

The Potters House

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[0:00] If you've got your Bibles, Jeremiah is where we're going. Jeremiah 18. We're going to visit the potter's house.

! Jeremiah 18. From verse 1.

Let's stand, shall we? Jeremiah 18, verse 1. 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 to 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.

[1:21] Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that Israel is in your hand. And so are we. Lord, let us be as clay in the potter's hand. Lord, do a work deep down within, by your Spirit's power, as we look at these things together.

In Jesus' name, amen. Please be seated. Some 2,500 years ago, the people of Judah were conquered and in exile as refugees. And God gave Jeremiah this picture of a message for the nation as a potter and clay.

Firstly, he tells us, number one, the potter. Behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. Verse 3. Arise and go down to the potter's house and look at the potter.

Behold, verse 3. He wrought a work on the wheels. Now, people would know as potters fashion things, there's a wheel that turns and shapes the vessel on the wheel.

The potter begins with this lump of clay, soft, pliable clay. And the potter has a purpose. He has a design. He has an intent as to what he is making on the wheel.

[2:33] The shaping of that vessel he does with his own hands. And likewise, God with us, amen, as his people. He fashions us patiently, purposefully.

He's got a plan, a design for every one of us. And God is at work on the wheel, as it were, as a potter with the clay. God is working with his own people, you and me.

And he's got a plan, a purpose, an intent. He desires to produce vessels. Vessels that are useful. Vessels that he can fill. Vessels he can use. Vessels that will bring him honour.

We've seen the potter. Secondly, we see the vessel, verse 4. And the vessel he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter.

The potter is making a vessel. He uses raw materials here. He chooses different shapes and lumps, different sizes and colours and consistency.

[3:30] And like that too, God uses a variety of human beings, of human vessels. As it were, out of the dirt, he took Adam and created him.

And for us too. He fashions us. We're vessels in his making. Every one of us is different. A different purpose. A different intent. And the pliable clay is what we must be.

Such that he can work on us. Work with us. And make us who he wants us to be. And we can be shaped and reshaped in the hand of the master potter.

Reshaped by his own touch. Notice here the vessel. We are clay, not crystal. Clay with all those flaws and impurities found within clay.

Yet God's vessels that carry the treasure, the good news, the glory within us. This clay has to be softened before it can be fashioned.

[4:29] We know we can get clay vessels that are brittle and hard. But the Lord, our potter, wants us to be soft, tender, sensitive.

That can be shaped. And friends, he's still at work in us, isn't he? I know there's some in their 80s and 90s here tonight.

That God's still shaping. There's still work yet to do in your sister, brother. There's still a work yet to be done. You're not finished yet. And then one day, glory.

That vessel will be ultimately glorified. And it will reach that zenith of that ultimate purpose. And for the meantime yet, we're Christians under construction, aren't we?

God hasn't finished with me yet. Please be patient with me. And that's what I say to Julie all the time. That God hasn't finished with me yet. I'm still a work in progress.

[5:32] And it's like we're still on the journey, aren't we? We've not apprehended yet. We've not reached that finishing line. And for the meantime, we're still getting prodded and pounded on that wheel.

As God's still making who he wants us to be. And we've heard of the potter. We've seen the vessel. Now, notice the vessel was nearly finished. But then something happened.

Bang. Thirdly, we see in the latter part of verse 4, and the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter.

The vessel was marred. There was something wrong. Something went wrong. There was a problem with the vessel. There was a mark, a fault.

Something went wrong. Something changed. The vessel was ruined. Even in the potter's hand, things can go terribly wrong. Why?

[6:31] Because we're clay. We're vessels of clay. We're still a work in progress. And the fault is not with the potter.

It is with the clay. The problem is with the clay. We're still human vessels. And we see that, as I recounted this morning, of Bible characters. Many of them fouled up.

Many of the kings of Israel and Judah, we know, they had their highs and lows, but they were quite fallible, frail human people.

