

## **CRACK POTS OR CRACKED POTS?** (Lindfield 8<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2019)

### **JEREMIAH 18: 1-11**

In the 1970s and 80s pottery enjoyed a huge resurgence in popularity. Everyone seemed to have coffee mugs, casserole dishes even whole dinner sets made from pottery. I remember having many such coffee mugs. These items ranged from reasonably priced items bought at a market or gift shop to very expensive, unique designs costing much more.

In Jeremiah's day pottery vessels were everywhere to be found. Pots and jars for storing food and water. Plates and bowls for everyday use. Jeremiah would have visited the potter's place quite often. The clay found near Judah was not of a high quality so many vessels wouldn't have lasted long before they cracked. Many homes would have had imperfect pieces – those with an odd shape or not evenly round. Even the imperfect pieces could have been quite useful (and maybe cheaper to buy).

When God tells Jeremiah to go to the Potter's house to receive the divine message he would have been at a very familiar place. There he sees what he'd seen a thousand times before: the potter crafting a piece that went haywire – maybe he wasn't spinning the wheel at quite the right speed or he had too little or too much water in the clay or maybe his hand slipped as he was shaping – whatever happened the article was spoiled so he moulded it back into a lump and started over.

God asks Jeremiah why He can't do that with Judah? God tells Jeremiah that he may have pronounced judgement on a nation but if they turn away from evil to do good then God might change his mind and spare it. On the other hand if God had decided to spare a nation but if it began doing evil and turned its back on God then he might change his mind and bring it under judgement. God is sovereign over ALL the nations.

In Judah's case God wants Jeremiah to remind Judah that they have an opportunity to turn back to God or they will only have themselves to blame if judgement comes.

The Hebrew word for "potter" is taken from a general word *yatsar*, meaning, "to fashion or form". That's what God wants to do with Judah and Israel. He still wants them to become the great nation he promised Abraham. Even though they had a chequered past God was not finished with them. God still wanted to form them in His image so they could be a witness to the world.

As Judah and Israel were God's people way back then, we are God's people today. I believe the same applies.

God can mould us, shape us into a vessel fit for his service but we must allow it to happen. This doesn't mean millions of robots stalking the earth – far from it. Just as clay has different colours, textures, properties, strengths and weaknesses so have we. Just as some clay is good for certain types of vessels and not others, so are we. The type, form and beauty of the vessel is in the hands of the potter.

Christians are people who have allowed God to shape them. We are shaped by all the influences of our lives. We learn firstly from our parents or whoever raised us. We learn

from our education, our friends, from the culture in which we live. We are composites of all these and so many more as well as the decisions we make along the way.

God uses all this to form us and use us.

Every potter has a bin or bucket where they throw the off cuts, the spoiled pieces. Every so often when a new item is being made the potter may need just a bit of extra clay to finish the piece so he reaches into the bucket for one of these pieces to put the finishing touch to his creation. Sometimes he may not have a specific project in mind so he'll reach into the bucket of off-cuts and broken pieces and fashion something new.

Sometimes we feel as though we are in that bucket. Sometimes we feel like an off-cut, a spoiled piece, a reject piece, a mistake. Depression sufferers often feel that way. Useless. Good for not much. We think life in the bucket of mistakes is all we're good for. But that is not true. We may be there for a while. We all have down periods. We may even feel that we're not much use to anyone any more BUT THAT'S JUST NOT TRUE.

Look at the Gospels. Look at who Jesus spent most of his time with. Look at who were the people who came to faith. Look at who set the example time and time again. Look at the lives changed forever because of their encounter with Jesus.

God reaches down and takes us wherever we are – fresh, new clay from the river bank or pool – or the piece that's been in the bucket for a time and gets to work fashioning, moulding, forming us into a new, useful and beautiful vessels designed for his purpose. That's what you are. That's what I am.

Moses, Jeremiah, Paul all claimed they were not fit for the purpose God had intended. Joseph rose from captured slave to Prime Minister and saved his

countrymen. God either answered their objections or ignored them and formed them into the pieces he needed. The same happens to everyone who puts their trust in Him. Whether it is an individual, a church or a nation as in Jeremiah's case.

Where are you right now? Today? I want to encourage you with the words of a chorus from "Scripture in Song" a book we used to use when I was in Youth Group. It's only 1 verse but it sums up what I have been saying.

*Something beautiful, something good,  
All my confusion He understood,  
All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife,  
But He made something beautiful of my life.*

Follow the words and listen to the music. Then say seated and we'll sing it together.

AMEN.

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