

Hope In The Potter's Hand

No teaching

And I want to read these first six verses, I want you to follow with me in your Bibles. Beginning in verse one, the word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause each to hear my words. So Jeremiah says, I went down to the potter's house, verse three, and behold he that is the potter was working a work or rotting work on the wheels. And the vessel, verse four, that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter. So he made it again a vessel as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the Lord came unto me saying, oh thou house of Israel cannot I do with you as this potter. Says the Lord, behold as the day is, or as the clay is, excuse me, in the potter's hand, so are also you in my hand, oh house of Israel.

Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet. He wrote the book of lamentation, which is to lament or to cry. The reason Jeremiah was the weeping prophet, because he preached and he pleaded and he prayed, but the nation of Israel, specifically Judah, the southern kingdom, would not listen to his words. They rejected the word of the Lord, which came through Jeremiah. They turned their back on God, and as a result, they would be taken captive by Babylon for 70 years. God would destroy the nation of Israel. So he is brokenhearted and he's weeping and he's praying, and then God comes to Jeremiah in this moment of discouragement and despair, and God tells Jeremiah I want you to go down to the potter's house. Now, pottery is one of the most ancient crafts that we have. We know that pottery has been around as long as men have been around. And it hasn't really changed much in all of these years.

Basically you have the potter, you have the clay, you have the wheel, maybe modern kinds of wheels, maybe more highly developed clay, but clay is clay, potters are potters, and the wheels are wheels. They're the elements that really haven't changed. So Jeremiah, you go down to the potter's house, and I want you to observe what he's doing. Why did God send Jeremiah down to the potter's house? Because God wanted to convey a message to Jeremiah. God wanted to convey this message that as Israel, like clay, had become marred in the hand of the potter, even so the potter was able to take the clay and make it again. And to fashion the clay, to make it as it seemed fit to the potter, cannot I do with you, oh house of Israel? Even as the clays in the hands of the potter, so are you in my hands, says the Lord.

So he was sending Jeremiah to observe the potter as a way of giving him a message of hope that even though Israel is marred by its sin and they turn away from me, God says I will remake them, I will restore them, and I will heal them, and I will forgive them. Now, the first application of this passage as I have conveyed is to the nation of Israel, specifically Judah, the southern kingdom, which would go captive in Babylon for 70 years. But I want to take the liberty this morning, and I do mean liberty, but I think that there's good biblical warrant for it, to give it a individual and personal application. I believe that we are clay, that God is the potter, and that the wheel is the circumstances of our life. That God wants to mold you, God wants to make you, God wants to shape you into a vessel unto honor that he can use fit for his use and for his glory.

So what did Jeremiah see when he went down to the potter's house? If you're taking notes, write these down. Three things. Number one, he saw a vessel made, a vessel made. Notice it in verse three. It says, when he went down to the potter's house, he says, behold he that is the potter rot a work on the wheels. So he looks and he sees three things. He sees a potter, he sees the clay, and he sees the wheels. Now, I believe that the potter represents God. The Bible is very clear in Isaiah:64, verse eight, as well as our Jeremiah passage, it says, but now, oh Lord, thou art our father and we are the clay. Thou art our potter, and we all are the work of thy hands. God is the divine master potter working supremely and skillfully. He knows what he is doing. Now, I know a lot of people will resist this concept of God being the potter and we are the clay, because the clay in a literal sense has no will of its own. It can't say to the potter, why have you made me thus as Paul says in Romans, can the thing form say to the thing that formed it why have you made me this way? Can you imagine talking clay?

And when you begin to press on the clay, it says, ouch, ouch, what are you doing? That when you begin to shape the clay, the clay says, wait a minute, wait a minute. Before we start this process, I want to know what you have in mind here. Am I going to be a beautiful vase? Am I going to be coffee cup? Am I going to be a spittoon? Am I going to be an ashtray? I want to know what's going on here before I yield to you. And we resist the idea that God is sovereign and that God can do whatever he chooses to do. I believe the Bible clearly teaches and it only makes sense that God is sovereign, that God sits in the heavens and God controls the entire universe. Now, he has purposely chosen not to violate his own nature. So even though he is sovereign, whatever he does is consistent with his nature, and the Bible says God is love.