And this vessel, this vessel, it says, it was marred, disfigured. It was floored. Maybe there were lumps or air bubbles.

Something had to be remade. It had to be refashioned. And there are times like that in our lives, aren't there, when things go badly, it seems, even for the best of his people, and even with the best of care, the vessel still can get out of shape, marred.

[7:42] And we're still being shaped through life's journey. And in the context here, the nation of Judah likewise had grown hard and brittle. It was like a pot ready to be thrown on the pot sherd, which was basically the scrap heap.

A place for broken pottery was where the marred vessel may have just been thrown out. It's marred. Throw it out. Judah had sinned against its creator, the potter, the almighty God.

Something was wrong with the material. There was a fault. And the fault was with the clay. It was spoiled, damaged, messed up. And even while the divine potter works on us, we can get marred.

We're living on a fallen planet, aren't we? And sin is very real. The pot collapses. There's no reason put here. Maybe no apparent reason.

It's life. Life sometimes happens like that, doesn't it? Things, wow, where did that come from? That was out of left field. And, well, that's just totally thrown us, what we're going through right now.

[8:54] Life can be hard. And we can fall in a heap when things go wrong, when the vessel is marred, when we're feeling like it's a mess right now.

And maybe it's forces out of our control that can happen. Maybe it's of our own mistakes, disobedience. Maybe it's neglect of fellowship or the word.

Whatever the reason, we can get messed up in life. And it might not be a reason of our own making. It might be just the fact that we're living on a fallen planet. And, you know, the environment is a big problem.

And the problem is, you can say the problems with the environment are this or that, but ultimately the problem with the environment is sin. That's what the problem is. You can do what you like with the climate control, but the problem is sin.

That's why the world is in the shape it's in. And we live in a throwaway disposable world, don't we? A world that says if it's broken, throw it away. You know, your phone gets broken, you get a damaged screen or whatever it is, and you think, oh, it's not worth fixing it.

[10:08] You throw it out in the garbage. And we're living in this broken throwaway culture, aren't we? There's disposable cameras for one-time use only. Oh, they're almost old hat now, aren't they, with digital cameras.

There's disposable nappies, disposable clothes, disposable contact lenses, disposable mobile phones. It's not worth the cost to repair your electronic gadgetry.

Just go and buy a new one. And this vessel, it was marred. People could have thought, just throw it out. Forget it.

Put it on the scrap heap. And we can adopt this attitude of throwing things away, giving up on people, on relationships. Just throw them away. Thankfully, God takes messed up people, and he keeps working on us, doesn't he?

He doesn't give up. The Lord Jesus doesn't give up on us. He doesn't throw us away. I heard a quote, God is interested in taking the worst he can find and changing it to the best heaven has to offer.

[11:10] God can take the vessel marred and make a vessel fit for the master's use. God can take a vile sinner and change him into a trophy of his grace.

We've seen the potter. We've seen the vessel, the vessel marred. Next we see, verse 4, it goes on, the vessel remade. Verse 4, So he made it again, another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it.

Here we see the vessel marred. This item of pottery being fashioned, and then something goes badly wrong. It's marred. It's fouled up.

It's wrecked. It's ruined. What does the potter do? He represents God. When he sees human beings such as we, and thinks, wow, they've fouled up, badly fouled up.

What does the potter do? The master potter. Does he throw the clay out? Does he throw us on the scrap heap and say, oh, they're too far gone, beyond redemption?

[12:16] Does he throw us out, as it were, into the garbage, and just find a fresh new lump of clay to work? No. Jeremiah saw the patience of the potter.

He did not throw the clay away. The vessel was remade. He works with it some more. He takes that same piece of clay, that marred clay. He takes that same piece, and he crushes it.

He destroys what he had made. He squishes it up, and he starts all over again. He reworks it, repairs it, remoulds it, reshapes it. Verse 4, it says, Jeremiah 18, so he made it again.

He made it again. Thank God. God gives us another chance, doesn't he? He doesn't give up on us. He keeps on loving us.

