

“Jars of Clay”

Date: February 11, 2018 **Place:** Lakewood UMC **Occasion:** Unashamed series
Text: 2 Corinthians 4:7-12 **Theme:** Shame, victory over it

Today we come to the conclusion of our sermon series on shame. I hope you've found it useful and inspiring. Today we want to celebrate the victory that God has given us over our shame, and see how God can use us for his purposes and for his glory.

I want to speak this morning to the people in our congregation who may feel unqualified to serve God. I want you to know that you are NOT unworthy. You are not disqualified, because our functional God has a way of using dysfunctional people. God wants the world to see what God can do, using people who trust in Him alone.

The Enemy of our soul, the Devil, or your inner critic, however you want to label the enemy, will use lies and discouragement and public shaming to convince you that you can't do something for God, that you aren't good enough, that you're not qualified, that you're not enough.

But God uses highly unlikely people to accomplish his purposes. So listen up. If bad stuff has happened to you, or if life has been hard on you, you are not disqualified, because God does not call the qualified. Instead, God qualifies those He calls. God specializes in using dysfunctional people.

The pages of the Bible are filled with stories of imperfect, common and even rebellious people who were used by God. Think about this list. Noah got drunk and accidentally exposed himself. Abraham lied about his wife. Moses was a murderer. David was an adulterer and a murderer. Peter denied the Lord. The Samaritan woman had five husbands and was living with a guy she wasn't married to. James and John were so arrogant and prideful as to ask for special seats in the kingdom.

God uses imperfect people. There simply are no perfect people; there is only a perfect God. It is so important that we do not allow the words and actions of other people, or for that matter even our own self-talk, to define us or limit our potential.

The Enemy of our soul will try to fill our minds with those lies – “you’re not good enough, you’re not smart enough, you’re not talented enough.” So, it’s important that we recognize those statements when they appear and talk back to them. (“Oh, it’s you again. Sit down and be quiet. You’re not in charge anymore! This is my life and you’re not running it anymore!”)

In 1 Corinthians 4:7-12, Paul describes Christians in this way. He calls us *jars of clay*. We have this treasure – the good news of the gospel – in jars of clay. In the first century jars of clay were just that – simple brown jars of mud thrown together on a potter’s wheel. Nothing special, nothing fancy. You might buy one today at Walmart.

They were brittle, common, unimpressive, but utilitarian. There was nothing fancy about a clay jar back in the first century when this was written. But God trusted the incredible treasure of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to such jars of clay. God trusts us to carry the message.

You see, God gains the glory when God does mighty works through ordinary, flawed people. That is such an encouragement to me. I don’t have to be anything special, and God can use me to accomplish his purposes. What an encouragement to all of us.

That should propel all of us forward in our willingness to serve God, and to be used by God, even when we feel unworthy. You see, God has only ever used flawed people to help people. All of the perfect people are in Heaven. By choosing flawed people with a flawed past, a shaky present and an uncertain future, God alone gets the glory.

So as we come to the close of this sermon series, I want us all to take encouragement, that none of us is perfect. So we should stop shaming ourselves by telling ourselves that we're not good enough, or qualified enough. Because as long as we keep telling ourselves how inadequate we are, we keep the focus on ourselves. It's almost narcissistic.

It is a life-changing shift of focus when we move from me to Jesus. Instead of focusing on what I have done, or haven't done, or what was done to me, I can shift the focus to what Jesus has done for me. Because of the cross I am a different person. My shame has been lifted. I have been forgiven, loved, healed and transformed! Alleluia! Amen?

A great way to stop focusing on our past is to start declaring, out loud, who we are in Christ today. We want to speak truth to the lies, about who we are in Christ, instead of who we used to be. Speaking the truth aloud locks into our hearts and minds the reality of God's power and work.

You might want to write these statements down and say them out loud for the next 30 days:

- I am **forgiven**; God has removed by debts, my trespasses.
- I am **justified**; God has totally changed my state of being.
- I am **regenerated**; God has transformed my heart.
- I am **reconciled**; God himself has become my friend.
- I am **adopted**; God has changed my family.
- I am **redeemed**; God has changed my ownership; I am his.
- I am **sanctified**; God has changed my behavior. I am a new person.

Instead of believing those lies of shame, choose to believe what God says about you in His word. Trust that he will somehow make a way where there seems to be no way. Choose to embrace the journey from shame-filled to shame-free living, throughout your life, so that you will rise up and

be all that God has called you to be, and to do all that God has called you to do.

My friends, no matter what has happened to you, no matter what someone has said to you – even if it was 50 or 60 years ago, God is able to redeem our past and make us into new creations. Listen to what it says in Romans 8:28 – “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, of those who have been called according to his purpose.”

Dearly beloved, all of our stories are really the same story. The degree of pain or shame may be different; the details of our stories may be slightly different. But the feelings of shame are the same. Sometimes we soar, sometimes we limp, but let’s stick together on this journey, and propel forward into freedom, so others can be free.

We are meant to live – truly live – unashamed of whom God made us to be. Unshackled from our past; unmistakably made unique in God’s image; unwavering in the pursuit of our purpose; undaunted in the face of giants; unlimited in our potential; unflinching in our loyalty to Christ; and undefeatable because of Jesus’ victory.

The world says, “Shame *on* you.”

I declare, “Shame **off** you!” Now go! Go in and possess the promised land of freedom. Go live the one and only life you will ever have! Go, fulfill your God-given passion, purpose and potential. Go lead others to Christ, and to freedom.

Be you. Uncovered. Unafraid. Unashamed. Amen? Amen!

This sermon borrows heavily from the book and workbook entitled *Unashamed* by Christine Caine, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Press, 2016, pp. 199-200; workbook pp. 98-115.