

LESSONS FROM MUD

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We're going to look at a very important biblical topic that often gets overlooked. Mud. Yup, you read correctly; mud, as in dirt, soil, clay, and muck. There are a number of scriptural references from which I might choose a text. To give you only two examples:

The Israelites, during their bondage in Egypt were compelled to make mud bricks, and there is also the story of Jesus who once healed a blind man by making mud from spit, rubbing it in his eyes and then telling him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The verse I have chosen to focus on however is a little verse, tucked away in Job 8:11, "*Can papyrus grow tall where there is no marsh?*" The K.J.V. reads: "*Can the Papyrus grow where there is no mud?*"

Job did not utter these words, but actually Bildad the Shuie did, one of Job's three "friends." The other two were Eliphaz the Temanite and Zophar the Naamathite. These three came to sympathize and provide comfort to their buddy, Job, who had just undergone the complete destruction and total collapse of his life: his family, his wealth, and his health. Of course, as you read through the account, you discover pretty quickly that these guys had the bedside manner of Attila the Hun!

Certainly, Bildad didn't have much good to say about anything, but from this one tiny verse he actually hit on something that allows the reader to discover a wealth of wisdom. I mean, even a stopped clock is right twice a day, right? What he is referring to is what life is like without God, and in doing so draws upon nature to bring his point home. He is saying that a man who does not have God, cannot have any hope of prospering in life. Just like papyrus cannot grow without mud.

Whether he meant it or not, there is a second principle of truth in this passage that I want to talk about. Call it the principle of evaluation. To the Ancients, the papyrus from which paper was made represented literature, music and art. To them it always seemed nothing short of miraculous that the cultural beauty inherent in their literature, art and music should emerge from out of the oozy deposits of repulsive looking mud found along the marshy banks of the Nile and Euphrates River.

The value of mud resides in its invisible properties. If we were to leave it to Webster's Dictionary then we wouldn't be left with much. It defines mud as: "*mire, wet dust, soft earth as in a puddle.*" But there is so much more to it.

Splashing through the emeralds

A story is told of John Ruskin, the famous Victorian thinker, whom was one day walking along the very muddy street of an English manufacturing town. Apparently having nothing better to do, he bent down and scooped up some of the blackish mush into a container and had it examined by a chemist. (I guess it had been a slow day for him.) It was revealed that the mud consisted of four basic elements: clay, sand, soot and water. It occurred to Ruskin that these are the very same substances from which precious gems are formed.

From clay we get the sapphire and the ruby. From sand comes amethyst. From soot we find the diamond. And as for water, well, it is the indispensable element used in the process of refining all the precious stones. So, in other words, when you walk through a mud puddle you are not wading and splashing through mud at all, but you are in fact splashing about in emeralds. Mud: humble, nasty, lowly, plain, and ordinary, can produce such valuable commodities as papyrus, paper and jewels. There are qualities in mud that can only be realized and activated because of energy and the creative power of God.

When Jesus was in the world He always saw the potential in people. He saw people as diamonds in the rough, needing only to be refined and polished. God sees that each of us possesses undreamt possibilities; pent up skills and talents just crying out for discovery and release and development and exercise. From a physical perspective, there's not a lot for Jesus to work with. According to the U.S. Bureau of Chemistry and Soils, the chemical and mineral composition of the average human body breaks down as follows:

- 65% Oxygen
- 18% Carbon
- 10% Hydrogen
- 3% Nitrogen
- 1.5% Calcium
- 1% Phosphorous
- 0.35% Potassium
- 0.25% Sulfur
- 0.15% Sodium
- 0.15% Chlorine
- 0.05% Magnesium
- 0.0004% Iron
- 0.00004% Iodine

Additionally, our bodies contain trace quantities of copper, zinc, fluorine, silicon, manganese, aluminum, and arsenic. The amounts of those elements and a few others that the body is made of, total about \$160.00 USD. (*"What Is Your Body Worth?" What Is Your Body Worth? Data Genetics. Web. 01 Apr. 2011.*) That's it. At this level, we are all the same; the ground truly is level ... (pun intended). Bill Gates is chemically worth about 160 bucks. You are worth about 160 bucks. We are all the same.

So what can God do with a hundred and sixty bucks worth of dirt? Well from a spiritual perspective, miraculous things; provided we are willing participants. In Jeremiah we see the Lord's frustration at the unwillingness of the Israelites to allow him to mold them and make them into what he desired them to be.

“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.’” Jeremiah 18:1-7

God clearly has a plan for every life. The question is, will we allow him to reshape us? Sometimes we consider ourselves too cracked and broken for God to do anything with; so we assume he is done with us, but that is just not true.

Thoughts presented in this devotional are taken from the book *MESSED UP: Proof That You're More to God Than Your Mistakes* by Guy Hammond and published by Illumination Publishers. The book is a companion to the documentary movie *FINDING GUY* by One Compass Media.