

Articles and Sermons :: Marred Vessels! Wayne Cox!

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Marred Vessels

"The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. 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. Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, 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 18:1-6.

The text is found in Jeremiah 18:6. Jeremiah has been called the wailing, lamenting prophet of God because of two things: Israel's sins and her impending doom and judgment. He was easily discouraged and would lose heart and hope when he thought that surely Israel had transgressed until God must of necessity break His covenant with Abraham. He didn't stop to consider that in spite of Israel's sins God would consummate His covenant with Abraham, that the consummation of the covenant with Abraham did not depend upon Israel's obedience or disobedience, but merely upon the faithfulness of God to Himself.

While Jeremiah was in this frame of mind, God sent him down to the potter's house to learn an object lesson there. He watched the potter as he worked a work upon the wheels and made a vessel, and the vessel of clay became marred in the hand of the potter; he made another vessel as it seemed good to him.

Now you will notice that he didn't say that he REMADE or IMPROVED upon the marred vessel, but he made ANOTHER vessel as it seemed good to him to make it." He made a new vessel, and it didn't say that he overhauled the marred vessel, but he made "another as it seemed good to him to make it." And God likens Israel to the clay and He, Himself, to the potter, pointing out in verse 6, "O, house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand O house of Israel"

Now I realize this has to do with Israel as a nation and Israel's future, but God deals with Israel as a nation; and God dealt with nations of old even as He deals with individuals as such. We are, therefore, going to discuss this in the light of what God does FOR, TO and on the BEHALF of individuals.

There are three things suggested in the text, and if you forget everything else I might say I beseech you to remember these three thoughts:

- (1) God's power demonstrated.
- (2) God's love manifested.
- (3) God's purpose defined.

I believe if you will study these particular verses I have read you can readily see that all three points I have mentioned are certainly set forth in these passages.

I. God's Power Demonstrated

God asked the question, or made the statement, that Israel is like clay, and He likens Himself as the potter. As the clay is subject to the molding of the potter's hand, God said, "Even so are ye, O house of Israel, in my hands."

God made man in the beginning for His own honor and glory, but man, like the vessel, became marred in the Potter's hand, or in the hands of his Maker. God made man and placed him in the Garden of Eden with only one restriction: he was not to partake of the fruit of the forbidden tree (Gen. 2:17), the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and said, "The day you partake of it, that day is the day ye shall surely die."

God pointed out to him that he might eat of the fruit of all the garden save this one tree. Man disobeyed God, and brought sin, death and degradation upon himself and his posterity. The "vessel became marred in the hand of the potter." This therefore, teaches that man, the creation of the Potter, became marred in the hand of the Creator, and God had to make him again.

Now, I am not reaching on total, inherent depravity—although I believe it if the Word of God teaches anything in the world it teaches that man is totally depraved in the sight of God. The WHOLE man, the TOTAL man is depraved; and there is nothing good, nothing holy in man. We do not mean to imply that men are as mean as they can become," for 2 Timothy 3:13 says, "Evil men shall wax WORSE and worse, deceiving, and being deceived." What we mean by total and inherent depravity is that the total man is corrupted and polluted by sin. All his faculties are depraved. The "do-gooders" say there is something good about all men and in every man. But the Word of God declares, most emphatically, there is NOTHING good in man. "I know that in me (that is, in the flesh) dwelleth no GOOD thing . . . (Rom. 7:18).

Paul said there was nothing GOOD in the FLESH; nothing but corruption. Man is depraved, cut off from God, without God, and without hope, spiritually DEAD, with a "HEART that is deceitful above all things" (Jer. 17:9). With an IMAGINATION that is evil only continually (Gen. 6:5). He is even DEPRAVED before he is BORN, and he is born in sin (Psalm 51:5). And the mind is enmity against God; so "they that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7, 8).

I will go one step further and say with Paul in Ephesians 2:1 that the man outside of Christ is DEAD, dead, and man's NATURE, his whole BEING, his entire MAKE-UP is corrupt. Paul said, "We were by NATURE the children of wrath, even as others."—Ephesians 2:3.

Man, therefore, the creation, became MARRED in the hand of the Creator, and it takes more than the REFORMATION of life to get him out of that condition. It takes more than joining the CHURCH; it takes more than an empty profession of faith; it takes more than the church ordinances (Baptism and the Lord's Supper). It takes more than the world claims: It takes the POWER of GOD.

