TITLE: A Red Letter Addition.

TEXT: 2 Co. 3:1-3, 5:20; Ps. 119:11; 2 Co. 4:1-7

Acts 4:13; Phil. 3:4-15

INTRODUCTION: Bibles come in many shapes and sizes today. If you go shopping for a new Bible you may be amazed at just how many options there are to choose from.

 First you will need to settle on a version.

KJ, NKJ, NIV, AS, NAS, RSV, NRSV, NCV, Living Bible, The message, Young’s literal translation, and Darby’s are just a few of the translations or transliterations available today.

 Then you will want to determine if you want just a plain bible or a study bible or a reference bible or a devotional Bible or a combination of all the above.

 Then what kind of cover you want! Hard cover, soft cover, imitation leather or genuine leather. Red, Blue, Black, White, Turquoise and most other colors under the rainbow are offered.

 Do you want a bible with index tabs to help you find the books of the bible quicker or one without index tabs so people will think that you already know where all the books of the bible are.

 And then what font or print size do you want-- 9 point, 10 point, large print or Giant print.

 And finally, do you want a black or a red letter addition of the bible? (Red letter addition is where the words of Christ are in Red).

And you thought that picking out a new bible would be easy!

 Well, we may fuss a lot when it comes time to buy a new Bible, but I really doubt that God cares what particular bible we may purchase.

What God does care about is what kind of bible we are!

Have you ever thought of yourself as a bible before?

Well, it is true! That is what the Word of God tells us.

**2 Corinthians 3:1 - 3 (NIV)** **1Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you?** **2You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody.** **3You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.**

This is a pretty amazing portion of Scripture!

Paul starts by asking a question..

**1Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you?**

Then Paul answers his own question….

**2You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody.**

Then he gets specific with what kind of letter we are to be….

**3You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.**

You are a letter from Christ! We are to be a red letter addition of the bible to the world in which we live!

Our lives are to be representative of Jesus Christ!

**2 Corinthians 5:20 (NIV)** **20We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us…**

 Each and every one of us, as believers, should read and study our bibles. We should be striving daily to get to know God better and better!

King David understood the importance of spending time in God’s Word.

**Psalms 119:11 (KJV)** **11Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.**

As Christians we should all read and study our Bibles daily, but we should not expect non-believers to read and study the Bible.

You see, we are the Bibles that non-believers read.

We are Gods epistle, a letter from Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts, and everyone should be able to read our lives and see Jesus written there.

**2 Corinthians 4:1 - 7 (NIV) 1Therefore, since through God’s mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart.  2Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.  3And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.** **4The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.**

**5For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.** **6For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,”****£** **made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. 7But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.**

 Roger Thompson, who wrote; "Treasure in a Brown Bag” shares this story:

*.When I was in high school, I worked for a time at Brinks Armored Car company, in San Bernardino, California. My job was to take care of the coins that Brinks handles. We used to get forty tons of coin from Las Vegas. My job was to wrap this coin, and you had to be double-jointed and triple witted to run the huge machine that wrapped coins. And I could wrap $10,000 worth of quarters an hour.*

 *A bag of quarters containing a thousand dollars weighs about eighty pounds—*

 *One day we got a call from Bank of America in downtown San Bernardino, and they were in a panic: "We've got to have some coin in the hour." Well, all the armored trucks were gone, and so Larry, my manager, backed his '49 Ford pickup into the bay. Now if Brinks ever finds out about this they're going to shoot this guy. We loaded $25,000 worth of coin in a '49 Ford pickup. That's over a ton and the thing was dragging..*

 *Larry said, "Hop in. We're going up to Bank of America."*

 *We hopped in. I'm in my T-shirt and blue jeans. We drove up to the front of the Bank of America, parked the truck, and Larry said, "Hang on, I'll go in and get the dolly, and we'll haul this stuff in." He says: I'm whistling, standing against this truck for twenty minutes. I don't have a gun. I thought, If anybody notices what is in this common looking pickup truck, I'm a dead duck! Of course, you can't carry eighty pounds times 25 bags very far.*

 *The treasure that people were walking by! But they didn't see it for the commonness of the delivery system.*

For these guys the commonness of their delivery system kept them from being noticed, but interestingly, God will often work in the realm of the common so that it will be noticed!

 An example of this is when Peter gives one of his first sermons after the Lord has ascended to Heaven and sent back His Holy Spirit to indwell His Church..

 After Peter had given this amazing message----
**Acts 4:13 (NIV) 13When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.**

Just what was the courage that these religious leaders of the Jews took notice of here in Peter and John?

 What they took notice of was the boldness in which these common, uneducated fishermen spoke to the crowd and the persuasive words they were using.

It says that this astonished them and the only answer that they could come up with to explain it was they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

Why would they make this connection?

 Because Peter and John were living red letter lives in Christ! They evidently talked a lot like Jesus had talked- In wisdom and with authority.

Paul says:

**7But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.**

 Treasure is usually kept in a safe or a vault that is hidden away from sight so that the treasure contained in it will be safe.

 I knew a man that had a lot of money and he was so concerned about it that he buried it all over his farm.

One time he took my dad out and showed him where some of it was buried in case something ever happened to him.

