

INTRODUCTION

The title of my teaching series from 2 Corinthians is “Hope for Cracked Pots.” Today, we’re going to look at 2 Corinthians 4:6-7 which is the passage for which I named the entire series. Today we’re going to talk about “God uses Cracked Pots.”

Since I moved to Texas almost 17 years ago, I’ve discovered that Texans are a unique kind of people. I came across a humorous list of ways to know if you’re really a Texan. V For instance, you know you’re a Texan if:

1. You’ve ever had to switch from “heat” to “cool” on the same day.
2. The value of a parking space is by the availability of shade.
3. You or someone you know has a belt buckle bigger than your fist.
4. You know someone who consulted a college football schedule to plan their wedding date.
5. You’re not surprised to find movie rentals, ammunition, beer, and bait in the same store.
6. You say you’re going to stop for a coke and get a Dr. Pepper.
7. Your grandmother’s car is a “dually.”
8. Someone in your family does a pretty good Willie Nelson impersonation.
9. You know cowpies aren’t made of beef.
10. You’ve eaten “little smokies” in a crock pot for special occasions.
11. You’ve ever gotten a Whataburger at 2 a.m. and knew five other people there.
12. You know what someone means when they say “I’m fixin’ to go.”

Well, I’m fixin’ to tell you that God can use all kinds of people. He can even use Texans! We’re entering a section of 2 Corinthians that contains profound truth. In my mind, 2 Corinthians 4 and 5 are two of the most important chapters in all of the Bible. This section ranks right up there with John 3, John 14, and Romans 7 and 8 in containing life-changing truth. This section we’re going to read explains the process by which God releases His power among people. In the last lesson we examined Paul’s description of his ministry. He was battling against the god of this age who is aggressively blinding the eyes of unbelievers to the truth. But there is a gospel light that is much brighter than any darkness Satan can cause.

Let’s read 2 Corinthians 4:6-7 to learn how God uses cracked pots:

“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing [*hyperbole*] power is from God and not from us.”

As we talk about this truth, I want to focus on three truths. First, I want to talk about the pots—that’s us. Then I’ll talk about the power—that’s Jesus in us me. Finally, I want to talk about the paradox—that’s the mysterious process God uses to release His power in this world.

1. THE PLAIN POT: My humanity is like an empty clay jar

The word for “clay pots” is *ostrakinos* which literally means earthenware. It was word used to

describe plain, ordinary, run-of-the mill pots. That’s not a very complementary term. This is a good analogy of our lives, because the Bible says in Genesis 2 that when God made man he formed him out of the dirt, or the clay of the ground. There are many references in the Bible that speak of God as the Master Potter and we are the clay. In Isaiah 64:8 we read, “We are the clay, you are the Potter. We are all the work of your hand.”

I’ve heard there is a new line of psychoanalysis in California. It’s called “psychoceramics,” because it deals with cracked pots. We’re all flawed and cracked in our humanity. Like clay pots in the Old Testament we’re just baked (some half-baked) containers made of mud.

Say this out loud with me: “I’M CLAY, BUT HEY, THAT’S OKAY!” God can use clay pots. Jesus said, “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free.” (John 8:32) So here’s a

LIBERATING TRUTH: God didn’t create me to be a decoration, but to contain something valuable.

A pot or a vessel is designed and created to hold something, not to be an object in itself. Consider for a moment the pots in your kitchen cabinet. As long as they sit there empty, they aren’t really fulfilling the reason they were made. A pot really doesn’t truly become a pot until it’s holding peas, spaghetti, or soup. In the same way, our lives are a contradiction until we understand that God created us to contain something.

I have three clay pots on this table. The first one is a piece of pottery that has been fired, glazed and then painted. It is pretty enough to be decoration alone. It calls attention to itself because it is such a pretty pot. That reminds me of some people who think they are doing God a favor by being around. They display their own talents and abilities. But God didn’t create you to be a decoration. He created you to contain something important. The next pot is much plainer than the first one, but it’s doing what a pot is really designed to do: It’s holding something. In this case, it’s displaying some flowers. Our attention isn’t drawn to the pot itself, but rather to what it is displaying. The third pot is a cracked pot, which I’ll talk about near the end of the message, but for now look at the first two. God didn’t create you to sit around and look nice and call attention to yourself. Instead, God created you and me to be plain pots, to contain something very valuable.

