

12. THE FLAWED JAR

Today we will look at an Old-Testament **parable** that teaches us about God's commitment to keep his promise to **intervene** on behalf of sinners. The parable comes from the prophetic writings of Jeremiah. The scene is a potter's workshop, where the ancient art of making wheel-thrown pottery is plied. (The technique is still used today.) As we enter his work area, we see the potter creating a masterpiece from a ball of mud made of clay and water. The piece of art that he is forming will be a masterpiece. First read *Genesis 2:7*; then read *Jeremiah 18:1-6*.

It takes skill to throw a two-pound ball of slippery, wet clay into the dead-center of a turning wheel. How diligently the potter works as he hunches over his wheel! With his fingers and strong hands surrounding the clay ball, he firmly presses the wet mass into the shape of a stout bowl. As he drizzles more water over the bowl, the potter gently pinches the bowl's thick, clay walls between his thumbs and fingers, pulling the moist clay cylinder upward as it spins on top of the turning wheel.

The potter in Jeremiah's parable is God. God is a master artisan. He formed Adam, the first human being, from the dust (clay) of the earth. He gave mankind a **soul**, which means that all human beings would have a spiritual nature, even as God has a spiritual nature.

The ball of clay represents the human creatures God created. You and I are represented by that ball of clay. Jeremiah's first lesson is a simple one: God is the Potter; we are his creatures. But we are not just any people. We are God's chosen people from eternity. In God's eyes we are very special. Moses once called us *the apple of God's eye* (*Deuteronomy 32:10*).

In Jeremiah's day God's chosen people were the Jewish people living in the kingdom of Judah. Like the jar the potter was forming on his wheel, the people of Judah were very special to God. He blessed them in many ways. Like the potter's jar, God formed the people of Judah according to his own will and in his own way (*Psalm 115:3*). God has complete freedom to do whatever he wants. When he formed them, he gave them a special role. The role was to daily remind his people what he had done for them, to share his Word and his promises with the people of Judah. He wanted his people to remember how committed he was to keeping the promise he had made

to Adam and Eve. One specific promise was to send his Son to earth as a baby, born from the tribe of Judah.

So, to continue the story from Jeremiah's parable, the potter's bowl begins to take shape. It looks as though it will be a beautiful clay vessel. But then the potter's keen eye detects a flaw. His heart is broken. No matter how small, the flaw meant that the jar the potter was forming was unacceptable. It had to be thrown onto the trash heap.

The message hidden in Jeremiah's parable was that the God's chosen people were flawed. They had stopped sharing God's Word with one another. They broke the Sabbath by working when they should have been worshipping and sharing God's Word with each other. They forgot to praise God and pray to him. Mothers and fathers were no longer passing God's promises on to the next generation (*Deuteronomy 6:4-9*). Their failure to live in obedience to the Potter's will was unacceptable. God had every right to cast Judah on the rubbish heap. But this Potter is a merciful God, who wants to show his great love for his chosen people. He holds himself accountable for keeping the promise not to throw the flawed jar out, but to reshape it according to his own holy will.

In Jeremiah's parable, the jar's flaw is sin. Like God's Old Testament people, you and I are flawed by sin. We were sinners from birth. Jesus carried our flaws to the trash heap of the cross for us. God rejected his own Son, looking the other way as Jesus hung, dying on the cross. He replaced our sin with his own perfect life. God used Christ's flawless beauty to remake the flawed jar that symbolized sinners (*Jeremiah 18:4*).

END VIDEO. BEGIN CONVERSATIONS.

REMEMBER WHEN ...

One beloved Christian hymn is entitled, *Beautiful Savior*. In what ways is Jesus *beautiful*?

WORD POWER: **parable; intervene; soul**

FROM THE TOUR

We know that God intervened in our lives by sending his Son to take the punishment for our sins. What has Jesus given us to replace our sinful lives, so we can stand before God's judgment throne as beautiful, flawless jars?

LEARN MORE

Read Isaiah 64:8. How have God's chosen people turned this relationship between the Potter and his beautiful clay jars upside-down?

Read Job 32:8. What spiritual knowledge has God's Spirit breathed into your soul?

Read John 20:21-22. Why would Jesus breathe on his disciples?

Read Jeremiah 29:11. Explain how this text connects with Jeremiah's parable about the potter?

TAKE-AWAYS

In a private prayer, ask God to help you remember that *he is God, and you are not.*

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What is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?
You have made them a little lower than the
angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.

Psalms 8:4-5