 I have known other men who have placed their valuables in lock boxes in banks hidden away from sight.

But God has placed His treasure in jars of clay!

Why?

 Because clay jars were commonly used items that would have been out in full view!

 No one would expect there to be treasure in them!

And when they are found to contain great treasure people will be amazed by it and attribute it to God.

 Each one of us is a jar of clay. We were made from the dust of the earth and formed into a vessel. In that sense we are common, for all other men are made the same way, comprised of the same material.

But in Christ, even though our vessel may be common, the treasure contained in it is not!

**7But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.**

The treasure that God has placed within our jars of clay is the gospel of Jesus Christ made alive within us by the Holy Spirit.

 I love hearing the Apostle Paul talk about when he came to contain this treasure in his jar of clay, in his life, and the way it changed his entire perspective on life…

 **Philippians 3:4 - 15 (NIV) …..If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:  5circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;  6as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.** **7But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.** **8What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ** **9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.** **10I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,** **11and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.** **12Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.  13Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,  14I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.** **15All of us who are mature should take such a view of things….**

 In his earthly heritage and accomplishments Paul had a lot to be proud of!

**5circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;  6as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless.**

 To his peers in Judaism Paul was the up and coming young executive to keep your eye on and he was proud of his heritage and his zeal….

 But on the road to Damascus he had a life changing encounter with the Lord and it changed his whole perspective on life…

**7But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ.  8What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ  9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.**

 There was something very interesting that happened in the life of Paul after his conversion.

 To his former peers in Judaism Paul was probably now looked upon with distain, probably looked upon as a traitor, looked upon as human garbage.

To the believers that once trembled in fear when Paul was in the area with arrest warrants for any Christian he came into contact with Paul now became a red letter addition of the Bible.

Someone with great treasure in his jay of clay!

Paul’s story reminds me of another story I read a while back.

 A man by the name of Craig Randall drives a garbage truck in Peabody, Massachusetts. In a garbage container one day, he noticed a Wendy's soft drink cup bearing a contest sticker. Having won a chicken sandwich the week before off one of these, Randall checked it, hoping for some French fries or a soft drink.

 Instead, he peeled a sticker worth $200,000 toward the construction of a new home.

One man’s junk can be another man’s treasure…

Who would have thought that a smashed up Wendy’s beverage cup in a garbage can would actually contain a treasure?

 The point is this: We may not be the most gifted or the most intelligent or the most talented or the most attractive person on the planet, yet if we have Christ Jesus living within our heart our jar of clay contains a treasure that is of the highest value of anything on this planet..

We become a red letter addition of the Bible to the lost of our world! We become **“a letter from Christ, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”**

There is a story of a young man named Norman.

Norman has wild hair, wears a T-shirt with holes in it, jeans, and no shoes. This was literally his wardrobe for his entire four years of college.

He is brilliant. He is kind of profound and very, very bright. He became a Christian while attending college.

 Across the street from the campus is a well-dressed, very conservative church. They want to develop a ministry to the students but are not sure how to go about it.

One day Norman decides to go there. He walks in with no shoes, wearing jeans, his T-shirt, and his wild hair. The service has already started, so Norman starts down the aisle looking for a seat.

The church is completely packed and he can’t find a seat.

 By now, people are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything.

Norman gets closer and closer to the pulpit. When he realizes there are no seats, he just squats down right on the carpet.

By now the people are really uptight, and the tension in the air is thick.

About this time, the minister realizes that from way at the back of the church, a deacon is slowly making his way toward Norman.

Now the deacon is in his eighties, has silver-gray hair, and is wearing a three-piece suit. He is a godly man – very elegant, very dignified, and very courtly and he walks with a cane.

 As he starts walking toward this boy, everyone is saying to themselves that you can’t blame him for what he’s going to do.

 How can you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some college kid on the floor?

 It takes a long time for the man to reach the boy.

The church is utterly silent except for the clicking of the man’s cane. All eyes are focused on him. You can’t even hear anyone breathing. The minister can’t even preach the sermon until the deacon does what he has to do.

When the deacon finally reaches Norman, the church watches as this elderly man drops his cane on the floor. With great difficulty, he lowers himself and sits down next to Norman and worships with him so he won’t be alone.

 Everyone chokes up with emotion.

When the minister gains control, he says, **“What I’m about to preach, you will never remember. What you have just seen, you will never forget.”**

 This story was adapted from a life account of Country singer Bill Anderson back when he was a kid going to college where he had an unsaved friend named Norman. Many times he invited Norman to go to Church with him but Norman didn’t want anything to do with Church or religion because from his experiences he said they were all hypocrites.

 Years later after becoming a Country Western star Bill Anderson, in thinking back upon his college days wrote this song..

 Play song—The Only Bible

 “Be careful how you live. You may be the only Bible some people will ever read.”

**7But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.**

**3You show that you are a letter from Christ, -- written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.**

 As Believers we all have a great treasure in these jars of clay! We have the treasure of Jesus living inside us.

 Are we living our lives in Christ as if we are a red letter addition of the Bible reflecting Jesus to everyone we may come in contact with as we may be the only Bible that some people will ever read?