Because his love is from everlasting to everlasting. So he made it again. How wonderful. How powerful. Again. He made it again.

[13:20] There was a second chance. He could restore that which was marred to what it can be in his plan, in his will.

He worked with it again to make it into something else, something better, better than what it was before. Let your character be shaped by God.

When you go through the marring and the wounding and the hurting, when you're feeling like you're crushed, he says, I can make you again.

I can rebuild. I can reshape. I can remake. He can begin again to make us a vessel. That seems good to him. When God crushes us and we are kneaded like dough, like clay, it's like the clay on the potter's wheel where that potter has got to pound it and push it and prod it and pull it and tear it and refashion it so that he can make it what he wants it to be.

And it's the same with us. Sometimes we go through those times where he throws us back on the wheel and we've got to start all over again to get right with him. He can begin again to make us a vessel that seems good unto him.

[14:42] We are his craftsmanship made into a vessel that suits his will. Your thinking or plan may not be his will but can we just surrender to the potter?

Let him have his way. Life is not about what suits us but about his will for us. Sometimes we've got to grapple. What is that? The clay has to go through a process pounded, battered, thrown around till it softens.

We can get hard, hard-hearted. God's got to break us sometimes to make us. I know I've heard it put as a kind of message around the bread of life and how we are like to be the living bread. We're meant to be as a loaf, as a lump of dough, as a loaf.

The church is pictured as a loaf, as a piece of bread. And for bread to be made, those grains have to be pulverised.

[16:00] They shake it, they break it, they make it, they bake it. Sometimes that process, isn't it? It's like with clay. The processes the clay has to go through from the wheel of the potter to be ultimately the vessel, the chosen vessel, the useful vessel for God's usefulness.

And so life is not what suits us but what His will is. And the clay has to be thrown around till it softens and the defects are removed. That pounding is doing a work deep down within.

It doesn't feel pleasant, it doesn't feel comfortable. That material is yet going to be easier for Him to work with. God's shaping you because He has His ultimate design.

Life for us is a process that may not always be pleasant. It may not feel good for us. You know, there's some preachers that will tell you, you know, if you think right, everything's just going to be so rosy and right and life's just going to be a walk in the park.

But we know that reality is difficulties come, challenges come and that's what happens here when the vessel is marred in the hands of the potter. Maybe for life, for us, it can be criticism that we receive.

[17:15] You know, people poking fingers and faces and saying things, wounding, hurting, remarks, even from those who love us can be hard.

A conviction in our heart from things we know God doesn't like and we know, Lord, I've got to get that sorted. Life can seem like a large circle as God throws us back on the wheel, as the master potter throws that clay back on the wheel and it's spinning around and around and it seems like we just get past one trial when here it comes around again, that clay on the wheel and the potter takes a wooden mallet to work at it, to remove those trapped air bubbles because they have to be removed for that vessel to be a vessel that is fit for the master's use because an air bubble can cause the weak spot in that clay vessel.

It would make that vessel fragile and unusable. What a picture of the trials and troubles of life. They work together for us to shape us and make us.

2 Corinthians 4.16 it says, for which cause we faint not. When we have trouble we faint not. When we have problems we don't faint. We don't despair. For though our outward man perish yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

For our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. You know I'm thinking this week ahead I've got a painful dental operation.

[18:54] They're yanking one of my teeth out. Think of that that's a light affliction will be just for a moment and then it will be relief from the pain I'm in.

You know life is like that isn't it? It's just for a moment you're going to get anaesthetic you're going to get some antibiotics it's not going to be that hard it's a light affliction I'm still scared to death of it but it will work for me there'll be a blessing from that and life's like that too isn't it?

