

SHAPES

JEREMIAH 18:1-12

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(Prepared by John Black using LifeWay's ETB materials)

Last Sunday we saw that Jeremiah heard of a plot against his life (Jer. 11:19) only to find, to his dismay, that those scheming to kill him were people from his hometown and even members of his own family. Jeremiah lamented to God as he felt the pain and hurt inflicted by his friends and enemies. In fact, we saw his lamentations turn to full-fledged imprecations. God used Jeremiah's pain to describe how He felt when His own people had turned on and abandoned Him.

Today we see the word of the Lord instruct Jeremiah to go to the potter's house. As he watches the potter work, he hears God's message. As the potter was working with the clay, it became flawed on the wheel. He did not discard the flawed clay, instead, he patiently reworked it into something else that would still be useful. The potter was in complete control of the clay just as God is in complete control of our lives.

Our being in control actually makes matters worse. T, F, A, DA. May depend on the situation. Sometimes we need to be in control yet other times we can really make a mess of things. That does not mean that things always turn out peachy when we are in control. **Are we ever really in complete control of everything in our lives?** God is the only One who has complete control, and He is working out all things according to His good pleasure. As we will see in today's study, that includes His work as the potter shaping His people, us, for His purposes.

Read Jeremiah 18:1-4 "Remade"

What is God telling Jeremiah to do? Go to the potter's house and wait for further instructions. So, Jeremiah goes and finds the potter working away.

What did Jeremiah see happen when the clay became flawed? The flaw may have been for any number of reasons, but whatever the reason, it caused the potter to rethink what he wanted to make.

Why didn't he just pitch the flawed clay aside? He realized it could still be useful to him so "he made it into another jar." He patiently reworked it to make something else.

Because the potter is in control, he has the right to change his mind if something in the clay puts up resistance to his designs. What the potter ultimately makes from the clay may be useful and serve a purpose, but it just wasn't the purpose originally intended. Similarly, God sovereignly works according to His plans and purposes, yet He reserves the right to change His actions based upon a change of circumstances.

The question at the top of page 50 in the quarterly brings Jeremiah's visit to the potter into our world today. **"In what ways have you seen God take brokenness and shape it into something beautiful?"** Just as Jeremiah saw the flawed clay reshaped into something useful and beautiful, I expect each of us have examples of lives reshaped and changed because of God's love and mercy.

God used the picture of the potter working the clay to show Jeremiah how He was working to shape His people for His plans and purposes. He was (and still is) in complete control of our lives.

Read Jeremiah 18:5-10 “Sovereign”

Who’s who in these verses? Israel was the clay, and Yahweh was like the potter.

Who has the sovereign right to determine the kind of vessel? The potter has control over what type of jar, pot, or vessel he creates while Yahweh has control over the future and existence of Israel.

What was God’s original judgment for Israel based on? God’s judgment was based on the sin of His people.

From these verses, what are the conditions Yahweh might choose to change His mind on how He would act? If, as in verse 8 the people turn from evil, then God will change His mind concerning the disaster such as in verse 7. If, as in verse 9 God announces to build and plant a nation, then that nation does evil, Yahweh will relent or change His mind concerning His plans to build and plant.

The application for us today is that God responds differently to the various ways people respond. God’s response changes as our obedience or disobedience changes.

One of the authors I studied, Kevin Peacock, pointed out several important truths about the character and ways of God.

1. People have a choice. It’s the “if...then” condition. If you like the intended outcome, then no change is necessary. If you want another outcome, then change your behavior.
2. God sovereignly reserves the right to change His actions according to the responses of people. He is willing to turn from His decision of judgment if the people choose to repent. He is also willing to turn from His decision to bless the people if they turn away from Him.
3. When God sends His prophets to announce coming judgment, that is an act of God’s divine grace. The announcement of judgment is a call to repentance.
4. God respects the choices that people make, even their choice to turn away from Him. The choices bring consequences.
5. God is willing to extend His grace to any nation or kingdom that He chooses, even those outside of His covenant people, Israel. He is willing to extend His mercy to all if they would turn to Him (Ezek. 18:23). Therein is our hope.

There is a thought-provoking question on page 52 of the quarterly that made me think of our world today. **“What are the dangers of presuming or taking for granted God’s blessing?”**

Read Jeremiah 18:11-12 “Warned”

So, God was showing Jeremiah (and us) that His sovereignty gives Him the right and power to forgive those who repent and to judge those who do not.

Jeremiah had told the people that God could turn judgment into blessing or blessing into judgment, so what is he telling them in verse 11? God’s judgment is coming for you, but you still have time to turn from your sin so that God would relent and withhold the harm coming toward them.

They were faced with an “If...Then” decision that would determine their future benefit or demise.

God is offering forgiveness if they will repent and turn to God but how do the people respond? “It’s hopeless.” We like our plans and are too stubborn to change. Some people can be so set in their thinking and their ways that they can no longer think straight or choose right. This could be considered a deliberate rejection of God’s call to repentance. The people would rather pursue their own desires and face God’s judgment than repent and find God’s mercy if they believed God would judge them at all.

How does “if” you repent and turn to God, “then” I will forgive work today? The same way as in Jeremiah’s day, either you do, or you don’t. You can think you are in control or realize God is in control.