

ESF, Lord's day service message  
12/9/2018

### **The Potter's Hand**

Jeremiah 18:1-6

*This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 2 "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." 3So I went to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. 4But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. 5Then the word of the Lord came to me: 6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the Lord. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.*

On New Year's Day, 1919, Georgia Tech was playing California in football. Late in the second quarter, Roy Regals, a California player, recovered a ball fumbled by a Georgia Tech player. In his excitement he became confused and began running in the wrong direction. After racing sixty-five yards he was finally tackled by his own player at the Georgia Tech two-yard line. California attempted to punt from deep in their own end zone, but the kick was blocked and Georgia Tech scored a safety. In the locker room at halftime, Roy Regals sat in the corner with his hands buried in his face, crying. Everyone else was silent. The coach didn't make his usual halftime speech, but shortly before the team was to take the field for the second half, he said, "The starting team is going back onto the field to begin the second half." The whole team left the locker room except for Regals, who remained in the corner, face in hands. "I can't do it, Coach," he said. "I can't play. I've ruined the team." The coach said, "Get up Regals. The game is only half over. You belong on the field."

Have you ever made a big mistake and thought that you will never be able to redeem yourself? Have you given up hope on yourself because you are tarnished with too many blemishes in your life? Have you ever

felt that you are a useless person for any reason? Have you ever felt you are inferior to others and got depressed?

In today's word, Jeremiah uses the imagery of God as the potter.

**PP - Project of slides of images (clay, potter, potteries)**

As the potter God creates our lives with wonderful purpose. With faith in the Potter's purpose for our lives, we can have self-esteem no matter who we are. As the potter God never gives up on us. With faith in this truth, we can have hope of a second chance no matter what we have done.

**God has made you with a unique purpose**

God is the potter who created man from the dust of the ground (Genesis 2:7). Isaiah 64:8 says, "*Yet, O Lord, you are our Father, We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.*" When a potter sits down to make his pottery, he has something in mind of what he wants it to look like. In the same way, God has a plan for each of our lives. As a potter makes vessels of innumerable shapes for different purposes with the same clay, God makes every life for a different purpose.

This is the point of verse 4 of our passage: *the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.*

As your physical shape is different from all other people, the purpose of your life which God has designed is also different from the purposes of all other people. It is unique and only for you.

You may compare yourself with others who you think are better than you. You may think that God has made you inferior to others. You may think that God is unfair. You may complain, "God, why did you make me this way?" But such thinking and complaining do not help you at all.

They only rob you of peace and joy in life. The Bible encourages you to accept that you are just clay and God is the potter. God is not a ruthless, or mean potter. He is the potter who loves every man he creates. He is the potter who creates a meaningful purpose for each pottery.

The prophet Isaiah uses the imagery of the potter to stress God's sovereign purpose over human beings. Isaiah 29:16 says, *You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay, can the pot say of the clay! Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "He did not make me"? Can the pot say of the potter "He knows nothing"?* Isaiah was saying that we have no authority to question God, because he is the Creator and we are his creation.

So, instead of complaining to God about who you are, believe that God has a unique and special purpose in your life just as you are. Pray to find that purpose. Start giving thanks to God for that. Then God will bless you to fulfill the purpose of your life.

While you are fulfilling the purpose God has designed in your life, you will surely be confident of yourself as you are. You can live with high self-esteem no matter what other people are saying about you. You will be free from comparing yourself to others and from feeling inferior to them.

### **God never gives up on you**

Although the clay may have a blemish, a potter can still mold it to make a beautiful vessel. If the clay is deformed while the potter is molding it, the potter does not throw it away, but squashes the deformed clay back into a mound and reshapes it again.

Likewise, as the potter, God does not throw us away when we have a blemish, but remolds us again and again. God never gives up on us even if we make mistakes and have blemishes as long as we remain in Christ.

A product which most of us have grown up with is Ivory soap. Besides being 99.44% pure, it has two uncommon qualities among soap. (1) It floats, and (2) it is the oldest of the best-sellers. But, it hasn't always been that way!

Years ago Ivory soap was just another brand among many. But then, one day, a factory foreman blundered by leaving a batch of new soap unwatched in the cooking vat during the noon hour. His lunch was delayed and the soap over-cooked.

However, rather than report the mistake and risk losing his job, the foreman decided to make the best of it. He shipped out the batch anyway. It seemed normal - although it was much lighter.

The results surprised everyone. Because, rather than complaints, the company was deluged with orders for the new 'floating' soap. The foreman cooperated with the company chemists to revise and modify the old formula to make a soap that floats. So, rather than being fired, the foreman was promoted.

Many who have made mistakes have learned that there can be "Blessings from blunders" - "a silver lining behind every dark cloud" - that "good can come from grief" - "and profit may come from peril". We have been told, and often tell others to "pick up the pieces and be positive" "move on" for, "it is always possible to make something better out of something bad."

That is exactly the way God works with us. Many times we may do wrong; a mistake of yielding to the flesh mars our life. Our attitude and action cause us to fall short of God's intended design. But God does not toss us aside as something that is worthless, or useless. He remakes us until He has completed his good purpose in us. He knows exactly what must be done to fix our broken lives, and he does it over and over again.

