

# THE MARRED CLAY

(The Sovereignty of God)

Jeremiah 18:1-12

Westend Bible Chapel

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The sovereignty of God is a significant theme in the Bible, and the story of Jeremiah and the potter's house in Jeremiah 18 beautifully illustrates this concept.

*A.W. Tozer-"God's sovereignty means that if there is anybody in this universe that can help you, it is God. And if there's anybody in this universe that can ruin you, it's God."*

## THE BACKDROP OF JEREMIAH 18

Jeremiah's call is recorded in 5 of Chapter 1: "***Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you; before you were born, I sanctified you, and I ordained you a prophet to the nations.***"

He was chosen before he was created and set apart before he was born. The prophet could not explain it, nor deny it. His election and calling, like that all of believers throughout time is the result of sovereign grace.

When God first spoke to Jeremiah, he was a young man. The LORD warned Jeremiah that his ministry would be unpopular, for he would announce the coming judgment of Judah: " ***They will fight against you, but they will not prevail against you, don't be afraid of their faces, for I am with you, 'says the LORD, "To deliver you"***" (Jer.1:19).

The scene is that the people of Judah had forsaken God and were following other gods and listening to the lies of false prophets and unholy priests.

Jeremiah's words were God's final words of warning to a people determined not to listen and take heed to God's law. He told them how the dreaded Babylonians were going to invade their land, cause the sword, famine, and pestilence to come upon them, and take many of them to Babylon as captives.

Their reply to Jeremiah was, "We ***will continue with our own plans: each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart.***" Even though the prophet's word was like a hammer and a fire to them, they chose to reject God's messenger and his correction, and it pained both God and Jeremiah.

Jeremiah, like Jesus, was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief and suffering.

He would be rejected by all the people, including his own family, and would be told by God not to marry.

Jeremiah, whose ministry lasted 40 years, is known as ***“the weeping prophet”*** because of all that he saw and experienced. Here are two verses that reflect Jeremiah's anguish and sorrow:

Jeremiah 8:21 (NIV)- ***“Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me.”***

Jeremiah 13:17 - ***“But if you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the Lord's flock will be taken captive.”***

Despite the harsh messages he was called to deliver. Jeremiah's lamentations throughout the book reflect his genuine concern and love for his people.

It was right during all that gloom and despair that God spoke to Jeremiah and reminded him of some profoundly important truths.

***“This is what the Lord says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jer. 29:10-11)***

## The Potter and the Clay (Jeremiah 18:1-4)

The prophet is sent to the house of a potter that he might get an object lesson on the work and will of God.

### THE POTTER

The first lesson from the potter and the clay is the revelation of God as Divine Designer, Masterful Creator. He is sovereign, He is the Divine Potter!

God's rules over the seen and unseen. Daniel 4:35: -"***All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'***"

### THE POTTER WORKING AT THE WHEEL

***V 3— Jeremiah saw the potter working at the wheel.*** The wheel is representative of God's movements, governance, and control of the universe and particularly His people. Ezekiel in a vision saw wheels within wheels- the wheels of God's promises, purposes, and providences, all working together for the glory of His Name.

## THE CLAY

Isaiah 64:8 (NIV): "***Yet you, Lord, are our father. We are the clay; you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.***"

The clay is the raw material. A skilled potter can take a useless lump of clay and make a useful vessel. He can take a worthless lump and make it valuable.

The clay, contextually, represents the "house of Israel." It was dug out of Egypt, and brought into Canaan, the great Potter's house where he desired to work His work on them.

Like Israel, the church is being taken out of the pit of darkness and slavery, and brought into the kingdom of His dear Son, that He might fashion us after his own image.

God's intense interest in human clay is unequalled. He never takes His eyes from it. He shapes it with great skill and concern. He maintains awesome power over the clay. The destiny of the clay is in His hands. He can make of it anything He desires.

***"Doesn't the potter have power over the clay...?"*** He certainly does!

But as Jeremiah watched, something went wrong, the clay was marred in the hands of the potter. This happens when there is a hard lump, or clay

hardens prematurely. It no longer yields to potter's touch. It resists and stiffens.

### **The Marred Vessel (Jeremiah 18:4-6)**

God initially created Adam and Eve in His image, out of clay, forming them as flawless vessels, showcasing His sovereignty. They were perfectly created by an absolute perfect, all-wise creator. Then sin entered, the vessel was marred, and so we are all naturally marred.

Israel, God's special people, in Jeremiah's day became marred in the sense of forsaking God, worshipping the idols of Baal, and burning their children as offerings to Baal.

But notice the blessed words "*in the potter's hand.*" The wonder-working hand of God is on the clay. God can reshape the marred and flawed vessel of clay.

The history of Israel illustrates God's sovereignty in shaping a chosen people, despite their flaws, as well as highlighting the importance of obedience to His law.

How many times our lives have been marred as we resisted God's work. Does potter discard clay? He could, he would not lose much. But He chooses to re-work the clay. Oh! The patience, love, and care of God.

