

Message #22

Jeremiah 18:1-23

Probably most believers do not know it, but this is one of the most famous sung chapters in the church. Adelaide Pollard was a deeply discouraged missionary, who was not able to raise the funds she needed to go to Africa. As a girl she suffered from many physical and emotional problems. She was a diabetic and experienced deep bouts of depression. She was sitting at home one night thinking about Jeremiah 18:3-4. She saw herself as needing to be remolded by the Potter. Before she went to bed, she grabbed a pen and wrote down a poem:

“Have thine own way Lord! Have thine own way! Thou art the potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after Thy will, while I am waiting yielded and still.

“Have thine own way Lord! Have thine own way. Search me and try me, Master today. Whiter than snow, Lord, wash me just now, as in Thy presence humbly I bow.”

“Have thine own way Lord! Have thine own way. Wounded and weary, help me I pray. Power all power surely is Thine. Touch me and heal me, Savior divine.

“Have thine own way Lord! Have thine own way. Hold o’er my being absolute sway. Fill with Thy Spirit till all shall see Christ only always living in me.”

In 1907 those words were put to music and the church has been singing that hymn ever since. What Adelaide Pollard came to understand and what Israel needed to understand is that they needed the Potter to remold them.

God’s people need to clearly understand this about God. He is the sovereign potter and He can do whatever He wants to do with His people who are the clay. **He can mold the clay into something beautiful and useful or He can destroy the clay.** God’s people need to understand this and Jeremiah was to tell them this.

THE ONE THING GOD WANTS PEOPLE TO UNDERSTAND IS THAT HE IS A SOVEREIGN GOD, AND HE CAN DO WHATEVER HE IS PLEASED TO DO CONCERNING BLESSINGS AND JUDGMENT AT ANY TIME AND TO ILLUSTRATE THAT POINT, HE USES THE ILLUSTRATION OF A POTTER AND POTTERY.

God wants Jeremiah to know this. God wants Israel to know this. God wants all of His people to know this. God wants the world to know this. God wants us to know this. We need to know this God is the sovereign potter who can do whatever He wants to do with the clay.

Many students of this text think that the events of this chapter occurred during the reign of Jehoiakim. He was a godless king who had no regard for the word of God or Jeremiah. This is the king that cut up and burned the word of God (36:21ff). He did not care about anything God had to say or about anything Jeremiah had to say. He did not care if Jeremiah was saying something about the spiritual world or the political world. God wanted all in the world to know He is the Potter and He does what He wants to do with the clay.

God can remold a cracked and ugly life into something beautiful or He can destroy it.

PART #1 – God tells Jeremiah to go to the potter's house. **18:1-2**

God's word came to Jeremiah and told him to get up and go down to the potter's house and there He would give him His words. Now the words that Jeremiah would receive from the Lord and preach to the people would get him in serious trouble. But at this point he didn't know that.

Obviously throughout his life Jeremiah had seen potters work. He had seen them produce various bowls and vessels for different uses.

Now a potter's house was certainly not the sacred Temple or some very religious priestly place, or some high and mighty political palace. A potter's house was a place where average people did ordinary work.

I don't think it is a coincidence that God tells Jeremiah, I will speak to you at a potter's house because that is where you will find the word of God speaking most of the time. God's word speaks to common ordinary people the most.

The truth is, the word of God was not found in the Temple. Phony prophets and phony priests were there communicating their prosperity, non-judgment message. God says go to the Potter's house.

Not much has really changed. You won't find the word of God in too many religious Temples or Political palaces; you will find it among average people who have average jobs. You will see God do His greatest transforming work among the common people who admit they are sinners.

PART #2 – Jeremiah went to the potter's house. **18:3-4**

When God told Jeremiah to do something, he did it. When Jeremiah got down to the potter's house, the potter was already making something out of clay. Jeremiah was watching this man doing his daily job.

As Jeremiah watched, he noticed that the thing the potter was making spoiled in his hand so he decided to make something else out of it.

Most believe that **verse 4** is the real crux of the illustration. **First, what the potter formed was spoiled and disfigured, and second, he decided to remake it into another vessel.**

What the potter had originally designed didn't turn out right, so he started a process to redesign it. Now to actually remake something from the clay you had to break it down and crush it so you could remold it.

That is exactly what God had to do with Israel. He had to crush this nation and break it down so He could remold this nation. It didn't turn out the way He originally designed it. So He needed to give it a makeover.

When the program of God swings back to Israel, this is exactly what God will do in the Tribulation. He will mangle up the clay so He can reform it into something beautiful.

PART #3 – Jeremiah receives specific messages from God. **18:5-17**

As Jeremiah was watching this take place, the word of the LORD came to him and actually spoke to him and gave him a series of eight messages:

Message #1 - God is the sovereign potter who can do whatever He wants with His clay people.
18:6

It is important that people realize this about God. He can do whatever He wants to do with anyone. He can bless a life; He can destroy a life. He can raise one up and He can bring one down. He can start doing one thing and end up doing another thing. He is the potter and people are the clay.

Message #2 - God can at one moment uproot, pull down and destroy any nation or kingdom.
18:7

God says I am a potter who can do whatever I want to do with a nation or a kingdom. As potter I can uproot, pull down and destroy any nation I want. I can raise up and take down.

Message #3 - If a nation will turn from its evil, I will relent of the calamity I plan to bring to it.
18:8

God says as sovereign potter over all nations, if a nation will turn from its sin and turn to Me, I will relent from pouring out My judgment.

How do we reconcile this with Numbers 23:19? God's supreme sovereignty as Potter allows God to do whatever He wants to do with any He wants, good and bad. He has programmed into His sovereignty a mobility in which He will move in accordance to what the people do. **God is immutable in that He does not change, but God is not immobile in that He does move.** His immutable character includes movement depending on what His people do.

