

FINDING OUR PLACE IN HIS HANDS

Jeremiah 18: 1-12 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson -- Youth Snow Camp

“Living for Jesus in an independent world makes it hard to live dependently upon Him. Independence before God says, "Get Your hands off me!" Dependence on God says, "Keep Your hands on me!" Did you know that the enemy of our souls is always trying to get his hands on us? He wants to possess us, control us, and steal, kill and destroy us. But God has other plans for us. God wants to teach us to know the difference between Him having His hands on us and the enemy trying to get his hands on us. The Lord wants to teach us how to speak to everyone who seeks to put their selfish or lustful hands on us, when it isn't God. There are times when we need to say firmly, "Get your hands off me." As young people, be certain the enemy will try foolish words to use somebody to tell you, "If you love me, you'd let me touch you wherever I want to." That's not love. That's the lie of the enemy. That's lust. If we learn what our place is in His hands, in God's hands, we will learn to say, "Lord, keep your hands on me." Years ago, Redd Harper wrote a song I love with true words we need in our lives. He wrote, "You laid your hand mighty Lord on the range Laid your wonderful hand on the prairie Lord you poured forth the fountains, Raised up the mountains, O Lord, keep your mighty hand on me. You touched your clouds, made them rain, From the rain made the sea, From the sea formed the clouds To give us life abundantly, You have the earth and the sky in your command Lord O please keep your precious hand on me."

There is a lesson in the book of Judges that pictures what God wants to do with our enemy so that we will find our place in His hopes and in His hands. God wants to disable and smite the enemy so that he will lose his grip on us and so that we will surrender our lives to Jesus, our God, our Creator, our Savior and our Lord. In Judges 1: 1-7, I find a very graphic story of the conquest of Canaan. "After the death of Joshua, the people of Israel inquired of the LORD, "Who shall go up first for us against the Canaanites, to fight against them?" The LORD said, "Judah shall go up; behold, I have given the land into his hand." And Judah said to Simeon his brother, "Come up with me into the territory allotted to me, that we may fight against the Canaanites. And I likewise will go with you into the territory allotted to you." So Simeon went with him. Then Judah went up and the LORD gave the Canaanites and the Perizzites into their hand, and they defeated 10,000 of them at Bezek. They found Adoni-bezek at Bezek and fought against him and defeated the Canaanites and the Perizzites. Adoni-bezek fled, but they pursued him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and his big toes. And Adoni-bezek said, "Seventy kings with their thumbs and their big toes cut off used to pick up scraps under my

table. As I have done, so God has repaid me.” And they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died there.” This is a grim picture, but it is God’s hope that we will surrender ourselves to Him. Then He will destroy the enemy’s plans by cutting off the thumbs of the enemy so he has no grip on us, and He will cut off his big toes so he cannot stand up easily or run after us when we run to Jesus as our refuge.

This morning I want us all to learn how important it is for us to fully surrender to the hands of Jesus. He wants to be the Potter in our lives. When we receive Jesus as Savior and Lord, He claims us as His own. When He wants us to be soft and malleable and pliable and surrendered to His will, open and ready to do His bidding, to follow His every prompting by His Spirit, and to be totally dependent on His hopes, His plans and at peace with being molded by His hands. He calls Himself the Potter, and He calls His children, His bride, His church, His own, the clay. What kind of clay are we be in the Potter’s hands? There are only a few options? What kind of clay are you, are we, am I?

ARE YOU SPOILED, HARD LUMPY CLAY? (I.) Notice 18: 1-4. “The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: “Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words.” So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do.” About fifteen years ago, I had the joy of taking Pastor Larry with me back to my roots in Kentucky. We went to many exciting places including a place near Berea, Kentucky in a little town of Waco, Kentucky called Bybee Pottery. Both of us watched the potter working with the clay. He was pumping his legs as if he were on a bicycle to turn the wheel while placing his hands on the clay. We watched him about an hour. It was fascinating and frightening. The first piece he was working on, he stopped a couple times and pulled out lumps in the clay and tried again. Finally, almost in disgust, he threw the clay away into a trash bucket. Then he used some new clay and made a beautiful and delicate vase. God wants to make us all as His children into something beautiful, something good for His glory. We are literally foolish clay in His hands if we become spoiled, like a spoiled child, if we develop hardness here or there and argue with our Potter. How many of us do just that with the Lord?

