

Jars of Clay

Although I am not a great lover of antiques I do enjoy watching programmes such as Bargain Hunt and take great delight when items bought for a pittance turn out to be quite valuable. A piece of Art Deco bought at a Car Boot Sale takes on a whole new meaning and value when it's revealed that the maker was Clarice Cliff! Generally speaking, it's all about the maker.

In the account of the potter and the clay in Jeremiah 18:1-6, we see that it's all about the Maker, the Potter, God himself. It is He who "formed man of the dust of the ground" (Gen: 2:7) and it is He who moulds the clay and shapes us to become the sort of vessel that He requires. This does not mean, however, that we are powerless vessels in God's hands and are therefore without responsibility for our own actions. We need to submit to God and be obedient to His word if we are to fulfil the plans He has for us.

Freshly dug clay is the hardest to work with, as it is full of lumps and stones which need to be brought to the surface and removed. If they are left they will mar the vessel. If we are to become vessels that God can use we must allow Him to shape and mould us. It can be a painful experience when God puts His finger on the impurities or bad habits in our lives which begin to surface, so the sooner we deal with them the better. If we refuse and hold on to them, it will mar our relationship with God. In Hebrews 12: 6 we read "For the Lord disciplines him whom the Lord loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." The chastening of the Lord is always motivated by love, and because He only wants what's best for us.

It is also vital that the potter kneads out the hidden air pockets that are in the clay. If he doesn't, once the vessel is put in the kiln, the air will expand and it will explode. Invisible to the naked eye these tiny air pockets are a good illustration of the danger of the secret sins we harbour and which we think no one knows about. In Mark 4:22 Jesus states "For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad." Our refusal to deal with the hidden sin will not only hinder our walk with God, but will bring out the worst in us as God turns up the heat and it is exposed. I thank God, however, that no matter what we have done there is always cleansing at the feet of Jesus for "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

Before the potter begins to shape the vessel, the clay must also be kneaded and mixed with water so that it becomes soft and pliable. One of the most important elements in making a vessel is water. Without the water, the clay will be very difficult, if not impossible, to work with. Without the water the clay will just remain a lump of clay, rigid and unyielding. Even when the clay is on the wheel, more water is needed for the potter to shape it into a vessel. If we are to remain pliable, it's important that we submit to God, and allow the water of His Holy Spirit to work in us and through us. In John 16:8 Jesus says of the Holy Spirit "when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin, and righteousness and judgment" and "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). We

need to be open to the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit, for the more yielded we are, the more we will do for the Kingdom.

The clay is now ready for the wheel and must be placed right in the centre. If it's too close to the edge bits will fly away and the potter will have to start all over again. The potter will then start shaping the clay by using his fingers and thumb to push the clay up and knows the exact amount of pressure to use. Always remember that when God is shaping us and the pressure is on, it's for our own good. God's intention is always to build us up, never to put us down. In Jeremiah 18:4 we read that "the vessel he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter." God will never give up on us, but will make us anew if we place ourselves in the centre of His hands and will. We are precious to Him and are, and always will be, the centre of His undivided attention.

From one lump of clay it is possible for the potter to make several vessels and as we see from Romans 9:21 he may make out of the same lump "one vessel for beauty and another for menial use." Like ourselves, no two vessels will be same, but each one will be unique and will be made according to the Potter's plans and purposes. Whilst some may be more ornate than others, ultimately we are all earthen vessels and the glory belongs to God alone. It's all about the Maker!