

"HE MADE IT AGAIN"

"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 18:4.

Jeremiah had been a very faithful servant of God. For years he had been preaching a message of love and of righteousness. He had done his best to awaken the consciences of the people and to show them God's way. To him it seemed that his strenuous efforts had hardened their hearts instead of softening them, and blinded their eyes instead of opening them. The lives of the people were marred by mistakes, weaknesses, failures, and sins. Their delinquencies, lapses, and failures cut Jeremiah deeply.

Jeremiah was pretty much disappointed, depressed, and despondent over Israel. To him it seemed that for the nation there was nothing left but hopeless ruin. He felt that his labors had been in vain. He concluded that he was a protest and nothing more. He felt like someone who was trying to rescue a drowning man, but in reality was only thrusting him deeper into the water. He wondered if Israel was going to be cast aside on the rubbish heap, as if the nation could not be of any further use to God, against whose will she had rebelled. Thinking that God had done everything possible for the nation, and believing that destruction was inevitable, Jeremiah was ready to give up and quit.

What a pitiful sight it is to see a strong man lose heart and hope! In the midst of his discouragement and despondency, and while the prophet was brooding over the failures of his people, God told him to go down to the potter's house. This command came to Jeremiah in the most trying phase of his ministry and when he was in special need of enlightenment and encouragement. God wanted to show him that his despondency was not justified. Although the people had refused to become what they might have been, and what God wanted them to be, still they might become something. There is never a time when men should lose hope. Although people may be rebellious against the will of God, broken by adversity and marred by sin, still, under God, there is hope.

In obedience to the command of God, Jeremiah started immediately toward the house of the potter. It is easy to visualize him in his loose-flowing robes walking slowly and softly out of the temple and toward the Eastern Gate. As he wandered down the slopes into the Valley of Hinnom, with the voice of God directing his steps, he thought of how different the course of Israel and the flow of her national life would have been if only God's will had been done. God had chosen the Israelites to be a light to the Gentiles, but, alas! they were darkness. In their unwise choice and evil deeds they had foiled the divine plan and frustrated the divine purpose. It was exceedingly difficult for Jeremiah to understand how the wise and gracious purpose of God could possibly be accomplished through a people who so consistently ignored His purpose and rebelled against His will.

Presently Jeremiah arrived at the establishment of the potter, and found him faithfully engaged in his daily work. This incident is a splendid reminder that ordinary scenes and secular work may be eloquent with divine teaching to any whose hearts are ready to receive it. As the prophet gazed intently upon this industrious workman, it seems to me that he must have noted at least four things.

I. A Person.

Having entered this ancient manufacturing establishment, which was one of the most interesting places in the East, Jeremiah observed this intelligent and capable workman sitting on the ground, with a mass of clay near him, a basin of water by his side, and a potter's wheel in front of him. He saw him take a lump of clay, moisten it, knead it with his hands, and then place it on the wheel which revolved at the pressure of his foot on the treadle. He observed his nimble fingers manipulating the clay on the revolving wheel. The clay soon began to take the shape of a useful vessel,

in keeping with the purpose and design of the potter. He was very careful to make the clay attain to his ideal for it. He was satisfied only when he had put his best into it, and brought out of the clay its highest possibilities.

Jeremiah saw in the molding of the clay by the potter a symbol of God's dealings with men. The potter represents God. He is an illustration of the interest, the attention, and the power of God. This incident teaches us the sovereignty of God. As we behold the potter at his work, we are certainly impressed with the right of the potter over the clay. Men are under the power of God. He is not a heartless despot, but He is gracious and rules with purposes of love for the good of His creatures. As the clay, on the wheel, was shaped by the potter's hand according to the will of the potter, so this world and all that is in it are shaped on the wheel of time by the hand of the infinite God.

There is a Divinity
That shapes our lives
Rough hew them as we may.

How glad I am that an all-wise, all-good, and all-powerful God presides over this universe. He has placed you and me on the wheel of His purpose, and through these years He has been trying to make of us vessels of honor for His use. If we are not vessels of honor, it is because we have not yielded to the skill of His wonderful fingers.

II. A Plan.

As Jeremiah closely observed the potter at his task, he realized that he was working with a certain plan or design in his mind. Even though the pattern was invisible to the onlooker, it was none the less real and definite. In its original state the clay was not attractive, but when the hands of the potter touched it, and the thought of the potter was worked out in it and through it, then there was a real and a great transformation.

