

# THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

## ISAIAH 64:8 JEREMIAH 18:1-6

Text: Isaiah 64:8 & Jeremiah 18:3

### **Isaiah 64:8**

<sup>8</sup> *But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand.*

### **Jeremiah 18:3**

<sup>3</sup> *Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels.*

Introduction:

God uses many images to describe His relationship to His people. He speaks of the shepherd and sheep relationship, the husband and wife relationship, a Father and His children, just to name a few.

All of these are wonderful examples and teach us many needed and valuable lessons about life, ourselves and our Lord. However, while we like sheep are protected and provided for by the shepherd, and as a wife, we are loved without condition by the husband and like children we are constantly under the Father's loving watch care, there is another facet of our lives that needs to be considered.

The Lord did not save us just so we could go to Heaven and miss Hell. He saved our souls so that we might be actively engaged in His service here on the earth.

Now, if we are to be His servants, we are going to need His power to get the job done.

A child of God should never think that he can live the Christian life on his own.

John 15:5 makes our dependence upon the Lord crystal clear. Therefore, perhaps the greatest portrait of God and His people to be found in the entire Bible, related to this matter of service, is this picture of the Potter and the Clay.

In these brief verses, we can see the plan of the Potter on display.

Let's consider the subject, Lessons Learned from the Potter.

## **1. THE MISSION OF THE POTTER (1-3)**

*(Jeremiah 18:1-3) "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 thee to hear my words. {3} Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels."*

A. His Intent - The Potter has a singular purpose.

He desires to produce vessels that will

1. Reap a profit, that
2. Will be found useful
3. Will bring honor unto Himself.

Illustration:

This is God's intention as well. He excels in taking old worthless clay and transforming it by His grace into vessels of honor and glory. He takes those things that are the "offscouring of all things", 1 Cor. 4:13, and turns them into vessels of honor.

*(1 Corinthians 4:13) "Being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day."*

Jesus saves the sinner by His grace and then He begins the process of changing that vile sinner into a vessel that will produce a profit for the Kingdom of God, one that will be useful to Him in His work, and one that brings honor and glory to His Name.

God is interested in taking the worst He can find and changing it into the best Heaven has to offer.

B. His Ingredients - In order to accomplish this lofty goal, the Potter must work with materials that leave much to be desired.

Illustration:

The condition of the clay as it is found:

The clay as found in the ground is not suitable for use. It is dug out and brought to the vicinity of the pottery and allowed to weather for weeks.

The dry material is then dumped into a cement-lined tank or wooden trough and covered with water. When the lumps have softened they are stirred in the water until all have disintegrated and a thin slimy mud or "slip" has been formed.

In coast cities-the potteries are all near the sea, as the sea-water is considered better for the "slipping" process. The slip is drawn off into settling tanks. All stones and lumps remain behind. When the clay has settled, the water is drawn off and the plastic material is worked by treading with the feet. The clay used on the Syrian coast is usually a mixture of several earths, which the potters have learned by experience, gives the right consistency.

The prepared clay is finally packed away and allowed to stand another six months before using, during which

time the quality, especially the plasticity, is believed to improve.

In other words, the clay, as it is taken from the ground, is worthless. It must be transformed into a useable state and this is a process that takes time and energy on the part of the Potter. This is a perfect portrait of sinners.

We are worthless to God in our natural condition. However, He is able to see the vessels that we can become. Therefore, He begins the process that will bring us to a place of usefulness. He digs us out, dries us up and washes us clean. This is a clear picture of the process a sinner must go through prior to salvation. The heart is pricked and the conviction of God begins to work in the heart. The sinner is lead along in little baby steps until he reaches the place where he receives Christ as Savior.

At that point, God begins the molding process.

It's seems pretty evident that the Lord doesn't have a whole lot to work with when He finds us. After all, we are all made from the same clay.

