

## “The Potter And His Work”

January 6, 2019

Jeremiah 18:1-12

Please find with me two passages today, Jeremiah chapter eighteen in the Old Testament and Romans chapter nine in the New Testament.

The Bible is filled with pictures; actually images; especially images that describe the LORD's relationship with human beings. For example, He uses the image of marriage to portray His relationship to the Church. He uses the image of a Shepherd with His sheep to show His care and concern for His people. Today's picture, found here in Jeremiah eighteen is a picture of Someone's hands molding and shaping clay into a water pot.

The ancient potter was usually a man seated on a chair and, with his foot you'll see him pushing a wheel attached with an axle beneath another wheel or a wheel-like table, actually, a turn-table; on which he has placed a lump of clay. And, as the potter pushes the bottom wheel around with his foot, he centers a lump of clay moving round and round on the upper table. He then puts his wet hands into the clay and carefully and gradually forms a pot; a pot of his mind's design. This sort of pot-making on a wheel is called throwing a pot. The picture you'll see here in Jeremiah is God in the role of a potter.

Here's the idea. Notice how much care the potter takes.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRQfX7aUPqs>

Did you notice the skill of the potter's hands as he works with his clay? It's easy when you see a potter at work to understand why the wheel is constantly spinning. You can also see why the clay has to be very soft. Otherwise there's no pliability. And one more thing. Did you notice that the potter is, not only skillful, but very determined, very patient,

very careful because his goal is to fashion the exact pot that is in his mind. A potter always forms a particular type of pot?

Today we use the term “ceramics.” What's the difference between ceramics and pottery? The difference is that pottery is made exclusively of clay. On the other hand, ceramics are made of both clay and other materials such as glazes. And the materials that ceramics are made of change into a permanent shape after they're heated while a piece of pottery is almost always in the shape of a pot. And pottery is formed on a wheel. But ceramics can be formed by your hand without a wheel and because you can place into a kiln to be heated to its permanent form.

One more thing about a potter and his pottery. While the clay is on the wheel, the potter can stop his potter's wheel, mash the clay together, and then, according to his own desire and for his own reasons, re-mold the entire pot. I've titled today's message “The Potter And His Work.” Shall we pray?

All of the images presented in the Bible help us to see and understand God. What is God like? Trace the images He shows you in His Word. One of the most surprising and wonderful is the image of the potter. It might be difficult for you to imagine God as a Potter. But that is exactly what the Bible says He is. Can you remember all the things you made with clay when you were a child? And do you remember that you could make *anything* you wanted out of that clay? That's the concept behind the potter. And that's why God presents Himself to us as our potter. You might say He's the Potter of Heaven.

And one day in the seventh century before Christ a prophet named Jeremiah was told by God to go down to the potter's house and when he arrived, he was to listen for God's voice. That's the story here in Jeremiah chapter eighteen.

Jeremiah does as he is told. And when he arrives at the potter's house, the LORD says this to him; verse three.

Jeremiah 18:3 *"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.*

*(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.*

Now, remember what Jeremiah saw that day; verse four. Jeremiah 18:4 *"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."*

Did you notice that the vessel being made by the potter was spoiled in some way? And the LORD tells us by way of application that it was marred in one of two ways; verse seven? *(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.*

*(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.*

*(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 everyone from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good."*

So, practically speaking, the pottery being made by the LORD has been marred in His hand. Instead of submitting to the LORD; instead of being pliable in His hands; instead of becoming the pot the LORD intended, Judah needed to be re-worked by the Potter of Heaven.

Now go with me at the New Testament; Romans chapter nine and verse one. Romans 9:14 *"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. (15) For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. (16) So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.*

*(17) For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. (18) Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.*

*(19) Thou wilt say then unto me, why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? (20) Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? (21) Hath not **the Potter** power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?"*

So, "The Potter And His Clay." What does the LORD have here for us today?

First, the image of the potter; what does that say? It tells us that God wants to be known by you and me as a Potter, verse twenty again. Romans 9:20 *"Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? (21) Hath not **the potter** power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?"*

Actually, this word from Paul in the New Testament is a quotation from Isaiah 29:16 *"Surely your turning of things upside down shall be esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? Or **shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?**"*

Jeremiah and now Paul here in the New Testament, present the LORD as our Heavenly Potter. And the Prophet

Isaiah says the exact same thing. Here's Isaiah 64:8 *"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."*

So, yes, the LORD is your Heavenly Potter.

First, the LORD wants you to know Him as your Potter.

