

“What If ...?”

January 13, 2019

Jeremiah 18:1-12

The following is an imaginary story. It's titled “The King and the Well.” “A certain king needed a faithful servant; one that could work closely with him in the administration of his kingdom. And he had to choose between two candidates for the position. He offered the two men the very same wages and gave them very careful instructions. He told them to go to the well just outside the castle; bring up water from the well; and fill a basket that he had placed nearby, saying that, later in the day, he would come by to inspect their work.

After dumping four, five, six, seven buckets of water into the basket, one of the men said, *“What's the good of doing this useless work? As soon as we pour the water into the basket, it runs out the sides.”*

The other answered, *“But we have our wages, haven't we? The use is the master's business, not ours. He is a wise King. What if the King has his own purpose that we do not understand?”*

*“I'm not going to do such fool's work,”* replied the complainer. Throwing down his bucket, he marched away.

The other servant continued all day and soon the sun began to set. He just kept bringing up water, pouring into his basket, and watching the water run through the sides of the basket; until he had drained the entire well. Then, looking down into it, with just the final few rays of the setting sun, he saw a glint, something shining at the bottom of the well. It was a diamond ring.

*“Now I see the use of pouring water into the basket!”* he exclaimed. *“If the bucket had brought up the ring before the well was dry, it would have been filtered out in the basket and we would have found it. The King was looking for his lost diamond ring. Our work was not useless after all.”* The King had found his most faithful servant.”

[Found on <https://www.sermoncentral.com> and adapted from “What If” by Pastor Charlie Roberts March 25, 2017].

Go back with me to the question that the faithful servant asked the complainer. ***“What if the King has his own purpose that we do not understand?”***

This little phrase “what if?” is found just three times in the Bible. Please find with me one of those places. It's Romans chapter nine and verse twenty-two. Romans 9:22 ***“What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: (23) and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory ...”***

I've titled today's message “What If ...?” Shall we pray?

Please look once again with me at this “what if” passage. Romans 9:22 ***“What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: (23) and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,***

*(24) Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (25) As he saith also in Osee [Hosea 2:23], I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. (26) And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.”*

When you read your Bible, it's always good to look for the main point that is being made by the writer. And Paul's main point here is that Non-Jews can become righteous before the LORD through faith while Jews, who refuse to exercise faith in their Messiah, are not true Jews and therefore not righteous in the LORD's eyes.

One of the questions then that must come up is the matter of God's sovereignty; especially the Old Testament teaching that God is a Heavenly Potter.

And Paul, as you know, is a careful thinker. Yes, the LORD wants you to think carefully about Who He is and what that implies. So Paul asks himself and you and me, his readers, this question, verse twenty-two Romans 9:22 *“What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: ...”*

So, first, what we don’t understand we often judge incorrectly. The king had given an assignment to two servants. Now, was there any requirement anywhere that says that the king must explain his every command? What would you have done? What do you do when you read one of the King’s commands and only here the command, but not the reason for it? And do you think God needs to explain to you everything He allows or everything He does? Is there a requirement anywhere that says that *He* must explain *His* commands? No, there isn’t.

Folks, when the LORD says some things in the Bible, sometimes He appears to be something or Someone we don’t expect Him to be. But this is so common. What we don’t understand we often judge. And we judge incorrectly

How many of you understand and can explain it? Who here understands why we need to love our neighbors, especially when they are extremely difficult people? Who here understands war? Who here understands suicide? Suicide, by the way, is defined as the most selfish act a human being can commit. A woman, an R.N., had made her plan to commit suicide. She decided to go up into a mountain; stay a few days, take a bottle of pills, and jump off a cliff. But she had taken along with her a book written by a man I know titled “The Ins And Outs of Rejection,” which she intended to read before she took her life. In the book she discovered *why* she had thoughts of suicide. And she read that suicide was the greatest act of selfishness known to man.

That sentence shook her and she decided to go see the author of the book. She met him at his office and she soon understood that she had incorrectly handled rejection and, upon hearing the Gospel, that day decided to put her faith in Jesus Christ as her Savior, her LORD, and her Life. Needless to say, she did not follow through on her plan out on the mountain.

Now, folks, who here thinks they understand such things? We don’t. And so, we also don’t understand how there are some “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction.”

So, rather than judge God because you don’t understand, simply let God be God and you be a human being; a servant.

First, what we don’t understand of often judge incorrectly.

Second, how much patience does God have? Look with me at the incredible patience of God from this twenty-second verse. Romans 9:22 *“What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, **endured with much longsuffering** the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: (23) and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory ...”*

“What if...?” sounds like a hypothetical, doesn’t it? And usually it is. But, many hypothetical questions often refer to things that are completely reliable. Who here thinks you can go to a job interview and get out without answering one hypothetical question? “What if your supervisor told you to lie?” You see, hypotheticals are often a call for you to think about something very seriously.

And that’s what you find here. Paul’s point is absolutely true; that God is incredibly patient. Paul puts it like this; “with much longsuffering.”

