The Potter and The Clay
Jeremiah 18:1-6 (NKJV)

Our scripture text comes to us this evening from the Old Testament Book of Jeremiah, chapter eighteen. And we will be reading verses 1-6.

JEREMIAH 18:1-6 (NKJV)

1 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!”
Introduction

These first few verses of Jeremiah chapter 18 is one of my favorite passages in the Old Testament. Jeremiah 18 is a message of HOPE, and GRACE, and MERCY!

These verses are a comforting reminder to all of us that no matter how badly we have messed up in life.....no matter how many mistakes we have made.....no matter how miserably we have failed........GOD DOESN'T THROW AWAY HIS PEOPLE! Instead, God takes us, “broken pieces and all” and remoulds us and reshapes us into a new creation.

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The Prophet JEREMIAH needed desperately to be reminded of this wonderful truth. Jeremiah prophesied in a time when Israel had become a divided nation; there was the Northern Kingdom of Israel; and the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

Jeremiah's prophetic ministry was to the people of Judah, the southern Kingdom. In those years when Jeremiah preached and prophesied the word of the LORD, Judah had a series of really bad Kings who led the people of Judah down a path of idolatry and wickedness. Despite his pleas for repentance, Judah continued to move farther away from GOD and closer to her destruction.

Judah's sinful rebellion absolutely broke Jeremiah's heart. This is why he became known as “the weeping prophet.” There was such a “Christ-likeness” in Jeremiah's sorrow, because remember how Christ “wept over the city of Jerusalem” because of her rejection of God's salvation?
Knowing that Jeremiah needed some reassurance that his prophetic ministry had not been in vain, GOD takes Jeremiah on a “little field trip.”

Jeremiah 18:1,2 (NKJV)

1. 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.”

When Jeremiah arrived at the Potter’s House, God was silent at first. He wanted Jeremiah to just stand still and watch the Potter at work.

Pottery is one of the oldest art forms in the world. It is a craft that has remained basically unchanged to this present time.

Jeremiah watched as the potter took the lump of clay and twisted it and kneaded it and pounded it until all the bubbles and impurities were out of it and it was soft and pliable.

Then Jeremiah saw that potter take that lump of clay and throw it on the wheel, and as he turned the wheel with the treadle, the potter would caress the clay with his talented fingers and smooth it out and start shaping the clay into something useful and beautiful.

But then the clay became “marred.” Perhaps it picked up some impurities like sand or grit; or maybe it began to dry out and harden and became less pliable. Jeremiah couldn’t see what the potter saw. But instead of throwing the “marred” clay away, the Potter began to remould it and reshape it into a new vessel that would be pleasing to him.
After watching this Potter at work for a period of time, GOD breaks His silence.

**Jeremiah 18:5,6 (NKJV)**

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!”

God's message to Jeremiah was crystal clear.

God is the “Potter” and Israel, God's chosen people, was the lump of clay. God had brought this “lump of clay” up out of the earth through the “see of Abraham.”

God “worked” and “kneaded the lump” of clay. For over 400 years God molded and shaped the Jewish people during their years of captivity in Egypt. Then through the leadership of Moses, God brought them up out of Egypt to begin their journey to the Promised Land.

But along the journey, “the clay became marred.” The people began to whine and complain and rebel against GOD. Did God throw “the clay” away? NO! God, “the Potter” broke the clay down and began to remold and reshape “His vessel” over a period of forty years in the wilderness. During that time GOD removed the “impurities” from the clay, by allowing everyone 20 years old and older who had made the Exodus out of Egypt, to die off in the wilderness, including those Ten negative spies who had brought back the bad report out of Canaan.
During those forty years, “the vessel” began to take shape. God, the Potter, gave Moses the Laws that would govern the Jewish people when they entered into the Promised Land.

Once they were in the Promised Land, Israel became God’s “vessel of honor.” God was their GOD and they were HIS PEOPLE. No other nation on earth was blessed like God blessed Israel. Just like a piece of pottery that has been fired in the kiln and covered in a brilliant glaze, ISRAEL glistened as God's masterpiece.

But then the vessel started “cracking.”

- The Israelites started worshiping false gods like Baal and Ashterah.
- The Israelite men started marrying heathen women from godless nations.
- The people rebelled against the law of God and did what was pleasing in their own eyes.
- The Jewish religious leaders and many of their Kings were evil and corrupt and led the Jewish people down a path of destruction.
- Then a “huge crack” developed in the vessel when the nation divided into the northern kingdom and southern kingdom.

GOD'S VESSEL OF HONOR HAD BECOME “MARRED.” HIS BRILLIANT MASTERPIECE BECAME A VESSEL OF DISHONOR.

This was “the vessel” Jeremiah saw. But that day at the Potter's House, GOD gave Jeremiah the hope that He would never throw “the clay” away. Instead, He would take her in her brokenness and remold her and reshape her into a new vessel.
APPLICATION

There is so much we can learn from this Old Testament parable about our relationship with GOD.