If a potter works according to plans, surely we can expect as much of God. If the potter plans every vessel that he makes, even so the Divine Potter plans every human life. This is taught repeatedly in the Scriptures. God has a plan for every life. He has a pattern for every character, and an ideal for every soul. He does not do anything without a plan or a purpose. He has a plan for your life and mine, as certainly as He had one for Moses, for David, for Paul, for Spurgeon, for Carey, for Judson, and for Livingstone. There is some definite, beautiful, and desirable ideal which he wants each of us to realize. Each life is going to be happy, successful, and useful in proportion as it fulfills the plan God has for it. Have you discovered God's plan for your life? It is certainly the height of wisdom to do so. Things cannot go well in any life that is outside the circle of God's will.

Before the potter shaped his vessel, he had the plan for it in his mind. When he took the clay and put it on the wheel and held his hand upon it as the wheel revolved, he wrought by a plan. Before a building is erected, the plan for it is in the mind of the builder. Before the artist touches the canvas with his brush, the picture is painted on the delicate walls of his imagination. Before the poet pens his inspiring lines, the thought is conceived in the sanctuary of his soul. Before the music is set in sharps and flats, the musician hears the song in the deepest recesses of his spirit. Before the sculptor lifts his mallet and chisel on the shapeless marble, the vision rises clearly and lovely in his illumined mind.

Before we were born into this world, God had a plan for each of our lives. Therefore, let us seek to find His plan for our lives, and strive to conform to it with unwavering fidelity. Not knowing what He is getting us ready for, let us earnestly pray, "Father, prepare us for what Thou art preparing for us." Let us place more emphasis on personal responsibility. We shall do well to emulate Jonathan Edwards who said, "Resolved,

first, that every man should live always at his highest and best for God. Resolved, second, whether any other man in the world strives to do so or not, I will, so help me God."

III. A Probability.

It was quite obvious to Jeremiah that the potter took every precaution against marring the vessel in the making. The potter concentrated on fashioning the clay into a useful vessel. He gave the clay every possible chance to become the vessel of his choice. Then, as the vessel neared completion, the potter paused in his work and examined it. He discovered that the vessel was marred. Thus, something had thwarted his plan and frustrated his purpose. The vessel was not marred through the lack of skill on the part of the potter, but because there was some stubborn, resisting quality in the clay that would not yield to the deftness of the potter's hand.

This defect in the clay might have been produced by any one of a number of things. The clay might have had an air-pocket, or a bubble of air, in it, and that would have caused the side of the vessel to puff out. The clay might have been too stiff. The clay might have been lacking in consistency. Or, the clay might have had a stone concealed in it, and that would have caused a blemish on the vessel.

Since the clay represents man, I am confident that you have caught the idea. Perhaps there is a stone concealed in your life, some sin that has become a part of your very nature, and it is marring and ruining your life. Sin always mars the vessel, thwarts the purposes of God, and frustrates His grace in the life.

It is quite probable that God's plan for your life will be marred by you. One shudders at the very thought that a frail human being can, and often does, mar the plan of God. The very weakest of us may thwart His purposes for our lives if we so desire. Refusal to do the will of God is what is wrong with us and with our world. And any who defy His will always make a mess out of life. It is the highest dignity of life, as well as the greatest danger in life, that we can say "No" to God, and thus mar His plan for our lives. Have you refused to do some piece of work which He has given you? Did you serve Christ until some sin came into your life, and you were marred in the hand of the Potter? Remember that sin is the only thing that mars the vessel of human personality. Sin always mars and defiles. Sin darkens the understanding, perverts the will, sears the conscience, changes the affections, and hurls reason from its lofty throne. Sin will leave its mark upon a nation, upon a church, upon a family, or upon an individual.

1. Nations mar the plan of the Divine Potter.

- (1) Israel did it.
- (2) Egypt did it.
- (3) Assyria did it.

These proud and recalcitrant nations defied the will of God and came to disaster, defeat, and doom.

(4) Our nation is doing it.