So we have a loving God and a sovereign God, and whatever God does lovingly and sovereignly, he does for his glory and for our good. God loves us, God cares. So when you think of the sovereignty of God and you're tempted to resist the idea, I don't like the idea of a sovereign God and I'm just a lump of clay and he can do whatever he wants, he can smash me and throw me away, I don't like that idea. I want to do what I want to do and I want to have a say so and I want to have a part. You need to remember that God loves you, that God cares for you, that God created you with a design and a purpose and an intention. But through sin in man's fall, that clay has become marred. And though man is made in the image and likeness of God, that image has been marred.

It's still retained to some degree, but that image has been marred, and God wants to restore us as clay to the full image of Jesus Christ. So we are the clay, he is the potter. God is the master potter, and I rest assured that God knows what he's doing. Did you know that God is working in your life right now? At least he wants to work in your life. But even though God is sovereign, unlike the clay, we as humans, we can resist his will. We can stiffen up. We can harden ourself. We can resist what he wants us to do, and we're no longer soft and pliable and yielded to the potter's touch, and he can't work with us and we become marred in his hands. So he's working, he's not passive. He's working, he's purposeful. He's working, he has a plan. And when God does a work in your life, God has the picture. God has the pattern of what he's going to do with you.

He can see it in his mind, and he's picturing what he wants you to be, and God creates you and makes you. Sometime an artist, if he's not copying a landscape or a seascape or another photo or doesn't have a model that he's painting after, if it's just an empty canvas, you have to kind of picture in your mind where you want to go with your brushes and what you want to paint, and you have to paint that image. And many times, God is working. We don't know where God's going. We don't know what God's doing. We don't know what God's plan is. Just some paint on a canvas, black background, and all we can see is the grays and the dark colors and we can't see any image coming together, and we start to resist him.

Wait, wait a minute, what's going on here? Wait a minute, what are you doing? What's the purpose? What's the plan? Trust in the Lord. Bible says trust in the Lord with all your heart. Lean not on your own understanding and all your ways acknowledge him, and he will do what? He will direct your past or he will make your past [inaudible 00:09:26]. God will bless you, God will form you, make you, and he'll use your life in a glorious way. In Ephesians chapter two, verse eight, nine and 10, three marvelous verses, but we focus on eight and nine, where Paul says by grace you have been saved through faith. And that not of yourself, it is a what? Gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. So salvation is a gift from God. We can't boast about our salvation. But then in verse 10, which we often omit in that quotation that we all know so well and we quote so often, it says for we are his, God's, workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. We are God's workmanship. Who's the we? We who are saved by God's grace. And that word workmanship is the Greek word poema. We get our word poem. It literally means something made, it came to me meaning a work of art.

Now, some of you're thinking if I'm God's work of art, I think he botched up on this one. I think God was so busy working on everybody else, and when he got to me, he just kind of said lump of clay, I'll just make an ashtray, here you go. I don't know what I am, I don't know why I am. I don't know why God has allowed what he's allowed in my life. I don't know what's going on. I see no purpose. I have no hope. There's no meaning. What is God doing in my life? God knows what he's doing. You who have been saved by God's grace, and that's where it starts. You have to receive Christ, be born again and you become His poema. His poem. His work of art. And one thing every artist tells you is what they try to do in their art is express themselves. They try to express themselves in their art.

God is trying to reveal himself not only to you but through you. So that when others see what God has done in your life, they will see the hand of God in your life and they will glorify your Father who is in Heaven. So God is the potter and God is working his will. But how does God work in our lives? Well, he works on the wheels. That's the second thing that Jeremiah saw. He no doubt saw the wheels that are turning. We have a pottery wheel in our house, my son throws pots, and he's gone for a couple years so his pottery wheel is in our garage. Anybody want to buy a potter's wheel?

