



Jars of Clay

Josh Patterson – November 29, 2009

Good morning. Last November 2008, I set out to do a wedding that I was really, really excited about because the bride to be was a long time family friend. I had known this family literally my entire life. I came home from the hospital in her mom's car. So I had known this family my whole life and was really excited to do her wedding. And then the groom was a guy I had met through the Village Church. He was a great guy, a guy that I looked up to and a guy that I really respected. I was excited about all that God had done to bring them together. This was going to be a family affair. My family was going to be there. It was just one that was circled on the calendar. There was a lot of excitement and anticipation about it. It was going to be held at a ranch in central Texas, and so we were invited to come down early and stay on the ranch. It wasn't like farm living; it was nice ranch living. So we were excited about all that this meant. We were going to drop off Lily, our three year old, with the other set of grandparents, and we were going to take Luke, who was just a newborn at the time, and he was just going to hopefully sleep in the room while we just enjoyed the weekend of rest, refreshment, celebration and all that this weekend was going to be. So we get there, and our room was amazing with a great view. I brought so many books just in anticipation of what this weekend was going to be, time to rest. So we get to the rehearsal dinner and there's about 70 other people there, all friends and family. So we eat the meal and it's that time where tradition says that you stand up and begin to honor the bride and the groom. And so they did. They just stood up and said, "We love you. . . We believe in you. . ." They were affirming them in the Lord, talking about all that they see in this couple. They talked about how they saw Christ in them, the glory in them, how they've shaped others, what they have done for others and the excitement for them moving forward. It was great, it was revelry, it was feast and it was everything you would want it to be.

Just at the end of dinner, the grooms grandmother is getting up to go to her room. It was later in the night, so she was heading to her room. She was walking up the steps, she missed a step and she fell. So we rush around and we do what we need to do, and obviously it changed the mood of the evening a bit. So we decided that we needed to get her to a hospital. She was an older lady and this is what we needed to do. She was conscious, and so we just put her in the car and, just as a precaution, we drove her to a hospital in Waco. We get her to the hospital, hand her over to the ER and wait. About an hour and a half later, they come out and say that she's passed away. She had suffered a more serious injury than any of us had really expected or anticipated and she passed away. So now it's about midnight and most of the people back at the ranch are kind of winding down and asleep. There is no cellphone coverage out there, so we have to drive back to tell the bride and the groom all that has just transpired. You see, they saw us leave just thinking maybe a concussion, maybe a bad bruise because of the way it was when we were there. So we drove back and let them know that things had taken a very serious and different turn. And all of a sudden, the bride and the groom began to think,

“Well, should we cancel this? Should we go forward? What’s the right move here? What do we do in this situation?” They were almost feeling guilty because we’re set up to celebrate, we’re set up to be excited and celebrate all that God was doing in them and through them and with this weekend, and now there’s this really serious situation that you just can’t ignore. And so what was the right move? We went back to the hospital to pray with a husband who had just lost his wife, a family that I didn’t know. I prayed with them, and about at 3:45 in the morning, I drive back to the ranch with a buddy, just exhausted, tired, crying and confused. I get there and just go to sleep, begging the Lord to give me clarity. Because I knew the next day that I was going to have to stand up before 250 people and share something. I was going to have to say something. And so we did.

This week, in anticipation of this weekend, this was a weekend that has been circled on the calendar. It was a weekend that has been circled on the calendar because it’s the last weekend at the Highland Village sanctuary. And for some of you, that might just be a transition point as you move into the Flower Mound campus, but for others of you and for us, this was a milestone and is a milestone weekend. It’s a weekend of sadness, it’s a weekend of joy and it’s just a culmination of all that God has done in this little room. It’s just a big weekend. We cried about it two weeks ago, just thinking about what it means and what God has done in our hearts here. So many of you, I can just look out and see your faces and I know some of your stories about what He’s done in your heart here, whether it’s in a prayer service or you were baptized right behind me or you baptized a friend, a spouse, a neighbor, a kid or you’ve cried your face out on this altar pleading with Christ or your marriage has been restored here and on and on I could go. It’s just a time to kind of rally the troops and celebrate and be excited. So that’s on this hand.

