

The Potter's Clay

“Ordinary Object, Extraordinary Meanings”



“O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.”

Isaiah 64:8

Do you want to be clay? Isn't that the worthless stuff that interferes with a good garden and that mass that doesn't absorb water and causes run-offs.

But in the hands of a good potter, clay can be changed into a beautiful object. The beauty depends on the potter.

In the Old Testament, God gives Jeremiah a lesson using a clay pot. It is very harsh, but God did not “sugar-coat” the truth. The people of Israel had been straying from God. He told Jeremiah to go to a potter's house and see what the potter did with a clay pot that was not right. After Jeremiah say how the potter destroyed the clay pot that was not right, the Lord told him to go talk to the people of Israel because they had strayed from God. God was comparing them to a clay pot. Jeremiah was afraid for his life. God didn't quit. He tried again to have Jeremiah warn the people. He told Jeremiah to call together the leaders and take a clay pot with him. Then he was to go outside the town and tell them what God had said. When they did not listen, Jeremiah was to throw the clay pot to the ground and smash it. This was what would happen to the people of Israel. The next day, Jeremiah was whipped and put in stocks. (Jeremiah 18-20)

Clay is not always easy to work with, just like us. But the good potter can refine the clay removing tiny stones or air bubbles or other impurities and work it until it is able to be formed into an object of beauty. The people of that day were familiar with clay and how it was molded. They just refused to listen to Jeremiah.

In Genesis 2, God is pictured as forming man from the earth as a potter forms his pots from clay. There is a beautiful poem written by James Weldon Johnson called “The Creation.” It is well worth reading.* Johnson gives God human qualities and the poem is very warm.

When Job is going through all his problems, he refers to himself as clay in the hands of God. Isaiah uses clay to refer to the relationship between God and man. In THE MESSAGE Romans 9:2-23, Eugene Peterson states the forming of each one as an individual. “God doesn't count us; he calls us by name. Arithmetic is not his focus.” We are all his people though we are very different. There are different colors and textures of clay. It is wonderful to know that we are not just a number. We are individuals in the hands of a wonderful God. The Master Potter doesn't deal with us in mass but as individuals. His love is given to each of us.

When we submit to the authority of God we are transformed by His love. When clay is first brought from the ground it is unusable; it is hard and full of impurities. We are filled with sin. As the clay is refined we are also refined by the Master Potter. We often need to be softened and pliable. We need to have our sins removed so we can pass on the love of God to others.

If we get an opportunity to watch the potter at work with his clay, we can see the changes as it is made into a thing of beauty. Also, we can see the Master Potter work with individuals and make them into a person of beauty.

God had Jeremiah go to the home of the potter so he could see what was possible for the people of Israel. They could become a wonderful nation, or they could be destroyed. We have that same choice. He's the potter; we are the clay. We each have a unique design.

In a book called Principles of Decorative Design, the author writes "It is the artist which gives the value--and not the material." We don't have much say in our design. If we allow God to work with us we can become beautiful. We can sing with others the wonderful song "Spirit of the Living God" by Daniel Iverson.

"Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me,
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me."

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for caring about me. Please help me to allow You, the Master Potter, to mold me into a beautiful person. Help me to not become harden to Your love, and to serve You every day. Amen

1. Are you willing to be clay in the hands of the Master Potter? What does that entail?
2. Was Jeremiah justified in being concerned about his life?
3. Have you ever seen the potter at work?
4. Have you ever seen the Master Potter at work?

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*"The Creation" (from *God's Trombones*, 1927)

And God stepped out on space,
And he looked around and said:
I'm lonely -
I'll make me a world.

And far as the eye of God could see 5
Darkness covered everything,
Blacker than a hundred midnights
Down in a cypress swamp.

Then God smiled,
And the light broke, 10
And the darkness rolled up on one side,
And the light stood shining on the other,
And God said: That's good!

Then God reached out and took the light in his hands,
And God rolled the light around in his hands 15
Until he made the sun;
And he set that sun a-blazing in the heavens.
And the light that was left from making the sun
God gathered it up in a shining ball
And flung it against the darkness, 20
Spangling the night with the moon and stars.
Then down between
The darkness and the light
He hurled the world;
And God said: That's good! 25

Then God himself stepped down -
And the sun was on his right hand,
And the moon was on his left;
The stars were clustered about his head,
And the earth was under his feet. 30
And God walked, and where he trod
His footsteps hollowed the valleys out
And bulged the mountains up.

Then he stopped and looked and saw
That the earth was hot and barren. 35
So God stepped over to the edge of the world
And he spat out the seven seas -
He batted his eyes, and the lightnings flashed -
He clapped his hands, and the thunders rolled -
And the waters above the earth came down, 40
The cooling waters came down.

Then the green grass sprouted,
And the little red flowers blossomed,
The pine tree pointed his finger to the sky,
And the oak spread out his arms, 45
The lakes cuddled down in the hollows of the ground,

And the rivers ran down to the sea;
And God smiled again,
And the rainbow appeared,
And curled itself around his shoulder. 50

Then God raised his arm and he waved his hand
Over the sea and over the land,
And he said: Bring forth! Bring forth!
And quicker than God could drop his hand,
Fishes and fowls 55
And beasts and birds
Swam the rivers and the seas,
Roamed the forests and the woods,
And split the air with their wings.
And God said: That's good! 60

Then God walked around,
And God looked around
On all that he had made.
He looked at his sun,
And he looked at his moon, 65
And he looked at his little stars;
He looked on his world
With all its living things,
And God said: I'm lonely still.

Then God sat down - 70
On the side of a hill where he could think;
By a deep, wide river he sat down;
With his head in his hands,
God thought and thought,
Till he thought: I'll make me a man! 75

Up from the bed of the river
God scooped the clay;
And by the bank of the river
He kneeled him down;
And there the great God Almighty 80
Who lit the sun and fixed it in the sky,
Who flung the stars to the most far corner of the night,
Who rounded the earth in the middle of his hand;
This Great God,
Like a mammy bending over her baby, 85
Kneeled down in the dust
Toiling over a lump of clay
Till he shaped it in his own image;

Then into it he blew the breath of life,
And man became a living soul. 90
Amen. Amen.