

## THIRD SERMON MANUSCRIPT

### "Do It My Way"

(This sermon was shaped and formed by a message given by Dr. Paul Leaming at St. James United Methodist Church in Tulsa, OK in 1993.)

#### Introduction

How much are you giving God? (**Repeat while holding clay in hand**). When I said "how much", many of you immediately thought of money. I am not talking about money today. Some of you thought of the time you give God. "God, I'll give you an hour for prayer." I am not talking about time today. I'm talking about you- your whole being, your life. How much are you giving God? Financial consultants encourage investors to diversify their investments so that when one stock or fund is down the other funds will balance the risk. God is not into diversification when it comes to your life. God wants all of you-not some, not 90 percent, all. When it comes down to it, what you give God determines what He makes of you.

Jeremiah learned this lesson in chapter 18 and 19 of his book. Let's turn there and learn from him.

#### Background to the Text

Jeremiah was a prophet to Judah who began his work some time before the fall of Jerusalem and ended his work in the

exile period. The Northern Kingdom had already fallen the century before and the Southern Kingdom was facing a Babylonian Empire that was about to overcome them. Judah had forsaken God over and over again and judgment day was approaching. Jeremiah delivers his words in chapter 18 and 19 as the people are slipping into deeper wickedness and rebellion.

#### Surrendered to Him

Jeremiah learns a symbolic message from God as he is sent to a potter's house. To give me an idea of what Jeremiah saw, I went this week to the home of a potter here in Huntsville. Dr. Clifton Pearson, the dean of Alabama A & M's Art Department, allowed me to visit his home this week and learn some lessons about pottery (**He even let me borrow this wheel and the other equipment you see here**).

In Jeremiah's day, the pottery wheel was built a little differently. It's possible that Jeremiah saw a potter sitting at a wheel that was composed of a larger, lower wheel and a smaller, upper wheel attached together by a shaft. The potter would spin the bottom wheel with his foot causing the top wheel to spin. In some instances, the potter would hire an assistant whose entire job was to lie on his side and kick the bottom wheel at whatever rate the potter requested. What a job, huh?

Let's look at what Jeremiah saw at the potter's house (**Read Jeremiah 18:3-12**). The first point of the message today is "surrendered to Him." The people of Judah failed to surrender to God after Jeremiah's words. Look in verse 12. "We will continue with our own plans." Surrendered to Him. We want to hold on to what is ours. Garrison, my eighteen-month-old, and Kimberlyn, his two-and-a-half-year-old cousin, illustrate this point all too well. When they are at Grandmommy's house and one of them picks out a toy, quite often the other one will decide it's their turn to have it. Words like "mine" and "my turn" can be heard along with crying and pouting.

Society conditions us to expect to be in control of our lives and our personal business. Who can remember "you deserve a break today" or "Have it your way" in recent hamburger commercials? The song "I Did It My Way" recently climbed back onto the top ten music charts after the death of Frank Sinatra. People are celebrated in society for taking control of their lives and doing things their own way. God, however, is saying "do it My way."

The story of the rich young ruler recorded in Matthew 19:16-30 is a prime example of someone who was not ready to fully surrender to God. When Jesus asked him to sell all he had and give it to the poor and to come and follow him, the young man was not willing to surrender. Are you surrendered today? When we are surrendered, our whole being on the wheel

of life is shaped by the master potter (**Slam the clay onto the wheel after having shaped it through the previous section**).

Life Hurts. Whether we surrender or not we still take a trip on the wheel of life. Without proper centering and shaping, a clay mass will slip and slide all over the wheel. In the potter's hands ,however, a vessel is created.

#### Shaped By Him

As we spin through life, we are shaped by Him. Point two is "shaped by Him" (**Begin shaping the clay on the wheel as it spins**). Pressure and force are required to create a vessel. Shaping hurts. The problem is that many of us don't see the hands of God shaping and developing us in the mist of the pressure and trouble. Jeremiah saw very clearly that God had ultimate control over the events of Judah and each person represented. No matter how you look at it, God uses force and pressure to shape and mold us into who he wants us to become. When he sees a flaw in the clay of our lives, He breaks us down and starts reshaping.