Reverent obedience to the Holy Law of God made this nation great. Our ancestors were men and women of prayer. They believed the Bible and lived by it. They magnified obedience to God. They magnified the church. This nation became great because of its loyalty to God. But America has been getting proud, selfish, self-willed, and rebellious. Should it keep on trying to get along without God, it, too, will sink down to sleep in the cemetery of defeated nations. Christianity is the determining factor of any civilization or nation.

2. Churches mar the plan of the Divine Potter.

The seven churches of Asia once radiated a glorious light which piloted the people into the right way. Then they became self-centered and their candlesticks were removed from them. Any church that presumes to defy Christ's plan is doomed. The only safe thing for any church to do is to obey Christ.

3. Families mar the plan of the Divine Potter.

Many families that were great and strong are now broken, scattered, and going from bad to worse. When selfishness dominates a family it is doomed to decay. Selfishness means the downfall of its possessor, whether it be a nation, a church, a family, or an individual.

4. Individuals mar the plan of the Divine Potter.

(1) Adam did it.

He thereby brought ruin and disaster upon the human race.

(2) David did it.

His triple transgression of adultery, murder, and hypocrisy wrote a terribly dark chapter in an otherwise noble life record.

(3) Samson did it.

(4) Saul did it.

(5) Simon Peter did it.

(6) John Mark did it.

(7) Many of our acquaintances have done it.

(8) We have done it.

All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God. God's plan for our lives has been thwarted many times. Some of His children are on the shelf because sin came into their lives. "The vessel was marred in the hand of the potter."

IV. A Possibility.

It is here that we come to the most glorious truth in this passage. It brings us much encouragement. It kindles our hope. It tells us that, even though our lives have been marred by mistakes, failures, and sins, we need not despair. Marred lives can be remade. There is grace sufficient to take the worst backslidden Christian and make him what he should be.

Instead of tossing the clay in the marred vessel aside, the potter started all over again. With the same clay he attempted to make another vessel as seemed best to him. He refused to permit his skill to be baffled. He intended to give his ideal reality, so he worked until the clay took the desired form. And he worked constructively. So does the Divine Potter. God's primary purpose is always to build. If we are to be His fellow-laborers, we must also work constructively. Generally speaking, nothing requires less of heart and less of brains than merely to destroy. A monkey with some matches can destroy more in an hour than hundreds of men can build in a year. "Let everything be done with a view to building." Bring your attitudes, your words, and your efforts to this high test: Will they help to build?

Just as the potter could not make what he wished with the clay, but did the best he could with what he had, so is God trying to do His best for us. If we refuse His best, then He gives us the next best. Even though we have marred His plan, He says, "Do not despair, I will give you another chance." Here is the glorious gospel of Christ, the way of hope, light, and life; the way out of the bogs, thimire, and the night. The statement, "The vessel was marred," gives us the dark picture of sin. The assertion, "He made it again another vessel," is the glorious news of salvation. Some may say, "That man is no good. You are wasting your time on him." Satan gets people to talk like that. God is able to make one into a new creature. He has taken the pieces of broken lives and made them over in many cases.

At the Jabbok ford He took Jacob the supplanter, wrestled with him, made him over, and left him as a prince with God. He took the broken fragments of Jonsh's life and made a different person out of him. When Jonah preached one sermon a whole city turned to God. Simon Peter failed miserably when the testing hour came, but God gave him another chance, and he became the powerful preacher at Pentecost. He has also made us again. Although we have faltered and strayed, He is giving us another chance. However, it must be stated that the marred life will never be what it would have been had it not been marred. But God will take your marred life, if you will turn it over to Him, and make it again, and give you another opportunity.

God has taken the marred lives of millions and made them again, and He wants to do the same for you. Let Him show you what He can do for you and with you. Let Him show you what He can do for you and with you. If you will place your life in His hands, and let Him mold it, make it, bless it, and use it, He will make of it something far beyond anything you could possibly do with it. Hand your life over to Him for all the days to come. Let Him have His way with you. Completely surrender to His loving will now.

And to those who are willing to accept Christ as your Saviour, and are desirous of walking in His way, we cordially invite you to make your public confession of this glorious fact by coming to the front, while we sing the simple hymn, which is also a prayer:

"Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.
Mould me and make me After Thy will,
While I am waiting, Yielded and still.

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Hold o'er my being Absolute sway!
Fill with Thy Spirit Till all shall see
Christ only, always, Living in me!"