

*Lord, send your Spirit, that we may hear again your words of truth. Set us free to seek your gracious and sovereign will, until the day when you make all things new- redeemed and right, remade in the image of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

**Jeremiah 18:1-11**

18:1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD:

18:2 "Come, go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words."

18:3 So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel.

18:4 The vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as seemed good to him.

18:5 Then the word of the LORD came to me:

18:6 Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done? says the LORD. Just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

18:7 At one moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it,

18:8 but if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will change my mind about the disaster that I intended to bring on it.

18:9 And at another moment I may declare concerning a nation or a kingdom that I will build and plant it,

18:10 but if it does evil in my sight, not listening to my voice, then I will change my mind about the good that I had intended to do to it.

18:11 Now, therefore, say to the people of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem: Thus says the LORD: Look, I am a potter shaping evil against you and devising a plan against you. Turn now, all of you from your evil way, and amend your ways and your doings.

**Luke 14:25-33**

14:25 Now large crowds were traveling with Jesus; and he turned and said to them,

14:26 "Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.

14:27 Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

14:28 For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it?

14:29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him,

14:30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

14:31 Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty

thousand?

14:32 If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace.

14:33 So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

### **Proclamation of the Word**

I always loved the song, "He's got the whole world in his hands"

- He's got the little bitty baby, in his hands,
- You and me brother...You and me Sister
- The wind and the rain in his hands, as Johnny Cash sings it.

I always think of that song as encouraging. The whole world in God's hands- safe and secure, at peace, as God intends it.

As poet Robert Browning put it, "God is in his heavens- all's right with the world."

Job 12:10, states: "In his hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of every human being."

But today we read this passage from Jeremiah, and there is a very different image of God's hands.

God has the rough, strong hands of a Potter.

And the Potter is remaking us. We are the clay in God's hands.

We, the nation of Israel, the people of God, the Church,

We are in God's hands, but this is not an all is well, peace on earth, image.

We may not be the nation of Israel invaded and defeated by the Babylonians,

But we can feel just as they did.

We look at the world and think, "Is this as God intends it?"

I think of the Bahamas dealing with the wreckage and damage, the deaths caused by yet another category 5 Hurricane.

Is this as God intends it?

Or I think of my friend NAME a health nut, smart, and beautiful, who has pancreatic cancer at age 48.

Is this as God intends it?

Or I picture the face of a 2 year-old child, beloved by his family, gunned down in a Walmart.

Is this as God intends it?

He's got the whole world in his hands....really?

Sometimes it does not seem that way to me.

And yet, the prophet Jeremiah speaks a word of hope and a call to repent!

HOPE that God has not given up on us yet.

And a CALL to change- to turn around.

The prophet says, "Turn now all of you from your evil ways."

God is taking the clay in hand, reforming and reshaping it into something totally new and different.

Maybe you have seen a Potter work the clay. Or maybe you have done this yourself.

Sit hunched over.

Arms braced- for the resistance.

You have to plop that lump of clay on the wheel.

Applying direct, steady pressure, holding the whole bowl

It is an art- to fashion a beautiful vessel- that can not only be beautiful, but useful.

A lump of clay in the hands of a Potter has so much potential.

Each lump of clay is different, and responds differently to the Potter.

If the Potter pushes too hard the clay will not take the right shape

But if the Potter doesn't apply direct pressure, the lump of clay will never become anything other than that- a lump.

And if the side gets too thin- it will be too weak and break.

So the Potter has to start over- work the clay into a ball again.

Plop it on the wheel and recreate it.

Sometimes over and over and over...to get the vessel God desires.

No wonder God needs a day of rest- we are tiresome work.

In God's hands we are secure-

but that does not mean we can be satisfied with things as they are if God is not.

Which leads us to that age-old discussion about the Sovereignty of God...and our place in God's world.

We wonder about how much choice we have in the matter if God is in God's heavens, and all is not right with the world.

The doctrine of the Sovereignty of God can lead us to a mis-understanding of

"God as an angry tyrant, a hair trigger tempered CEO with his finger poised over the SMITE button on the celestial computer."<sup>i</sup>

Remembering back, the Students of PSA used to go twice a week after school to play with the neighborhood children at a Government housing project.

Our goal was to give the kids a positive place to play with some supervision. Occasionally, one child did something wrong, like hit another child.

There was one little girl who would say, "Ooh, God's gonna punish you."

God as holy Smiter is not a new idea.

But God's sovereignty does not limit our choice.

In fact, God gives us a frightening amount of responsibility for God's world.

We are not inanimate lumps of clay.

We are given minds to think, hearts to love, and wills to do what is right.

Moses received the Law, the 10 Commandments, as a covenant agreement.

God had saved his people from Slavery, and then gave them a way to live.

God said, "You are mine. I love you. I will be your God and you will be my people.

And you are to trust me, obey me, serve my will (not your own).

But if you play with fire, misuse your knowledge and talents for evil, I will discipline you. I will not let you destroy each other and the world I created and love."

God will do everything in God's power to bring us back-

God wants to build us up, plant good things, so that all creation can flourish.

So rather than destroy us, which God does not want to do, God invites:

Turn from evil, repent.

I will change my mind and bless you.