Isn't it funny when your kids leave but their things don't? And dad had to spend the whole day cleaning the garage of everybody's junk. It's like they're all married, they're all gone, why do we

have to save their dolls and their stuffed animals and all that stuff [inaudible 00:12:38] have to be at our house? Let's have a rummage sale. Lot of heartbroken kids, right? You sold what? So he's got this big pottery wheel, it's really heavy. I about killed myself trying to move it the other day. But the wheels, I would say, represent the circumstances, or how does God mold us and shape us, he spins us on the wheel. And a lot of times he starts spinning a little faster than we want to and it's whoa. And we want God to slow down or we want God to make it known to us what he's doing, but the circumstances, I believe, God uses, he uses our joys, he uses our sorrows.

So don't complain against your circumstances. It is, in reality, complaining against God. You know that the speed in which the wheel turns when a potter's throwing a pot and this wheel at my house is kind of turned by your foot, you spin the wheel as you throw the pot, it's not electrically driven, you have complete control of the speed of that wheel. And you can slow it down or you can speed it up. You have complete speed over that wheel. I believe that God has complete control of your life. There's not a pain or a sorrow or a heartbreak that God hasn't been controlling in your life. All the dark threads the weaver needs God has allowed in your life for one purpose. To maybe wake you up, to bring you back. Maybe some pain or sorrow was a result of your own sin, but God will allow it and use it in your life to bring you back to a place of surrender and repentance.

And God, I need you. And Lord, you are the potter. I am the clay. Forgive me for I've taken myself off the wheel or I've resisted your will, or I've had some sin in my life that I haven't repented of, and it's marred the clay and it's hardened the clay, and God cannot shape you and mold you and make you after his will. This is a message today where God is encouraging us to surrender, to yield our lives as clay to the potter's hands. So let his will be done in our life, to not resist him. Yes, I know divorce is a horrible, tragic thing. Yes, I know it's sad to lose someone you love. Maybe even a child. You lost a child. The death of a child is always so difficult. Maybe infidelity in your marriage and you're the innocent party and your heart is broken.

I've never seen greater pain than that someone finds out that their spouse has been unfaithful and their heart is broken, their world is turned upside down. And sadly, as a pastor, I've had to see it so many times, and so devastating. Or a child that's gone to be a prodigal, and your heart is broken. Or maybe it's a drug issue or alcohol problem. Maybe you've lost a job or maybe you've been diagnosed with a disease and you don't know what you're going to do and what the future holds. God is spinning the wheels around you to mold you and shape you and fashion you into a vessel that is beautiful. But we need to surrender to him. We need to yield to him. We need to surrender our lives. There's a third element, and that is the clay. There's the potter, representing God. There's the wheels, representing the circumstances of our lives in which God is in control. And then there's also what he saw when he went to the potter's house in verse four, or verse three, he saw clay, which is a picture of man. Job cried out and said, thou has made me as the clay. Remember in Genesis when God wanted to make man, what did he do? He got a dirt ball. He got a dirt clot. Guys, you're dirt clots.

Just thought I would encourage you. Say what'd you learn at church today? I learned I was a

dirt clot. But when touched by the master's hand, and God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, God created man in his image and his likeness. I am the highest of God's creation. I am made in the image and likeness of God. God's crowning achievement in creation created man, and he caused Adam to fall asleep, he took from his rib, and he made the woman, and he brought the woman unto the man as we're studying on Wednesday night the meaning of marriage and the covenant of marriage and the message of marriage. So wonderful that God created man in his image and likeness, and he made the woman and he brought the two unto one another. So God's crowning creation. Yes, we are from the dirt. Common clay. Practically valueless. Anyone can go out in their backyard and get a bucket of dirt. Has no inherent beauty. It is helpless to improve its own condition. What could be more common than dirt? Right?