And then on Thursday morning, there was another situation that arose. About 9:30 on Thursday morning, I get a text message from Matt’s mother-in-law saying that Matt had had a seizure and to pray. So Natalie and I began to do that and my heart sank. I had zero information beyond that. A few minutes later, I got text message that said that the EMT’s were there and they’re taking him to the hospital. So I got in the car and went to the hospital and got to be with Matt and Lauren and the family. And let me just unpack for you what happened so that we’re all on the same page here and to give some updates on where we are and what’s ahead. Matt had a seizure Thursday morning about 9:30 at the house. Lauren was cooking in the kitchen, getting ready for the day, and Matt was hanging out with the kids. He walked to his chair, fell over and had a seizure. So the EMT comes out and they take him to the Emergency Room. There they run a few scans and go through all of his medical history. He does not have a history of seizures. This is not in his family. No symptoms preceded this or anything. So they run a CAT scan and seemed to locate something, so they ran an MRI and here is the language of the doctor. They found “a small mass on Matt’s right frontal lobe.” We have zero information beyond that.

So that’s where we find ourselves. The next step is to see a neurosurgeon. And so Thursday about 3:30, Matt got back to the house. Some of the elders went over to his house on Thursday night and were able to pray with Lauren and him. They’re in good

spirits. His heart sank when he heard the diagnosis. Whose wouldn't? But the Lord has really restored peace in his heart. And has really given him a quiet confidence in the reality that Christ is all we have. And here's the truth of that. That was true last week, and it's going to be true next week. You see, it just becomes clearer at times that Christ really is all we have. Christ is all. And so we prayed and we laughed and we talked about the how we're not going to speculate here because we just don't know right now.

So we prayed with him, and on Thursday night it was kind of a search to find who these neurosurgeons are and who we needed to get. So we sent out the feelers, and there were two names that came back and two names that continued to come back through different channels. What I mean by that is everyone went out and came back, and there were two names of doctors that consistently came up. So God really clarified two people. So on Friday, one of those doctors called Matt on his cellphone and he said, "I don't know who you are, but nine people called me today. And so I figured I was just going to call you back." And that was great. So he and Matt had a conversation. He is a believer, which is just another bonus. And so this guy was able to talk to Matt and says this, "We'll know more next week. Right now, it would be nothing or it could be something really serious. We just don't know. So what you need to do is bring me the results of the MRI and the CAT scan on Monday, and I will look at those and analyze those, so when we meet on Tuesday, I'll be able to clarify what this is and what the next steps are." So Tuesday is the day that should be circled on our calendars and we should be praying for Tuesday and praying for clarity of what this means. So that's where we find ourselves. At this point, he's having to take anti-seizure medication, which is just standard protocol until he meets with the neurosurgeon. He can't drive, he can't be at home by himself and there are some things like that that are standard procedure if you've had a seizure. And so this is where he is. They really are in good spirits.

I've been in real close and constant contact with them along with some of the other elders and some real close friends. And they have what they need. What I mean by that is all of the external needs are really taken care of. I just want you to know that what they continue to tell me is how loved they feel by you. Because the outpouring of "Can I do this? Can we help here?" has been almost to the point of overwhelming. It's been great. So their yard is going to be mowed, they have food coming to the house and all of those things are being taken care of. What they need from your right now is your continued prayers. So just continue to intercede and stand in the gap for Matt, Lauren and the family. The kids are doing okay. It was a little scary for Audrey early on because she was in the room, but she was able to talk with Matt that day and describe, "Daddy, this is what you did." And for her that was healing and she needed that. So they're doing well. They really are. But you can pray for them. Where we don't want to go right now is all the thousands of scenarios of speculation that right now just aren't helpful. Because those speculations lead to fear and those fears lead to anxieties. And what we want to do is put our trust in the Lord. We're going to put our trust in the Lord at this time. And the reality is we don't know. So take courage and be strong in the Lord as Matt and Lauren are, and we'll continue to pray and press on forward as a congregation. There are more questions than there are answers, and we'll be sure to give you as much information as we can as it becomes available.