If the VESSEL is to be remade, reshaped, remolded it takes the power of God to do it. Men cannot remake, rebuild themselves. Notice that the sweet singer of Israel said in Psalm 100:3, "Know ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are the sheep of his pasture."

David said, "The Lord is God and HE will, HE must do something. HE hath made us, and not WE ourselves."

Men may talk about working their way into the good graces of God: it can't be DONE. Men may say they can pull themselves up by their boot straps, or reform until they are acceptable in the sight of God; but I tell you, it can't be DONE. It takes the power of God. To refashion men's lives, the power of God must be demonstrated. This great verse, Psalm 100:3, says, "It is God that hath made us and not we ourselves." Thus, this is conclusive proof—is it not. "It is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves." He is talking about the spiritual rebirth and not the physical birth.

"It is God that hath made us. . . ."

Jesus said to Nicodemus that a man must be born again, and in John 3:8, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is everyone that is BORN of the SPIRIT." The Spirit of God takes over and regenerates, rebuilds, reshapes, remolds men. They can't do it themselves; it takes the power of God.

Then the third thing under the heading God's Power Demonstrated is the making of a new vessel which God will fashion as it pleases HIM. Not as it pleases MEN now, but as it pleases God.

You know, I get out of patience with God sometimes. Don't you? You might say to me: "Brother Cox, what a thing to say." But I say again that I get out of patience with God sometimes. I pray and pray and God seemingly is not aware that I am praying. I plead with God and He seemingly ignores me. I grow impatient when God seemingly turns a deaf ear toward

rd me. When I get up here in the pulpit and preach my heart out and no one comes, I want to go down into the audience and do the work of the Holy Spirit in compelling them to come. I grow impatient with God when no one is saved, but I am drawn irresistibly to the conclusion that God works and NONE can stay His hand. Everything He does is to please Himself, and it is NOT to please you. God is a jealous God, you remember that.

We are going to see that God doesn't save men to provide them with a fire escape. Although, that is wonderful on our part, but saving men from Hell is secondary, incidental to the real reason men are saved.

Psalm 115:3: "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased."

The man that gets things from God is he who waits upon the Lord. Sometimes I feel like getting out into the audience, but I can't do the work of the Holy Spirit. He works as He pleases; God does as He PLEASES and not to please us. I know this is hard for us to accept, but it is true, nonetheless.

In Ephesians 1:4, 5 we read: "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself according to the good pleasure of his will (what God does is according to His own pleasure and will, and for WHAT?) to the PRAISE of the GLORY of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."

Now I know the carnal mind doesn't accept that; nevertheless, it is according to God's Word. Everything God does is according to His will and pleasure.

II. God's Love Manifested

If God didn't remake, remold, reshape men's lives, His love would not be manifested in what He has done for us. Well, WHAT has He done for us?

In 1 John 4:10, we read: "Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the PROPITIATION for our sins." And in the 9th verse: "In this was MANIFESTED the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."

That is HOW the love of God was manifested toward us. He sent His only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sins. John said that WE didn't love God. The reason God loved us isn't because we loved Him first, and God didn't love us because of any a foreseen love or faith on our part. But God loved us and "gave his only begotten Son to be the propitiation for our sins." Beloved, that is the LOVE of God MANIFESTED toward us. God gave Him to be a sacrifice for us. That vindicated the law and satisfied the justice of God: He gave Him because He LOVED us.

Do you know that the most astounding thing in all history is the love of God? There isn't a man alive who can define this love: It is boundless, eternal, limitless and shall never cease. "He LOVED us and GAVE his Son that we might have life."

A boy was helping me in a meeting one time and he told me that he was in a college where the instructor taught them that Jesus' death was the death of a martyr and denied the substitutionary death of Christ, the Bible doctrine of the Atonement. I asked him if he were quite sure of this, and he replied: "I ought to be, I heard it for twelve months." I then asked him if it had made any difference in his own faith, and he told me that it hadn't on his part, but it had for others. I again asked him if he were sure the professor had said this, and he told me he was certain.

Can you feature that for one moment of time that Jesus didn't HAVE to die? If Jesus had not died upon the cross for our sins there would not be one soul saved. He died for our sins that God might be PROPITIATED and the law VINDICATED in the sight of God. That is why Jesus died. God's love was manifested HOW? By what He DID for us. WHAT did He DO? He SENT His Only Begotten Son to DIE for our sins, that God might be propitiated and we might be reconciled.