And yet God takes it and he molds it and shapes it and makes it a thing of value. The story is told of an old scarred and battered violin. It was being auctioned off, and the auctioneer held up the violin. And it would seem that the violin was only going to go for about \$3. What do I hear for a bid for this violin? And the bid had only got up to \$3 when this old gray-haired man stood up from the crowd and he came up to the auctioneer's platform and he took the violin out of the auctioneer's hands. He dusted it off very carefully and he tightened the strings, tuned them up, and then he took the bow and he began to play the violin. And from this violin came this beautiful song, this beautiful music, and then he handed it back to the auctioneer and the auctioneer held up the violin.

He says, now what am I bid for this old violin? Instead of \$3, the violin was sold for \$3,000. You say, well, what made the difference? Why would it be sold for so much? The touch of the master's hand. Your life without God is worthless. But when God touches you and plays his music through you, and he writes a poem in your life, and he creates you in the image and likeness of Jesus Christ, because the goal of God's sanctifying work in the life of the believer is Jesus Christ. When people say, I don't know what God's doing in my life, I always tell them, I know what God's doing. You do? What's God doing? He's trying to make you like Jesus. He's trying to make you like Jesus. And he's got a lot of rough edges he needs to knock off. There's a lot of hard spots he needs to take out.

There's a lot of dust and dirt he needs to polish off. We got a long way to go, but that's the process. Once having been saved by God's grace, God is working in our life to become his [foreign language 00:20:08]. Empty, clean, and yielded fit for the master's use. But Jeremiah not only saw, verse three, the vessel made, but he also saw, verse four, the vessel marred. The vessel marred. And I've already alluded to it, but I want you to notice in verse four he says and the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter. Stop right there. How could this be? How could the master potter, the God of Israel, how could the clay become marred in the hand of the potter? Let me tell you something, the problem is not the potter. Okay? The problem was the clay.

There was something hard in it. Some foreign object came into it. Something caused the clay to not cooperate with the potter's touch. The clay became marred in the hand of the potter. Yes, he is sovereign. And yes, he accomplishes his purpose. But we, unlike the clay, have a will. And

when we set our stubborn will, our sinful, selfish will against God, and we don't want God's will in our lives, then our lives, like clay, become marred in the hand of the potter. When I was in high school, I took an arts and crafts class. And I can draw and I can paint and I can do all that stuff. Matter of fact, I do all the other students' drawings and paintings and they'd get A's and I wouldn't have time for mine and I'd get D's or B's. B's or D's, or whatever. I was so busy helping everybody else with their artwork. But I'll never forget, to this day it still bugs me, I could not, for the life of me, throw a pot. I couldn't throw a pot. And my son's good at it and stuff, and I haven't gotten on the wheel because I'm too embarrassed. And I know that when I touch that clay, it's going to fly off the wheel. Every time I'd prep the clay like they said, I'd center it, I'd start to spin the wheel, everything's good until I touch it.

Everything's cool. If I had just sat there and looked at the clay spin in the wheel, everything's cool. But once I touched, it would go "woo woo woo", and it'd fly off. I'd put it back on, try to get it shaped and centered, start to spin the wheel, the minute I touch it, "woo woo woo", fly off. So I just get so upset, I just hit the wall with a clay and put some grooves in it, make an ashtray. I made more ashtrays that year and I gave it to my mom, she didn't smoke. Hi, Mom. Here's an ashtray. Thank you.

Aren't you glad I'm not the potter? You'd all be ashtrays right now. So we see that the marring was a result of the clay, not the potter. He is the master potter. Someone wrote in a poem 'tis I whom mar his working. I am so blind. I do not see that many a painful process is love most kind. How often I struggle, chafe at sitting still, marring the working of his blessed will. It is I who mar his working. God, I don't like that. God, don't do that. And I don't want to do this. I don't want to go there. And I resist his will. Perhaps some secret cherishing of sin that only you and God know about is in your life and it's hardening the clay. Perhaps it's an unwillingness. Forsake your sin. Maybe God is speaking to you this morning about a sin in your life that you need to forsake. The Bible says if we confess our sin, that God is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and to cleanse from what? All of our unrighteousness. Only as we confess our sin is God able to work in our lives. Maybe you're resisting his will.