Now, some of you think that you suffer more than you should. And I think I understand that. My family has had to

suffer things that were and are, to this day, very hard to handle.

But is there anyone here who thinks they understand the patience of God? Can you understand why He's especially patient with people who continually reject Him?

Patience, the patience of God, the longsuffering of God is found in an interesting place in God. It's found in His riches.

Did you know that God is rich? And did you know that one of the riches of God is His longsuffering? Turn back just a few pages to Romans two verse four. Romans 2:4 "*Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?*"

What's inside God's riches? His goodness, His forbearance; forbearance is patient self-control and tolerance; and His longsuffering.

Now find with me Romans 11:33 "*O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!*"

Along with His goodness, His tolerance, and His longsuffering, God's riches includes His wisdom, His knowledge, and His judgments; all of which are His ways. And they're all past finding out by puny human minds; which means we haven't even scratched the surface of our understanding of what God is like. Then there's the riches of His grace and the riches of His glory and the riches of His mercy (Ephesians 2:4). The Bible lets us in on *some* of the qualities of God. But, to be honest, they're unsearchable. We can't really understand the riches of God. So, the Bible says "*Oh the depth of the riches ... of God.*"

Well, folks, who here can identify with the incredible patience of God? "*What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of*

*wrath fitted to destruction: (23) and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory ...*"

Would you agree with me that God is patient? Would you agree with me that He has incredible patience?

God, according to the Bible, is sovereign. That means He's LORD. Every time you read the word "LORD" in your Bible, you are reading the sovereignty of God. He's LORD over everything and over every one of His creatures in every place in the universe. And so Paul merges the sovereignty of God together with the mercy of God in this passage. And how does He exhibit His mercy? In His incredible patience.

God is so high and He's so exalted in His position that He's able to see into every single heart in the universe throughout all of history all at the same time. And how many people do you know who are missing out on a personal relationship with this sovereign God because they don't think they need Him? They don't think they need His Word. They don't think they need His Gospel.

I hand out tracts each week. And this week a woman looks at me, refusing the tract, and says "I don't need that." I smile and I say "When you have time, just quietly read it." And I don't take it back.

And add to that this; verse twenty. 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?*

*(22) What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: (23) and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory ...*"

Folks, none of us here has any right to resist or oppose the LORD. Your purpose is not to resist him. Our purpose

is not to resist His purposes in our lives, but to surrender to them. Who here has a right to answer back to God *"Why did you make me like this?"*

You see, He's the Sovereign Potter and we are the created clay. He's life. And we live because He lives. And as your Sovereign, He has absolute authority over your life.

And to see your stubborn will, imagine this. Imagine that you are Vasyl Lomachenko. Vasyl, a Ukrainian boxer, (he's thirty years old today); imagine you are Vasyl. Imagine that you are the strongest boxer in the world right now.

Now, imagine you, Vasyl, the greatest boxer in the world, are driving down the highway and your chosen rate of speed is eighty-five miles per hour. And imagine a state policeman pulls up behind you with his lights flashing. Now, remember, you're the greatest boxer in the world. You are undefeated. And the officer comes to your window. Now, what do you have to say? You have nothing to say. Why? Because you have power. That policeman has authority. But, the LORD is sovereign, which means He has both power and authority. [This idea comes from Witness Lee on <https://www.ministrysamples.org> "Sovereignty"].

Here's how Jude describes His own Brother, the LORD Jesus. Jude 1:25 *"To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."*

Do you know what the goal for your life is? It's to listen to *Him*, to know *Him*, and to let *Him* exert *His* will over you.

So, consider this. God is incredibly patient with you.

Now, imagine this. Suppose we walked into a room and witnessed the following:

"Tommy, pick up your toys."

"Which toys, Mom?"

And without another word, mother sent Tommy to his room for disobedience.

We'd think this mother too harsh.

But suppose we entered the room an hour earlier when she gave Tommy a loving hug and asked Tommy to pick up all his toys... or thirty minutes later when she reminded him he needed to pick them up before company came... or fifteen minutes after that when she told Tommy she'd punish him if his toys weren't picked up soon. Who here would see Mom as harsh? Or, would you consider her incredibly patient?

Instead, you'd see her requests as reasonable and Tommy's reactions as rebellious. [Found on <https://biblelovenotes.blogspot.com> "God's Incredible Patience"].

First, what we don't understand of often judge incorrectly.

Second, the incredible patience of God.

Third, God made you to be a vessel that contains God; verse twenty-three. Romans 9:23 *"and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the **vessels** of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory ..."*

Some are vessels of wrath, fitted to destruction. And some are vessels of mercy, which God has before prepared unto glory. A vessel is what God calls you. A vessel is the term God uses to describe you and me when it comes to the matter of His sovereign power of the universe.

God calls us by many names in the Bible. But, when it comes to His relationship to us as our Sovereign LORD, He calls us vessels. And what's a vessel anyway? A vessel is a jar; a jug; a clay jug; a sort-of water bottle; even a mug.

Let me close with just a few words about vessels. First of all, they are brittle; capable of being shattered into a thousand pieces.

