

God as the Merciful Potter – Part 1 of 2<sup>1</sup>  
September 11, 2012, Kichijouji Bible Study Meeting  
Gotthold Beck

Jeremiah 18:1 The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying,  
18:2 Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear my words.  
18:3 Then I went down to the potter's house, and, look, he wrought a work on the wheels.  
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.  
18:5 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying,  
18:6 Oh house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? says the Lord. Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in mine hand, Oh house of Israel.

Jeremiah  
29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.

Romans  
9:19 You wilt say then to me. Why does he yet find fault? For who has resisted his will?  
9:20 Nay but, Oh man, who are you that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it. Why has you made me thus?  
9:21 has not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel to honour, and another to dishonour?  
9:22 What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction:  
9:23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had before prepared to glory,

A day before yesterday we looked at these same verses. The subject of that day was 'God as the potter full of compassion'. We tried to clarify what the Lord wanted to say through Jeremiah. I would guess that 29:11 is a verse favored by many people.

Whenever we can't help but wonder what the intentions of the Lord are, why the Lord allows certain things to happen, we can look to verse 11 for the answer:

Jeremiah  
29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of

evil, to give you an expected end.

What a wonderful call from the Lord! I want to discuss with you two points today.

Firstly, I would like to talk about the plan of the Lord God to give us his everlasting blessing.

Secondly, I want to talk about the conditions required for His plan of blessing to be accomplished.

First, let's think about the plan God has laid out for us, that of His everlasting blessings. We can find it in verse 4, which we just read.

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.

Jeremiah is talking about making a vessel from clay, which symbolizes humans. The clay must be shaped into vessels that satisfy the will of the Lord, into vessels that please the Lord.

The clay is useless unless it is made into vessels that satisfy the potter. Same as the clay, if we cannot be formed into the image of Jesus, our Father God as the potter will never be pleased. This purpose of the Lord is explained in the famous verse 29, Chapter 8 of Romans:

Romans  
8:29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

The Lord God works on us with clear intentions. He seeks to transform all of us into the image of His Son, the Lord Jesus. Jeremiah 18:4 tells us that there are three kinds of vessels: the failed vessels, other vessels and the good vessels that were made according to the intentions of the Lord.

First of all, I would like to talk about the failed vessels. In the first part of the verse, the clay was ruined in the potter's hands while he was shaping it into a vessel. If we only look at this part, it seems as if there is no hope left for the clay, that it is in a situation of total desperation. My life was ruined. My life totally failed just like a broken vessel.

There is no hope in my life. The failed vessel represents such situations. It is so miserable. As we look back on our past, we all have a lot of memories of painful days, memories that are filled with remorse and

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make us suffer from guilty consciences.

Secondly, it also talks about 'other vessels'. The Lord remade the failed vessel into another vessel. It is said that the Lord God gave new shape to the vessel. You might understand it that He made new vessels to fulfill his intentions. He chose some other people to serve Him. I was not used because I was useless to the Lord. The Lord is not interested in me, but he is interested in someone else. If you think this way, it is bad. It is wrong.

The third kind of vessel is the good vessel, which was made exactly how the potter wanted. The potter recreated his old vessel into the new vessel according to his intentions. The Lord always does best, and thus the vessel that was made as the Lord wanted it to be must be the best one. The Lord can take the clay from any failed vessel and remake it into a new vessel according to His will. If the Lord, who can make the best vessel from any kind of clay, tells us that we are good and He is pleased with us, we will be filled with hope and we can keep walking ahead. No matter what kind of clay we are made from, even if we are totally failed clay, we will overcome through the blessing of the Lord. The love of the Lord will win a victory over any problems we have.

And, when everything is done, the Lord God will say, 'It is good'.

When the Lord created the first man, Adam, He said it was very good. He did not say 'not bad'; He said it was very good. God is so perfect that he could not create imperfect beings, humans. However, this first man Adam, and all his descendants, failed themselves because of their sins and arrogance; they failed so badly that they had no hope to be recovered. Paul wrote in the epistle to Romans,

#### Romans

5:12 Therefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin. and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

However, the Lord God's everlasting plan is to save humans and it will never be affected by sins. The Lord God did not think of fixing humans covered with sin; rather, He attempted to recreate them into totally new vessels. This new vessel was, of course, Jesus.

It was Jesus Himself. Jesus, the leader of the new creation. What does this tell us? It implies that the Lord God will never be satisfied with our nature as the failed vessels. The Lord God does not merely clean up failed vessels covered with sin and make them look better. The failed vessels have to be replaced with new and good ones. Paul explains this fact in the second epistle

to the Corinthians. We should think of this verse every day.

#### 2Corinthians

5:21 For he has made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin. that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Jesus was made to be sin. Sin itself. It is written so. If we use the allegory from Jeremiah we just learned, Jesus was crushed in the hands of the potter, pinched in his fingers and finally died as the 'failed vessel'; however, he was eventually recreated into the new vessel. Soon after Jesus died, He resurrected along with the totally recreated new human race.

#### Jeremiah

18:5 Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying,  
18:6 Oh house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? says the Lord.

The answer to this question of the Lord was provided when Jesus was created as the new vessel. Isn't it a most wonderful encounter for us?

There are three conditions for us to be transformed into vessels that meet the intentions of the Lord God, that is to say, to be the image of Jesus:  
Firstly, the clay must obey the potter.  
Secondly, there has to be a pottery wheel.  
Thirdly, the nature of the potter matters.

All of three conditions have to be met. Let's look at each condition now.

Firstly, the clay must obey the potter. The clay is chosen by the potter; clay does not choose its crafter. When the potter chooses the clay, he knows that the clay itself has no value as is. The Lord does not inquire too deep into our nature, knowing that we are valueless anyway. Still, he tries to recreate useless and helpless humans like us into the vessels of blessing.

The Lord chose us knowing how miserable we are. As we come to depend on the Lord more and more, we become disappointed in ourselves because we realize that there is nothing good inside us. But fortunately, our Lord God chose us knowing we are so helpless; thus, the Lord will never be disappointed by us.

We are encouraged when we realize that we are chosen by the Lord. However, sometimes the clay chosen is too hard and unusable by the potter. It is not such an easy thing to walk the way that meets the intentions of the Lord. Even Jeremiah the prophet was anguished because he was not sure whether he was truly following the will of the Lord. He kept pleading to

the Lord.

In other cases, the clay is too soft and the potter cannot form anything from it. The potter will try to make a vessel from the clay, but some clay is so weak that it cannot be formed into a vessel. Many of the brothers and sisters who were once accepted as children of God are still too inconsistent, unstable and cowardly. These people easily get blown away, just like a flower in the wind, and they always choose the easiest path to walk.

We are, in fact, the miserable and weak clay. However, to be changed to the image of Jesus, we have to obey the Lord. Are we truly obedient to the Lord? Do we sincerely obey the Lord so that the Lord can handle us as He wants?

Do we have ears to hear? For us to become vessels that fulfill the intentions of the Lord, in other words, to be transformed to the image of Jesus, the son of God, there are some conditions. The clay has to obey the potter.

A pottery wheel is necessary to fulfill the second condition. What is the pottery wheel in our lives? It is the circumstances we have to live in everyday. We learn spiritual lessons from listening to the words of the Bible. We read the words of the Lord and have intimate communion with Him when we are alone at home. However, we will only be changed to the image of the Lord through pain and suffering in our daily lives.



If the clay is not on the pottery wheel firmly, it cannot be formed into a good vessel. Although we are inspired by the Lord and are given the opportunity to understand the intentions of the Lord when we learn from the Bible, to truly be changed to the image of Jesus, we have to be placed at the center of the pottery wheel, which is represented by the experiences in our daily lives. The pottery wheel never stops but it is constantly revolving. If the pottery wheel does not revolve, even the best potter cannot create any vessels.

Sometimes the potter kneads the clay too strongly and the clay wants to get away from the pottery wheel. When Jeremiah visited the house of the potter, he witnessed that the same person was kneading the clay and revolving the pottery wheel at the same time. When we try to escape from the pottery wheel, we are actually trying to get away from the hands of the Lord.

The Lord Himself shows us the way at every corner in our daily lives. Let's not forget that it is not the pottery wheel but the potter, the hand of the Lord, that crushes us and makes us suffer. All troubles and sufferings are prepared for us by the Lord to transform us into the image of the Son.

We see many different kinds of pottery wheels. However, let us not question the intentions of the Lord and not attempt to change our environment to our own will. The Lord God will lead us at the best time toward the best direction. There is a very important part in the Hebrews:

#### Hebrew

12:5 And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to children. My son, despise not you the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of him:

12:6 For whom the Lord loves he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives.

There are three conditions for us to be the vessels that the Lord intended, that is to say, to be the image of Jesus.

As I just mentioned, the clay has to obey the potter and there has to be the pottery wheel. Finally, the nature of the potter is also very important.

Who is the potter? He is not human. Humans would simply discard all failed vessels. This potter is the Lord God Himself. Humans would never think of recreating new vessels from the failed ones. They would just give up the spoiled clay because they wouldn't be able to create the vessel they wanted.

However, the true Lord God in the Bible is not like a

human. Every day we should hope to encounter this Lord. On the day we finally meet this Lord, we will look up to His face filled with blessing and wisdom, smiling the smile of victory.

The God in the Bible will make all failed vessels turn around. The Lord God we believe in has a plan which nothing can change.

The Lord never starts what He cannot finish. The Lord has all the wisdom, patience, blessing, love and power for that. Our Lord does not know disappointment. He is the God of hope. We are the clay held in His hands.

The Lord has chosen us as the clay that will be transformed into the most satisfying vessels, that is to say, to the same image as Jesus. This is the true and only intention of the Lord. He will never be satisfied with anything else. We can use a chipped vessel and not consider it as failed.

We can fill that crack with putty to hide it or paint the vessel to make it look better. Humans would do so. However, the Lord won't. The Lord will never be satisfied unless it is altered to exactly the same image as Jesus, which He wants. Just filling in the crack with paste or painting the peeled surface will never satisfy the Lord.

Jeremiah

18:6 Oh house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? says the Lord. Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in mine hand, Oh house of Israel.

Can't I deal with you like this potter? Can't I transform you into the image of the Son, the Lord Jesus?

Jeremiah

32:27 Look. I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. is there any thing too hard for me?

This is the question the Lord keeps asking us. How do we answer? Only those who have no faith will distrust the almightiness of the Lord. Jeremiah came out to the world to spread the words of the Lord and he met the believers. They belonged to people of the Lord, but they were, in fact, faithless. Let's look at the words they said.

Jeremiah

18:12 And they said. There is no hope. but we will walk after our own devices, and we will every one do the imagination of his evil heart.

In other words, they said, "God, you need to accept what we are now" and they refused to be reshaped as clay in the hands of the Lord at His will. When people

try to serve the Lord with their innate human nature and capacity, they are acting in the same way as these people.

No matter how faithful and of good will we are, the Lord cannot use us for His purposes as long as we are what we were when we were born, and we belong to the flesh. What does the Lord Jesus need to recreate our failed and miserable nature?

Needless to say, it is the cross. The Lord, as the potter with limitless love and patience, holds us tight in His hands just like the clay placed on the pottery wheel. Because the Lord holds our lives in his hands with all His strength and He intervenes at every corner of our daily lives, it may be painful sometimes.

No matter how painful our lives are, we should maintain the belief; the belief that John the Baptist had when he said the Lord has to be increased, and I have to be decreased. We always have to keep these words in our hearts when we face the Lord.

Psalms

81:10 I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt. open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

The Lord wanted to fill their mouths. However, the people of Israel in those times did not appreciate what the Lord did. They refused Him.

Psalms

81:11 But my people would not hearken to my voice. and Israel would none of me.

81:12 So I gave them up to their own hearts' lust. and they walked in their own counsels.

81:13 Oh that my people had hearkened to me, and Israel had walked in my ways!

81:14 I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries.

End