In John 10, Jesus said repeatedly, "No man TAKETH my life; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again." Over and over Jesus said that He had the power to lay down His life, and had power to take it up again. "I give my LIFE for my SHEEP," saith the Master. And in the golden text of the Bible, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—John 3:16.

I believe that—don't you? I certainly do NOT believe that ONE sheep for whom Christ died is finally lost in Hell. I don

Don't believe that God loves men who are in Hell. If His LOVE not AVAIL for them, then it might not avail for you and me.

The world thinks that God loves every man without exception, and that everyone is the object of God's affection. But that isn't true; there is not one word of truth in that. There is a world of believers and the world of unbelievers. Do you feature Christ dying the most cruel, inhuman death and not AVAILING for every last sheep for whom He died? I don't believe that. God loved the world of BELIEVERS, those who do believe or will yet believe; His elect. He is "long suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

That is how His love is manifested toward us.

In 2 Timothy 2:10 we read Paul's words: "Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sake, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory." Paul said that he endured much to preach the Gospel whereby the elect are brought to a saving knowledge of Christ.

2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

If you will go over the context you will see what he is talking about. He is NOT talking about YOU and YOURS, but about US. There is a great deal of difference between you and "us." He is talking about the elect—look at 1 Peter 1:2: "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." (Cf. 2 Pet. 3:1, 9.)

Then God's love is manifested in the REBUILDING of broken lives. What He has done and what He is doing for men, women, boys and girls in every walk of life is the MANIFESTATION of His LOVE.

One of the greatest examples of a rebuilt life is found in the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 7. This poor outcast woman came and anointed the feet of Jesus, washing them with her tears and drying them with the hairs of her head. Jesus only spoke a few words: "Thy sins are forgiven; thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." And she went; her life having been remolded by the Master.

Now I come to the last thought:

III. What is the Purpose of Man's Salvation?

I said in the beginning that God doesn't save men just to keep them out of Hell: that is secondary, a result or "fruit." Some men think that they can just use God for a fire-escape. Naturally, if you are saved, God is going to keep you out of Hell, but that isn't the PURPOSE of your salvation.

Well, then, for whose sakes does God save men? I'll tell you right now, it isn't for your sake, but for the sake of Christ.

Ephesians 4:32: "And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Paul said that God forgave the Ephesian brethren for the sake of Christ. When men get that through their heads and hearts Christ will come to mean a great deal more to them, and they won't be so egotistical; their life will be less SELF-centered and more Christ-centered.

Again, in 1 John 2:12 we read: "I write unto you little children (speaking of young Christians) because your sins are forgiven you for his name's SAKE."

God saves men for Christ's sake. He cannot do otherwise; for Christ DIED for the sake of vindicating the law of God on behalf of His sheep; therefore, God must save for the sake of Jesus. He saves for the SAKE of Christ, and that is the ONLY reason He does. Jesus died to satisfy the justice of God on the behalf of His sheep and God for Christ's sake saves those for whom Christ died. You remember that

We have already seen for WHOM or for whose SAKE God saves men; now WHY does He save folk? Romans 8:28, 29 tells us: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be CONFORMED to the IMAGE of his Son, that he

e might be the firstborn among many brethren."

God saves men that they may be CONFORMED to the image of His Son. That is the PURPOSE; that is the why of salvation, that it might be to His honor and glory; "that we should be to the PRAISE of his GLORY, who first trusted in Christ" (Eph. 1:12). That is the purpose. God made man that man might be to the honor and glory of God; but man, the creature, the CLAY, became MARRED in the Potter's hands, and God made another vessel as it seemed good in God's sight. God determined that man was to be to the praise of His glory in His sight, and it shall be so. It is going to be to the honor and glory of Christ.

In conclusion, may I ask you this simple question, and please listen closely: if you have come to see the fact that you are just the clay and God is the Potter, if you have been made to see WHY the vessel has to be made afresh, and GOD must do it, if you have sometime in the past trusted in works or ordinances to save you, please learn now that there is no LIFE in those things. If you are trusting in your works to save you, if you are trusting in moral life, good character, anything else but JESUS, there is no life in those things. God must REMOLD, REMAKE, REBUILD you, and May God help you to see that today. Amen.