' Acts 10:33." *Christ's Object Lessons*, 59.2.<sup>3</sup>

The parable of the sower plainly shows that we bear a decisive responsibility in the care of our own vessels.



<sup>3</sup> For further study we recommend the second chapter of *Christ's Object Lessons*, "The Sower Went Forth to Sow."

### Why Should We Appreciate the Vessel?

We also need to appreciate the vessel, no matter what it may be, that brings us the truth because it brings us the treasure. Christ chooses simple vessels, those that are usually despised by people. What lesson do we need to learn from this?

The Lord desires our attention to be directed to the treasure, and not to the vessel. It is not the vessel that deserves to be honored but the treasure that is contained within it. Any homage given to the vessel would be a distraction from the treasure.

"But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence." *1 Corinthians* 1:27-29.

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

Every person used by God as a vessel in which He places His treasure should give the honor to God, and not take it to themselves. But whoever honors the treasure aright will also appreciate the vessel which is used to communicate the treasure. This means that we will love those whom the Lord gives us to pass on the message. And for those who really appreciate the message this will be quite natural.

Mary, the sister of Lazarus, serves as a fitting example of those who truly appreciate the treasure. "And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word." *Luke* 10:39.

To "sit at the feet of Jesus" means to be still and to listen to Him. But it also means that we humble ourselves, give up our own ways, and accept His rebukes. It means to love Jesus.

The Galatians similarly expressed their appreciation for the treasure of divine revelation, as Paul writes: "And my trial which was in my flesh you did not despise or reject, but you received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus." *Galatians* 4:14.

It should be the endeavor of every believer to accept the message with the same zeal. That is gospel order.

Andreas Dura