

Journey through Jeremiah Part 20 The Potter and the Clay

A sermon series by Pastor Byron Chesney, Th.D. – Wednesday, May 03, 2017

† Jeremiah 18:1-23

As we approach chapter 18 we need to know it is a continuation of the previous chapter which was dealing with the sins of Judah and what the LORD said was going to happen if they did not repent and turn away from their false idols and to Him and Him alone. -- We see in this section the analogy of the Potter and the Clay. Some of the best preaching material in all the Bible. There are also many songs that have been written around the Potter and the Clay.

(1) *The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, (2) Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words.*

Jeremiah is instructed by God to go to the Potter's house. All throughout the Bible you will find references to the Potter and the Clay. It is a symbol of God and Mankind, God being the Potter and Mankind being the Clay. Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Romans, and Revelation all reference the analogy of the Potter and the Clay.

Paul said this in **Romans 9:21** *Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?*

Notice that the LORD just instructs Jeremiah to go to the Potter's house, he doesn't tell him what for except to hear His words. That is how the LORD works in the heart of a pastor. He just asks for obedience and when we obey then the LORD gives us the message He wants us to preach. In Jeremiah's case, it is the Potter and Clay.

(3) *Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. (4) And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.*

It is the picture of a Potter taking something that is worthless, and marred, and making something completely new out of it. It says that "*he made it again another vessel.*" The Potter doesn't just smooth over the blemishes, he completely reworks it until it is perfect and new.

That is what the LORD Jesus does with us. That is why the Bible says that we become a "New Creature." We become "another vessel," no longer the blemished, marred, sinful vessel, but a brand new, shiny, pure vessel of honor.

(5) *Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, (6) O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.*

The LORD is willing to work with Israel as the Potter works with the clay. He is willing to make them anew and mold them into vessels of honor if they will only allow Him to. That is His desire for them.

(7) *At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; (8) If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.*

Even in the final hour before they are to be taken by their enemies the LORD extends His grace and mercy toward them. He is giving them yet another chance

before it's too late. He tells them if they will turn from their evil he will "*repent of the evil*" he had thought to do unto them. That means that he will change His mind if they repent. He will protect them.

(9) *And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; (10) If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.*

Then he gives them the alternative. If they do not turn from their evil he will not change his mind about what he has set into motion. He will carry through with their punishment and allow their enemies to take them and destroy their homes, cities, families, and lands.

(11) *Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.*

He gives Jeremiah the words to say to the men of Judah as their final warning. He is to warn them that God has a plan set in motion for them and it's going to be against them. This is their last chance to turn from their evil ways before he unleashes His wrath.

(12) *And they said, There is no hope: but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.*

Oh my, this has to be one of the hardest verses in the Bible to have to read. It is unreal that a people that have been given ample warning and given such grace and mercy, that they will actually purposely defy God. They are saying to Jeremiah, forget about it, we are not going to change our ways. We are set in our ways and have absolutely no plans to change or repent. We will do whatever we jolly well please. We love our sin more than we love the LORD.

Wow, this sounds just like the land that we live in today. We live in a wicked and perverse generation of people that are walking after the evil wicked imaginations of their own hearts. They have no fear of God or the repercussions for their sins.

(13) *Therefore thus saith the LORD; Ask ye now among the heathen, who hath heard such things: the virgin of Israel hath done a very horrible thing.*

The LORD tells Jeremiah to look among the Heathen and see if there be anyone else in this world that would act like this? Not even the heathen would be so corrupt that they would just out and out reject grace and mercy. It is unheard of. The people of Judah have become worse than the ungodly heathen nations. He calls them "*the virgin Israel,*" meaning a people that have been set aside to be the bride of the groomsman who would watch over them and protect them but they slip off into adultery.

(14) *Will a man leave the snow of Lebanon which cometh from the rock of the field? or shall the cold flowing waters that come from another place be forsaken?*

The *snow of Lebanon* and the *cold flowing waters* are both blessings that God has bestowed upon Israel. He is asking if they are willing to give all of that up? Do they love their sin so much that they are willing to give up all of the blessings that God has given to them and will continue giving them if they turn back to him?

