

August 1

Jeremiah 17-20

When our hearts drift from the Lord, one of the first things to go is our desire to set aside time for worship, and being attentive to our walk with him. In the first part of our reading Jeremiah is instructed by the Lord to confront the people about their carelessness in the keeping of the Sabbath day. The people had drifted from keeping this fourth commandment. For the Jews the Sabbath set them apart from all other peoples and made worship a sacred priority in their lives. One of the first things that goes away when people lose their fervency for God is their desire to worship him. A true heart of worship remains the hallmark of those that belong to God. It's just as Jesus told the woman at the well "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth".

Chapter 18 tells us about Jeremiah's trip to the potter's house. Watching a skilled potter make things is captivating! The spinning platform and the hands of the potter forming a beautiful pitcher or vase are a sight to behold. A lump of ordinary clay is transformed into a useful object. For us, handmade pottery is an artistic expression. In those days pottery was essential to everyday life. Pottery was the can or bottle of the day.

As Jeremiah watched the potter form a pot, a defect appeared. There was probably a hard lump in the clay that ruined the pot. The potter then reformed the clay into another pot. The Lord then told Jeremiah that people are the clay and the Lord is the potter. God can make whatever he wants out of the clay. In Romans 9:21 Paul tells us: ²¹"Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for special purposes and some for common use?" I think God gets more pleasure from making a beautiful pitcher than a sludge pot! His desire was that his people be a vessel of honor, but because of their defects, he would have to remold them.

Chapter 19 once again uses pottery as a picture. The prophet buys a clay jar and takes it to the valley of Ben Hinnom, the valley of burning. This is the place where unthinkable child sacrifices were made. There Jeremiah smashed the jar as a statement of God smashing the city of Jerusalem. When he returned to the city, Pashhur, an official in the temple seized him, had him beaten, and then locked him up in stocks overnight. The next morning, when released, Jeremiah proclaims a curse over Pashhur and his family.

The threats, beating, and imprisonment once again overwhelm Jeremiah. He wishes he could stop his messages of judgment but could not. It was like a fire in his bones that continually put him under threat. Even while pressed beyond his understanding, at the end of our reading Jeremiah bursts into praise! "Sing to the Lord! Give praise to the Lord!" Paul and Silas praised God with singing while locked in stocks in the jail at Philippi.

Those that bear the message of God may suffer great persecution, but they also experience the deepest praise. Bear his message. Sing his praise!