

ON THE WHEEL

Treasure in the Darkness

My name is Jeremiah: I am a prophet to the nation of Judah. God took me to the potter's house and there I watched a potter making a pot. The potter was frustrated by the clay because it was marred, and as I watched, the potter began to remake the pot to create something unique and beautiful.

It was, truly, a beautiful picture of the gracious, loving and patient God of the people of Israel, my people. God desperately wants my people to live in his bigger and better story, but they stubbornly refuse. God, in his infinite love and mercy, wants to rescue them from the disaster of the north, but they will not listen. God longs to remake them and mould them into his beautiful vessel, but they have become angry with me because they have no desire to hear about disaster.

I despair and cry out to God. I am angry because God, it appears, will not protect me from them! Now God tells me to go back to the potter and buy a pot! I am to take the pot to the valley of Ben Hinnom, by the Potsherd gate. I am to take the priests and elders with me, and when I get to the valley I am to proclaim again to them the word of the Lord our God. I am again to pronounce disaster on them.

This disaster will be so great that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. I am to proclaim to them that because of their actions they will reap consequences that are their worst nightmare. I am to go to the Potsherd Gate because it is the place where the potters of Jerusalem throw away the broken, unwanted, discarded pottery!

I am to stand at the gate overlooking the valley of Ben Hinnom because it is the garbage dump of Jerusalem. I am to go to that place because it is Gehenna, the fire pit in which their children have been burnt in sacrifice.

My heart is heavy in despair, if only my people will listen....

“Hear this, people of Judah and Jerusalem. Hear this, you leaders, priests and elders. You are this pot, created and loved by Yahweh, the God who chose you, and loves you and wants to make you beautiful. He has loved you from before he chose you. He has wooed you, and saved you, and rescued you, and helped

you, and provided for you, and held you and protected you. But you have not listened!!

You have chosen to follow the evil of your own hearts, and you have rejected my love and pushed me away. But the time is coming when, if you continue in your ways, I will do to you as I will do with the pot. As this pot is smashed into pieces so will the nation of Judah and people I love!”

¹⁴ Jeremiah then returned from Topheth, where the LORD had sent him to prophesy, and stood in the court of the LORD’s temple and said to all the people, ¹⁵ “This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘Listen! I am going to bring on this city and all the villages around it every disaster I pronounced against them, because they were stiff-necked and would not listen to my words.’”

20 When the priest Pashhur son of Immer, the official in charge of the temple of the LORD, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, ² he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put in the stocks at the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the LORD’s temple. ³ The next day, when Pashhur released him from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, “The LORD’s name for you is not Pashhur, but Terror on Every Side. ⁴ For this is what the LORD says: ‘I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; with your own eyes you will see them fall by the sword of their enemies. I will give all Judah into the hands of the king of Babylon, who will carry them away to Babylon or put them to the sword. ⁵ I will deliver all the wealth of this city into the hands of their enemies—all its products, all its valuables and all the treasures of the kings of Judah. They will take it away as plunder and carry it off to Babylon. ⁶ And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house will go into exile to Babylon. There you will die and be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied lies.’ (Jeremiah 19 v 14 - 20 v 6)

We might hear this part of the story of Jeremiah and Judah and think we hear an angry God. We might hear this part of the story of Jeremiah and Judah and think that God is out to punish the people. And you can hear it that way if you want to. But there may be a far better way to hear what is happening which tells us something important about God.

God's heart is always to restore his people and to enjoy relationship with them. Because God is love, and always acts in love, he sometimes has to let his people face the consequences of their choices. We might think of that as punishment – as God punishing his people. It is, in truth, a great act of love, one that causes God great pain.

God does not inflict punishment on his people. If he hands it out, it is to teach them a lesson. The truth is, they bring it on themselves. The act of love is, for God to leave the choice to the people. God always waits to restore. In love, punishment serves as a way to restoration.

Jeremiah dramatically breaks the pot. The symbolism is powerful. Jeremiah went to the potter's house and watched a potter create a uniquely useful pot, with skill and love. That pot now lies in pieces, shattered and broken.

Sometimes we feel shattered and broken. Sometimes we feel shattered and broken through events and circumstances over which we have absolutely no control. Sometimes we feel shattered and broken because of the choices of others. Sometimes we feel shattered and broken because, in truth, we've messed up.

Sometimes we might feel like God is punishing us. If God is punishing us, it is an act of love, and it is a way to restoration. God's greatest desire is for Judah to come back to him and to live in the light of his love. God's greatest desire for you, is that you come back to him and live in the light of his love.