I remember growing up in church and resisting God's will for so many years. I don't want to surrender. I don't want to yield. I don't want to follow God's will for my life. And oh, bless a day when I put the white flag up in my heart and I said, God, I surrender. I surrender. What a blessing it is when God can mold us and shape us, forgive us and cleanse us. Sin mars the image of Jesus in our lives. And I know it's hard. The circumstances are hard. Maybe you've gone through some horrible situation and it has hardened you toward God. My appeal to you today is soften your heart. Ask God to soften your heart. Ask God to soften your heart. Don't have bitterness. No reason for anyone in this church today to leave service with bitterness, unforgiveness, hatred, or anger in your heart.

Leave it here. The Bible says and we cast all our cares upon God because he cares for us. I love that verse. The Bible says in the Psalms roll thy burden upon the Lord and he will sustain you. I encourage you to. You don't leave church today without saying, God, take away this anger, take away this bitterness, take away this hatred, take away this unforgiveness. Because

you become like clay that is marred and God can't make you a vessel unto honor. And you're only forestalling the good work that God wants to accomplish in your life. Yield to him. He can make you a vessel unto honor. Someone said again and a poem, marred in the making, but with wondrous patience takes he the clay, and to his hands and fashion slowly in his own way. So God is patient, God is kind. God takes our lives and he molds us and shapes us.

And that's the third thing that Jeremiah saw, I want you to notice that at the end of verse four. Third thing he saw was a vessel remade. A vessel made, a vessel marred, and then a vessel remade, verse four. So he made it again, verse four. Another vessel as, catch this phrase, seemed good to the potter to make it. That's where the rub comes in. I want to go this way, God wants me to go that way. I want to be this, God wants me to be that. I want to engage in my sensual pleasures, and God says, no, I want you to walk in holiness.

I want to be disobedient to God, and God wants to make me a vessel as seems good unto the potter. The clay can't say to the potter, why have you made me this way? The clay yields to the potter. Don't resist his will. The will of God in your life is good, it's perfect and acceptable. I don't care what age you are, I don't care what status you are. Married, unmarried, widowed, widower, empty nester. Maybe there's kids running all around your house. Whatever you're at. God wants to work in your life and make something beautiful. It's a vessel that he can make again. And I love that He made it again as seemed good to the potter to make it. Do you know that God is the God of second chance?

Some of you have been marred by divorce, some of you have been marred by drugs. Some of you have been marred by sexual immorality. And you think that God is finished with you, you think that God can't use you. You think that God is through with you. Think again. Jacob is a classic example. He was called the heel catcher, the schemer, the conniver. He tricked his brother Esau out of the birthright and he did all these manipulative things to kind of control his own life. But long story short, Jacob came to the brook Jabbok and he met with the Lord that night and they had a wrestling match. And God had to break Jacob.

And Jacob was hanging on to the Lord, and the Lord said, let me go. And Jacob said these words, I won't let you go until you bless me. I won't let you go until you bless me. And guess what God did to bless Jacob? He crippled him. You go, what kind of a blessing is that? He said, you want to be blessed? Okay. He crippled him. He took his whole thigh, his whole side, his whole hip, and he disjointed it and his leg shriveled. And Jacob walked with a limp for the rest of his days.

But even though Jacob was walking with the limp, all the cunning, all the craft, all the scheming, all the maneuvering, all the conniving and scheming was gone from his face. There was a glow of God's blessing on his life. I call it the crippling that crowns. Because Jacob responded properly to God's touch of crippling. Jacob had his name changed to Israel. Israel. Governed by God. And he had 12 sons and they became the 12 tribes. And from that one tribe of Judah came this Messiah, the savior of the world. Jacob. Crippled to be blessed. God gave him a second chance.

