

Brooklyn College Archives and Special Collections

Collection Name: The Papers of Rev. Dr. William Augustus Jones, Jr. (Accession #2007-012)

Title of Sermon: A Treasure in Trash

Date: Undated

Original Format: Audiocassette

File number(s): C025_A / C025_B

Transcriptionist: Sheana Corbridge

(choir sings)

SPEAKER #1: The Lord be with you. (choir responds “_____??”) Oh, Lord show thy mercy upon us. (choir responds “and grant us our salvation”) Oh God, may clean our hearts within us. (choir responds “_____??”) Oh, lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world (choir responds “grant us thy peace”)

Let us pray. Eternal God our father, wellspring of all that is excellent and beautiful, we come now in the spirit of worship. Grant unto us a fresh awareness of thy presence that we might rejoice in thee. Guide us we pray in the way everlasting. Grant us wisdom and grant us courage our Lord to walk with humbled hearts and uplifted spirits because one day you brought peace to our souls. We beseech thee oh Lord, that thou will touch those who have gathered in thy name and in thy service. We pray for added strength and encouragement as we walk through the valleys of tribulation and the valleys of the shadow of death. We need not fear evil because you shall stand by our side. For this we are grateful. Keep us from day to day. We might always lift thee up. Teach us father to pray as you did teach your disciples to pray. To pray never ceasing, to pray believing, to pray our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

(choir sings “The Lord’s Prayer” followed by another unknown hymn)

REV. DR. WILLIAM AUGUSTUS JONES, JR: It is always a happy privilege to welcome those who listen to the Bethany worship Hour. We look forward to sharing with you each Lord's day our own worship experience here at Bethany church. From time to time, we receive inquiries concerning the address of the church. Should any of you desire to visit us we are at 460 Sumner Avenue in Brooklyn. 460 Sumner Avenue here in Brooklyn. We will be delighted to welcome you at any and all of our services. God's blessings rest upon you today, tomorrow, and always.

(choir sings “I Wanna Be Ready”)

JONES: Here now the reading of the scripture lesson as contained in Second Corinthians, chapter 4, verses 1 through 7. “Therefore, seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, (recording drops out for a moment for this part: “not walking in craftiness,”) nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of

darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” God bless the reading of his sacred word. Let us turn in the hymnal to the hymn of consecration, selection 201 “Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior.”

(choir and congregation sings “Pass Me Not O Gentle Savior”)

JONES: I called your attentions today to verse 7 of chapter 4 in Paul’s second letter to Corinthian Christians, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us.” That’s the King James rendering. The new English bible puts it this way, “we are no better than pots of earthenware to contain this treasure and this proves that such transcendent power does not come from us but is God’s alone.” I want to talk today about “Treasures In Trash,” “Treasures In Trash.” There ought always be a certain freshness about religious faith. Whenever religion becomes like a stagnant stream, it constitutes a living contradiction to the promise made by Jesus at Jacob’s well. Said the master one day at high noon to that woman at that well, “the water that I give shall become a living spring of water within. Welling up into eternal life.” Religious faith ought be marked by freshness. Good religion is active, alive, bubbling, exuberant. I reiterate, good religion is marked by freshness. The lyrics of a Jamaican melody put it well, “something in my heart like a stream running down makes me feel so happy as happy as can be. When I think of Jesus and what he’s done for me something like a stream in my heart running down.” Authentic excitement is part and parcel of the believer’s experience and no person need ever apologize for legitimate excitement in religion. Enthusiasm is to faith, what oxygen is to life. The root of the word itself makes it plain. For the word enthusiasm derives from the Greek words “in Theos” meaning “in God.” If you’re in God, enthusiasm and excitement should attend your journey—and why not? He who is bigger than creation has permitted you to participate with him in the work of redemption. The almighty himself has allowed us entry into the sanctuary of his holiness. The crown prince of glory has come all the way from heaven down, to die for our deliverance. Jesus himself has come into our hearts and I say to you, that’s a happening worth singing and shouting about. We should celebrate it every day of our lives. Paul described in this second missive to Corinthian Christians, God’s beneficent act of grace on the behalf of all who would believe.

pause in recording as cassette tape 1, side 1 ends

recording of cassette tape 1, side 2 begins.

