

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
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John Crosby  
Where's the Light Coming From? | Mark 7:20**

As you start a new year, you have to wonder what's coming. But I think you also have to wonder what's most important, because there will be some important things that happen, and things that seem important in the moment, but what's really at stake in the new year? Can I just tell you, I don't think it's anything as trivial as a new administration. I don't think it's anything as small as American economies. I think it's much, much more important; I think what's at stake is much more important than that. There is a place just outside of L.A. called Box Canyon—just to the east of downtown L.A. Box Canyon is where a couple of fairly famous people live and it shows what's at stake in the new year. The first one of those is famous, frankly, only to me, or to people who have too much time and education. He's a philosopher, a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern California, a theologian. His name is Dallas Willard. He wrote a bunch of books and helped us think about faith in Christ, and mirrored what it might look like to start down that path. He died about a year-and-a-half ago. The other famous person in Box Canyon is still alive (as a matter of fact just got released from the hospital this week) and is going back, not to live his days in Box Canyon, but to live his days in jail. His name is Charles Manson, a mass murderer. Both of them from the same neighborhood, both of them making choices, and both of them ending up in very different places.

Those are the possibilities of what's at stake with the human soul. C.S. Lewis once said, "You have never met a mere mortal. You have never met an ordinary person." Boy, I tell you, he was right about us, right? No normal people here. Lewis said, "You have never met somebody that you will not be able to see 10,000 years from now. And 10,000 years from now, if you see that person, you will not recognize them, but you will either be tempted to run and fall at their knees because they look like an angel, or you will run away in terror because this person has come to look like a demon in hell." That is what's at stake in the new year.

The reason that I started with Dallas Willard is because he has a pretty clear grasp of that. He said, "The most important thing is that you are an eternal being in a

wondrous universe.” He says, *Brother John, you think you have to be someplace else. You think you need to accomplish something more in order to find peace, but it’s only right here. God has yet to bless anyone except where they actually are here and now. He blesses you here and now or not at all. Your soul is not something that lives on after your body dies. Your soul is the most important thing about you; it is your life.* I’ve come to agree with that. I have a body; we all have physical bodies. The only thing I’m sure about with this body is that 75 years from now, it will be dust and ashes. That’s the only thing I’m sure about with this body, but I am almost as sure that there is more to me than this body, that there is more to you than your body. The most important thing is on the inside, and that’s what you come to church for—to talk about what’s on the inside. So, when you get to a new year, you talk about the “new you” in 2017. The problem is that we almost always start the new year by saying *this could be the time when I get my act together. Really...this year it could happen.* If you take this prayer card and put it in here, and if you learned how to discipline yourself this way, and if you start to eat like that, and if you go and do this with your relationships, and you do this at work, and you read this book, and you give this much money...this will get better and better, it will be shiny, you’ll polish this, people will look at you and say, “Wow! Have you lost weight? How’s it going?” And we spiritually talk about that—it’s called image management. And it works. It really does, it works fine. Trust me, it works fine and I know because I’ve done image management and it works great [loud sound of glass shattering] for a while. And that’s what happens when you think you are going to have a better year by polishing the outside. By trying harder. By reading the right book. By having the right diet. By saying the right things at work, whether it is religious or not.

I need a better way. I’m tired of this. I think there must be a better way, and as I look at the scriptures, I think there may be a better way. The apostle Paul was a vase polisher, he was a Jew of the Jews. He out-Jewed all the other Jews. He was a teacher. He killed all the heretics. He was serious about it—he polished his vase day and night. And then, it fell apart on him. It cracked, and he said he needed to try something different. And this is what he wrote to the Corinthians.

God said let light shine out of the darkness. God made His light shine in our hearts to give us the knowledge of God’s glory, displayed in the face of Christ. [2 Corinthians 4:6]

Your life is supposed to shine. But we have this treasure, we have this light, we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from

God, not us. So we're hard pressed, but we're not crushed. We're confused, but we're not in despair. We're persecuted but we're not abandoned. We get knocked down, but not destroyed. We're always carrying around death with us, but that's so that the life of Jesus can be revealed in our bodies.

We're going to take seven weeks this year and talk about Seven in 2017. What I want to make clear from the beginning is we do not want to polish the vase. I want to start with this premise: you are a cracked pot. Whether I know your name or not, I'm saying you are a cracked pot—and I know that because I have a mirror—and so am I. And so was the apostle Paul. And that image gave him the idea that he could either polish the outside, or he could say *what I need is to be broken and let the light that God puts inside shine through the cracks*. So, what I would like to do is give you seven habits, seven weeks where you could put God's light on the inside. Receive God's grace and God's love. Let that get inside you so that through the cracks people might not say, "Have you lost weight?" They might say, "What's happening?" And you might say, "I don't know—I feel like I am being loved by God. Maybe it's making a difference."

I think it's important that we realize that following the way of Jesus ripples from the inside out. It's not a New Year's resolution that tries harder; it's more like getting infected with a good disease that works from the inside out. It's both the path of Jesus and the way. That is, you live the way that Jesus did. It's not polishing. That's what Jesus was trying to get to. He said,

What comes out of a person is what defiles them. <sup>21</sup> For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, <sup>22</sup> adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. <sup>23</sup> All these evils come from inside and defile a person. [Mark 7:20-23]

You add your sin in there. All this evil comes from inside. That's what defiles a person Jesus said. Jesus could have said *that's where the cracks come from. That's where the vase gets broken*. The key is not to just try to polish the vase.