Isaiah 45: 9 completes the picture of how we become spoiled clay. I read, “Woe to him who strives with Him who formed him, a pot among earthen pots! Does the clay say to Him who forms it, ‘What are You making?’ or ‘Your work has no handles?’ In Isaiah 45: 11, Isaiah adds, “Will you command Me concerning...the

work of My hands?” There is no fooling God. He knows us through and through. There is no fooling Him with our lies, our alibis or our hypocrisy. He sees and feels every bit of hardness, the lumps in our clay. God deals with us just as a potter does. He is sovereign—which means He is in charge of what he makes and designs on His Potter’s wheel. Since He knows what is inside us, He knows when it is impossible, and too late to keep trying to use our piece of clay. We know from Genesis 6: 3 and what God did in Noah’s day, that God’s Spirit will not always strive or keep trying with us. So many songs have been written about this. I love an old song the Cathedral Quartet sings: “Empty and broken, I came back to Him A vessel unworthy, so scarred from sin. But He did not despair...He started over again And I bless the day, He didn't throw the clay away. Over and over, He molds me and makes me, Into His likeness, He fashions the clay. A vessel of honor, I am today, All because Jesus didn't throw the clay away. He is the Potter...I am the clay And molded in His image, He wants me to stay. Oh, but when I stumble... When I fall... When my vessel breaks, He just picks up those pieces, He does not throw the clay away...Over and over, He molds me and makes me, Into His likeness, He fashions the clay. A vessel of honor, I am today, All because Jesus didn't throw the clay away.”

If we are lumpy clay, with hardness in our hearts against God, our Potter, He may very well have to redesign us into another kind of vessel, requiring less pliable clay. He may take us from His design to be a vessel of honor, a vase for flowers to make us into a trash can? Can God, would God do that? Paul wrote in Romans 9: 20-22, “But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?” Has the potter no right over the clay to make out of the same lump of clay one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?” If we are lumpy clay, could we even deny God and His presence in our lives? Isaiah 29: 16 adds, “You turn things upside down! Shall the potter be regarded as the clay, that the thing made should say of its maker; “He did not make me,” or the thing formed say of Him who formed it, “He has no understanding.” In essence, do any of us tell God, “You don’t know what you are doing with me.” Even a dedicated believer can get lumps in their clay. The most righteous of all people who ever lived, outside of our perfect Lord, was Job. In his sickness, boils and despair, in Job 19: 8, 9, Job accused God, saying, “Your hands fashioned and made me, and now You have destroyed me altogether. Remember that You have made me like clay, and will You return me to the dust?” Secondly,

ARE YOU DISOBEDIENT, BOUNDARY BREAKING, STUBBORN CLAY THAT WON’T LISTEN TO GOD’S VOICE? (II.) Notice our text in Jeremiah

18: 5-12. “Then the word of the LORD came to me: ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done?’ declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will relent of the good that I had intended to do to it. Now, therefore, say to the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: ‘Thus says the LORD, Behold, I am shaping disaster against you and devising a plan against you. Return, everyone from his evil way, and amend your ways and your deeds.’ But they say, ‘That is in vain! We will follow our own plans, and will every one act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart.’”

What a mess! Clay that won't listen, won't obey, but is willfully, stubbornly disobedient by choice. God has had ancient boundaries down through history that have never changed. Those boundaries are true for children, young people, adults, and the elderly. Those boundaries are “Love, respect, honesty, and obedience.” Do you remember King Saul whom we talked about last night? He was a classic example of this awful kind of clay. I Samuel 15: 22, 23 speaks of the prophet Samuel's rebuke of King Saul when he wouldn't obey the Lord. Samuel said, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and stubbornness or presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being king.”