Pressure involves pain. Birds know something about the pains of growing up. Many species of birds teach the young to fly by pushing the youngsters out of the nest and catching them only after they have attempted to fly. Life requires us at times to do uncomfortable things in order to avoid even more uncomfortable or damaging things. After my

appendix operation, a nurse came in and asked me if I had gone to the bathroom since the operation. I said no and she proceeded to tell me that she would have to use a catheter if I didn't go soon. The operation had required a catheter during the procedure. It was excruciatingly painful to go to the bathroom after the operation but the thought of a catheter being used while I was awake prodded me to find a way.

When I was growing up, I would wake up on occasion and tell my parents my legs ached. They would say it was just growing pains. God allows growing pains. Jonah felt the pressure of God's shaping in his trip to Nineveh. When the thumb of the potter presses down on the center of the clay to make an opening, major pressure is applied (**Illustrate throughout the speaking**). God continues to work with us, shaping us as He sees fit.

Jeremiah saw the potter recognize some marring in the pot he was making. He was able to break it down and start the process over. Dr. Pearson says that when clay is reformed and shaped over and over again, better clay is produced each time. It is easier to mold, easy to shape, and easier to create a prized piece. What an analogy for our lives. God is working out all imperfections, creating a prized piece for His glory. If we don't surrender completely, and allow God to remake us and fix the marred clay, then we are in for trouble. The people of Judah

refused to yield. This prompted God to send a clear message to the people in chapter 19.

### Soft for Him

Some time passed between chapter 18 and 19. Jeremiah was told to buy a clay jar and to take some of the elders and priests and go to the Valley of Ben Hinnom, at the Potsherd Gate. A place basically that served as a garbage dump for broken pottery and other trash. The type of jar that Jeremiah was to buy was a *baqbuq*, Hebrew for a water decanter four to ten inches high with a long and narrow neck. The Hebrews called the jar this name because of the way liquid sounded as it was poured out of the jar. Look at what Jeremiah is instructed to do in verse 10 of chapter 19 (**read verse 10 through 11**).

Breaking pottery as a symbol of destruction was not new to the people of the world at this time. Egyptians over a century before would write the names of their enemies on clay pots and smash the jars as a sign of overcoming their enemies. The people understood what Jeremiah was saying and they didn't like it. After delivering the message at the potsherd gate, he gave the message at the temple. Look at what he said in verse 15 (**read verse 15**).

Pottery can be shaped and formed as much as the potter would like until the time comes to place it in the kiln to fire the vessel and harden it. The heat of the kiln actually

alters the chemical make-up of the clay to the point that it no longer is clay. It becomes a stone.

We must remain open to God's shaping and correcting before the fire comes. Point three of the message is "soft for God" **(Hold a finished clay pot in hand as the sermon continues)**. If we become like the people of Judah, God will reach a point of breaking us. When your life is finished and you pass on, then the fire will be put to your work and the beauty of his workmanship will shine through. Or, a marred vessel will be uncovered. One hardened by rebellion, by stubbornness, by self-serving desires. God will have no choice but to break the jar **(Break the clay pot, that has been in hand, with a hammer)**.

#### Conclusion and Invitation

The people of Judah ignored the warning of Jeremiah as he delivered the message of God on more than one occasion. In 586 B.C. the kingdom came to an end. How much are you giving God today? Are you surrendered to Him? Or will you say at the end of your life, "if I had known I would have given God more of my life"? Are you being shaped by Him? Or are you blaming the devil for all the problems you so often create for yourself? Are you soft for Him? Is your cry for God to continue his work in you?

Three types of people will be the focus of my invitation. Those who recognize that they have not fully yielded

to God and are wanting to change are welcome to come forward in a moment. Those who feel the shaping of God in their life at present and who will admit that they have rebelled against His hand are welcome at the altar in a moment. Finally, those who want a softness toward God developed in their life are invited to come forward for prayer. How much are you giving God? We must be surrendered to Him, shaped by Him, and soft for Him. Let's pray and as I conclude my prayer, feel free to make your way to the front if you feel prompted to respond.