C. His Instruments - The potter uses several implements to bring the clay to a place where it is usable.

## 1. A Shovel

This is the tool he uses to dig the clay from the earth. This is a picture of the Spirit of God who comes to where we are in sin and speaks to us in convicting power and draws us to Jesus.

## 2. A Mallet

After the clay has been cleansed and processed, it is laid on a table and beaten with a wooden mallet. The Potter does this to remove any air bubbles that might be trapped in the clay.

If he doesn't the air bubble will form a pocket that will produce a weak spot and cause the vessel to be fragile and unusable.

Illustration:

This is a picture of the trials, calamities and chastisements of life that tend to work together to shape us in the image of the Lord Jesus Christ 2 Cor. 4:17.

*(2 Corinthians 4:17) "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;"*

## 3. The Wheels

The potter is in control of the wheels at all times.

#### 4. His Hands

While the clay spins around on the wheels, it is never out of contact with the Potter's hands.

## **2. THE MINISTRY OF THE POTTER (v 4)**

*(Jeremiah 18:4) "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."*

### A. A Problem With The Vessel

1. Even in the Potter's hand, things can go terribly wrong.
2. The fault is not with the Potter, but is a problem with the clay.
3. There are times when with the best of care, the vessel still gets out of shape.

Illustration:

The Bible is strewn with the wreckage of lives that began well and ended poorly.

- Hymeneaus and Alexander - 1 Tim. 1:19-20

*(1 Timothy 1:19-20) "Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: {20} Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme."*

- Demas 2 Tim. 4:10

*(2 Timothy 4:10) "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia."*

## B. The Perception of the Potter

1. Because his hand is resting on the vessel, the Potter knows when a problem arises.
2. He sees the status of the clay and begins taking whatever steps are necessary to correct the problem.
3. The same could be said for the Lord. He knows everything about us and because His hand rests on our lives, He is

instantly aware when things aren't as they should be. At that moment, He begins to take the necessary steps to get us back in usable condition.

### C. The Patience of the Potter

1. Even though the clay is misshapen and deformed, it is still in His hand.

2. The Potter takes the marred vessel, presses it back into a lump and begins again.

3. This time, the vessel may turn out well, but it may be deformed once again.

4. If so, as long as the clay is moldable and pliable in His hand, the Potter will rework it and reform it until he is able to produce a vessel that satisfies Him.

## **3. THE MESSAGE OF THE POTTER (v 5-6)**

### A. A Message of Control

1. According to verse 6, the Potter has absolute control over what becomes of the clay.

2. It is in His hand and He makes of it what He desires.

3. What a message to the people of God! He is in control of our lives and He makes of us what He wishes. Some are sturdy vessels that are used over and over again. Others are very fine and delicate like expensive china. They are used only on special occasions, but are glorious to behold at any time.

#### B. A Message of Compliance

1. The only duty that the clay has to yield to the will of the Potter.

#### Illustration:

Many years ago in the "horse and buggy" days, a man and his wife were riding along a very narrow and dangerous stretch of road. The woman became extremely nervous, and in her fright she grabbed one of the reins.

As calmly as possible the husband responded by offering her the other reign; "Oh, no," she cried, "I don't want them both! I could never manage that animal alone!" "Well, then," he said gently, "you must

make your choice. It's either you or me. We can't both drive the same horse!" The frightened lady quickly surrendered full control of the carriage to her husband. Everything was once again in good hands, and they journeyed on safely.

Illustration:

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."

The man replied, "I didn't either. That's why I kept the brakes on so we wouldn't roll backwards."

To live without total dedication to Christ is the same as trying to go forward and to hold back at the same time.

Conclusion:

As you fly around on the wheels of life, are you confident that God's will is being done in your life as it should?

If you are a vessel that is refusing to yield in your life, here or there, there is no better time than the present to take care of that need.

Will you come to the Lord and place yourself afresh and anew into the miracle working hands of the Heavenly Potter?

Will you allow Him to work His will in your life so that you can be a vessel of honor and glory unto the Lord?