So as I thought about this weekend and thought about where to go, I thought about that wedding. Because when I stood up before that small gathering, I had to say something. And here's what the Lord gave me that morning before we gathered. The reality of grief and the reality of joy, they hang in tension and balance in life. If we live in honest life, if we live a life of clarity, if we live a real, authentic, Christian life, then there is the tension between joy and pain constantly. There should be. Because we mourn with those who mourn and we rejoice with those who rejoice, and there's always someone mourning and there's always someone rejoicing. And the fact is that that balance is held together in the cross. Because in the cross of Jesus Christ, you see joy. The Savior saved. On the cross, He reconciled a world unto Himself. The One who knew no sin became sin, that we might become the righteousness of God. There is immense joy in the cross of Christ. And then literally in tension with that is the sorrow and the agony and the suffering of the Savior. And you cannot tease those apart. They are one in the same. And so if you and I understand life through the lens of the cross, we don't get away from either. We live in the tension of both grief and joy, unapologetically celebrating, all the while we weep and long for a better day. That's just life.

And the picture for me at that wedding was this. As we got through the wedding and got to the reception that night, the mom who lost her mom the night before is dancing with her husband while they both cry. That was it. For me, that just crystallized the moment. They were both celebrating, unashamedly celebrating the wedding their son while grieving the loss of her mom. And so I want to read and talk about a passage. So please turn to 2 Corinthians 4, we'll start in verse 7. This whole book of 2 Corinthians is how we, by means of the Spirit, walk through suffering. That's the nature of 2 Corinthians. And Paul starts off in verse 7 by saying this, *"But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."* The treasure that he's talking about is referenced in verse 6 where he says, *"For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."* That's the gospel. So this treasure, this gospel we have *"in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, 'I believed, and so I spoke,' we also believe, and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."* Paul says that this treasure, this gospel, this good news, the light of the glory of Jesus Christ is kept in jars of clay. The reason that it's kept

in jars of clay is not to display the jar, but to show the surpassing power of God. The imagery that Paul is using here is this. Jars are brittle, they're fragile, they're weak, it's just pottery. This imagery in the New Testament is something that is chipped and tattered and just not sturdy. And it's not to highlight the jar. Paul is saying that the jar is a vessel that highlights the prize inside, to show and demonstrate that the power belongs to God Almighty. And he says, "Although we're in situations that are perplexing and crushing and just despairing, we are not beaten down. And the reason is because a future grace awaits those who are in Christ Jesus, and that future grace is guaranteed because the One who raised Christ from the dead will also raise us so that we might be in His presence. So don't lose heart. We're all wasting away. The outer man is wasting away, but the inner man is being renewed day by day. Because all of this is transient and temporary, but it is not to even be compared with the eternal weight of glory that is ours in Christ Jesus.

And so here's the reality. Matt Chandler is a jar of clay, just like you and just like me. This building is a jar of clay. There's nothing special about this room. What's special about this church is that the treasure is the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what's special. And that is what God is highlighting through all of it. The reality is we're just wasting away, all of us. We live in broken down houses, you do and I do. And no matter what the window dressing looks like, the reality is day by day we're wasting away. But the inner man is being renewed, and it's being renewed to look more and more like the Son. And Paul says that these things are light and momentary afflictions that are not even worthy to be compared to the eternal weight of glory. He's contrasting the lightness of what we find ourselves in now with the weight of glory that is ours in Christ. We don't have anywhere else to go. This is our hope. This was our hope last weekend, last year and last decade. It will be our hope next weekend, next year and next decade.

And so here's what I want to do. I want to pray, and I want us to pray together. If you're not a believer here this morning, then here's what I would encourage you to do. I would encourage you to ask the Lord questions. Because suffering is just as much your reality as it is ours. The hope of the Christian is not that we would find our strength in ourselves. The hope of the Christian is that we would endure through it. The hope of the believer is the future grace that Christ has afforded us and that we know there's an eternal weight of glory beyond comparison. And so we're going to pray.

The first thing I want us to pray for is the Chandler family. And here are some prayer points if you need some. You can pray for healing, ultimate healing. You could pray that they would have peace, faith and courage. You can pray for their hearts, that they wouldn't be filled with anxiety and speculation and all these fears that undoubtedly the enemy is putting there. So pray for them. Pray for their kids. Pray for their extended family, all of which are here, so they're all walking through this together. So let's pray and intercede for our pastor. Let's intercede for our friend.