Second, why? Now, what does that mean? Why would the LORD compare Himself to a potter? Why a workman? Why an ordinary workman? Why a hard-working skillful artisan? Here's why. Because God knows that when you see Him as He is, you can see yourself as you are. And to see Him as your Potter helps you to respond to Him as the clay would submit itself to the skillful hand of the Master.

And folks, God's ability as a Potter is that of a Sovereign God. He's sovereign over you and over me. And He faithfully works on us. He deals with us as if we were lumps of living clay. By the way, wasn't the very first man, Adam, formed from the clay of the ground?

Folks, the LORD has made you and I; each of us; as it has pleased Him. So, why *wouldn't* He describe Himself as a Potter?

First, the LORD wants you to know Him as your Potter.

Second, the reason the LORD shows Himself to us as a Potter is because we need to see Him as He is if we are ever going to see ourselves as we are.

Third, how much control does the LORD have over you? The life and work of a potter must be one of the most interesting ever. You see, every pot he makes is unique. Each one of you has been made according to design in *His* mind. He's made you with His own purposes in mind.

Now, what did you see when I read the passage in Jeremiah? Or, what did Jeremiah see when he arrived at the potter's house? He saw a potter, a potter's wheel, and a lump of clay.

And from that did you see that the LORD has a significant amount of control over your life? Did you notice that He can do whatever pleases Him with His clay? Can you now see yourself as you really are; living clay with the ability to respond to the LORD's touch? And what happens when the clay on which the LORD is working, you and me; what happens when it doesn't respond to His hand as He thinks you should? Does He toss out that lump of clay? Does He throw it aside and get a new lump? No, He re-makes you. And, because He's God, He's perfectly wise in how He's made you *and* in how He re-makes you.

Look back once more to Jeremiah chapter eighteen and verse four. Jeremiah 18:4 *"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. (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 key to understanding this picture is found in the word "marred." It means "spoiled." Something happened to it so that it wasn't just what the potter wanted. So, he picked it up, mushed it together, added some water and began to re-work it.

Aren't we all, to a degree, spoiled vessels on the LORD's pottery wheels? Don't you see how patient and determined God is with you to take you with all your imperfections and re-mold and re-shape you? Do you see how carefully the LORD works on your heart? Can He sense how skillful He is in His work with you? Can you feel His persistence in your life?

You see, it's a nice image to think that the God, the Potter, has His hand on you. That's actually comforting. But the message to Israel through Jeremiah was that God doesn't

give up on pottery that doesn't suit Him. And He's able to put it right back on the wheel and re-do it.

What's happened with a lot of people is that we're not so pliable in God's hands. And with some of us, we don't think He's got it right. We'd rather be something other than what He thinks we ought to be.

150 years earlier another Prophet, Isaiah, had spoken this to the Jews of his day. Isaiah 45:9 *"Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsberd strive with the potsberds of the earth. [A potsberd is a piece of broken pottery]. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, what makest thou? Or thy work, He hath no hands?"*

First, the LORD wants you to know Him as your Potter.

Second, the reason the LORD shows Himself to us as a Potter is because we need to see Him as He is if we are ever going to see ourselves as we are.

Third, how much control does the LORD have over you?

Fourth, God always acts out of His love; even when He's persistently stern. Go back with me again to the fourteenth verse of Romans nine. Romans 9:14 *"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. (15) For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. (16) So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.*

*(17) For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. (18) Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."*

Folks, the LORD is as perfect in His sovereignty as He is magnificent in His mercy. These are two very difficult things to put together, aren't they? He's sovereign and He's merciful. Or, put another way, He's sovereign and man has a free will; and needs mercy. Now, just because we say the LORD

is sovereign; that doesn't rule out the fact that you have a strong will. God is all-powerful. Yet, He constantly deals with human beings who are stubborn. We have strong and sometimes very stubborn wills.

Those of you who have difficulty merging God's sovereignty with your free will can solve your dilemma by looking into your own heart. Look at sovereignty through the perspective of sin for just a moment.

God is totally sovereign over everything and everyone. But what's going on in your heart right now? Are you dealing with a particular sin? Are you finding yourself resisting Him? God, not only knows, but has provided a way out. Now, is this way His sovereignty or it is your own will?

You see, the major issue that merges God's sovereignty with your free will is His mercy. That's what the Bible says right here in Romans nine.

God is Perfect in Sovereignty and man I truly imperfect in his selfishness and sin. So, what's God to do? One thing. Extend mercy.

And how can you merge these two ideas; the sovereign will of God and strong will of man? You can't; but He can. Only God can. You can see how strong *your* will is. You can oppose God. You can resist Him. You can, and often do, sin. Yet, God doesn't lose His sovereignty because you insist on your own way.