The potter has in His mind a purpose for the clay. The clay does not know what is in the mind of the potter. It can only be discovered by yielding to His touch.

### **God's Sovereign Plan (Jeremiah 18:7-10)**

*Jeremiah 18:7-10 - "7 If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, 8 and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. 9 And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, 10 and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it."*

In these verses, God asserts His sovereignty over nations and kingdoms. He declares His intentions to either bring judgment and destruction or to show favor and blessing. This highlights God's ultimate authority as the One who governs the destinies of nations.

### THE CONNECTION BETWEEN GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND REPENTANCE

In this passage we have a true but mysterious blending of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

The key element here is the response of the nation or kingdom. God's pronouncements are conditional on the behavior of the people. If a

nation turns from its evil ways and repents, God is willing to relent from bringing disaster. Conversely, if a nation turns away from Him and does evil, God will change His intended course of blessing.

Collectively and individually, obedience leads to blessings, while disobedience leads to adverse consequences.

The bible is clear, God in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ has provided the way for all to peoples of the world to be blessed through Him. But blessings are conditioned upon repentance and faith in Him.

2 Peter 3:9 says that ***"the Lord is...not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."*** Acts 20:21 gives both sides of the coin: ***"...that they must turn in repentance toward God and have faith in Lord Jesus Christ."***

Not everybody does repent and believe. Some people reject Christ altogether. That kind of clay will be rejected by God, cast out forever, never reshaped or reused.

Isaiah 41: 25 tells us how the clay was first trodden with the feet of the potter in ancient times. And when it became of the proper consistency it was placed on the "wheels." With water poured on it regularly as the wheel turned, the soft clay was progressively molded in the desired shape.



Humbling ourselves at the Potter's feet, with true repentance allows God to shape us. The water of the Holy Spirit keeps softening us, so that we are sanctified continually and made into an honourable vessel for the Potter's use and glory.

2 Tim .2:20--***Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.***

### Application in Our Lives

Recognizing god's sovereignty in our circumstances is fundamental.

Romans 9:20-21 (ESV): ***"But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what be molded say to its molder, 'Why have you made me like this?' Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?"***

Sinner or saint, angel, or devil, no one can resist God's sovereign will and purpose for each created being.

Daniel 4:35 - ***"All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of***

***the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: 'What have you done?'***

For the saints, His chosen vessels of glory, whom he prepared in advance, before the creation of the world, He by His Holy Spirit is at work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. He is molding and shaping us to make the riches of His glory know to us.

A potter creates vessels for specific purposes, whether for beauty, utility, or both. In the same way, God shapes us as vessels for honorable use in His kingdom. As clay is fashioned for its purpose, may we live lives that honor God's purposes, becoming vessels of His love, grace, and impact.

To achieve that however, the clay must yield to the potter's touch, our lives find purpose when we willingly submit to God's will. Yielding does not imply weakness, but rather a posture of unconditional surrender that allows God to shape us according to His desire.

Being in the Kingdom of God, we are in the special sphere of His favour and grace. All the circumstances are but wheels in which our spiritual character is formed. We should shrink back in our trials and tribulations because they are forming us. Tribulations worketh patience and patience experience.

The process of transformation involves patient. A potter's work is not rushed; it takes time. Similarly, God's work in our lives is a gradual process. He shapes us through experiences, challenges, and growth.

Just as clay is molded over time, may we embrace God's patient work of transformation, allowing Him to mold us into vessels of His glory God crafts our lives with meticulous attention. His design is purposeful, each detail fashioned according to His wisdom.

Let us trust God's sovereignty and take comfort in it.

Charles Spurgeon- *"There is no attribute more comforting to His children than that of God's sovereignty. Under the most adverse circumstances, in the most severe trials, they believe that sovereignty has ordained their afflictions, that sovereignty overrules them, and that sovereignty will sanctify them all."*

***And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).***

A potter refines the clay until it achieves its intended purpose. Similarly, God's work in our lives leads us toward spiritual maturity and wholeness and ultimate perfection. God's wise craftsmanship leads to a flawless finish. As clay undergoes refining, may we trust in God's perfecting work in us.

Ephesians 2:10- As He shapes our existence, through us, His manifold wisdom is being made known to angels. In Ephesians 2: 7, says, that in the coming ages, we, the church shall be the His primary showcase of trophies grace--incredible examples of the wealth of His grace and kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

From the mud of the God's backyard to the palace of God's glory, His church will be His eternal object of beauty and utility.

2 Corinthians 4:7 - ***"But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us."***

God has already poured into our hearts the divine light of His love and glory, the glorious truth of His salvation and grace, the rich treasure of the good news of Christ.

God caused the treasured light of the knowledge of the glory of God, to fill and flood our weak, physical bodies, so that He might live in us and work through us – for our eternal benefit and for His greater praise and glory.

A poet once said, *"I wish there were some wonderful place called The Land of Beginning Again."* Well, praise the Lord, there is such a place--it is the place of the Potter's house. I challenge you to go to that place right now!

Jeremiah 29:10 -11 ***For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."***