

JEREMIAH 18

AT THE POTTER'S HOUSE

One day, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, Jeremiah went outside the city to the Valley of Hinnom, on the outskirts of Jerusalem. There, in a little hut, he found a potter busily engaged at his handicraft. "Behold, he wrought a work on the wheels" (verse 3). As the prophet stood quietly beside the potter, he saw him take a piece of clay from the mass that lay beside his hand. Having kneaded it to rid it of the bubbles, he placed it upon the wheel that was rapidly revolving horizontally, at the motion of his own foot driving the treadle. From that moment, his hands were at work. He shaped the vessel with his skillful touch – widening it a little here, and leading it up into a more slender form there, and opening out the vessel's lip. Thus, from the shapeless clay, there emerged a fair and beautiful vessel that was even fit for the Temple court or the royal palace. But when it was nearly complete, and the next step would have been to remove it and place it in the kiln; the clay vessel fell into a shapeless ruin because of a flaw in the material, and broke into pieces – some lying upon the wheel, and others upon the floor.

The prophet naturally expected that the potter would immediately take another piece of clay, and produce the ideal vessel which had been so hopelessly marred under his hand. Instead, however – to his astonishment and keenly excited interest – the potter gathered up the broken pieces of the clay with scrupulous care, and pressed them together as he had done at first. He placed the clay on the wheel again, where it had been before; and he made it into another vessel, as seemed good to his mind to make. Perhaps this second vessel was not quite as fair as the first might have been, but it was still beautiful and useful. It was a memorial of the potter's patience and longsuffering, of his careful use of material, and of his power of repairing loss and making something out of failure and disappointment. What a lovely picture of the longsuffering patience of God! What a bright anticipation of Christ's redemptive work! What a beautiful parable of remade characters, lives, and hopes! To us, as to Jeremiah, the Divine thought is flashed: "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" (verse 6).

The purpose of the prophet's observations at the potter's house seems to have been so that he could give his people hope! Even though they had marred God's fair ideal for their lives and their nation, yet a glorious and blessed future was still within reach. If they would only yield themselves to the touch of the

Outline of the chapter:

- ❖ The Lord gives Jeremiah a lesson to give his people, taken from what he saw at the potter's house – verses 1-10
- ❖ The people are rebuked for their stubborn obstinance in sin – verses 11-17
- ❖ Jeremiah appeals to God against those who sought his life – verses 18-23



Great Potter, He would undo the results of years of disobedience which had marred and spoiled His fair purpose. He would make His chosen people an honorable vessel, which was sanctified and fit for the Master's use. The same thought may apply to us as well. Is there anyone among us who can say that he is not guilty of having marred and resisted the touch of God's hands? Who is there that does not lament opportunities of holiness, which were lost because of the stubbornness of the will and the hardness of the heart? How often the Lord finds it necessary to make us again, as the potter remade the vessel! Even when we have done our best work and failed, and when other people have turned away from us with disappointment, the Lord brings to perfection that which concerns us – for His mercy endures forever, and He cannot forsake the work of His own hands! Have you marred God's early plan for your life? Are you lamenting, "I had my chance and missed it; it will never come to me again!" It is here that the Gospel comes in with its gentle words for the outcast and lost! The bruised reed is made over again, and turned into a pillar for the Temple of God. The feebly smoking flax is kindled to a fervent flame. Thus these "waste products" are shown to be of extraordinary value; for they yield the fairest colors, or provide the elementary principles of life!

Jeremiah delivered his message to his countrymen; but we read that the people said, "There is no hope." They were resolved to walk after their own devices, and to follow the imaginations of their own evil hearts (verse 12). The people had fallen into gross idolatry, they had left the ancient paths, and they had entered upon a way that was not good. Therefore, God threatened to scatter them before their enemies. The prophet was faithful to his trust, and uttered these threatenings in the ears of the people. But what then? His earnest admonitions were answered with words of personal enmity. "Come," they said, "let us devise devices against Jeremiah. They boasted that they had priests and prophets of their own, and they did not need the advice of Jeremiah (verse 18). They planned to take away his life (verse 23), and thus to rid themselves of one whom they deemed their enemy. This is often the kind of gratitude that the world gives to faithful preachers of God's truth. Jeremiah prayed most vehemently against them – not in the language of personal vindictiveness; but as an expression of indignation against sin, and of zeal for the glory of the Lord of Hosts. When men continue to be merciless in their malice, we may lawfully desire that God will plead our cause.

Lord, we praise You as our Father and our Great Master Potter, Who delights to restore and rebuild the souls of all of Adam's broken sons and daughters! (Ps. 147:1-3) Make us anew in Christ Jesus; and make us vessels that are fit for Your use, so that we may serve You here, and glorify You to all eternity! Amen.