

Some Things I've Learned from Pottery

About a year ago I took up pottery. Pottery is one of the oldest processes on earth. Whenever archeologists find bits of pottery, they figure that's where a town or settlement was once upon a time. Pottery is intriguing to me because it's a mix of beauty and function, art and science. A painting on the wall is nice, but you can't really do anything with it. A pot can be nice to look at, but you're limited only by your imagination (and skill!) as to what you could use it for. Building pottery helps me be quiet and focus, and spending time at the wheel is a wonderful time to pray and think.

So for starters, the book of Jeremiah and chapter 18-19 has some interesting references to pottery and the making of it.

Starting in 18v1 it says **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.**

Right out of the gate God says that He's going to use physical pottery to teach Jeremiah spiritual truth. Maybe we could also learn a little something from it by letting it remind us of what God said.

Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels.

Just as a "For-Your-Information", most potters make pottery using one of three methods. Handbuilding is one way, which is exactly what it sounds like. You take a lump of clay and press and pinch it until it reaches the shape you want. Products of this method are sometimes called "pinchpots." Another, is coilbuilding. This is where you roll the clay into long, narrow rolls where they can be stacked on each other and then smoothed out. The method mentioned in this verse is possibly the most common these days, at least among the potters I know. It's where you put the clay on a wheel that's spinning around really fast and use the pressure of your hands or tools to shape it.

And the vessel that 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. When that wheel gets to spinning, the smallest little movement can throw the clay off center. The good news is, you can mash it up and try again. The "it" is referring to the same ball of clay. He didn't reach over and get more clay from his clay storage container, he just mashed what was on his wheel down into another ball and started over.

Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD.

Remember when God told Moses to stand back because He was about to destroy "all the congregation"? (Numbers 16) It seems like He was telling Jeremiah He could mash them up and make something He could actually use!

Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel....

"Have thine own way Lord, have Thine Own way!"

Thou are the Potter, I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after Thy will,
while I am waiting, yielded and still”

That’s the heart the Lord was looking for within His people Israel, and wasn’t getting it!

He goes on to talk about what all He will visit upon them and then says “...**Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaketh a potter's vessel, that cannot be made whole again:**”

At this point he’s referring to an “**earthen bottle**” (Jer 19v1) that has already been heated in the kiln and changed from clay into stone. It is a fearful thing when God says He’s going to break you. May the Lord give us a soft heart where He doesn’t have to deal with us like that!

On a technical note, the LORD is absolutely right (Surprise! Surprise! Surprise!) about not being able to be made whole again.

You can mash wet clay up into a ball and try again. You can even take air dry clay and put it in water, and within a few hours or days it will soak up enough moisture to be malleable again.

However, once the clay goes into the fire, it turns to stone and will never be clay again or be able to be molded.

To me, it’s a sobering reminder that once a man dies, he goes into the fire and all hope is lost for all eternity. “**And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgement**” (Heb 9v27)

“**He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still:**” (Rev 22v11)

So what have I learned from pottery? Among other things,

1. That God uses the age old process of pottery making to teach spiritual truth.
2. That I need to be like clay, where God can mold me as He sees fit.
3. That I need to ask God for the humility to trust and obey Him so He doesn’t have to get tough with me!
4. That I need to get the gospel out to sinners while I have time, because “it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment” and once you die and go into the fire it’s too late.

Amen.

P.S. I thought that Judas and the “**potter’s field**” had some interesting points to it, although the Lord hasn’t really showed me anything yet with regard to it.

It was probably a pretty worthless and unsightly piece of land. Why? You can’t grow crops in clay soil, so you couldn’t use it for that. Actually, there probably wouldn’t have been much vegetation of any kind. Also, it most likely would have been full of holes from the potter digging clay out of it for his workshop projects. I myself have taken a shovel and bucket out to my own “**potter’s field**” (a creekbed in my case) and dug clay. The area quickly fills with “potholes” as you search for nice, smooth veins of clay.

A place like this would also have probably been outside of town, which I suppose is why they were going to use it **“to bury strangers in”**, and from the fact that rich folks in that area like Joseph of Arimathea seemed to prefer a tomb cut out of the rock.

Also, it soon became a grisly graveyard site when Judas hanged himself. The fact that his body hung there long enough to rot it's way down (Acts 1v18) is another indicator that it was outside of town. He probably would not have been up there long if he'd done the deed from a light pole on main street! Regardless of it's appearance, it's connected with death in that it was the site of Judas' suicide and bought for the express pupose of being a burial site, and was even called **“the field of blood”** (Matt 27v8). Finally, although the verse in Psalms may not be talking about this particular place, it surely fits the description of a barren clay field outside town filled with potholes and dead bodies when it connects to Judas' final resting place on this earth in Acts 1v18 by saying:

“Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein”

Anyway, no hard doctrine, just some observations.