If people respond to Him, He will move in a positive way. If His people do not respond to Him, He will move a different negative way. He is the potter and we are the clay. But as clay we play a role in determining what God will mold us into becoming.

Message #4 - In any moment, I may decide to plant and establish and build up a nation. **18:9**

God can rebuild and replant nations who fear Him and reverence Him. He can remove one nation and replant it or replace it with another. Truth is when it comes to morality, there are many nations far superior to the United States. God can take one nation out of its prominence and raise another to prominence.

Message #5 - If a nation does evil in God's sight that He decides to bless, He will not continue to bless it. **18:10**

If God promises to bless a nation, a church or individual and that nation, church or individual turns to evil, God will not do the good He was going to do.

Message #6 - God informs Judah that He is going to turn against her if she does not turn from her Evil. **18:11**

Judah was invited to return to the Lord but if she did not do it, God would bring calamity on her. So God as potter can promise to bless a people and end up not blessing them or He can promise to judge a people and end up not judging them. **The contingency factor is the people turning from the evil.**

Message #7 - God informs Jeremiah that the people will continue to follow their own plans and stubbornness of evil. **18:12**

God is so sovereign that He knows exactly how His people will respond. It begins by the people saying, "It's hopeless." It is too late. God had just told them that He would relent if they would turn to Him, but their response is, "It's hopeless." In other words, we aren't going to change.

God's people need to know this and so do nations; it is never too late to change. Those who commit suicide are shortchanging what could have been. It is never too late to turn to the Lord and receive the blessings of God.

But these people would not do it.

Message #8 - God informs Jeremiah of the absolute stupidity of His people. **18:13-17**

God asks Jeremiah to go out and ask the nations if they have ever seen anything as stupid as His people.

Would snow ever forsake its location to go to a place where it would melt into nothing?
Would people who depend on cold water that flows from a foreign land ever stop it?

The obvious answer is no.

But in **verse 15**, God says My own people have forgotten Me. They actually worship false and worthless gods rather than Me. They have walked away from their ancient paths and they are following all kinds of worthless and idolatrous things.

God says in **verse 16**, they are walking on paths that will lead them to disaster and desolation.

Other nations will look at what I have done to them and be astonished that I am doing this to My own people. **Verse 17** says God will turn His back to His own people and He will not show them His face when they are experiencing their horrible calamity.

PART #4 – The people respond to the message of Jeremiah. **18:18**

Jeremiah proclaimed the words to the people and they responded. But they did not respond in the way they should have. They did not say we need to turn back to the Lord. In fact, their response was we don't need Jeremiah to tell us anything.

Response #1 - We need to devise some plan against Jeremiah. **18:18a**

Response #2 - Jeremiah is not the law. **18:18b**

Response #3 - Jeremiah is not a priest. **18:18c**

Response #4 - Jeremiah is not a sage. **18:18d**

Response #5 - Jeremiah is not a prophet giving us God's word. **18:18e**

Response #6 - We need to strike down Jeremiah. **18:18f**

Response #7 - We must not listen to any of his words. **18:18g**

PART #5 – Jeremiah emotionally responds by talking to God. **18:19-23**

Jeremiah talks honestly and emotionally to God. Many commentators criticize him for this. Some have gone so far as to say a prayer like this is “unworthy of a prophet of God.” But frankly, there is a place for this kind of communication with God.

Jeremiah has a right to pray to God about anything. He is leaving the matter to God, but he does have a right to pray. If a man of God actually prays this kind of prayer against someone, it is not a light matter.

Response #1 - Jeremiah asks God to listen to him and what his opponents are saying. **18:19**

God sees all and hears all and Jeremiah appeals to that.

Response #2 - Jeremiah asks God whether the good he has done should be repaid with evil. **18:20a**

Jeremiah reminds God that he had prayed for these people and defended them.

Response #3 - Jeremiah reminds God that he has proclaimed that the people need to turn to God and turn away from evil. **18:20b**

Jeremiah said I tried to get people to turn away from the things that made You angry.

Response #4 - Jeremiah asks God to destroy all those who are against him. **18:21**

These people against Jeremiah were trying to stop the will of God. This would include men, women and children. So Jeremiah asks God to remove them.

Response #5 - Jeremiah asks God to bring raiders to all of them to destroy them. **18:22**

As these people had dug a pit for Jeremiah, bring upon them sudden destruction.

Response #6 - Jeremiah asks God to not forgive their sin. **18:23a**

The iniquity is that they had targeted Jeremiah with the goal of killing him. Jeremiah says to God, don't let this evil be blotted out.

Response #7 - Jeremiah asks God to overthrow them in His anger. **18:23b**

Notice he asks God to deal with them "in the time of Your anger."

Dr. Warren Wiersbe wrote: "If Jeremiah seems too angry for us, perhaps some of us today aren't angry enough at the evil of this world. Thanks to the media, we're exposed to so much violence and sin that we tend to accept it as a normal part of life and want to do nothing about it. Crusading has given way to compromising, and it isn't "politically correct" to be dogmatic or critical of ideas that are definitely unbiblical" (*Be Decisive*, p. 102).

Is it possible for a nation and for God's people to so sin against God that He will not forgive them? Is it possible that God can turn against a nation and people He once blessed? Yes it is.

God's angry chastisement does not typically come instantly, but it will come eventually.

We are living in a nation that has made a mockery of God and His righteousness. Stay faithful and watch what God does. These people who promote evil and have done evil will not get away with it. God will not forget it or forgive it, unless they turn to Him.

He is the potter and people are the clay, and wait and see what He will do.