

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

TEXT: JEREMIAH 18

INTRODUCTION:

1. The figure of the potter and the clay is found all throughout the Bible: in the book of Psalms, the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zechariah, the apostle Paul, and the book of Revelation.
2. In all these references, we see that God is the potter and He does whatever He wants with the clay.
3. Here in Jeremiah 18, the prophet Jeremiah was told to "go down to the potter's house." The LORD told him, "there I will cause thee to hear my words" (18:2).
4. So Jeremiah obeyed the LORD, and went down to the potter's house, "and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels" (18:3).
5. The wheels were two circular stones connected by a shaft. The lower wheel was turned by the potter's foot, engaging the upper wheel so the potter could form his vessel from a lump of clay on the upper wheel (18:3)
6. If the vessel became marred, the potter would not throw it away. Since the clay was moldable, "he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" (18:4).
7. The symbolic lessons of the potter and the clay are easy to understand. The potter represents God and the clay represents man. J. Vernon McGee said the wheel represents the "fortuitous concurrence of circumstances."
8. God controls the wheel.
9. J. Vernon McGee says, "Man is different from clay — he is given a will. He can yield to God. The Potter is not arbitrary or vindictive. He is patient. 'He remembers that we are dust' (Psalm 103:14)" (*Thru the Bible*).

I. GOD IS THE POTTER

1. God is sovereign -- "Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand" (18:6). The message was for the "house of Israel" (18:6), but the application is for us today -- God is in control of our lives.
2. One of the reasons people sin with such impunity is they have an unscriptural concept of God. Like a potter creates an earthen vessel, God created us. They teach in the public schools that men have evolved from monkeys. This is wicked. The Bible teaches that God created us.
3. Isaiah 64:8 says, "But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand."

4. When the Bible speaks of God as a potter, it means that He has a plan for our lives. He has the power to change us, and to guide us, and to control us. But we have to be willing to want to be changed, and guided, and controlled.
5. God is sovereign over all the nations, including the USA (cf. Jer. 18:6-10).
6. God's sovereignty does not preclude man's free will. Jeremiah 18:8 says, "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."
7. Men can choose to turn from their sin or they can choose to turn away from God.
8. God does not "repent" the way men repent (18:8, 10). Here the word means "relent." The NKJV says, "If that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it."
9. Clay cannot mold itself. People say they want a change, but at the same time they are not willing to let God change them. Remember: God is the potter. We have to allow God to work on us. But this takes faith in God.
10. Many years ago, back in Florence, Italy, a sculptor threw out a piece of marble. He had tried to make something out of it but gave up. "I can do nothing with it," he said when he tossed it out. Other sculptors heard about this, and they too tried to work with it. Eventually they all gave up, and that piece of marble lay on a rubbish heap for 40 years.
11. One day Michelangelo was out taking a walk when he spotted this piece of marble. He saw something in it no one else could see. He brought it to his studio. Friends came by and said, "What is that?" He told them, "That is King David!" But all they could see was a big block of marble. Well, Michelangelo got to work and before long he had created his masterpiece, "David."
12. God looks down on this dirty old world and sees a bunch of clay -- big blobs and little blobs of clay. Some are on the rubbish heap of sin. But God looks down and says, "I can make something good out of that blob down there!" "I can make something beautiful with that clay down there!"
13. The LORD is a skillful potter. He can take an old blob of clay that has been marred by sin and make something good out of it. "So He made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it" (18:4). Notice: "So he made it again ..."
14. Jesus said, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again" (John 3:7).
15. I am not the same old dirty vessel I was when God saved me. "He made it again another vessel" (18:4). Only God can do that. God is the potter. I am glad I'm in the potter's hands. What about you?

16. God has a plan for your life; God has a plan for my life. Just like Michelangelo had a plan for that old piece of marble, God has a plan for us.
17. Like a master potter, God sees the finished product, and He will mould us the way He wants to if we will let Him.
18. Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."
19. Phil. 1:6 says, "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

II. WE ARE THE CLAY

1. In Jeremiah's day the clay represented the house of Israel (Jer. 18:6). But as we compare Scripture with Scripture, we see that this principle applies to all people. God created us all; He is the potter; we are all clay.
2. The Bible says, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7).
3. The LORD said to Adam, "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19).
4. Psalm 103:14 says, "For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust."
5. And what is clay, but dust mixed with water. Clay by itself is of little value, but it can become something wonderful if molded by the right hands.
6. Nobody can calculate the tremendous potential in an individual's life. But without God working on him, and molding him, man is nothing but a worthless blob of clay, or a marred and useless vessel, good only for the trash heap. What good is a cracked jar or a broken vase?
7. J. Wilbur Chapman said, "The clay is not attractive in itself, but when the hands of the potter touch it, and the thought of the potter is brought to bear upon it, and the plan of the potter is worked out in it and through it, then there is a real transformation" (*Revival Sermons*).
8. G. Campbell Morgan, in his commentary on this passage said, "There are vaster secrets wrapped in humanity than humanity has ever yet discovered; higher and nobler purposes to be fulfilled through this strange race of which we form a part, with all its passion, and its power, and its doubt, and its groveling, and its ascending, than we have ever dreamed."

III. THE PEOPLE TURNED AGAINST JEREMIAH

1. The LORD warned the people of Judah (18:11), but they did not want to turn from their evil ways (18:12). So God said He would scatter them (18:13-17). He had warned them before (9:16; 13:24).
2. The plot to hurt Jeremiah was their second attempt (18:18, 22, 23). The first attempt was back in chapter 11 (cf. 11:18-21; 12:6).
3. Jeremiah was a man of prayer (18:19), and if his imprecatory prayer seems harsh, we need to remember it was in line with the leading of the Holy Spirit (18:20-23; cf. 20:8, 9).
4. Warren Wiersbe said, "Those who opposed him were opposing God, and Jeremiah asked God to deal with them...If Jeremiah seems too angry to us, perhaps some of us today aren't angry enough at the evil in this world...It isn't 'politically correct' to be dogmatic or critical of ideas that are definitely unbiblical" (*The Bible Exposition Commentary*).

CONCLUSION:

1. About 100 years ago at a prayer meeting, an elderly lady prayed, "It really doesn't matter what you do with us, Lord -- just have your way with our lives."
2. A lady named Adelaide Pollard was at the prayer meeting that night and was moved by this simple prayer.
3. Miss Pollard had been going through a difficult time. She felt God had called her to Africa as a missionary, but she was unable to raise the necessary financial support.
4. So she was discouraged that night at prayer meeting, but was greatly impressed by the woman's prayer, "It really doesn't matter what you do with us, Lord -- just have your way with our lives."
5. When Miss Pollard returned home from prayer meeting, she started reading and meditating on Jeremiah 18:3, 4. Before going to bed that night, she had composed her famous hymn,
6. "Have thine own way, Lord! Have thine own way! Thou art the Potter, I am the clay: Mould me and make me After thy will, While I am waiting, Yielded and still."
7. According to the Bible, God is the Potter, molding each and every one of us. Some of us, like Adelaide Pollard, desire to be molded into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ.
8. Unfortunately, others refuse to yield to God, and become useless vessels, fit only for destruction (cf. Rom. 9:21-23).