Rather, here's really what is happening. God is sovereignly dealing with you in mercy; every day. The only way to see God's sovereignty and man's free will in the same context is to see God as wonderfully merciful.

Isn't that what Paul says here? Verse fifteen. Romans 9:15 *"For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. (16) So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."*

In His sovereignty God is in charge. But in His mercy He extends kindness, forgiveness, love, goodness, etc. to people like you and me. When you sin, are you being obedient? No. But when you confess that sin, God in His sovereign grace is merciful to you.

Here in Romans nine Paul is dealing with God's mercy towards Israel. Paul is an Israelite. Paul loves the Jews. They are his people. And Paul would willingly die if that would cause the Jews to turn to Christ and be saved. Here's verse one. Romans 9:1 *"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, (2) that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. (3) For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:*

*(4) Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; (5) Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen."*

Mercy is written all over Israel; the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the Law, the worship, the promises. To be honest, that same mercy is written over every one of us. Folks, there isn't a minute of your day that you can't thank God for His mercy. His mercies are like sunshine. They are new every morning. You see, God always acts out of love. By the way, mercy? It means that you don't get what you deserve. In grace God gives you *much* more than you need. But in mercy, you get less than you deserve.

So, for those of you who can't figure out how to merge God's sovereign control over the world with your stubborn free will, my answer is Paul's answer. God is a great God of mercy.

In His mercy He poured out His love on the Jews. He gave them the Law. He gave them the covenants. He gave

them the glory, the worship system of Leviticus, and the entire OT is filled with His promises. He even gave them a Messiah; Jesus Christ. Yet, in His sovereign love, He permitted them to reject His Son and then to crucify Him.

You see, it's at the Cross where you see the sovereignty of God and the free will of man merged. God, in Christ, showed His mercy even to the very ones who were hammering nails into His hands and feet. You see, He always acts in love.

First, the LORD wants you to know Him as your Potter.

Second, the reason the LORD shows Himself to us as a Potter is because we need to see Him as He is if we are ever going to see ourselves as we are.

Third, how much control does the LORD have over you?

Fourth, God always acts out of His love

Fifth, and finally, stop judging God. Instead, see Him exactly as He is and love Him just as He is; verse ten.

Romans 9:10 *"And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (11) (For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;)*

*(12) It was said unto her, the elder shall serve the younger. (13) As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. (14) What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid."*

When we don't understand something about God, you can be sure you will incorrectly judge Him. Who here thinks they can understand this passage? Before the twins were born, Jacob and Esau; before either of them did what was right or did what was wrong; the purpose of God according to election was effect.

God spoke to Rebecca and said "the older twin will serve the younger one." Genesis 25:23 *"And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be*

*separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.”*

You see, God is your Potter. He’s the One Who put you on the wheel. He’s your Creator. He’s your Designer. He’s your Sovereign LORD. And He’s perfect in His righteousness; in His love and in His mercy.

Folks, you can’t understand how God can know about you before your birth. *You* can’t understand how He can say whether you will serve or be served in this world. But *He* can. Why? Because He’s God. And the only way for us to properly respond to Him is to respond to the truth of Who He is.

Let me close with this by way of personal application. See yourself as you really are before the LORD --- clay.

One, you are needy. How do I know that? Because God says you are clay. So, you are needy and He is able.

Two, when you are soft like the clay, the words of the Bible are more easily absorbed.

Three, as clay you are learning daily dependency. Some of you think that life is made up of highs and lows. And maybe it often is. But the LORD is looking for consistency in pliability. Paul says I am able to be abased. And I am able to abound. No matter what; for me to live is Christ and to die is gain. So, how are you learning dependency? You are trusting Him no matter what He allows to come into your clay.

And last, God remembers that we are dust. You forget that. But He doesn’t.

So, who here is going to acknowledge that you agree with your Bible that God is your Heavenly Potter and you are a work in His hand?

Lynda Moldrem wrote these words that I think might be a blessing and a help to you today.

“Though He Slay Me.” It goes like this.

As God molds the clay for a vessel,

It may be a task full of pain;  
But, knowing the heart of the Potter,  
A vessel of love will He frame.  
Thought He slay me,  
Yet will I trust in Him.  
Though He slay me,  
Yet will I trust in Him.  
I lay all my heart on His altar.  
And rest in His infinite care.  
Though He slay me,  
Yet will I trust in Him.

And, as the men come to serve your Communion, I want you to watch this with me.

Closing video after the sermon

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NR0vhnu51Uc>

Shall we pray?

Hymn # \_\_\_\_\_ “ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

If time after Communion, here’s a second video.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRbWAtU6LPw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ExMvIbyG1aU>