

The Potter's House

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THE POTTER'S HOUSE

The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.'
Jeremiah 18:1-6

God sent his prophet to the potter's house so that, by observation and inspiration, he might receive God's message to deliver to God's people. The potter had a lump of moist clay on his wheel which he shaped, quickly and with great ease, according to his own will. But something was found in the clay, a stiffness, a pebble, or some displeasing quality. 'And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.' If the clay is not used for one purpose, it will be used for another. If it is not to be moulded into a vessel of honour, it will be moulded into a vessel of dishonour, according to the will of the potter.

The Clay

The clay here represents the house of Israel. Israel had been dug from Egypt like clay from the pit. God brought them up into the land of Canaan, where he gently shaped and moulded them. But they were stiff and unyielding. A heart of stone was in them. Therefore that nation was marred in the hands of God. And he turned his grace toward the nations of the world. Paul enlarges this message and tells us that the clay represents all men (Rom. 9:18-24). Clay is raw material, infertile mud, useless, except in the hands of the potter. That is what you and I are, useless clods of red earth, sons and daughters of Adam. God dug us from the pit of fallen humanity by the hand of his omnipotent grace. He fashioned us into the image of his own dear Son and filled us with his mercy. God's elect, sinners chosen to eternal life, are vessels of mercy, made and prepared by God to be filled with mercy.

The Wheels

The wheels Jeremiah saw are the purposes, promises, providence, and power of God. All the circumstances, experiences, and events of our lives

in this world are wheels used by God to mould and shape his people into the image of Christ, according to his will (Rom. 8:28-29; 11:36). And the wheels of providence and grace move according to God's eternal purpose of grace in predestination.

The Potter

The Potter is the Lord God himself. You and I are as clay in the hands of God. He owns us. He has (and always exercises) the right to rule us, use us, shape us, and dispose of us as he will. He says, 'Cannot I do with you as this potter? Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand.' God is not in our hands. We are in his hands. God is not ruled by our will. We are ruled by his will.

Absolute Sovereignty

God sent Jeremiah to the potter's house to show him two things about Himself. The first thing Jeremiah learned in the potter's house is this: The Lord our God is irresistibly sovereign (v. 6). The God of the Bible is totally, absolutely, irresistibly, uncontrollably, universally sovereign. He created all things, owns all things, rules all things, and disposes of all things according to His own pleasure, even you and me!

God rules everything, absolutely. In creation, in providence, and in grace God is sovereign. God is incontestably sovereign over all his works and all his creatures (Daniel 4:35-37). God exercises his sovereignty with the greatest ease. We cannot resist him. One turn of the potter's hand, one spin of his wheel completely alters the shape of the clay, makes it, mars it, or makes it anew. So it is with us.

We are God's creatures, the work of his hands. Our times and our lives are in the hands of God (Job 12:23; 34:29; Psalm 107:33; Isaiah 45:7; 46:9-13). And God will be glorified in all his works. Vessels of honour and vessels of dishonour both reflect the potter's wisdom and skill. Vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy show forth the praise of God. 'The LORD hath made all things for himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil' (Proverbs 16:4). But God's glorious sovereignty is most clearly revealed in his works of grace (Romans 8:28-34; Ephesians 1:3-14). The first lesson from the potter's house is this: Our God is irresistibly sovereign. We rejoice in that. But God is not arbitrarily sovereign.

Absolute Justice

In the exercise of His sovereignty God is always equitable and just. That is the second lesson Jeremiah was taught in the potter's house (vv. 7-10). God dispenses His favours sovereignly and unconditionally. Anyone who speaks contrary to that is ignorant both of the Scriptures and of the character of God. But God does not punish men unconditionally. God has not arbitrarily predestinated anyone to hell. Anyone who teaches such a doctrine as that is also ignorant of both the scriptures and the character of God.

Salvation is unconditional, without works. Grace is free. But wrath, judgment, and eternal damnation are conditional, based entirely upon the works of wicked men. Vessels of mercy are 'prepared for glory' by God. Vessels of wrath are 'fitted for destruction' by their own wicked works. God is always equitable and just (Psalm 89:13-14). When he threatens wrath, if the sinner repents, he will be merciful (vv. 7-8). When he bestows mercy, if men despise His mercy, He will turn against them in wrath (vv. 9-10).

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