Moses in mind of the Jews is one of the greatest men that ever lived. Moses. But you know how he got his start in life? He was born a slave to a despised race. He was born a slave, a member of a despised race, and yet Moses had a sense of God's call on his life. And at the age of 40, he tried to deliver Israel from the bondage. He killed an Egyptian. He saw two men fighting, one an Egyptian, one a Jew, and he broke up the fight and he killed the Egyptian and buried him. And he was no doubt thinking to himself, I'm the deliverer, I'm the chosen. I'm Moses. I'm drawn out. I'm God's man of the hour, trained in the school of Pharaoh. All this education, all this wisdom, 40 years old, he's flushed with the idea that I'm the deliverer, and he murders a man.

You know what happened to him for the next 40 years? He goes out into the wilderness of Midian and he is a shepherd in the wilderness. 40 years becoming something, 40 years becoming nothing. And Moses thought, for sure, I blew it. It's over. God can't use me. Nothing's going to happen. I thought I was deliverer. I was wrong. I'm just going to watch over these sheep out in the desert of Midian. And then one day, he saw a bush, and it was burning. But the bush was not being consumed, and so he was drawn to that bush. He went to the bush and he's checking it out. It was a gas bush. Had a gas line. If Moses had gone around behind, there was a little gas valve there. I'm kidding. God was in the bush. Jehovah was in the bush. And God spoke to Moses out of this burning bush, he said, Moses, take off your sandals for the ground you're walking on his holy ground. And Moses went prostrate before God in this bush. And God spoke to Moses. He said, now, I want you to go to Pharaoh and I want you to tell Pharaoh to let my people go.

What was Moses' response? Find somebody else. I'm a loser. I'm a failure. I tried and it didn't work. I tried and I miserably failed. I murdered a man. I'm a murderer. I can't do that. But we know the story. That God took Moses and for the next 40 years took someone who thought he was something, showed him he was nothing, and used nothing for the glory of God. Amen. He's the God of the second chance. How about Peter, that around the fire, the enemy said, I don't know him. I'm not one of his disciples. And he denied the Lord three times. And then after the resurrection, three times, interesting, three times Peter denied him, three times. Jesus said, Peter, do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? Yes, Lord, you know I love you. Then he said, feed my sheep, feed my lambs. And he took broken Peter, shattered Peter, marred Peter, and he reshaped him and remolded him and put him out into a ministry. I don't think God can use me. My life has been marred. God can forgive and God can restore and God can heal and God can use you for his glory. There is hope in the potter's hand. God is the potter. We are the clay. Now, the cool thing about our relationship to God is as you look closely, as God is molding and shaping the clay, there's scars in the potter's hands.

There's scars in the potter's hands. He loves the clay. He died for the clay. He gave his life for that clay. You can trust the potter's hands. But the first step you need to make is to realize that Jesus became marred for you when he died on the cross and he gave his life on the cross. He died for your sins so that you could be forgiven. If you're here today and you haven't taken that first step of saying, Jesus, I believe you died for me, and Jesus, I believe you rose for me, and Jesus, I believe that you can forgive me, then today you need to receive Christ as your savior. The Bible says, all have sinned, all have fallen short of the glory of God. The Bible says there's

no one righteous. No, not one. We've all sinned and fallen short of God's standards.

But when Jesus went voluntarily to the cross, God the Father took our sins and he placed them on the pure and sinless son of God. And he paid the penalty for our sins. He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. And by his stripes we can be healed. We can be forgiven. We can be remade. We can be whole. And once that takes place, you become His poema, his work of art. Are you clean and empty and yielded and pliable in the potter's hands? Are you become the potter? And you're trying to tell God what you will do and what you won't do. You're trying to tell God where you go and what you won't do. Instead of saying, God, you are the potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after your will while I am waiting, yielded and still.

And you say, Lord, have your own way. Have your own way. I will yield my life to you. Are you willing today before you leave this service to right now between you and God to confess known sin, to trust and believe in Jesus Christ, to give up your marred life and put it in the hands of the potter and say, Jesus, I will trust you. I've made a mess. I've made a mess. I want to turn it over to you and I'll yield to whatever circumstances of whatever things you allow. God, have your way in me. Make me after your will. Make me as seems good to you, the potter. Quit resisting God's will in your life and surrender to it today. Let's pray.