We sometimes think God doesn’t need anything or anyone. But when you understand this truth, you realize that in one sense God *needs* empty pots to fill up with his treasure. Some people’s pots are already full. We fill our pots with all kinds of things. Some people are full of themselves, or full of a greed for money or success. We fill our pots to overflowing with things that won’t matter in a million years. God can’t fill a pot if it’s full. God needs empty pots.

There’s a great story from the life of Elisha to illustrate this point. In 2 Kings 4, one of Elisha’s friends died, leaving a widow and two young sons. The widow was penniless, and the creditors were coming to claim her two sons to be slaves. Elisha asked her, “What do you have in your house?” The widow replied, “All I have is a small amount of olive oil.” Elisha said, “Go round up all the empty jars you can find. Don’t just ask for a few, ask for a lot. Then take all those empty pots and start pouring the oil into each one. When one is full, set it aside and keep pouring

oil into the next one.” So the widow filled up her house with empty clay jars. She started pouring until every jar in the house was filled to the brim. When the last jar was filled she told her son to go out and get more empty jars, but there were no more to fill, and at that moment the oil ran out.

When she told Elisha about the miracle he said, “Sell the oil and pay your debts and live on what is left.” I like to say that there’s a parable in every miracle (and a miracle in every parable). Those empty clay jars represent us, and throughout the Old Testament, oil was a symbol of the Holy Spirit. When we present ourselves to God as empty jars, He can fill us with His Holy Spirit. I imagine the widow wished afterward that she had gathered even more empty jars. Like that day when the oil filled all the clay jars, we live in a time when the eyes of the Lord run throughout the earth, looking for people who love Him enough to offer their lives to Him as an empty vessel that He can fill.

2. THE PRECIOUS POWER: Christ lives in me like treasure in a jar

Note again that “we have this treasure in jars of clay.” The word translated “treasure” is *thesauros*, just like the thesaurus you have in your library. Inside my thesaurus I discover a literary and verbal treasure trove of words. You can’t tell a book by its cover and you really can’t tell a person by their appearance. The plainest, most unlikely clay jars contain the priceless treasure of the life of Jesus Christ!

LIBERATING TRUTH: I can never successfully imitate Jesus—but I can contain and display the life of Christ in me

Christianity is not following a bunch of rules, and it’s not trying to imitate Jesus. Trying to imitate Jesus is performance based religion, and it only produces misery and failure.

I love it when people wear the WWJD bracelet. It’s a reminder to continually ask themselves the question, “What Would Jesus Do?” Then the person wearing the bracelet tries to do what Jesus did. But that question is only valid if you realize there are human limitations involved in answering it. It only takes you so far. For instance, when you ask the question, “What would Jesus do?” you assume you KNOW what Jesus would do in a given situation. I’m not sure if I know what Jesus would do sometimes. He had a way of surprising people and doing just the opposite of what they expected. But the main limitation to WWJD is: “Even if you knew what Jesus would do, what makes you think you could do what Jesus would do?”

Let me give you an example. One time Jesus was in a storm. We know what He did. He spoke to the wind and rain and said, “Peace be still.” So does that mean the next time you’re in a thunderstorm you should walk out into the wind and lift your hand and say, “Peace be still!”? Go ahead and try it, just don’t get struck by lightning!

All I’m saying is that the Christian life is *not* imitating Jesus. It’s simply containing the life of Jesus and allowing Him to live His life in and through my body and my personality. Maybe we should make a bracelet that says WWJDIM and let it stand for “What will Jesus do in me?”

Paul makes this clear in a verse we’ll be talking about in the next lesson: “We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.” (2 Corinthians 4:10)

The focus can’t be on the clay jar, it must always be on the treasure within. The Apostle Paul called himself the chief of sinners, yet He wrote the secret to effectiveness was “Christ in you the hope of glory.” Just as this second pot contains and presents these flowers for your enjoyment, so God made me to contain and to display the wonderful life of Christ.