That light affliction it might be that persecution you suffer for Christ when you stand for him when you reach out to people and they curse you for it that light affliction which is but for a moment it worketh for you an eternal weight of glory we may not like that pounding of the mallet on the potter's wheel but it will make us more usable more workable in his hand so it's a good thing so when things are difficult and we can feel deflated and confused and overwhelmed know that the potter is in charge the potter controls the speed of the wheel he controls the shaping the making and the wheel turns according to his will he's in charge the vessel was subject to the decisions of the potter believers here tonight God has a plan in mind it seems it might seem like you can't work what's presently happening out but God has a plan yet in mind and he has total control over the decisions of our lives over what becomes of the clay he makes of it what he desires

God is still in control and no matter what we face in life all things are eventually going to work together for good they're going to work out to your good those of you who love the Lord and according to his purpose Romans 8 28 lastly finally notice the vessel where is the vessel the vessel is in the potter's hands verse 4 we are still in the potter's hands that's the good news isn't it we might be marred we might be feeling like well we're getting thrown around going around in circles

and there's some prodding and pushing there's some difficulty in the present but thank God doesn't throw that marred piece of clay out on the scrap heap he takes weak and frail and lacking human beings men and women just like you and me and he pays the ultimate price for his clay he died for it to redeem us from sin to make something special out of our life and while that clay spins around and around on the wheel it's in constant contact with what the hands the potter's hands isn't that good news to know whatever's going on for you you're in the potter's hands you're in his hands our times are in his hands our lives are in his hands we're underneath are the everlasting arms no one can snatch you out of his hand the father's hand you're in the hand of

God and if you humble yourself under the mighty hand of God he's over you and under you and he's molding he's shaping he's forming the clay by his loving guidance he's making of that clay what he desires it to be notice he applies the pressure sometimes the pressure is God sent we can trust him nevertheless God can sometimes seem removed a million miles away but he has promised he will never leave us nor forsake us you as that clay on the wheel are in the hold of his hands he has promised he will always be in touch with his clay and in the master's hands if our lives can just be placed in the potter's hands there is still hope isn't there if our lives are only just to think of that truth that I am in the master's hands there's hope and though it looks like we're messed up our lives are troubled he goes to work again you know you might think wow

[23:29] I've blown it I'm just marred I'm a marred vessel I'm just you know fit for the scrap heap spiritually he works on us again again again and there is hope there is purpose for every believer that we can be vessels unto honour a vessel of honour unto the Lord if we place ourselves in his hands let him work his will let him use us for his glory a preacher Wilbur Chapman said the clay is not attractive in itself but when the hands of the potter touch it and the thought of the potter is brought to bear upon it the plan of the potter is worked out in it and through it and there is real transformation the hands of the potter the thought of the potter the plan of the!

transformation the Lord is in control of our lives he makes of us what he wants and we can become a vessel fit for the master's use that's the ultimate isn't it that we'll be fit for the master's use that the very God of creation can take weak little me and do something with my failing self that will bring him some glory that's all we can want and seek for to submit to his will Romans 9 21 it says when a potter makes those jars of clay he can choose to use the same lump or to make one jar for a special occasion another for ordinary purposes he makes of the clay what he sees fit that's Romans 9 21 kind of paraphrased that he takes that lump of clay and he can decide what he wants to make out of that clay what kind of vessel he wants to make now we think of different kinds of vessels you look in the pantry and you see the different vessels the different containers some are very fine some are more practical some are expensive china

God decides what he wants for each one of us where he wants us to serve what he wants us to do some would be beautiful useful to carry the good news of his love and care and purpose just to draw some truth here what can we learn how can I learn something from me out of this God is patient he works patiently perseveringly he purposefully works out for good the impurities and the imperfections it's a life work isn't it it's a life in a work in progress he's patient the potter doesn't throw us away now some would think oh they're not worth wasting a prayer on they're too far gone God doesn't treat us like that he doesn't throw us away because the church is full of imperfect faulty people there are no other people in this church sorry if I'm offending you by saying that but really the church is full of imperfect faulty people because that's all he's got God is still working on us and really the church is a field hospital for the wounded we're all in this same condition of that work in progress and the vessel the potter spins that wheel and he molds and forms us to shape notice it's the potter's will to fashion and shape it's that picture of God that he's ultimately in charge and Philippians 2.13 it says for it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure his purpose is to make us beautiful and useful vessels are you going to be soft and pliable in his hands the master potter he's got his purpose for us and he's always at work on the clay whatever the reason we've gone astray you know see when a vessel is made on a potter's wheel sometimes it starts to lean over or it starts to kind of lose its proper shape and yet God keeps reshaping us doesn't he he keeps remaking us renewing us and God's not averse to starting over again

