

Clay in the potter's hands  
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Text: Jeremiah 18

God sent the prophet Jeremiah to watch a potter. What did he learn?

1. The Potter

God is the potter. He works purposefully. God intends pots for particular ends, and He brings about that pot with patience. Of course, the potter works authoritatively; the pot cannot resist or complain.

2. The Wheel

A potter's wheel is a shaping instrument. What is the wheel that God uses to shape us into what He desires? In the case of Judah, God was using Jeremiah as the wheel, for he bore the troubling message of repentance. In our lives, circumstances like demotions are formative implements in God's hands. While we are quick to cite God for blessings, the hardships of life are used by God. Granting limited power and authority to the enemy, the Lord even sharpens and strengthens His servants through the activity of our ancient foe; and by reason of the exceeding greatness of the revelations, that I should not be exalted overmuch, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch. Concerning this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (II Corinthians 12:7-10 ASV).

### 3. The Marred Vessel

When Jeremiah was observing the potter, the pot being shaped was marred, spoiled, and ruined. This raises the question: Can God fail when He is making a vessel? When it comes to His eternal purposes, God never fails; He achieves His purposes. Why? God in His sovereignty has something in mind for vessels of wrath; thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he still find fault? For who withstandeth his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that replest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why didst thou make me thus? Or hath not the potter a right over the clay, from the same lump to make one part a vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor? What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering vessels of wrath fitted unto destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory upon vessels of mercy, which he afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he also called, not from the Jews only, but also from the Gentiles (Romans 9:19–24 ASV)? But from our perspective, when we consider marred vessels narrowly (not through God's eternal purposes), it does look like God fails with some people.

### 4. A Remade Vessel

The potter reworked the first pot into another vessel before Jeremiah's eyes. He did not throw the clay away; instead, he remade it. Are you not glad that God restores marred clay? Today, God remakes us as a new creation through the work of His Son. Then He puts us into the kiln, the oven. It is not pleasant, but our potter knows what is best for His vessels. In the forging of our lives, we cry out, God, why is this happening? But when a vessel emerges from the oven, a masterpiece of God's construction is completed.

This pivotal instance in the ministry of Jeremiah indicates that God is sovereign, not just over our lives but also over nations. God was

plotting disaster against Judah, and they resisted His offers of repentance. They wanted to shape themselves. In response, God's justice was coming in the form of the captivity of Judah with all of its atrocities. But the nation had earned its wages. God held them responsible for their evil and withdrew His mercy. For us, we should remember that God ultimately rules over the earth, and that should encourage us. In hardship and blessing, He is shaping His children.

Better yet, Jeremiah 18 should remind us that God loves to remake marred vessels. He converts us and continually sanctifies us. Do not try to remold yourself! Instead, acknowledge that you do not understand God's ways. Yield and submit to the potter; His way is best. He is in the people molding, character-building business. When the circumstances of life are difficult, remember that God can use whatever He wants in order to turn you into an honorable vessel for His service.