(15) Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity, and they have caused them to stumble in their ways *from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up;*

How sad that God's own people have forgotten him. Not even the heathen's forget their gods but the Children of Israel have forgotten the Lord God Jehovah and are burning incense to other gods. Here he says they are burning it to "**vanity**," meaning vain things, things that cannot help them. Because of this they have stumbled from the ancient paths and walking in ways "**not cast up**." That means new ways that are untried and unfamiliar, they have not been walked in and are rough and dangerous.

People are doing the same thing these days. Nowadays with the influx of social media and live streaming you can see how Churches have left the ancient paths and are on paths "**not cast up**." I am appalled at some of the things I see going on in Churches these days. Dancing, rock music, scantily clothed members, it's a disgusting rock and roll flesh show. You can't tell me that God is in that.

(16) To make their land desolate, *and a perpetual hissing; every one that passeth thereby shall be astonished, and wag his head.*

Judah has become nothing but a laughingstock to the world. Their idolatry has caused their land to be desolate and now whenever anyone passes by them they hiss at them. That word "**hissing**" means "**a whistling of scorn, a bleating of ridicule**." People pass by and they hiss, click their tongues, wag their heads in disbelief of the shape they have gotten themselves into. They do not pity them, they loath them and are happy because of what they have become.

(17) I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will shew them the back, and not the face, in the day of their calamity.

The LORD says that he will scatter Judah before their enemies like an **east wind**. The east wind is known to be very strong and damaging. It is the wind that they relied on to scatter the chaff that was separated from the wheat.

He says "I will shew them the back, and not the face." That means that he will turn his back on them and not show them any favor. The God that they once could run to and turn to in their time of need will turn his back on them.

(18) Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.

Now we see the wickedness of the people of Judah. Instead of repenting they want to turn on Jeremiah. They claim they have priests, wise men, and prophets other than Jeremiah who are not speaking out against us. We will listen to them and forget this Jeremiah.

They want to do more than just forget him or kill him, they want to destroy his good name and his reputation. That's what it means when they say "**let us smite him with the tongue**." They are willing to tell lies and spread rumors about him to try and shut him up. They want to destroy him personally.

My friend there are people out there in this world that would like nothing better than to destroy the man of God. Listen, if you preach the truth then you are going to have enemies.

When you preach against sin people can't take it. Instead of repenting they will do everything in their power to destroy the preacher even if it means making up lies and spreading rumors about him. They don't care if they destroy the preacher's reputation or his family or whatever. They just want him shut up.

That is why James chapter 3 addresses the damage done by the tongue.

James 3:6-8 And the tongue *is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. (7) For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: (8) But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.*

(19) Give heed to me, O LORD, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me.

Jeremiah cries out to the LORD. He has nowhere else to turn but the LORD. He doesn't have any friends, his family and countrymen all hate him and want to destroy him and all he has done is preach what God said.

(20) Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, *and to turn away thy wrath from them.*

Jeremiah is now pouring his heart out to God. He is in amazement of how he is being treated by the people. After all of the times he has prayed for them and all he ever wanted was for them to be protected and live for God and this is how they repay him? He asks if good is going to be repaid with evil? He reminds the LORD that he actually stood up for the people and begged him not to turn his wrath on them.

(21) Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their *blood* by the force of the sword; and let their wives be bereaved of their children, and *be widows*; and let their men be put to death; *let their young men be slain by the sword in battle.*

(22) Let a cry be heard from their houses, when thou shalt bring a troop suddenly upon them: for they have digged a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet.

(23) Yet, LORD, thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay *me*: forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from thy sight, but let them be overthrown before thee; deal *thus* with them in the time of thine anger.

Let's be careful not to think that Jeremiah is seeking revenge in some spiteful way. He is simply declaring the vengeance that the LORD said he would take out upon them in the first place. Jeremiah isn't going to sit back and laugh when he sees the slaughter and destruction of the people of Judah, he will weep and mourn for them but he places it all in God's hands. He has preached what the LORD told him to preach, he's done everything he possible could for the people but now it was up to God as to what would happen to them. – It is not persona vengeance that Jeremiah is seeking, he is simply seeking that the LORD be glorified.

† All Scripture from the Authorized King James Version of the Bible