

The Potter, the Clay and the Plan

Text: Jeremiah 18:1-10

One of the most captivating metaphors in the entire Bible has to be when God invited Jeremiah to the potter's house to receive a message. The message is as relevant for the Church and individuals today as it was to ancient Judah at the time.

Some background would help us better understand the message. In the sovereign way God has formed his people collectively into a nation, he also does so personally and individually. The Lord said to Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). There is a unique tribute to the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture found in the words of Jeremiah 1:9: "Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth." We can trust the Bible. When we open up its pages, we are opening the very words of God. God rebukes Judah for committing idolatry with gods that are not gods (Jeremiah 2:11). Then God shows the vanity and emptiness of a life built without the true and living God: "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). We hear the heartbreak of our Lord in Jeremiah 2:32, 33a when He says, "Can a maid forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? yet my people have forgotten me days without number. Why trimmest thou thy way to seek love?...." Then in Jeremiah 3, God pleads with His people to return to Him. In Jeremiah 4, the Lord commands the people to break up their fallow ground (Jeremiah 4:3). And then in Jeremiah 6:16, "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein."

In our metaphor we are introduced to the potter, the wheels and the clay that becomes a vessel. I cannot think of this story without thinking of the hymn by Adelaide A. Pollard that says,

"Have Thine own way, Lord,
Have Thine own way.
Thou art the potter; I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting yielded and still."

1. THE CREATOR (Jeremiah 18:6)

What is God to you? God is a person. This world is not in the hands of an impersonal God. Dr. Harry Rimmer said that a person without God "is a blind man in a dark room looking for a black cat that is not there." God is the Potter, we are the clay. We cannot run without God knowing where we are.

Jacob was running. He was running from his brother, when he found Bethel. Genesis 28:12 says, "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the

earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.” Then in Genesis 28:16 and 17 we read, “And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” Jacob, running from his father-in-law, Laban and dreading meeting his brother, came face-to-face with God. Genesis 32:30 records, “And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.” Jacob found he could never run from God nor could he hide from God.

Jonah tried running from God, but was not successful. God found him. God stirred up a storm that brought up the great fish that put Jonah back on the path God had originally planned for Jonah.

There are two Bible verses that are found nowhere else in the Bible other than Mark 14:51, 52: “And there followed him a certain young man, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and the young men laid hold on him: And he left the linen cloth, and fled from them naked.” This unnamed young man is thought to have been John Mark. John Mark had a tendency to run from God and His will. He was the reason Paul and Barnabas took different paths. Just before Paul died, he was able to say, “...he is profitable to me for the ministry” (II Timothy 4:11b). It was John Mark who scribed the book of Mark.

God likens Himself to the Potter. He is Sovereign. When the potter forms the clay he throws the clay in its raw state upon the wheel. Then he pushes it, centers it, aligns it just right and buries his thumbs into it and with his hands he pulls it up into the air as though he is holding invisible inward handles.

God doesn't need us in the truest sense of that word. He said in Psalm 50:12, “If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof.” Notice God's might revealed in Isaiah 45:5-7: “I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.”

II. THE CLAY (Jeremiah 18:4)

We are the clay. We are pliable and can be usable in God's hands. Clay is not valuable compared to diamonds, rubies, gold or silver. But when God puts His mighty hand to us, we become of inestimable value, so valuable that He redeems us with His precious blood.

The clay that is being formed is “...marred in the hand of the potter....” The clay is not marred “by” the hand, but “in” the hand of the potter. In every case that there is a problem, we are the problem. God will move Heaven and Earth to aright our lives.

III. THE CIRCUMSTANCES (Jeremiah 18:3)

The wheels represent our life circumstances. There is an upper wheel and a lower wheel. The lower wheel controls the speed, starting and stopping while

the upper wheel is what the clay rests upon. Ezekiel 1:16 speaks of "...a wheel in the middle of a wheel." This is a vision of God working in and through life's circumstances. God stops our wheel and allows us to be flattened, pulled and yanked, until that which was marring us is removed.

IV. THE CRUCIBLE (Job 24:10)

The furnace or kiln is not mentioned. It is, however, understood that in the process of the clay becoming a usable vessel, the clay must be placed in the fire. Job confirms that he will come forth as gold after the trial. And he was right.

V. THE CASUALTY (Jeremiah 19:1, 10, 11)

There is a sad ending in our metaphor. The vessel that was not pliable, that fought against God's working, ended up broken. God's ultimate goal for us is found in II Timothy 2:20, 21: "But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work."

God's plan for us is to be vessels usable, honorable and that which would bring glory unto Him.

"Have Thine own way, Lord,
Have Thine own way.
Hold over my being absolute sway;
Filled with Thy spirit till all can see
Christ only always living in me."

-Pastor Pope-