God goes a little farther in Jeremiah 18: 13-15. Listen! “Therefore thus says the LORD: Ask among the nations, Who has heard the like of this? The virgin Israel has done a very horrible thing. Does the snow of Lebanon leave the crags of Sirion? Do the mountain waters run dry, the cold flowing streams? But my people have forgotten Me; they make offerings to false gods; they made them stumble in their ways, in the ancient roads, and to walk into side roads, not the highway.” Disobedient clay leaves the ancient roads for the side roads, the ancient boundaries for new selfish boundaries. The Word of God in Proverbs 22: 28 declares, “Do not move the ancient boundaries or landmarks, that your fathers have set.” What kind of clay is it that turns March Madness into a fiasco—painting new boundaries with the out of bounds marks being at the foot of the bleachers and making the basketball goal 12 feet high? Who do we allow into our lives to move all the

boundaries? What books do we read? What shows do we watch? What practices of the world do we accept? Why do we run from listening to our Potter? We ought to be crying to our Potter when the enemy comes in like a flood, and pray, “Lord, raise up a standard against the enemy. Get the enemy’s hands off me.” Why won’t we listen to our Potter? Why do we allow the enemy to get his evil, greasy, grimy, dirty, killing hands and fingers on us? Why do we let the enemy hornswoggle us? Have you ever been hornswoggled? That’s what happens to disobedient clay. You say, “Pastor, use hornswoggle in a sentence.” Okay, here goes. “Who hornswoggled you into disobeying your parents, to get drunk, get high, have sex, get pregnant as a girlfriend or get your girlfriend pregnant as a boyfriend, tell your parents a lie? Hornswoggle means to hoodwink, to swindle, to trick, to cheat, to deceive, or to pull a hoax on you?”

Satan is a liar and he uses strange people to hornswoggle us. Would you read a book entitled, “How To Live In Harmony” by Adolf Hitler or “Humility And How I Attained It” coauthored by Charles Barkley and Mohammed Ali? Would you watch a PG-13 movie with sex scenes in it because it contained good Russian history and your friends told you it was okay as long as your parents didn’t find out? Would you try meth to win a dare for \$5.00? It only takes one quarter of a gram of meth to OD. Who would you allow to talk you into making failing grades to prove you were mature? Would you shoplift to be a part of a club or gang? Would you believe the lie that to be a perfect girl who can find a husband, you have to starve yourself and become anorexic or that you have to throw away your virginity to prove you love a fellow? Guys, who are you letting hornswoggle you into thinking you can only prove you are a man by having sex with a girl, by looking at pornography, or by smoking cigarettes or marijuana? Cry out to your Potter if you know Jesus and say, “Protect me, Jesus, and please pull Satan’s grip off my mind and heart and eyes and spirit. I surrender to Your hands, Lord. You be the Potter. I am the clay. There’s a third and only right option. Job found that out!

ARE YOU SOFT, SURRENDERED PLIABLE CLAY? (III.) Isaiah speaks of this in Isaiah 64: 8 saying, “But now, O Lord, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You are our Potter; we are all the work of Your hand.” Dozens of song writers have captured what God’s hopes are for us in His hands? What are His hopes for us in His hands? Darlene Zschech has awesome lyrics in the song she sings with Hillsong. “Beautiful Lord, Wonderful savior I know for sure all of my days are held in Your hands Crafted into your perfect plans. You gently called me into your presence Guiding me by Your Holy Spirit Teach me dear Lord to live all of my life Through your eyes. I’m captured by Your holy calling Set me apart. I know You’re

drawing me to Yourself, lead me, Lord. I pray. Oh Take me, mold me, use me, fill me, I give my life to the Potter's hand. Oh Call me, guide me, lead me, walk beside me, I give my life to the Potter's hand. You gently call me into your presence Guiding me by Your Holy Spirit Teach me dear lord to live all of my life through your eyes. I'm captured by Your holy calling Set me apart. I know you're drawing me to Yourself; lead me, Lord. I pray. Oh Take me, mold me, use me, fill me; I give my life to the potter's hand Oh Call me, guide me, lead me, walk beside me I give my life to the Potter's hand.” Songs well up in my spirit as I think of what God wants to do in each of your hearts. I close with an old old song I love: “Only to be what He wants me to be –every moment of every day. Yeilded completely to Jesus alone, every step of this pilgrim way. Just to be clay in the Potter’s hand, ready to do what His word commands, Only to be what He wants me to be, every moment of every day.” Which of the three kinds of clay are you? (1) **ARE WE SPOILED, HARD LUMPY CLAY?** (2) **ARE YOU DISOBEDIENT, BOUNDARY BREAKING, STUBBORN CLAY THAT WON’T LISTEN TO GOD’S VOICE?** (3) **ARE YOU SOFT, SURRENDERED PLIABLE CLAY?** God knows. Which kind of clay do you want to be in the Potter’s hands?