

## Shining Through the Cracks

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Most archaeologists are turning the dirt over in various parts of the ancient world and unearthing various artifacts that give us a glimpse into that part of the world and into those civilizations. Oftentimes what the archaeologists have discovered are clay jars. Clay jars, just earthen jars that are all over the ancient world. Some are beautiful. Most are plain and common.

In past civilizations, skilled potters would take raw clay from the earth and use their hands to shape it for a particular purpose. The jars were created mostly for cooking, for carrying water. In Jeremiah 18:1-6. “This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message. So I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. Then the word of the Lord came to me. He said, “Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?” declares the Lord. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel.”

Now, the apostle Paul picks up on this pottery imagery in his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 4 and verse 7 when he says, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.” That phrase “jars of clay” is rather interesting. But it’s an interesting way to describe our humanity, is it not? It suggests that we are beautiful and functional. It also says that we are weak and easily broken into pieces. We are formidable and fragile at the same time. Or can I say, we’re just a bunch of cracked pots. Isn’t that true?

There is something humbling about being compared to a jar of clay. And in a lot of ways, we resist it, do we not? We’d rather present ourselves as strong and capable, not weak and fragile. For example, I was thinking about those who run for political office. If you’re

running for political office, the last thing you want to do is let people and, especially, your opponents know even a hint of the weakness that might be a part of your story, because your opponent will pounce on that. And so you present strength. You present you've got it all together and you have all the answers as a politician. Or think about the last time you interviewed for a job. I always hate the question, so tell me about your weaknesses. I don't know. I don't think about my weaknesses that much. We don't want to, because we're presenting our strengths and what we bring to the table. But in the kingdom of God, it's all different. And the idea that we are mere earthen vessels, jars of clays, captures some of the ironies in the Christian life.

Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 12 and verse 9 or so, he talks about how three times he prayed, "Lord, will You take this thorn in the flesh away from me?" And the answer came back to him "My grace is sufficient for you, and my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul says, "That very thing that made me weak and powerless, I wanted God to take away." We don't know what the thorn in the flesh was, but God said, "No, that's the very thing through which My power flows. My power is made perfect in weakness." Ironic, isn't it?

Here is another irony. The foolish are wise in the kingdom of God. That which the world says is foolishness, is something through which the wisdom of God is shown. 1 Corinthians 1:27-29 "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." The weak are strong. The foolish are wise. How about this one? The humble are exalted. Jesus said this in Luke 14:11. "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." One more. The broken are beautiful. Remember when David sinned against Bathsheba? It took about a year before he confessed his sin. And he came to the Lord humble, and in brokenness, Psalm 51:17, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." God is drawn to our

brokenness. He finds it beautiful. However, only the healing power of God through Jesus could take the brokenness in your life, those weak places, those fragile places, and through the miraculous hands of the potter who created us, reshape us and mold us into a purposeful and useful vessel into which He can place His treasure.

Go back to 2 Corinthians 4. Paul says, “But we have this treasure in jars of clay.” Circle those words “this treasure.” What does he mean by “this treasure”? We understand now a little bit about the jars of clay. But what does he mean when he says we have, we possess—and he’s speaking to Christians here, believers in Jesus Christ—“we have this treasure in jars of clay.” Well, you have to back up in the text to see the larger context of what he’s saying. Really just go back to verse 6 and he mentions something he describes as “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.” What does he mean by “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God”? It has something, if not everything, to do with this treasure that we possess in jars of clay. What Paul is saying here is there is something so valuable, so treasured by God and He chose to take His treasure that has something to do with the knowledge of the glory of God and the glory of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and place it inside of us, in cracked pots, in broken vessels. If you have something treasured in your house, that last thing you want to do is to put it inside something broken. Usually, we take valuable things and treasured things, and we put them in beautiful display cases, don’t we? But God chose to do just the opposite. He knows we’re broken, not because He’s at fault as the potter- he didn’t make us correctly. No, because of our sin. Sin broke us. And sometimes our brokenness is related to other people sinning against us, what they’ve done to us. Sometimes our brokenness results because of sin that we’ve committed against God. And we don’t realize how broken we are, but the fact of the matter is we’re broken. We’re fragile. We’re cracked pots. But when you come to faith in Jesus Christ, here’s what God does. He takes His treasure—the glory of the knowledge of the glory of God and the light of the glorious gospel of the glory of Christ—and He places that treasure inside of us.

Now, two things I want you to see here. Number one, the treasure is more valuable and more important than the vessel. The other thing all this tells me is this. As a believer in Jesus Christ, you and I are chosen vessels. God chose you as a believer in Jesus Christ to

place His treasure in you. He created the whole humanity in His image. But of those who place their faith and trust in Christ, He goes one step further to add value to us. He takes His treasure and places it inside of us. You are a chosen vessel if you're a believer in Jesus Christ. Now, the apostle Paul was a broken vessel. Actually, Saul of Tarsus was a broken vessel, if you know his story in the book of Acts. Saul went around killing Christians. And he met the Lord Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. And in Acts 9:15 "He's a chosen vessel of mine to bear my name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel." Only God would have done something so upside down, so ironic as to choose a guy like Saul of Tarsus and say, "You're a chosen vessel of mine."

I want to encourage you to receive that this morning as a follower of Christ. You're a chosen vessel. Inside of you is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God and the light of the glorious gospel of the glory of Christ. No wonder Jesus said to His disciples, "You are the light of the world. I'm putting My treasure in you." But that treasure is meant to shine through your broken places, through the cracks, through the chips, through those weak places, through those fragile places. The problem is we want to cover those places up, don't we? We're presenting our strong self.

Now, because we are the clay pots, God is glorified when His power flows through our weakness. 2 Corinthians 4:7, "But we have this treasure in jars of clay"—and here is the reason— "to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." You see, when we're always about the business of showing our strong side, then it's all about us, isn't it? It's because of my background, my resume, my experience, my this, my that. I accomplish this because of strong me. God wants to accomplish something through you and through me, through the broken places and those weak places that we're trying to hide from others.

Now, for that glory to shine and that power to flow, we as believers in Jesus Christ do have a responsibility here. I want you to hold your place in 2 Corinthians chapter 4 and turn

with me to 2 Timothy chapter 2. We have a responsibility to keep our vessel clean. 2 Timothy 2:20 says, “Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honourable use, some for dishonourable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonourable, he will be a vessel for honourable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.” He changes the analogy a bit from the potter to a homeowner who has a number of different vessels. And the implication here is that God is willing to take His treasure and put it in a broken vessel, just not a dirty vessel. It’s our responsibility as followers of Jesus Christ that if there is anything in our lives that are not rightly related to Him, then what do we do? If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse us, to cleanse this vessel from all unrighteousness. A clean vessel is the best vessel through which the power of God flows and the glory of God shines. David is a great example. David was in a very unclean, weak spot as a king when he was living in sin. And it was time to clean the vessel, to come clean before God even as he did in Psalm 51. But if your brokenness is simultaneously a result of something that somebody has done to you, just know that the Potter stands ready to pick up those pieces and to put you back together and to reshape and to mold and to heal and to redeem that which is broken in you.

Again, sometimes our brokenness is the result of our own mistakes, our own sin. Cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, but we have nobody to blame but ourselves. And we need to come to the cross of Christ. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to cleanse us, to cleanse this vessel and to lead us in the way of everlasting life. That’s the good news today, dear friends. It may be uncomfortable for you to even interact with those weak parts of your life, those broken parts, those parts that you’re trying to hide from everybody else, that you’re trying to put in the past. But as God is healing and as He is redeeming, He is looking to shine His light and to flow His power through those difficult places.