JONES: Said Paul, “for God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” Faith is a shining reality. It glows with particular radiance; it is marked by sure luster. Faith has a sheen of its own and the redeemed soul is naturally excited about what God has done. Paul made it plain in lifting up the status and dignity of all who follow Christ—and then on the heels of this sterling ascent, the apostle made a quick descent. He did not remain on that mountain where he talked about God’s light shining in our hearts. He did not dwell in those blissful heights. He made a great pronouncement, quickly broke camp, and rushed downwards to the valley. This preacher announced, God hath shined in our hearts and without even pausing to reflect he employed the conjunction “but,” “God hath shined in our hearts but we have this treasure in earthen vessels.” As

if some of the Christians at Corinth might be overly excited about their recently received righteousness. He pushes them quickly into the realm of religious reality. God, the holy one. God, the creator, and redeemer. God in Christ has taken up residence in our hearts but don't become silly about it. Don't become fanatical about your righteousness. Don't boast about your goodness. Your humanity has been honored by holy occupancy but whatever you do, don't become guilty of unthinking enthusiasm. Keep your feet planted on the ground. Your excitement is proper but let it be natural. God hath shined in our hearts but we have this treasure in earthen vessels. It's a treasure, it's a priceless treasure, but it's a treasure in trash. The body which houses the treasure is but as trash. Good religion is a treasure in trash. Now before anyone jumps to the conclusion that this preacher has a low view of the flesh. Let me tell you what I mean by trash. I make a real distinction between trash and trashy. I've seen so many lives that are trashy, vile, and vulgar, uncouth, profane, blasphemous, wicked, unrepentant, un-Godly. I know people whose deeds are filthy and who give off a foul odor. People may be trashy, but no human body is ineluctably evil. The body is holy. The body is good. Know ye not that we are the temple of the living God? This body is a dwelling place of divinity. Whatever God makes is essentially good and yet I declare that it's a treasure in trash. Trash? Yes, trash but in what sense in the sense of perishability. Trash as temporariness. Trash as transitoriness. It's a treasure in trash. This body must decay. This body is subject to disease and disorder. This body is destined to die. I don't care how pretty people say you are, nor how much you try to preserve your physical being. It matters not how splendid your physique, nor how often you go to your health club. Your doctor may have declared you physically fit on yesterday but my brother and my sister, you have a date with dust. You're a candidate for the cemetery right now and your reservation has already been made without the privilege of cancellation. Though God has shined in your heart, it's a treasure in trash. Blessing has come to your weakness; holiness has touched your humanness and only God and people working through God can affect this kind of happening. At the purely human level, treasures and trash have no fellowship with one another but with God the seeming contradictions become complementary. With him, treasure and trash are not antithetical, but rather they are dialectical. Let me make it plain, the treasure sanctifies the trash. How else can we explain the surprises that show up in the most unlikely situations? Surprises such as something good like Jesus coming out of Nazareth. Geniuses springing up from ghetto soil or words of wisdom falling from the lips of the so-called scum of the earth. I've learned some mighty good lessons from people who according to most folks don't count for much. If your soul is sensitive and if your spirit is attuned to things that really count, there is recurring evidence of what God can do with folks whom people put aside as trash. Right now, on the rubbish heap, in the junkyard, in the trash pile, there are pearls of a great price waiting to be discovered and all who live under God with a proper humility can simply look at themselves and be continually amazed by what God has done and with what God continues to do with their unprofitable lives. Our best righteousness is as filthy rags when we measure ourselves against the righteousness of God. In Paul-ine language, we are but as dung, but if the treasure is in you, your possibilities are unlimited. If the love of God is shared abroad in your hearts no peaks are insurmountable. If you believe says the bible, all things are possible—but it's the treasure in the trash that allows for triumphant living. Listen to the tent maker from Tarsus, we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. The new English Bible is more direct, we are no better than pots of earth and where to contain this treasure and this proves that such transcendent power does not come from us but is God's alone." I know not how it is with you, but when I look at my own life and view my achievements and my successes, my gains, my strengths, and all of my blessings—I'm forced to acknowledge that no matter how smart some people might say I am, I