Now if you would just transition and pray for our transition as a body. This year has been a significant year in that we've asked a lot of people to go to a Dallas campus, two years ago, we asked a lot of people to go to a Denton campus and now this is our turn.

And so it's going to be different. There's a change ahead of us and it starts next weekend. So in your times of prayer, even now, I want you to celebrate Christ for all that He's done. And just in looking around in this room today, I know some of your stories and I know what Christ has done in you. You've shared it. You can't help but to tell what He's done, how He's healed, how He's restored marriages, how He's provided, how the body has come around you. This is a place where you have found a spouse, and God provided that for you. This is a place where your kids were born and they're hearing the gospel. This is the place where you first understood the gospel of Jesus Christ. I know that those stories are in here, so celebrate those stories in your prayers now as you exalt the King. And then pray that those stories of His great goodness would continue, that He would save, that He would heal, that we would continue to see His glory on display. So let's pray.

And then finally, pray for your heart. If you're like me, this has revealed something about your own heart, that maybe you've been wrestling with a lot of fear, maybe you've been wrestling with a lot of anxiety. Pray for your heart in this. Isaiah 26:3 says the Lord will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is steadfast in Him. Rather than our minds running to a thousand speculations, there's one anchor that I know is sure and true, and that's who I want to run to and that's where I want my heart to be - in Him. And so pray for your heart that it be guarded as the wellspring of life. Pray that your heart would be protected in the Lord, that you would be strong in Him. Pray that your heart would be ready to speak the gospel when your neighbors say, "Man, I heard what's going on at your church. What's the deal?" When your kids are asking you questions, my hope for my answers and yours would be, "Our hope is in what Christ has done and what He has promised." And so although all the present circumstances are despairing and perplexing, we're persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed and the reason is because Christ Jesus was raised and He has promised His people a resurrection as well. That's our hope. That's it. And so pray for your heart. Pray that it would be quick and ready to speak those truths. Pray for your heart to be ready to receive those truths. Because even if we're not quite there yet, the hope is that we would be. Pray for your heart that we would just be awakened to the reality that this is reality, that suffering is a part of God's plan, not an aberration of it. So he says that these things are light and momentary afflictions and they are used to prepare us for the eternal weight of glory that's ours in Christ. So pray for your heart in that.

"Father, I thank You that we can cast our cares on You because You care for us. I thank You that we can boldly approach the throne of grace in our times of need because Christ has opened the door for those who believe. I thank You that we've been reconciled to You through the cross of Your Son. I thank You that You made Him who knew no sin to be sin that we might become the righteousness of God. I thank You that our hope is that we will be with You forever and forever and forever and that these broken down houses are yet a reminder of the eternal weight of glory that is ours in Christ Jesus. I thank You that You divinely enable us to endure, because through that, You show off Your power and Your might. I thank You that You give us grace upon grace in our times of need, and we need You. So I pray for comfort, I pray for peace, I pray for settled hearts, I pray for my heart to be settled in You and I thank You for the promise that You will keep him in

perfect peace the one whose mind is steadfast on You. I pray for Matt. I thank You for what a gifted man He is, and I thank You for his friendship. I thank You for how he pastors us. And God, I pray for his healing. I don't know what the situation is, but I know that You do. I pray for his heart, that You quell any fears or anxieties. I pray that he and Lauren would press into You together. I pray for his family, that they would find a peace that's beyond understanding. Father, ultimately we're asking that, whatever this is, it would come to nothing. That's our hope and that's our prayer. And until we hear differently, we'll pray that way, Lord. And we'll continue to pray that way. We trust You as a body, recognizing that all of us are simple jars of clay, hoping that what is being revealed is the treasure of the gospel of Jesus Christ within. And we certainly bless You for Your Son, as even on this Advent Sunday, we begin to turn our heart's attention and our mind's affections on the reality that Christ has come, the hope of the world, the light has come into the darkness. And in Christ there is no darkness at all. We celebrate the fact that You are the light. And in our dark times, in our dark moments, in our dark hearts and in this dark world, You are the light, the hope of the world. And so we will sing unashamedly and celebrate that this morning without guilt, unshackled and unburdened. And so God, may our grief propel us in worship even more. And so receive it this morning, God. Be exalted. In Christ's name, amen."