

6. The Potter's will

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The only occasion that I got my hands on pottery in the process was painting goofy things on them. But as a Sculpture Department student of an Art College in Seoul, South Korea, I got to work with clay for four years.

At the first class during the freshman year, my professor told us that we had to soak the clay for some time before we started to hammer it with a wooden sledge hammer. Once the water was well soaked into the clay, we pounded it until the clay has become the right texture – not so hard, not so mushed. From then on, we could use it for our clay sculpture.

During the clay sculpture session, no sculptor can make the final sculpture from the beginning to the end in one shot. It takes countless adjustments, sometimes it practically tears the whole thing apart and starts all over again.

While I made my clay sculptures, I'd never once asked questions or wanted to know what my clay bundle thought about my sculpture. It was completely up to me to decide what I was going to make and how I did.

Tonight we are going to learn how the sovereignty of God's will work with man's free will. No, we are not going to get into the endless argument of the eternal security. That is just plain dumb and waste of time.

A. THE POTTER'S WILL

Jeremiah 18:1-6 The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: 2 "Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words." 3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. 4 And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. 5 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 6 "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. "Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!"

I haven't seen anyone who was so mesmerized by a lump of clay. There is no beauty or attraction in itself, but when the hands of the potter touch it, and the thought of the potter comes to life upon the clay, it transforms into beauty from nothing.

I can guess that this event probably happened during the reign of king Jehoiakim, one of the many ungodly kings. This one was especially bad. When we get to chapter 23, you will find out.

When the clay seemed uncooperative, the potter started it all over again. Yes, though the interpretation of the image was for the nation of Judah, but the application was individual, calling for a response from the people of Judah and Jerusalem. It also calls for a personal response from us today.

To some people, including Christians, they are such a cat's meow in their own eyes. They think of themselves very highly and they even think that God has to cater to their needs. News flash, He doesn't.

Let's make a logical thinking here. Man was made out of the dust of the earth. Until the Lord put breath into his nostrils, it was still a lump of clay. In other words, we are nothing, unless the Lord has His hands on us.

Genesis 2:7 And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

As the potter has power and will over the clay, so our God has absolute sovereign authority and will over the nations and individuals. I know what Sir John Acton said, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." But that only applies to humans, not our God.

Though our Lord has absolute power, He is not irresponsible and arbitrary in what He does. Everything He does is always consistent with His nature, which is holy, just, wise, and loving. He does NOT need our advice, nor does He want to. Additionally, we have NO right to criticize or demand what He does, because we are nothing more than His creations.

Romans 11:34 "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?"

Of course, those who put too much importance on humanity, think that God should include humans' opinions in His decision making process. Guess what, the universe is owned and run by our God who reigns in a monarch style, not a democratic style. When was the last time the majority vote did do any good in this country? We live by divine promises and precepts, not theological explanations. Additionally, He is not obligated to explain anything to us.

B. MAKING IT WORSE

Jeremiah 18:11-12 "Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the Lord: "Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good."'" 12 And they said, "That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will every one obey the dictates of his evil heart."

I am completely amazed by our God's patience and mercy. Here again, we find our Lord extends His mercy toward the people who had been rejecting Him all this time. Did He not know what their response would be eventually? He did, but because of His love for them, He still offered His mercy in v11.

Unlike the clay on the potter's wheel, humans have the ability to resist God's will. But the problem is that there are consequences that come with our resistance against the Lord. If we do, we are fighting against the Lord. Guess who wins?

Like these Israel people, rather than repenting, the majority of the people around the world is so enslaved to their sins by their own choice, they choose to continue in their sins. This reminds me of Genesis 19. The people of Sodom were after two angels who were visiting Lot's home. They wanted to gang rape them. So, the angels struck those people with blindness. Instead of looking for a doctor to get treated, they continually looked for the door to get into the house.

Genesis 19:11 And they struck the men who were at the doorway of the house with blindness, both small and great, so that they became weary trying to find the door.

Rather than repenting their sins, the homosexuals in America who have the AIDS virus, demand the US government to pay for the medicines against AIDS so that they can continue in their sins.

In case you think that I am hard on homosexuals, let me make it clear here. My sins are no different than theirs. The difference is that when I sin, I confess it to the Lord and ask Him to forgive me for my sin and I do my best with the power of the Holy Spirit not to continue in it.