could not possibly have led in all out and brought it to fruition. I might have passed my courses, but I surely would have flunked life. I might have heard the applauses of people but if God hadn't been in it, I never would hear the applause of angels. I might even have made a good living, but on my own I could not have made a life. When I look at me, when I analyze this piece of trash that has only the name tag William A. Jones, I'm forced to say, "nobody but you, Lord. Nobody but you!" Every day of my life I have to declare by the grace of God, I am what I am. This trash couldn't have produced it. Only the treasure could have done it. The power does not come from us, it is God's alone. He alone makes the desert to blossom. He alone can straighten crooked character. He alone can melt the stony heart. He alone can sweeten sour dispositions. He alone can make selfish souls generous. He alone can make people pray for their enemies. God plants the treasure in the trash and how rightly we pray, thine is the power and the glory forever. So whatever good you do for others, give God the glory. Whatever light from your life brightens another's darkness, give God the glory. Whatever strength you have, give God the glory. Whatever good comes your way, give God the glory. Don't be arrogant, don't be proud, don't be vain. Don't move through life as though God in the world can't make it without you. Don't be presumptuous, give God the glory. Don't parade your own powers, don't seem self-sufficient—and when you do good, don't boast about it, give God the glory. It's not your trash that brings things to pass, it's God's treasure in your trash. Be humble so God can use you. Be kind, so God can smile on you. Be open-hearted so God can bless you, if you honor the treasure within—there's no telling what the Lord will do. God's got green pastures for the faithful. Gods got ____ ?? waters for the committed. God's got daily bread for the dedicated. If you honor the treasure, no good thing will he withheld. If you ask, it will be given. If you seek, you will find. If you knock, the door will be open. Yes! Hallelujah, yes! Honor the treasure, treat it with respect, treat it with reverence, nourish it with love, feed it with prayer. Honor the treasure! Finally, this body is so akin to trash, houses the treasure, but the treasure keeps me going. I house the treasure, but the treasure holds me. It alone makes me keep on keeping on. It equips me with staying power. When the going gets rough it holds me. When times are tough, it holds me. When enemies arise, and friends flee, it holds me. When the storms of life are raging, it holds me. It provides power to persevere. No matter how hard you try, you can't stop the saints of God. The treasure is in them. I don't care what stumbling blocks you put in their pathway, you might slow them down, but you can't stop their progress. For they know something that you don't know about. Something within me that holds the reigns and something within me that banishes pain, something within me that I cannot explain. It's a treasure I tell you, you can't stop the saints of the most high God. Why you might as well take a teaspoon and try to dip the Mississippi River dry. You can't stop God's people no matter how hard you try. There's a treasure there. Just look on some old soldiers of the cross and how they keep on moving. Look at them. I'm looking at some of them now, they're marching up to Zion. Look at them. Their storm tossed and shipwrecked but still singing the Lord's song. Look at them, roughed up but still rejoicing. Look at them victimized but ever victorious. I tell you, there's treasure in the trash. Look at them, their bodies beaten and battered by time and some of them are broken down, but they serve God anyhow. Well Paul told us what the treasure would do. In the very next breath he said, we are troubled on every side yet not distressed, we are perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed. You can't hurt the treasure, that's why Jesus said, "fear not him was able to kill the body. Fear him only who's able to destroy body and soul. Fear God." And if you can live like that, in a world like this, why not rise, shine, and give God the glory. All of my help comes from the Lord. Whatever I am, is because of him who made me what I am. God is the answer. I know who brought me all along the journey, God is the answer. He

rocked me to sleep last night and watched over me all night long and woke me up this morning and started me on my way. Gods is blessing me right now and they that put their trust in him shall be his Mount Zion. God will take care of his own, yes, he will. Have I got a witness? Have you tried him? Have you trusted him? Yes! The Lord will provide for his people for he has planted a treasure in this trash. We have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. So be careful Christian, be careful how you boost and brag about yourself. Be careful Christian, be careful about ascribing success to your own ingenuity. Be careful Christian, I don't care how wise you are—there's a God somewhere to whom father and glory belong alone. Give God the glory, for it is he that hath made us and not we ourselves. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not walk. The lot maketh me to lie down in green pastures. The Lord leadeth me besides still waters. The Lord restoreth my soul. The Lord anointed my head with oil. The Lord, do you know him? The Lord, the Lord God almighty, the Lord, the Lord of heaven and earth prepare at the table before me in the presence of mine enemies. The Lord's goodness and his mercy follow me all the days of my life and when I get done living and lie down to die, only this trash will be deposited in the cemetery. The real me can never die. They may roll my remains down this island. Some preacher may eulogize me. They may carry this trash out to some cemetery, but by the time you get word that Jones is gone, the real me will already be over yonder. There's a treasure in this trash. Brother Macmillan, you're a good undertaker but you can't bury the real me. Oh no! Brothers and sisters, you may love me and come in here to view my body one of these days, but you won't be looking at the real me. No, you can't see the real me. You can't see what makes me me, there's a treasure in this trash. I've been born again. Gods got a claim on my soul that soon one morning I'll fly away and be in rest. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah! The doors of the church are open. Is anybody here today who wants to recognize his or her essential dignity? That image of God planted in you by God's own hand when he made man and that you that he sent his son, Christ to rescue from all of the problems of this trash like existence? This trash presents all kinds of problems. This trash alone is tempted. This trash gets in the way sometimes and if it wasn't for this trash, I'd go on to God right now. There's a treasure, God wants to adorn your life with his goodness. He wants you related to him through Jesus Christ, his son. If you're here we beg you to come while we sing the hymn of invitation. Perhaps there's someone here today who knows Jesus Christ as Lord but who has no relationship with any church in this town. If you're here, we welcome you to come and unite with us here at Bethany. The doors of the church open unto you as we sing the hymn of invitation, selection 80, "Down At The Cross." If you're here, God help you to come while we sing to his glory. Will you come today?

(organ plays and choir and congregation sing "Down At The Cross")

JONES: (speaking while music plays) The doors of the church open unto you; God help you to come. Why don't you come? Jesus is calling.

The creation of this transcript was generously funded by Jennifer Jones Austin.