In this parable there are three key elements:

(1) There is “THE POTTER”, who of course if GOD, our heavenly Father.

(2) There is “THE CLAY,” which is you and me and all who are God's children.

(3) And there's “THE POTTER'S WHEEL,” which represents our earthly life and circumstances.

There are three valuable “life lessons” for you and me to learn from this wonderful passage.

First, there is.....

THE PRINCIPLE: “God, The Potter, Is In Control”

1. We have all heard people boasting about being “a self-made man” or “a self-made woman.” When people make this boastful claim they are saying that “everything they are, everything they have, and everything they have become” is the result of their own human efforts.

2. As children of GOD we must understand that you and I can no more “make ourselves” into anything than “a lump of clay” can make anything of itself.
3. GOD IS THE POTTER, we are just “the clay.” And just as the potter exercises his will over the lump of clay, GOD desires to exercise His will over us.

   Proverbs 16:9 (New Living Translation) says, “We can make our plans, but the LORD determines our steps.”

4. It is when we try to be “The Potter” of our own lives that we get ourselves in trouble.

   Everyone of us has accumulated some “cracks” and “chips” along the way. And if you and I will think back to our biggest mistakes and failures in life chances are they came at a time when we tried to be in control..... times when we tried to be our own “Potter.”

5. We must never forget that “we are not our own, we were bought with a price.” And because we belong to GOD, He wants us to TRUST HIM with our lives, knowing that by submitting to His will, He will mold us and shape us into the very best we can be.

   Secondly, let's consider....

   THE PURPOSE: “God Desires to Make Us Vessels of Honor”

1. Just what is it that GOD is trying to make out of you and me? His purpose is to transform us by His grace, from a worthless piece of clay into “beautiful vessels” that will bring glory and honor to Him.

2. And “the vessels” that bring the greatest honor and glory to GOD are those that are conformed to the image of Christ.
ROMANS 8:29 (NKJV) For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

The apostle Paul writes in Galatians 4:19 (NKJV) “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again UNTIL CHRIST IS FORMED IN YOU.

3. When a potter sits down at his wheel to work with a lump of clay, he has a purpose in mind for that lump of clay. His purpose may be to turn that lump of clay into a vase......or a bowl......or a cup......or a pitcher. And as he works that piece of clay his goal will be to work towards the fulfillment of that purpose.

THE PROCESS: “God Will Use Our Circumstances To Mold Us Into Vessels of Honor”

1. It takes TIME for a potter to transform a lump of clay into a beautiful vessel.

2. Likewise, it takes TIME for God to transform you and me into a vessel of honor in the image of Christ. It is a process that can be very painful at times.

3. Paul describes it so beautifully in II Corinthians 4:7-11......

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 8 We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. 11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.
4. When a potter starts out working with a lump of clay he has to apply more pressure because the clay does not yield so easily. He begins by applying pressure to the foundation of the piece of clay and as the clay softens to his touch, the potter then begins to work the clay from the foundation up. And after forming a tower or pillar out of the clay, the potter then takes his fingers in digs right into the very heart of the clay to form a cavity. And as he opens up the heart of the clay, he begins to transform it into what he desires for it to become.

5. Like a lump of clay, you and I are sometimes resistant to yield to the Potter's hands and pressure must be applied. God applies pressure by allowing us to go through trials and hardships that will soften us to be more compliant to His will.

6. Once we “soften to the touch of the Potter's hand” God goes to work on our heart. He transforms us from the inside out, just like the potter works the clay.

7. Some of you may have made some terrible mistakes in life. Perhaps you went through a divorce. Or maybe you got involved in an adulterous relationship. Perhaps you became addicted to some sinful habit that took control of your life. Or maybe you got involved in some unethical business deals. Or perhaps you betrayed your mate or betrayed a dear friend.

And when we make huge mistakes in life, we often feel as though we have done irreparable damage, and God can never use us.
8. If you are one of those people who thinks that, think again! **God never throws away a piece of His clay.** When we make terrible mistakes in life, THE POTTER can do nothing else but **crush us and break us down and begin remolding us and reshaping us into a beautiful vessel that will bring glory and honor to Him.**

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**C O N C L U S I O N**

We have all heard that saying, **“Please be patient GOD isn't finished with me yet.”** There is a whole lot of truth in that statement.

You and I are not yet complete. We are all “a work in progress.” Day by day…..trial by trial….God is molding us and shaping us to become more like Christ. And one day when we meet Christ in eternal glory, we will become God's finished “masterpieces!”

"The Potter's Hand"

Beautiful Lord, Wonderful Saviour
I know for sure, all of my days are held in your hands, crafted into your perfect plan
You gently call me into your presence guiding me by Your Holy Spirit
Teach me dear Lord to live all of my life through Your eyes
I'm captured by Your holy calling
Set me apart, I know you're drawing me to yourself
Lead me Lord I pray

Take me, Mold me, use me, fill me
I give my life to the Potter's hand
Call me, guide me, lead me, walk beside me
I give my life to the Potter's hand

by DARLENE ZSCHECH