God offers grace so we can begin again I can think when I first became a Christian I made a profession of faith and then I grew weak and I was swayed here and there and worldly friends and worldly thinking started to drag me in the wrong way and then it came to a place where I made a recommitment a rededication of my life a refreshing a renewal of my vows as it were a rededication of my heart to the Lord and it's like that that God can start us he can start over again can't he he can start right right over again God's grace he can begin again and the potter begins with something that doesn't amount to much just a lump of clay just some little mass some shape some unformed shape but by his working on it he brings it to a place of usefulness and it's the same for you and me brother sister no matter your age no matter your situation of life you can be useful for

[29:45] God in some measure it's like that with our lives you might be in your 90s here tonight God's still got something good he can use you for his glory he can use you for his purposes and he is doing and he's patient so that maybe it'll take you to 90 to get things sorted don't leave it that long you might not see 90 but he patiently works on us doesn't he he doesn't give up and he brings us to a place where he can use us and it says that it seemed good to the potter it seemed good to the potter so the end product was it seemed good to the potter the final result so in Isaiah 64 8 a like verse says but now oh lord thou art our father we are the clay and thou our potter and we all are the work of thy hand that's Isaiah 64 verse 8 he wants to fashion us fire us fill us to be that lump of clay in God's hands ultimately to be the vessel that he can fill and use let's ask these questions am I totally yielded to the will of

God for my life can we say there's some areas where I need to yield to him to trust the potter to surrender my will to his will you know many of us are like the fellow who rode in his car as it was being towed to be repaired when they arrived at the repair shop the tow truck driver told him I didn't think I was going to make it up that big hill you know the car he was in the car and the tow truck was pulling him up the hill and the man said I didn't either that's why I kept the brakes on so he wouldn't roll backwards you know sometimes we can we can be like that can't we God wants to take us somewhere but we've got the brakes on God's saying go here do this this is my will for you but we've got the brakes on and we wonder why it's so hard let's trust the potter trust the potter place yourself your life afresh into his hands the message of the potter tells us we have another chance when we failed

God can rework he can salvage us and we are still in the master's hands he's creating what he intends us to be so we can bring our hurts our failures our wounding our hurting and receive his forgiveness and grace we can feel his hands remake us and start again start it again and ultimately it'll seem good to him what he makes because he's in charge and he's got his purpose in view for us it's about being in the master's hands motivated by what he wants compelled by his compassion are we willing that he rework us and renew us reshape us are we willing to be on that spinning wheel and to let him do what he has to do to make what he wants us to be and to be ultimately that finished product in glory god knows what he's doing for the meantime he's the potter and we are the clay he will make us to be a vessel for his honour for his use as is good and pleasing to his will let's pray lord we thank you that we can see that reality of our lives as being a time of shaping and even marring and renewing reshaping lord help us to be as vessels that are soft and pliable that we can be moved by you and help us lord not to not to resent it when we have some pounding going on but to know ultimately we know you're going to make something good and it will seem good to you because you're the making of us lord and we can only be resigning to that that charge over us that you hold to be willing vessels and we pray lord if there's any hearing this lord that each one might know the grace that saves that we can call on your name and know your saving grace it changes everything lord as we put our trust in your gift your love gift of the cross where you died in christ's body was our sin as it was nailed the penalty was paid and now as our risen saviour lord we glorify you pray for everybody present for every family every heart every home that they might know christ is master in jesus name amen a