3. THE PUZZLING PARADOX: God delights in using imperfect vessels

The Bible contains several examples of a paradox. Jesus said, “in order to live you’ve got to die.” Another puzzling paradox is that God chooses to use imperfect, flawed, cracked pots. But the reason WHY God uses imperfect people is seen in the final words of our text. “To show that this all-surpassing (*hyperbole*) power is from God and not from us.”

Unfortunately, in this world we establish our own pecking order. We tend to place people in social levels based upon their wealth, education, or status. We think we know “our place” and we unconsciously place some people below us in the social order, and a few above us. But the ground is level at the foot of the cross. And I think it is part of God’s sense of humor that He often chooses to use the most unlikely candidates to carry out His plan.

I had a seminary professor who used to say, “God can strike a mighty lick with a crooked stick.” That was his way of saying that God Almighty can use frail, fragile, cracked people to accomplish his plans in this world. God calls all kinds of people, but He delights to use those that the world considers to be a little inferior.

The earliest Christians were called “unlearned and ignorant people” yet God used this rag-tag bunch of believers to turn the world upside-down. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth to remind them of the kind of people God uses, “Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the 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.” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29)

In a way, it’s not surprising that God used Billy Graham. We all know that Billy Graham in a genuinely humble man who would never boast of his accomplishments. But naturally speaking, Billy Graham was tall, handsome, with a powerful distinctive voice. He had wavy hair and piercing eyes. Billy Graham is educated and sophisticated—and God still used Him, God just had to work a little harder!

But the same God who called and used Billy Graham in the 20th century also called and used an overweight, uneducated shoe salesman by the name of Dwight L. Moody in the 19th century. Moody only had a third grade education and those who heard him reported that he murdered the English language. He was never ordained, or attended a seminary, but God used him in the late 1900s to shake two continents for Christ. It was said he pronounced the word “Jerusalem” in only one syllable. Once when invited to speak to a group of educated clergymen in England he

started his message by saying, “Don’t never think that God don’t love you for He do.” Moody was a cracked pot, but he was an empty pot who had allowed God to fill him with the priceless treasure of Jesus Christ. As a young man, Moody heard a preacher named Henry Varley say, “It remains to be seen what God will do with a man who gives himself up wholly to Him.” And on that day, Moody determined to be that man and offered God his life as an empty clay jar to be filled with God’s power. And today, 108 years after Moody went to heaven, you can go to Chicago and still see Moody Bible Church, Moody Publishing, and Moody Bible Institute. Here’s the final

LIBERATING TRUTH: A cracked pot reveals more of God’s light

We read that the same God who said, “Let there be light” at creation is the same God who made His light shine in our hearts. A cracked pot allows more light to be seen. Dr. Harry Ironsides wrote about this truth: “In order for a light to shine out of a vessel, it has to be broken. One may know all about the way of life and yet never communicate light to others, because that one has never been broken in the presence of God.” (*Second Epistles to the Corinthians* p. 110)

There’s another great story from the Old Testament to illustrate this. In Judges 6 we meet an unlikely candidate to be a leader. His name was Gideon. One day the angel of the Lord appeared and said, “Hi there, mighty warrior, God is with you.” Gideon probably swung his head around to see who else was there that the angel was addressing because he was anything but a mighty warrior. When the angel told Gideon that God was going to use him to lead the Israelites to kick out the Midianite invaders Gideon said, “You’ve got the wrong guy. I belong to the weakest of the twelve tribes, and my clan is the weakest of the weakest tribe. Besides that, I’m the weakest man in my whole clan. I’m the runt of the litter!” But God said, “That’s great! You’re exactly the kind of person God likes to use.”