Revelation 2:27 says this. *"... And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as **the vessels of a potter** shall they be broken to shivers [very small pieces]: even as I received of my Father."*

Let me show you what broken to shivers means. This happened on national television in October 2012.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WED6Te\\_-rQg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WED6Te_-rQg)

*“As the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers (very small pieces).”*

1.2 Million dollars? You see, we’re brittle, capable of being shattered into a thousand pieces.

Second, to be described as a clay pot, a vessel, is to be described as humble and lowly. Some of you think you’re much more than a vessel. Some of you think you’re a ring or a crown; something with some class and something with a lot more glory in it. Or, even if you see yourself as a vessel, you might even think of yourself as a porcelain Ming vase valued at \$1.2 million dollars; certainly something above the ordinary person of this word.

Now, did you notice how easily it broke? *“... And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers [very small pieces]: even as I received of my Father.”*

First, brittle.

Second, lowly.

Third, something of huge value to God. Here’s how the LORD speaks about His vessels. Hebrews 9:21 *“Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.”*

What you are, as a Christian, is someone who is of great value to the LORD. Do you have a special mug that you use at home every day for your coffee? Why is it so special to you? One reason; it’s yours and it’s in constant use. It’s your favorite.

The LORD says that all of the vessels in the Tabernacle were sprinkled with blood. And, spiritually speaking, you are a vessel that’s been sprinkled with the blood of Christ. According to the Bible, all the vessels of the ministry have a special place in the LORD’s heart.

When something has been sprinkled with His blood, it’s been set apart for the LORD’s use. I know it might seem a bit crude for me to say it this way. But, you are somewhat like your own favorite coffee mug; special and in constant use.

So, brittle, lowly, special; and one more thing. What is the purpose of a vessel, a clay pot, a jug, or a mug? It’s designed to be filled up and poured out.

How long has it been since you’ve seen yourself in this way? There are some Ming vases, for sure. But, I will guarantee you that your main feature if you’re a Ming vase is pride. And have you ever read what the LORD thinks about pride?

Folks, you’re brittle, you’re special, and you’re useful to the LORD. But here’s why.

Find with me II Corinthians 4:5. Here’s what the verse says. *“For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake. (6) For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (7) But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.”*

Did you notice what the treasure inside the earthen vessels is? It’s the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. The LORD has placed spiritual light inside your vessel; inside of you. And it’s the life and the light of Son.

Now think about this. Usually an earthen vessel, a clay pot, the thoroughly ordinary jug, hides the light. But in the case of these earthen vessels, the LORD says His light shines through them. That makes these vessels, you and I the greatest vessels ever. And our greatness is found on the inside.

Look on down in the passage to verse eleven. II Corinthians 4:11 *‘For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.’*

The living, resurrected Christ, is alive inside of each Believer. Paul says “Christ lives in me.”

So, you are an earthen vessel, brittle, lowly, something of great value to God, and the one place God intends for His light and life to be manifested in this world.

And, just one more thing. You are a vessel of mercy. You are a bottle of mercy. The primary thing He wants to fill you with is His mercy. People who are filled with His mercy are people who know the riches of God’s glory. God has prepared you for mercy now and for glory later.

And as a vessel, you are intended by God to carry out two purposes; one, to be filled with mercy and then to have that mercy poured out on others.

Let me close with this today.

How does God value you? He values you according to the kind of vessel you are. God’s plan for you is quite simple. One, as a sinner, you needed His mercy. He sent His Son to be your Savior and LORD and Life. Jesus shed His blood so that you might be saved. Two, once you are saved, you needed His mercy. And that mercy comes in the form of assurance of your salvation. He sent His Spirit to indwell your body and to intercede before your Father as you pray and to bring you personal assurance that you belong to Him. Three, once you see that God has sent His Spirit to indwell you, you need His mercy – to fully surrender *your* will to Him. That’s it. Once you have surrendered your will to His will, then He takes over and uses you as His vessel to pour out life to someone else. It’s that simple. You are a vessel. And every day of your life you just surrender yourself to Him and let Him pour your life out for someone else.

The NT has lots of references to a Christian being filled up. What do you think God does with earthen vessels? He wants to fill them. Why? So that we can be poured out. How often do you find the words “filled” in the New Testament? Well, what do think is filled? And filled with what? Vessels are filled; filled with His Spirit; filled and overflowing with His love, His joy, His peace, His longsuffering, His gentleness, His goodness, His faithfulness, and His self-control.

How many times have I heard some of you say that you don’t know why God is doing this to you or you don’t have the strength to handle this or that thing? Or, you ask, why is the LORD allowing this? The answer? Who are we to reply against Him? Aren’t we His vessels? Doesn’t He have a right to pour into us what He wants and then pour out of our lives what He wants?

Think about it like this. What do you carry about with you all the day long and every day of your life? You carry the presence of God. You have the wonderful Spirit of Christ living in you. So, everywhere you do, you, His vessel, carry Him.

“A Vessel of Honor” video (five minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eBnJVNE0AZc>

Shall we pray?

Hymn # 33 “Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise”