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# Campbell Chapel

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Sermon by Bob Bradley



# The Potter and the Clay

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Bob Bradley

I want to talk this evening from the book of Jeremiah 18. It is a story about Jeremiah being instructed by Almighty God to go down to the potter's house. He was going to down to the potter's house and God was going to give him a message. We want to read that and I know we won't have time to get through all of this.

**Jeremiah 18:1** The word which came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying,

**Jeremiah 18:2** Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words.

**Jeremiah 18:3** Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels.

**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 18:5** Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

**Jeremiah 18:6** O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay *is* in the potter's hand, so *are* ye in mine hand, O house of Israel.

**Jeremiah 18:7** *At what* instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy *it*;

**Jeremiah 18:8** If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.

**Jeremiah 18:9** And *at what* instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant *it*;

**Jeremiah 18:10** If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them.

**Jeremiah 18:11** Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.

**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.

Jeremiah is speaking to Israel, Judah, the city of Jerusalem. We know this is happening before Nebuchadnezzar comes. God has spoken to Jeremiah and told him what is going to happen, if you read chapter 26—I believe it is—He has already told him that they were going to go into captivity and they were going to be there for 70 years.

Before that time gets here, Jeremiah is warning people. Jeremiah has got a message. God has given him a message. The Bible says here that He speaks to Jeremiah and

says, "Hey, Jeremiah I want you to go down to the potter's house." Do you know what Jeremiah does? He gets up and goes.

That is a good thing for you and me. When God speaks unto us, and God bid us to go somewhere and to do something, do you know what God has got? God has a plan. He is going to do something good for us. He is going to show us some things.

One thing before I go too far here, that I want to say. In my lifetime, God has asked me and directed me to do many things. He has given me messages to preach. Most of them—I told this to someone yesterday—I don't know that I have ever left church and went home and felt like I did a good job. Even be that as it may, when God gives the message, or instruction, or whatever it is; then we go and do that, do you know what has never happened to me? I have not been put in jail for it. Have you? Something that God has asked you to do; have you ever got put in jail? No. I've been in jail, but not for preaching gospel.

Here is what happens. Do you know what Jeremiah did? Jeremiah preached the message. Do you know what the next thing that happens to him? They put him in jail. They set up a campaign to get rid of him. They slander him. They beat on him with tongues this long. Do you know what they did? They put him jail. Not only that but also, king Jehoiakim—if I pronounce his name right—do you know what he did? He took Jeremiah's scrolls and Jeremiah's messages and Jeremiah's sermons that came from Almighty God, do you know what he did with them? He put them in a pile and burned them. Do you know why? He thought he could get rid of God's message. He is going to get rid of God's plan but he can't do that.

The Bible says that Jeremiah goes down to the potter's house. He goes down to the potter's house. If you know anything about clay, and you know anything about pottery; pottery is made out of clay.

Years ago, we used to mine clay. You could look at some of this stuff and it all looked the same but it was very different. We had one old guy; he was probably 90 years old, and I would go up there and cover a half an acre or acre. He would go out there and pick him up a piece of it and stick it in his mouth. I thought what is this old guy doing? That is how he would tell whether it was good clay or bad clay, whether it had sand in it or not, or whether it had rocks in it or not.

Anyway, clay you take and put it on a wheel; these guys did back then. They made all kinds of pottery. They made their bowls, pitchers, glasses, all kinds of things they used to cook in and used in their houses and homes and things like that. They made it. A potter would make it. He would put it on a wheel. He would sit here and he would peddle this thing with his feet. This wheel would turn around up here. He would take a big glob of this clay and stick on there. He would put his hand in a little water over here. Listen. If you don't put some water on your hands, if you don't get some water on the clay; you can't do much with it. It just balls up.

In my life, if I don't get some water from heaven sometimes, I get all balled up.

Here is what happens. He sits there and turns this wheel. Clay is—for the most part—

is dry. Clay is not worth anything to amount to anything. You can go buy a ton of clay for 6 or 8 bucks. Amen! Just in that form it isn't worth anything. Really. It is just not worth anything. However, in the hands of the potter, it becomes magnificent.

I was going to bring a picture and I forgot it. A pitcher had been made by someone spinning. They made this thing and it is so pretty. It is useful. It is something that is useful. This is what the potter would do. He would take the clay and put it on the wheel. He would sit here and he would pedal. As this thing turned, he would take his hands and he would shape whatever he was shaping.

Jeremiah goes down here and as the potter is working here, something happens. Something happens here. Probably there is something in the clay that is just not exactly suiting him. How he was making it doesn't suit him. Do you know what he does? He takes the clay and picks it up off of there, wads it up and he slams it back on there again, and starts all over.

Sometimes in life—listen—sometimes in life that is what God has to do with me. Sometimes in life, do you know what happens? I don't want to be submissive to God.

The clay there, that clay, in the potter's hand was always submissive. The clay did not get up and tell the potter, "Hey, I don't like what you are making me." We want to do that to God sometimes. We want to tell God, "Hey, God I don't know what you are doing in my life."

Here is what happens. He is there. He is watching it. The potter sees something that is in the clay. Maybe it is a little piece of a rock, a speck, as he is turning this thing. It is not coming up just exactly what he wants it so he takes it and he spots it down and starts all over.

He tells Jeremiah "Can I do the same thing with the house of Israel? They are in my hands. They are the clay and I'm the sovereign God. I am the potter. I am the One that is in control. I am the One that brought this nation from Egypt and made them a nation in one day. I am the One that did that. I am the One that gave them this city and this land and everything that is here. I have done that. They are in my hands. Jeremiah, I can do that. I can do that. I am sovereign. They belong to me and I can do the same thing with this nation."

Listen folks there is a lesson here for you and me. When we get saved, God puts us on the wheel. He starts turning the wheel. He starts turning the wheel. As the potter turns the wheel, he might find a piece of rock or two or find something that is not exactly right. Do you know what he will do as he is turning it? He will pick it out and throw it away. He will pick out and throw it aside. As God turns the wheel in my life, there are sometimes things that He needs to get out and things that He needs to throw away. There are some things that are going to take away from the vessel He is working on.

Listen. Here is the thought I had today. I never had this before. When that potter starts spinning the wheel before he ever lays his hands on the clay, he knows what he is going to do. He knows what he is going to make. He knows how he needs to move his hands. He knows how he needs to hold his fingers. He knows what he is doing before he ever gets started on working on that particular piece of clay. He knows what he is doing and he knows what he is going to make. He has a picture in his mind. Amen!

I thought about Kim today. She makes quilts and different things. Before she ever starts, I'm sure that she gets a picture in her mind that when she starts sewing pieces together, she is not doing it randomly. She has a picture in her mind that when she gets all of this sewn together, it is going to be a coat or quilt or whatever it is. It is all going to work.

God is the same way in my life and in your life. As He turns the wheel, on my life, and on your life; things are not always going to be good. Sometimes we may not like what God is making out of us. Sometimes there may be adversaries. Sometimes there are going to be problems and hardships and things like that. God is still yet turning the wheel. God has a plan in His mind and His heart as to what He is going to make out of us. He is going to make something out of us that is going to bring glory to Him. God is just not doing this because He doesn't have anything else to do. He is working on me and you because He loves us. He is working on me and you to make us into something that will bring glory to His name. Doesn't that excite you? It should. We are just the clay. We aren't worth anything. However, in the hands of an all-knowing, all-powerful potter, we can become something great. Everybody here can become something great. God has a plan. Do you know what He wants to do? He wants to build us and shape us, make us, and form us into something that will bring glory to Him. Does everybody agree with that? You have potential. Everybody here has potential. We don't want to admit it. If we admit we have potential then we may have to actually do something. You know. We have potential and you can do it; don't ever let anyone tell you that you can't do it.

I never was much on that. If someone told me I couldn't climb a tree, I usually climbed it. Or I couldn't do this or that or whatever; I usually tried it. It is the same thing in our Christian lives. God is working on me and you, folks. We have issues. The clay isn't always what it should be. There is going to be bumps as he is turning the wheel. He is going to have some things out sometimes and throw them away. He is going to have to do that. However, do you what He is not going to do? He is not going to stop turning the wheel. We are saved. We are born again. He is not going to stop turning the wheel. He is going to continue to turn it and take the stuff out of the clay. Us, we are just dirt. That is all we are. We came from the dust. That is all we are. As He turns the wheel, He is working on us. Things that we need out of our lives that when we submit to Him, just like that clay does. The clay can't jump up and say, "Hey, I don't like it." The clay can't jump up and say, "I like that rock. I like that piece of rough stuff." Do you know what the clay is? The clay is totally submissive unto the potter. That is who you and I need to be.

Whatever God is working out in my life, first of all, I know that I am saved. I know that I have been born again. I know I am living in the will of God. Know that first, then turn the rest of it over to Almighty God. Lord, here it is. You work it out. You take care of it. I will stay on the wheel. Whatever it takes. Whatever needs to come out of my life, whatever it is to make me a better Christian; then thank God, take it away so that I can bring glory to your name.

Do you know what I know about God? He is righteous. He is holy. My friend, He is not like this world. Do you know what God will do? God will get rid of some stuff in my life that I don't need and it will make me a better person. He will do that same thing for you.

When I say that do you know what people thinks? They get scared. God's going to take this away. God is going to take that away. Come on guys. God loves us. He loves us. He died for us on a cross. He is working on our lives every day. If God says I don't need it then I don't need it. amen!

He works. He twists. He turns. I have two more hours on this message but I only have three minutes.

Here is what happens. There is a lesson here. I learned some things in this that I never saw in my life. I told Donnie this. We were having lunch the other day, talking. I thank God for the things that He can teach us. There are so many things that I have missed in life. There are so many things that as I read the Bible and I read it again, and again; and there are people here that has probably read the Bible 10 times more than I have. But things I have just missed. Things I did not see. Things I did not know was there. As I read this story today, or yesterday, or whenever; I saw some things here that I don't want you to forget. There are some laws that God has. Just like He said here about the nation of Israel. He says, if I want to it is my business. If I say I am going to bless a nation over here, whoever they are, I am going to raise them up. It doesn't make any difference. I am God. I can do whatever I want to. If I tell them that if they obey me then I am going to bless them. God can do that. He is God. If that same nation, that I have raised up and I told them that if they would live right and be obedient to me I would bless them. Then if they turned around and sinned—do you know what God says? I am not going to bless them because I am God.

There is a law. Listen. There is a law of free will. When God made me and you and mankind, He placed within us the law of free will. God did not make robots. You men, you are not robots. We make decisions. We make decisions to worship Him, or we make decisions not to worship Him. The blessings of God depend upon me worshiping Him. Amen! Not only that but if you read the rest of the story; there is a law of condemnation and judgment. That is in this story. The law of condemnation and judgment.

God says, I have raised you up. I have blessed you. If you live right and do right and you are doing what you need to be doing; then I am going to bless you, but if you don't then there is condemnation, and there is judgment.

Get this. As you read this story, do you know what you are going to find out? There are some words in here, tremendous words. The condemnation, if we live all of our lives here in rejection of God, the condemnation doesn't stop at the grave. Nor does the punishment stop at the grave. Men today, reject God and God punishes, and God condemns. All kinds of issues come along in life. That doesn't stop if I die rejecting God. The condemnation and the punishment go on for eternity. Truth! That is the book. Isn't it. That is the law of condemnation and judgment.

This law is this one. The law of repentance and salvation. God says here, "Hey, if a nation here, whoever they are if they are doing wrong, if they repent; do you know what He said He would do? If a nation had been evil and doing evil. If they will repent and turn to me and do right; then do you know what He said I will do? "I will forgive them. I will turn from the evil that I purposed to do unto them because of their sin." Do you know what that is? That is the law of repentance—doing an about face—and the law of

salvation.

Get this. This ought to bless your socks off. The law of repentance, if I have experienced repentance today, and I'm saved today, living in the will of God today, and living in the will of God tomorrow, and the next day, and the next week...and so forth; then the law of salvation will not stop at the grave. Amen! We have eternal life. We have an eternal life. That is a law. That is something that is forever settled in heaven. If you are saved today, living in the will of God today, you followed the Lord down through your life; you never ever have to worry about being lost. Amen!

That scares some of us Baptists. I get a few letters from time to time saying I don't know what I am talking about. When I read some of those letters, most of the time, people won't sign them. When I read letters like that I know that they know nothing about salvation. They know nothing about the God of heaven. They have lived all of their lives like God has them on a string, holding them over a lake of fire just waiting for the first time they mess up to cut the string.

Listen. Salvation is better than that. The God of heaven is better than that. The salvation He brings, eternal life is better than that. I'm not living like that. You don't need to live like that. I'm not saying we are perfect. I'm not saying we have it all worked out. However, you can go to bed tonight knowing you are saved and if you die before morning, you don't have to worry about going to the lake of fire. You can live that way and you can go to bed that way tonight. Amen! If you can't, you need to find a place to pray. That is truth.

God loves us. Jesus died for us. He died for the nation of Israel, a nation that He called and made a nation.

He did so much for them but yet they turned their backs on Him. God told Jeremiah about the message and what he needed to preach. Do you know what he said? "Jeremiah, I will tell up front you are wasting your time. I want to go tell them. I want you to go preach to them, but they are not going to listen to you, Jeremiah. They are going to go their own way. They are going to do their own thing. Jeremiah it is your job to go warn them."

I have family, you have family, we have people we live beside of and work around that are not going to hear us, but there are some out there that will hear us. Do you know what we need to be doing? We need to be searching for them, looking for them, trying to find those that wants to go to heaven. Whether they hear us, or whether they don't hear us; that doesn't give us an excuse to quit. Amen!

God is speaking. God is calling. Come.

One thought before I turn this off. He put the clay on the wheel. He worked on it. he got it just exactly like he needed it. However, at that point it was absolutely worth nothing. Do you know what it had to do? It had to go through the fire. He had to go through the fire. It had to be in the fire before it was ever any use. Amen!

Listen. There is going to be some fire going on but aren't you glad that He loves us?

Come and pray—