

Pot or Potter (Jeremiah 18:1–17)
By Pastor Jeff Alexander (5/10/2020)

Introduction

“Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel” (18:6).

1. In this text God instructs the prophet to do something to illustrate a word that He will give to the people. God uses many things to illustrate truth.
2. Two important truths are taught in this passage we will examine today.
 - a. The first truth is the absolute sovereignty of God in the salvation of His people for the restoration of the fallen world.
 - b. The second truth is the Lord’s plan to establish Israel as an honorable vessel for the kingdom.

As we have before shown, the Lord put up with the rebellious house, patiently enduring all her vile sins in order to fulfill His promises to Abraham. These promises were fully realized in Jesus Christ, the Last Adam, through whom God is restoring humanity to holiness in a new-covenant community.

I. Sovereign Choice

1. An instructive visit (vv. 1–4)
 - a. Jeremiah is instructed to visit a potter’s house where God will *cause* (Hebrew *hiphil* of *shama*) the prophet to *hear* His words. *Hearing* God’s truth is a matter of divine sovereignty (1 Corinthians 2:14; Matthew 13:13).
 - b. The term, *potter*, is also instructive. The Hebrew word for *potter* is *yatsar*, meaning to *create* by crafting or shaping existing materials into something useful. It literally reads, “*the shaper’s house.*” Jeremiah saw this craftsman *working* (Hebrew, ‘*asah*, to form something) at his wheel.
 - c. A *spoiled* creation (v. 4)
 - 1) The clay vessel in the potter’s hand was *marred* or *ruined* on the wheel, spoiling the original object that the potter was creating.
 - 2) Rather than discarding the ruined pot, the potter reshaped the clay into another useful vessel.
2. The lesson of the potter (vv. 5, 6)
 - a. Like the clay in the potter’s hand, the Lord asserts His absolute right to do whatever He chooses with the “*spoiled*” nation (v. 6b).
 - b. God is God who created all things, and He has every right and all power to do whatever He wills (Isaiah 46:8–11).
 - c. The response of the people was their unwillingness to listen to their God and amend their ways, especially since God threatened them with judgment. Only sovereign grace can save anyone.

II. Sovereign Grace

1. The question of free will
 - a. The *freewill* emphasis in Christianity raises serious questions about God’s sovereignty. If humans are truly free to make moral choices, then it is assumed that God is morally bound by those choices and must limit His sovereignty.
 - b. Two scenarios demanding human ownership of *responsibility* are given (vv. 7–10).

- 1) If God threatens judgment against a nation or kingdom but the people turn from their evil ways, He will relent of his purpose to judge.
 - 2) If God desires to build and plant a nation or kingdom to do good to that people, if they turn and refuse to listen to Him, He will relent of the good He intended to do for them.
 - c. Can defiant humans (free will) frustrate the plans of God? This passage would seem to confirm that they can and do. However, what is rather taught here is that God holds moral and sentient beings *responsible* for their choices.
2. Paul's perspective on the potter's house
- a. Referring to Jeremiah, Paul shows the Potter's right to make of the clay whatever He wants. Paul answers the question of why the descendants of Abraham rejected Jesus. Their rejection was not due to any *failure* on God's part but to His *design* that the true descendants of Abraham be, not of *lineage*, but of *promise* through faith in Jesus (Romans 9:19–23). Romans 9, avoided by most preachers, Paul teaches the truth of God's absolute sovereignty in the matter of salvation.
 - b. Paul closes by citing Hosea 2:23. This is the very thing that the Lord revealed in Jeremiah—His intention to build a holy nation that would bring Him proper honor (1 Peter 2:9, 10).

What Can We Conclude?

1. What kind of vessel has the Potter made of you (2 Timothy 2:20, 21)?
2. What is it to cleanse oneself from what is *dishonorable* (*profane* or *common*)? The term translated *cleanse* is used of *purging* in the liturgical sense of making something *holy* (*honorable*)—set apart for God's use.

We purge out the old life by the Spirit that we might live a new holy life to the glory of God. This *purging* is sanctification (to be made holy or “*set apart*”) through the Spirit, preparing the vessel for God and “*every good work*.” The responsibility of the sanctified vessel follows in 2 Timothy 2:22–26. Sanctification produces holy obedience.