What I'd like to do for the next seven weeks is to talk about the places where you feel like you're cracked...broken. And so what we have done is to look at different places in our lives, and we would like to hear from you what the crack feels like in your life. So would you—for the second time in thirty years I'm going to encourage you to pull out your phone in church. Everybody pull out your phone, if you have a

smart phone, and go to the text function. Where it says “To”, enter 555888. That’s who you are sending it to. And then, down at the bottom, type in “2017 Survey”. That’s all there is to it. If you don’t have a smart phone, we will send you an email this week. And for those of you that are still paper people, as you go out, this is on the information desk. This is just a thirteen question survey. The Communications team sent it to me on Thursday and it took me two minutes and thirty-seven seconds. I timed it and I didn’t try to go fast. We don’t want you to write a thesis; we just want you to say where does it hurt? Where are you stressed? What can we learn together? Would you do that with us, try that? We will try to say we are all cracked pots—how do we shine? Not how do we get fixed; how do we shine?

Our response then for this new year is not to try hard to polish the outside, but instead it is to bring light to the heart, light to the inside. To allow ourselves to live as though we are loved. Let me say that again: I would like you to allow yourself to live as though you are loved. Not perfect so you have to fake it, not getting better so you get approval, but live in a way that you are loved, so that you can sense that God loves you and it’s going inside of you...because you know what happens when God’s love gets inside of you? You leak—the jar cracks—you leak. And so you need to get refilled, and when you get refilled you leak that love out and it shines. That’s what the apostle Paul was talking about.

I was stunned over the holidays. I read a columnist—one of the things that was good for me over this last six months in the election craziness was I was trying to listen to voices from the left and from the right, and trying to really listen, and one of the voices I started to hear was Michael Gerson who is a Republican speechwriter-turned-columnist for the Washington Post. Gerson just did a New Year’s post and he used this line that...it was my sermon. The guy is preaching in the Washington Post. This is what he said: “It’s not an easy thing. It may be the work of a lifetime. It may be the hardest thing you’ve ever done. It is not an easy thing to live as if we are loved.” I love that. It’s not easy to quiet the voices of self-condemnation. Some of you are walking around with such a load of guilt that you can’t feel joy. To live outside the tiny cosmos of our desires...in other words, we are all so bent on getting secure and getting a little more and getting ahead that we miss the larger world beyond our desires. To live as if we are loved. To extend the grace that we have been shown. To be forgiven, and then instead of judging others, forgiving others. To act on a vision of humanity in which all are equally loved by God, and believing that God could love you almost as much as God loves me. That we are loved together by God. It is the work of a lifetime because all our habits go the other way. So what I’d like to do is give you the first habit that would

put light inside this coming week. We are going to do this together. At one end of the pew or the other, there ought to be a basket, and inside the basket are pens and pieces of paper. The paper is in half sheets...everybody take one half-sheet. I got this twenty-seven years ago. I know it because I was at the National Presbyterian Church in Washington D.C. I was the Associate Pastor there, and I was trying to memorize scripture. I stink at memorizing scripture; I'm terrible at it. I have to work hard at it. And there is this one passage I was trying so hard to memorize because I had the sense it would put light inside my broken jar, and I just couldn't get it. Finally, one of the smart people in Washington gave me a mnemonic. He said, "You need to get a mnemonic...something that will remind you of that." So this is how I get light inside the jar. I remember that two neurotic Roman priests lost an eccentric pope. It's an image, right? Who could forget that? That for me was a lot easier than memorizing this:

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. [Philippians 4:8]

Think about the true, the noble, the pure, the lovely, the admirable, the excellent, the praiseworthy. Think about those things, and the God of peace will be with you. Now, I don't know that you need a mnemonic. I don't even know if you need to memorize it, but what I do know is that like a computer, its garbage in, garbage out. Similarly, God's light in, God's light out. I do know that when I think about what is true or noble or pure or lovely or admirable or excellent or praiseworthy...when I think about that, for that moment at least and several moments afterward, I am more filled with peace because I have light on the inside. This is a promise from God. This is a habit that I would like us to get into, so here is what I would like you to do—this is on the back of Getting a Light in Your Cracked Jar, I put that list there—so true is not figuring out the test answer, it's even when the world says something is different, what is so true for you that you need to remember it? Noble. We're not noble people, so when I see somebody resisting pressure, I should thank God for that. In a world where everything is grey, I should think about what is right—especially when I'm tempted to compromise. I love this idea of pure. Pure doesn't mean holier than thou. Pure is the look of the faces of the kids in the Children's Sermon. They don't know any better. It is our call to be unstained. Lovely. I believe that when you see the beautiful, it reminds you that there is a God. Admirable...excellent. Excellent is not about expensive or classy or famous. Excellent is just doing the best you can. Think about a time when you have done

the best you could. Then the last one, praiseworthy. Think of somebody who has done something that should be lifted up. Tell them.

Here's what I would like you to do. If you went and did all seven of these, you'd forget it by this evening. Do one. I'm going to ask Rich and the band to come up now, and here's what I'd like you to do. I'd like to have us take just two minutes—Rich and Sarah are going to play softly underneath—we're just going to take two minutes and what I'd like you to do is say *what would I like to think about today? What's one thing that I would like to think about today?* I'll give you an example. Last night I said the one thing I wanted to think about was this idea of pure, and the image that came to my mind was that kid singing in the Mosaic service. I want that. Lord, make that for me. I don't know what it is for you, but just take one minute, put an "X" next to it or write a word next to it, and just that one thing...think about. Think about, today.

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