Gideon gathered an army of 32,000 soldiers, and God said, “That’s too many. If they win the battle, they’ll think that they did it by their own military strength instead of by my hand.” So Gideon said, “Any of you guys who are afraid of going into battle, head back home.” 22,000 left on the spot leaving Gideon 10,000. God said, “That’s still too many—they might think they are responsible for victory, let’s trim it down again.” So Gideon told the men to go to a stream and drink water. God said, “Every man who gets down and laps water on all fours like a dog, send him home. Keep only the ones who kneel and use their hand to drink.” 9700 of the soldiers lapped the water, leaving Gideon with only 300 soldiers. God said, “That’s a great number. This way, when you win against overpowering odds, everyone will know it was by my power.”

So at God’s direction, Gideon’s band waited until midnight and then quietly surrounded the camp of the Midianites. Each soldier was given an empty clay jar, a torch, and a trumpet. They placed the torch inside the clay jar. At a given signal, all the soldiers blew their trumpets and smashed their jars and shouted, “A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!”

The Midianites awoke in a panic at the sound of the trumpets, breaking jars, and shouting. They were so confused that they started fighting one another. Those who weren’t killed fled into the night. If I had more time, I’d tell you that there are three elements required for victory: boldness;

brokenness; and brightness. But for now, let’s notice that the light of the torches weren’t revealed until the clay jars were broken.

That’s what God wants to do—to let His light shine through us. And God delights to use broken, flawed, cracked pots, so that He and He alone will receive the glory. The Message translation of this passage says it well, “If you only look at us, you might well miss the brightness. We carry this precious Message around in the unadorned clay pots of our ordinary lives. That’s to prevent anyone from confusing God’s incomparable power with us.” (2 Corinthians 4:7 *The Message*)

So if you’re a cracked pot, don’t despair. God delights to use cracked pots. On this table I have a plain pot that is cracked. I want to lower the lights inside this room to demonstrate that God can shine through the cracks and flaws of your life if you’ll just surrender yourself to Him.

J. Hudson Taylor was one of the first missionaries to take the gospel to China. Although he suffered from extremely poor health, God used him. He was a weak man, but he was a plain, empty clay jar that God filled with the treasure of Jesus Christ. Taylor once wrote, “All of God’s giants have been weak men who did great things for God because they reckoned on Christ living in them.” Hudson Taylor was too humble to call himself a giant, but he understood the puzzling paradox that a mighty God can use broken, cracked, weak vessels.

CONCLUSION

There is a beautiful fable from China that illustrates exactly what I’m trying to teach. Once upon a time there was an elderly Chinese woman who owned two large clay pots. She would hang each pot on the ends of a pole which she carried across her neck. Each day she would walk from her house to the nearby stream to fetch water. She would fill up both pots, pick up the pole and walk back to her house. One of the pots had a crack in it while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full pot of water. At the end of the long walk back to her house, the cracked pot always arrived only half full. Because of the crack, half the water had leaked out during the trek.

For two full years, this happened daily. The Chinese woman arrived home with only one and a half pots of water. Of course, the perfect pot was proud that it had never lost a drop of precious water. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its imperfection, and was miserable. The cracked pot thought of itself as a complete failure. One day, the cracked pot was so tired of failing that it spoke to the woman. The cracked pot said, “I am ashamed of myself because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your house. I have failed you, and I’m sorry. Maybe you need to replace me with another pot that isn’t cracked.”

The old woman smiled and said gently, “Did you notice that there are flowers on your side of the path, but not on the other pot’s side? I have always known about your flaw, so I planted flower seeds on your side. And every day as I’ve walked back you’ve been watering those seeds. For the past two years I’ve been able to pick the flowers to decorate my table. Without you being just the way you are, there would have been no beautiful flowers to grace my home.”

Brothers and sisters, it's okay if you're a cracked pot. Like the clay jars that Gideon and his soldiers broke, there a tremendous value in being broken. We throw away things when they're broken, but God cherishes broken people. God uses broken things. Jesus took the five loaves from the little lad and broke them before He multiplied them. He wants to multiply your effectiveness but He can only do that when you're broken. When Mary brought the alabaster box of perfume, it was only when it was broken that the fragrance filled the house. And when you are broken, the fragrance of Christ can be detected in your life. Jesus even said, "This is my body which is **BROKEN** for you." So, broken down, cracked pots, rejoice because God uses cracked pots so that He and He alone with get the glory!

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes