

IN THE POTTER'S HAND

Text: Jeremiah 18:1-10

Key Word: Mold

Key Thought: How does God Mold us into a vessel that He can use - or reuse?

Pottery is one of the oldest crafts recorded in the Bible. Originally all pottery was formed in a crude manner with simply the use of the potter's trained hand. With the discovery of the potter's wheel came a noticeable change in both design and detail. By the time Jeremiah spoke this vivid example, pottery had been used for close to 4000 years.

If you would follow the prophet on the day of his walk to the potter's house, you would end up in the Valley of Hinnon near what was called the Potsherd Gate (Jeremiah 19:2). This gate was found near the Tower of the Furnaces where the pottery kilns were located on the west side of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 3:11,12:38).

Another important part of this craft was a field with which to weather the dry native clay dust. The final necessity was a stream of water in order to mix the clay into its proper texture.

God used the illustration of a potter at work to describe His working with the nation of Israel (and of us today). It was through this illustration that we find three very important truths about the God we serve.

What Can Be Clearly Seen about God Through this Vivid Illustration?

I. THE PURPOSE OF GOD

II. THE POWER OF GOD

III. THE PATIENCE OF GOD

I. THE PURPOSE OF GOD

“Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?”

Romans 9:21

God chose the nation of Israel for a very important purpose. He had called them as a nation unto Himself even before they were a nation. It was through these chosen ones that all other nations would be blessed. He gave them special laws in order to keep them pliable in His hand. God kept fashioning and shaping them into a nation that would declare His glory.

I. THE PURPOSE OF GOD (Contd.)

Every potter knows that he must carefully select the clay he is about to use. This is not the job for an apprentice. Certain signs would help in the selection of the clay but the real test came once the clay was put on the wheel. The hand of the potter although it was rough, it was also trained to be sensitive to locate any impurity or hardness. This illustration therefore, perfectly fits into God's dealing with the children of Israel.

God's purpose for us was much the same as it was for the tiny nation of Israel. He wants us to enter a covenant – a new covenant with Him. This new covenant is built upon grace. He no longer wishes to place an old law on tablets of stone but rather His desire to write His perfect will on the fleshy tablets of our heart. But why are some of us still hard? The answer is simple - Impurities. When impurities entered the clay, the inevitable response was that hardness took place.

It is very important that we understand what takes place next. Instead of throwing the clay away, the potter chooses to change His original intention for the clay. The clay was resistant to the potter's purpose. **It is important to understand that the quality of our life often determines what God will choose to do with us.**

When it comes to choice in life, God wants us to choose the best. It's not a matter of do's and don't's but rather that **we should carefully consider the outcome of our actions. Will our actions force God to change His perfect will for our lives?** Will our attitudes and actions bring impurity into our life that will harden us to the wonderful purpose God has desired for us?

"In a large house there are articles not only of gold, and silver, but also of wood and clay, some are for noble purposes and some are for ignoble. 21. If the man cleanses himself of the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work."

II Timothy 2:21

II. THE POWER OF GOD

The power of God was clearly seen at the beginning of time when God created the heavens and earth as well as man.

“The LORD God formed (to fashion or shape or create) the man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living being.”

Genesis 2:7

No one is able to create life as God does. He not only creates. He also sustains life. If God didn't have the power over death, we all would die immediately. When God created Adam he was dead until God breathed in the Him the breath of life. God never created man to die.

Death was a direct result of sin. Sin is the one thing that brings a change to God's plan for our lives. God chooses life for us but we sometimes choose death by our disobedience. God not only has the power to bring life but he also has the power to bring death. We live in a society that has chosen to remove God from much of its thought. Man in his foolish knowledge now believes he is able to live without God.

Isaiah the prophet said,

“You turn things upside down as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, ‘He did not make me?’ Can the pot say to the potter, ‘He knows nothing?’”

Isaiah 29:16

“Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker . . . Does the clay say to the potter, ‘what are you making?’”

Isaiah 45:9

We must come to grips with the truth that our life is totally governed by God's mercy. He has all power over life and death. He chooses life for us -- not death. God can either uproot, breakdown and destroy OR He CAN build up and mold a people for His name. How do we rate on the heavenly Potter's wheel?

Isaiah recognized God's power over him and his nation.

“Yet O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.”

Isaiah 64:8

III. THE PATIENCE OF GOD

Some people believe that God changes His mind toward us. Certain versions (KJV & RSV) uses the word “*repent*” to describe God’s action. This word gives us the impression that God can’t make up His mind what to do.

We should instead see it as God’s modifying His action toward a people who have changed their mind toward Him. **It is not so much that God changes His mind as it is that He changes the treatment of us because of our modified behavior.**

In the process of developing a piece of pottery, the vessel is placed on the wheel once it dries to a leathery consistency. Here the final cutting and parring takes place. To help beautify the vessel, the potter will coat it with “*slip*” (*clay that has the consistency of cream*). It is also at this time that mineral color is added to give a greater beauty. Then it can be rubbed with a smooth stone to give it a shine. Beautiful designs are often painted on it at this time. It is then ready to be fired in temperatures anywhere between 750 degrees Celsius - 1050 degrees Fahrenheit. The firing process is the most difficult for any apprentice to learn. The master must stay close to his side during this training time.

It is during the beautifying and firing stages of our life that we can clearly see **the Patience of God.** It is here that He spends the most time making sure that every detail is taking care of. We serve a patient God.

“The LORD is not slow (slack) in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you. not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

II Peter 3:9

Job said,

*“Your hands shaped me and made me. Will you now turn and destroy me?
9. Remember that you molded me like clay. Will you now turn me to dust again?”*

Job 10:9,10

III. THE PATIENCE OF GOD

*** Back in nearly '80s, we traveled with Pastor Nelson, Loretta and their daughter Joanna to a convention near Seattle, WA. On the Sunday morning we attended the church in Everett, WA that Pastor Nelson had served in before coming to Fort McMurray, Alberta.

After the service, they had a number of prints of a beautiful picture that portrayed the love and patience of God to a wayward nation.

Jesus is seen kneeling before the Liberty Bell with His hand tenderly covering a large crack. The U.S. flag is firmly placed behind Him. An eagle is looking down upon its Master. A dove was used to portray the peace that Jesus was trying to offer the nation. The Word of God rested silently at the base in the picture.

The look on our Lord's eyes was one of compassion and care for a backslidden nation. His long suffering is seen as He kneels in prayer humbly beseeching the nation to repent. The prayer of King Solomon is written on a scroll for all to see. ***

"If my people who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land."

II Chronicles 7:14

Our LORD has given us a choice to respond to Him. We are as clay in His hand. He has a purpose for us in which His power will be revealed. He is waiting patiently for our response.

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Date: Aug 1/21

Place: FCA

Time: 10:30Am

Song: In The Potter's Hand; Change my Heart Oh God - C