

The Marred Vessel

Pottery making is one of the oldest of human crafts. One of the very first inventions made by man was the potter's wheel.

Pottery begins with the choice of suitable clay (in Job 10:9 - Job reminds God that He made him out of clay) - and the careful preparation of that clay. The potter removes all grit, pebbles and other unwanted substances so that the clay will be perfectly smooth. He adds just enough water to enable the clay to be kneaded into a tough "dough." Before the potter starts molding the clay, he dips his hands into water which keeps the clay from sticking to his hands.

He does not have to move his fingers around the clay - the clay on the wheel moves instead, whether by peddle or electric power. The potter begins by plunging both thumbs into the mass of clay. As he moves his thumbs and fingers in certain ways, gradually drawing up the sides, he brings the clay to a finished shape.

There are several metaphors in scripture where God as our Father is identified as the potter and we, as His children, are the clay. The clearest portion is Isaiah 64:8 "Yet, O Lord, you are our Father, we are the clay, and You are our potter, and we all are the work of Your hand."

The power that the potter has over the clay is very clearly articulated in Jeremiah 18:1-4 - The Word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear My words." Then I went down to the potter's house and behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. The word *marred* is an old English word used in the King James and actually means spoiled or disfigured.

The picture here is that God the Great Potter desires to mold and shape each one of His children into a vessel that He can use for His highest purposes - (II Tim. 2:20 & 21). However, when the vessel is marred it is not because the Potter lacks skill in the formation, but because of the bad quality of the clay and its stubborn resistance to be formed according to God's will.

We can fail to yield to the inward or outward pressure of His hands or resist His removal of the unwanted substances; grit, pebbles, etc. - but He does not cast us away! Instead, He begins to deal with the clay to make it more smooth, pliable and malleable -(to be hammered without breaking).

Notice that Jeremiah 18:4 says "He made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it." When God makes another vessel it is different than the original design. Gradually revealed in the clay of our humanity is God's purpose:

1. Loveliness: the desire to create something lovely
Psalm 149:4 - He will beautify the meek with salvation
2. Usefulness:
II Tim. 2:21 - a useful vessel

God's molding is characterized by patience and a demonstration of His changeless love. Jeremiah 31:3 - I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn you and continued My faithfulness to you.

When God is molding and shaping us, we must remember the words of Ephesians 2:10 - For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which

God prepared in advance for us to do. "In advance" means from the foundation of the world! God has no last minute calls or assignments. His plans for us have been prepared from the beginning of time.

Have you felt the pressure of His Hands? Pressure can come inwardly through conviction - Ps. 32:4 - Day and night Your hand of displeasure was heavy on me. Or pressure can come outwardly through circumstances beyond our control - people, places, events - used to shape and mold our lives. Clay is mindless and passive - we need to be willing and receptive to the pressure of God's Hands.

Do you recognize His power over the clay? Isaiah 29:16 - Shall the potter be considered of no more account than the clay? Shall the thing that is made say of its Maker, He did not make me?

Do you resist the pressure of His Hands or do you yield?

The *marred vessel* can look up into the marred visage of the Son of God (Isaiah 52:14) and see there, and there alone, the *assurance of the forgiving love of God*.