Do you know that AIDS is the only communicable disease that doctors are not allowed to reveal the patients' names to the CDC and should not quarantine the patients from spreading the disease? Why? It is because the homosexual community lobbied the politicians and the liberal media so that they became a protected group. In the meanwhile AIDS virus continually spreads under the protection of the US government.

Unlike other countries around the world, the Americans don't have an excuse for their sins.

C. SILENCING GOD'S MESSENGER

Jeremiah 18:18-21 Then they said, "Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come and let us attack him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words." 19 Give heed to me, O Lord, And listen to the voice of those who contend with me! 20 Shall evil be repaid for good? For they have dug a pit for my life. Remember that I stood before You To speak good for them, To turn away Your wrath from them. 21 Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, And pour out their blood By the force of the sword; Let their wives become widows And bereaved of their children. Let their men be put to death, Their young men be slain By the sword in battle.

These arrogant sinners who wanted their sins to continue without any interruption from God didn't want to hear any more of God's sovereignty or the sermons of impending judgment from Him. They thought that if they could silence God's messenger Jeremiah, He couldn't speak to them anymore.

Isn't that the same reason why unbelievers persecute Christians around the world? Being persecuted by unbelievers is not "if", rather "when." Jesus gave us the warning regarding this:

John 15:18 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.

John 16:33 These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

D. THE IMPENDING JUDGMENT

Jeremiah 19:1-2 Thus says the Lord: "Go and get a potter's earthen flask, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests. 2 And go out to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the Potsherd Gate; and proclaim there the words that I will tell you, Jeremiah 19:10-13 "Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, 11 and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: "Even so I will

break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, which cannot be made whole again; and they shall bury them in Tophet till there is no place to bury. 12 Thus I will do to this place," says the Lord, "and to its inhabitants, and make this city like Tophet. 13 And the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah shall be defiled like the place of Tophet, because of all the houses on whose roofs they have burned incense to all the host of heaven, and poured out drink offerings to other gods."'"

At the command of the Lord, Jeremiah made a second trip to the potter's house, this time as a customer and not a spectator, and he took with him some of the Jewish elders. Did he forget that they were planning an evil plot against him? Yes, he knew. But God's command was a command for a faithful servant of God.

The Potsherd Gate was also known as the East Gate and it was where the potters worked and the broken pottery was thrown. It overlooked the Valley of the Son of Hinnom where the Jerusalem garbage dump, a.k.a. Gehenna, was located.

This place used to be the focal point of idol worship in Judah until king Josiah had desecrated it by making it a garbage dump. This is where the Jews sacrificed their own children to the idol Molech.

Breaking pottery was an action sermon of God's judgment against the people of Judah and Jerusalem. I've quoted what German writer Friedrich von Logau said, "Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small; though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds He all."

E. A DISCOURAGE PROPHET OF GOD

Jeremiah 20:1-2 Now Pashhur the son of Immer, the priest who was also chief governor in the house of the Lord, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things. 2 Then Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord. Jeremiah 20:12-13 But, O Lord of hosts, You who test the righteous, And see the mind and heart, Let me see Your vengeance on them; For I have pleaded my cause before You. 13 Sing to the Lord! Praise the Lord! For He has delivered the life of the poor From the hand of evildoers.

At the beginning of the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah, the Lord told him this:

Jeremiah 1:8 Do not be afraid of their faces, For I am with you to deliver you," says the Lord.

Like us, Jeremiah might have heard this as he would not be harmed by his enemies. The Lord didn't say that, but He promised that He would deliver Jeremiah. Why would Jeremiah have to be delivered unless he is in deep doodoo? Sometimes, we'd like to hear what we want to hear, don't we? So, the prophet was discouraged. Let's not be hard on him. We often get discouraged for far less than what this prophet had to endure.

But his spirit was lifted while he started to see the whole situation from the Lord's perspective. Instead of dishonoring him, his enemies would themselves be dishonored.

F. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Unless the Lord is in our life, who we are is nothing and what we do is nothing.
- 2) We live by divine promises and precepts, not theological explanations.

3) When we face difficulties, let's look at them again from the perspective of our Lord. Our spirits will be lifted.