Looking closely at the Jeremiah passage, you can imagine that in God's hands, the Potter works tirelessly with the clay, trying to shape it to her intended design.

What feels like punishment, may be correction.

Like a parent, whose child is rebellious and living in such a way that harms himself or others, that parent has to act.

The frustration and patience, the work and the energy, is all worth it because the parent loves the child.

Parents have to put the child in time-out, take the car keys, perhaps even kick the child out of the house.

Tough love is not tough because it is mean.

It is tough because it breaks the parent's heart.

Sometimes the child has to lie in the bed he has made, suffer the consequences, and possibly turn around.

Hopefully, the child will return home by his own choice- his own will.

In the end, it is God who is Sovereign- but that sovereignty is marked by a God whose love is always just, and whose justice is always loving.

We do not always follow God's will.

As I mentioned before:

I think of the Bahamas dealing with the wreckage and damage, the deaths caused by yet another category 5 Hurricane.

Is this as God intends it?

Or maybe sinful human beings contribute to the sickness of God's good creation.

Or I think of my friend NAME, a health nut, smart, and beautiful, who has pancreatic cancer at age 48. Is this as God intends it? Or maybe human bodies get sick because we are finite. We are not God. We are not immortal.

Or I picture the face of a 2 year-old child, beloved by his family, gunned down in a Walmart. Is this as God intends it? Or maybe sinful human beings do not want to make the hard changes to serve the greater good for our public safety.

When it comes to Sovereignty – we would rather be in charge sometimes.

Think of Sovereignty this way-

Stan Mast writes, "I like the way my grandfather, a simple country preacher, put it. 'God is both 100% sovereign and we are 100% responsible to choose. How do we reconcile those two? We don't. We hold them together. It's like two gigantic redwoods on the coast of California. They grow up together, parallel, but never touching, at least as far we can see. But up there in the fog,... into which they disappear, unseen by human eyes they meet and their branches interlace.'"<sup>ii</sup>

What God does promise is faithfulness and love.

A covenant- a promise to live up to God's end of the agreement.

God promises us the comfort of the Holy Spirit, through Jesus, life everlasting.

God's Promise (Woody Guthrie words, music Ellis Paul)

I didn't promise you skies painted blue

Not all colored flowers all your days through  
I didn't promise you, sun with no rain  
Joys without sorrows, peace without pain.

(Refrain)

All that I promise is strength for this day,  
Rest for my worker, and light on your way.  
I give you truth when you need it, my help from above,  
Undying friendship, my unfailing love.

When God's calls for us to return again, to God's good intentions  
When God's plea does not work,  
God sends his Son, Jesus,  
Offering God's very self and life and presence.  
Jesus calls us to the way that leads to life.  
That involves taking up a cross and following him.  
Letting go of all those things in which we find security- family, money, possessions, even status- those things that can become idols in our lives,  
to follow the one true God.

And submitting all to God's most gracious and loving will.

The world went after Jesus because of this call to sacrificial love- to loving God first and foremost, and loving neighbors, even the hard to love neighbors, as yourself.

The crowds, the religious leaders, the government went after Jesus, because once again, people want to be sovereign. They crucified him, hung him on a cross to die.

Our only measure of God's will now is Jesus Christ, God fully revealed.

And when we have questions about right and wrong, about God's will,  
we ask is this "of Christ" or "anti-Christ."

When we see that which is "anti-Christ" we can repent of it.

Most of us have heard of the "anti-Christ" as the enemy of God,  
mostly through rapture promoting books like the Left Behind series.

But whatever does not measure up to Christ is "anti-Christ"-  
not just a proverbial evil anti-hero.

On a personal level, cheating on my spouse, committing adultery is anti-Christ.

On a social-political level, white nationalism, is more than racism, it is anti-Christ.

Sexual assault, human trafficking, abuse is not just wrong. It is anti-Christ.

And we see that all that is personal is socio-political, and all that is socio-political is personal.

God is Sovereign over ALL- "All means all, Y'all" as the slogan goes.

God does have the whole world in his hands- God is the Creator of heaven and earth.

When God sent Jesus into the world, in effect, God said, "He is your measuring stick."

He is how you will know my will, my covenantal love.

After 10 Commandments, the call of the Prophets to return to my will, even after suffering the consequences of your disobedience, if those events cannot change you, God says, "Here I am, I am coming in person."

And now you can see that you can make a choice to be "of-Christ" or "anti-Christ."

Hence, the hard choice of being a disciple.

When confronted with the person of Jesus Christ,  
we now know the truth of God's perfect will.

We are responsible for what we know.

And we must examine ourselves.

We are accountable to God- over and above all.

Like clay in the hands of the Potter, we can bend our will to God's, cooperate,  
and get behind Jesus, following in his steps.

We, his Church, must reclaim Jesus and repent of that which is anti-Christ.

I tell you the truth.

And the truth will set us free.

Prayer-

"Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way,

Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.

Mold me and make me, after thy will,

While I am waiting, yielded and still."<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Stan Mast, Jeremiah 18:1-11, Calvin Seminary's Sermon Starters, Proper 18C, September 2, 2019.

<sup>ii</sup> IBID.

<sup>iii</sup> Adelaide Pollard, "Have Thine Own Way" hymn.