Ashikaga Yoshimasa was the eighth Shogun of the Ashikaga Shogunate in the 15th Century. One day he broke his favourite tea cup into pieces. He sent it to China to have it repaired. They said it couldn't be done, so the shogun then gave it to his Japanese craftsmen. To his surprise and delight they transformed it into a jewel by filling the cracks with lacquered resin and powdered gold.

The Japanese art of restoring broken objects known as Kintsugi was born. The art of Kintsugi makes it possible for broken pottery to have a new lease of life and become even more beautiful than before. Craftsmen will use a precious metal – liquid gold, liquid silver or lacquer dusted with gold to join together the broken pieces. The restoration gives every pot that is repaired a unique quality and beauty. Each pot is a work of art.



It is in its very brokenness that each restored, broken pot has its own story and beauty. Kintsugi literally means golden repair. In the hands of the craftsmen, a broken and shattered pot becomes more beautiful than before.

In the hands of the master potter, is it possible that in our brokenness we might become more beautiful? You are loved with a love that makes you beautiful.

Jeremiah gets into a lot of trouble for speaking God's word so dramatically and then going to the temple and saying the same things again. Jeremiah is wrestling with a simple truth: He's doing what he believes God has called him to do and it's causing him considerable pain. Anyone know what that's like? Maybe, you have followed what you believe to be God's call on your life, and yet it's turned out to be anything but what you'd hoped and imagined.

Pashhur was the chief overseer of the temple. It is quite possible that Pashhur was the popular preacher of the day. Pashhur was the preacher everyone flocked to hear. This, remember, was in the time of Josiah's reform of religion, when there was a revival of the faith of Judah. Pashhur was a man of promise.

While there was an atmosphere of reform, things were not right. Pashhur used his influence to make it sound like everything was alright and people loved him. Jeremiah had a very different message and Jeremiah is anything but popular!

Here's a challenging truth: just because a preacher is popular, doesn't make him right! Just because a church is full doesn't mean it is an authentic community of Christ followers. Equally, just because a preacher is popular doesn't mean his message is a fraud, and just because a church is full doesn't mean everything is superficial.

But some preachers are frauds and we shouldn't listen to them. What is wrong is to evaluate the worth of words and deeds by their popularity. What is wrong is to approve only that which is applauded. What we must not do is to assume that only the celebrated is genuine.

The truth about God is sometimes rejected and sometimes embraced. Jesus consistently gave the same message, but got very different responses. Following God's call gets Jeremiah put in the stocks, by Pashhur. We think of the stocks as something your feet were placed in. It appears that in Jeremiah's day the stocks involved the whole body – and twisted the body to make it extraordinarily uncomfortable.

How does Jeremiah respond? Well – he has a go at Pashhur, proving he's human! But in verses 7-18 he cries out to God (you may want to read it later). In fact, Jeremiah is brutally honest with God about what he thinks. It is, in truth, a bit muddled, but it is a very honest and human response to the pain he is feeling. He questions God's call on him, wishing he'd never been born. He rants that following God and speaking his word only gets him into trouble.

But, somehow, in the middle of his honest crying out to God, he remembers something important – something that will sustain him through his darkness. He remembers that: "The Lord is with me." Perhaps, in his present darkness, he remembers what God told him all the way back at the beginning of his ministry. And what was it that God told him?

¹⁷ "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them.

¹⁸ Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials,

its priests and the people of the land. ¹⁹They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD. (JEREMIAH 1 v 17-19)

Those words are Jeremiah's treasure in the darkness. There is a bigger and better story in which Jeremiah is living his part.

Jeremiah, it seems, is ready to give up and so sometimes are we, aren't we? Following God and living for him can be hard and life can be almost unbearable. What was it that enabled Jeremiah to stick it out, to keep on going, to follow God anyway? Perhaps this: he'd learnt never to let go in the darkness that which God had taught him in the light.

How are you doing friends? When it seems the darkness is overwhelming and too great to handle? Friends, never let go in the darkness that which God has taught you in the light. That is treasure in the darkness.

Sometimes the darkness can break us and shatter us. God is the master potter who takes the shattered pot and restores it, using our brokenness to create a pot that is more beautiful than before. And in his hands, through the darkness, he restores us into his uniquely beautiful people. Perhaps our biggest challenge is to hear today the words of God through his prophet Jeremiah: Come back to me; it's better that way!

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