Charlie Steinmetz had one of the greatest minds in the field of electricity... in his day; no one knew more that he knew. Steinmetz built

the generators that moved the assembly line in Henry Ford's first plant in Dearborn, MI. The assembly line worked like clockwork and after the Model A came the Model T with its 4 cylinder, 20 horsepower engine. The assembly line hummed and profits began to pour into Henry Ford's pockets. And then one day the assembly line came to a sudden halt and the plant went dark. Mechanics tried unsuccessfully to find the source of the electrical problem that had crippled the assembly line. Ford was losing money and finally in frustration he called the brain behind the system. Steinmetz arrived at the Ford plant, pushed a few buttons, fiddled with a few switches and threw the master switch. The lights came on and engines ran and the assembly line began to move. A few days later Ford received a bill from Steinmetz for \$10,000. Although Ford was a rich man he thought ten grand was a bit steep and protested asking Steinmetz how he could charge so much for having spent so little time tinkering with a few wires and switches.

Steinmetz then resubmitted the bill to Ford. It read: "For tinkering around with the motors: \$10. For knowing where to tinker: \$9,990."

To fix our broken lives, God has paid an unfathomable price. He has sacrificed His own son. By the sacrifice of Christ, God rebuild our broken lives to be a masterpiece. Ephesians 2:10 says "*For we are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*"

You may feel like you are no longer useful to God. You're a cracked pot, too many mistakes, with too many flaws, and too many stains. Well, here's the good news, if you are in Christ, God can reshape your useless life and turn it into something wonderful.

### **God molds you to live for a purpose**

The clay that comes out of the earth is very raw and filled with blemishes. If a potter took clay right out of the ground, form it and baked it, most of it would either crumble or explode because the imperfections inside of it. In its natural state, clay is not ready to be made into anything.

To be useful in the hand of a potter, the clay must be filtered, softened, and left for a time to settle and become smooth and pliable. If the clay is hard, the potter will break it or beat it until it becomes soft. If the clay is dry, the potter will put water on it and beat it to mold it into a shape. Then it is placed on a table and beaten with a wooden mallet. The potter does this to remove any air bubbles that might be trapped in the clay. If he doesn't, the air bubble will form a pocket that will produce a weak spot and cause the vessel to be fragile and unusable, or in extreme cases, explode when it is being baked in the kiln.

As the potter, God shapes and molds our lives through different ways. Like the clay, we are worthless in our natural condition. In our natural state, we are not ready to be made into anything. However God is able to see the useful and beautiful vessels that we can become. Therefore, God does the same thing any potter does with clay to make us gentle and humble and useful to Him.

First, God may mold us to be gentle and humble to fully surrender to his will through his word. God's word has power to break our stubborn hearts. Hebrew 4:12 says, *"For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."*

Through his word, God reshapes our lives. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

While you are meditating or hearing God's word, you may be convicted in your heart to do something. At that time, do what God is telling you. Follow the word. Even if it hurts your pride, even if you don't feel like doing it, just do it as God convicts you with his word. Then you can be molded by God to be a useful vessel.

Second, God convicts us of our pride and stubborn will through his Spirit. Jesus says in John 16:8, *“When he (the Spirit) comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment.”* There may be times when you can hear an inner voice in your heart. The inner voice may convict you of your sins. It is the Holy Spirit who is doing that. Don’t resist what the inner voice says. Confess your sins before the Lord and ask his mercy of forgiveness. Then you will become soft and humble so that God can mold you to be a useful vessel.

Third, God may use people to make us gentle and humble. In 2 Samuel 7:14 God says, *“I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men.”*

David suffered a lot by king Saul who was jealous of him and tried to kill him many times. David had to constantly flee and move around to escape from Saul’s attack. He lived a very difficult and harsh life for many years because of Saul. But he did not hate Saul or try to revenge Saul. While he was suffering by the hand of Saul, he humbled himself before God and respected Saul as God’s anointed king. Then God molded him to be a great leader and eventually to be a great king.

Do you have people around you who are very difficult to deal with? Is your boss very harsh? Are you suffering a lot because of some people’s mistakes and wrongs against you? Do not hate them, curse them or revenge wrong with wrong. Consider them as tools of God. God may use them to discipline you and mold you. If you do, you will become gentle and humble. Then God molds you to be a useful vessel.

Fourth, God may use happenings and circumstances in our lives to make us gentle and humble. When Jonah refused to obey God’s command and rebelled against it, he faced a storm. In the storm he was thrown into the

belly of a huge fish. Through that experience, he was broken and completely surrendered his life to God's will. God molded Jonah to be a gentle and humble person through that trial. And God used him as a great preacher to save many people.

Even if you are not sinning against God, sometimes, God may use trials in your life to mold you to be humble. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:7-9, *“But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”*

God continues to make and reshape us with every passing hardship. God does not send the hardships but he does use them to transform us when we conform to his will for our lives.

When you face trials, surrender yourself to God. Then he will shape you to fulfill the purpose which he has designed for your life.