

We Are God's Masterpiece

Jeremiah 18:1-11 (NIV)

¹ This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." ³ So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. ⁴ But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him. ⁵ Then the word of the LORD came to me. ⁶ He said, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel. ⁷ If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, ⁸ and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. ⁹ And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, ¹⁰ and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it. ¹¹ "Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, 'This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.'"

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." (verses 1-2) (Play [Youtube video](#).) Watch for a minute the potter at work. See what Jeremiah would have seen. What do you notice? (Wait a minute. Watch with them.) What did you observe?

I noticed that this is very careful work, requiring two hands, as well as focus. The potter also gets his hands dirty. He has to kind of beat, pound, and slap the clay at some points, and at other times he uses very fine and intricate movements and tools. You don't immediately see the shape that the clay is going to be, but by the end you have a beautiful work of art. One pull through is usually not enough, but many, time and time again. And if it isn't right, the potter reforms and reshapes the clay.

When Jeremiah went to the potter's house per the Lord's direction, he saw something similar. "But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him." (verse 4) Here is the lesson, Jeremiah. Then the word of the LORD came to me. He said, "Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel." (verses 5-6)

God has always been the Potter. When God made the very first person, the Lord God formed him from the dust of the ground. What does a potter use to make pottery? Clay. A form of earth, just as God used in forming Adam. When God first made Adam, he declared Adam good. Adam was perfect, perfectly shaped by God.

But then there was a problem, just like the potter and his clay. The clay was marred in the potter's hands. The clay was spoiled, not at the fault of the potter, but a fault with the clay. God's first human work of art, Adam, also became marred despite all the care and attention God was giving to him. Adam chose to disobey God, rebel against him. Adam sinned.

This sin has plagued all of us since we all come from the same marred clay, the same Adam. We know it because we are the ones who say, "Hey, nobody's perfect." We know it when we see evil in the world, like more mass murder shootings as just happened in Texas and Ohio. We know it when we examine our own thoughts and actions and see all the ways that we are selfish, manipulative, hypocritical, and critical. We are not right. We are not okay or acceptable as we are. We need to be reformed and reshaped.

The Great Potter went about that work just for us. He got his hands dirty. He came down from heaven and took on that same flesh formed from the dust of the ground. Because he is God, he came and clothed himself with our human flesh but in perfection. He was not marred with sin. With the careful work of his hands, the words of his mouth, and the attitude of his heart he was perfectly obedient to God, to his parents, to those in authority over him. He lived the perfect template that we should have been, that Adam should have been. The only marring he faced was the marring of his flesh, the scourging and the whips, the nails that pierced his flesh as he was hung on the cross. Though he was innocent, without sin, perfect, he let sinful people mar his body. By doing so, he substituted his life for ours, lived perfection for us, and suffered the penalty we should have suffered for our sinful marring, our imperfections.

When God the Father raised God the Son, Jesus, from the dead, he held up to the world the perfect piece of pottery – the life of his Son who lived out perfection and took away the sin of the whole world. But his work did not end there. He is still getting his hands dirty every single day with us. He is working to reform and reshape us who are marred by sin.

Are you okay with the idea of God reforming and reshaping you? While watching the potter at work, do you remember seeing the smacks that the potter gave the clay? Have you thought about the pinching that occurs to make those shapes or the scraping that makes the fine and intricate designs? Although these professionals make it look easy, being reformed and reshaped by God is not. To be pressed in to a ball, to be smacked to work out lumpy sections, to be pinched to straighten the misshaped portions, this is work and pressure and change as the potter shapes the clay.

To be reformed and reshaped by God (basically, to be repentant) requires a denial of our marred, sinful self. It's an active working by God in us as his children to give us opportunities guided by him for us to put sinful ways and thoughts and desires behind us. Although the momentary pleasure of giving that zinging, hurtful comment tempts us, God reforming us teaches us to hold that comment at bay and keep our lips shut. Being reshaped by God sometimes means denying ourselves what we want to do like sitting on the couch playing that video game instead of serving my family by unloading the dishwasher, helping to do laundry, mowing the lawn, etc. Instead of spending money I don't have, clicking and viewing websites that only lead me to lustful and adulterous fantasies, God works to reshape our thoughts to be wise stewards of what he has given us, to maintain the sexual purity that he has renewed us in. It hurts to be reformed, reshaped, repentant. Do we still like this picture of being the clay and God the Potter?

The clay is worked on by the potter. This is maybe where we throw up another objection. Are you okay being out of control on who you are, what you will become? Do you trust God when he takes something away from you, when he takes a loved one out of your life, when you move to a different area, lose your job? Or would you prefer that we switch the analogy now to something like the barber and your hair, that I tell the barber how to cut my hair, I give him guidelines on what he can and cannot do, that I pick the design and style? Because the clay does not get to tell the potter what to do, how the potter should shape them, what they should look like in the end. If God is the Potter, we are not in control. It scares us to be at the mercy of someone else.

But that's just it. In this analogy of the potter and the clay, think of whose mercy you are at. You are at the mercy of God. You are at the mercy of the one who gave up his one and only Son so that he could reform and reshape you into perfection, clothe you with Christ's perfect life, fix you with Christ's substitutionary death. God the Master Potter reforms you and reshapes you so that you prosper, so that you are perfect, so that you are saved from destruction. He is the God who wants this for you. So, when he reforms and reshapes us as seems best to him, you and I are being reformed and reshaped by someone who is perfect and who only turns out perfect products. Yes, it hurts. Yes, it takes me out of control of my life and my eternal life. But this is for my good. God never wants the death of the wicked or the damnation and eternal separation of the one marred with sin. This is why he got his hands dirty. This is why he came to save you and me.

The sad fact is that if we want to, we can remain stubborn, marred clay. If we continue in evil and in disobedience to God, he will reconsider the good he had intended for us, just like he did with the Israelites. Century after century the Jews defiantly sinned against God. Time and time again, the Potter had mercy on them and refrained from uprooting them, tearing them down, and destroying them. His constant calls for repentance, for reformation, they went unheeded. So, he calls them to repentance here through Jeremiah: "Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, 'This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.'" (verse 11)

Their response? "It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; we will all follow the stubbornness of our evil hearts." (verse 12) They wanted to stay marred in sin; they planned on it. And the Lord did reconsider the good he had planned for them. The Israelites were uprooted, torn down, and destroyed. Yet he still got his hands dirty by sending his Son to take away their sins as well as ours.

God, that Great Potter, is asking you today, "Will you turn from your evil ways? Will you repent? Will you be reformed and reshaped by me and my hands?" What is your answer? Lord, we surrender ourselves to your ways, not ours. Reform us. Reshape us. We will want our way. So, change us. Mold us as you see fit. Clothe us with Christ's perfection, that perfection that you got your hands dirty to give us. Help us to deny our sinful selves, those temptations that want us to wander away from you. If you have to press us down, pinch us, even smack us, so be it. Remind us that you do this out of mercy and love for us as you reform and reshape us to your perfection. Give us trust in your hands, Lord. Rescue us from being marred clay. Make us your masterpiece. Amen.