***Jeremiah 18:1-23 The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: 2“Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause you to hear My words.” 3Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. 4And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. 5Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 6“O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?” says the Lord. “Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! 7The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, 8if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. 9And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, 10if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it. 11“Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord: “Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.” ’ ” 12And they said, “That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will every one obey the dictates of his evil heart.”***

We’re with Jeremiah again tonight, as God continues to speak His plans over Judah. None of these plans come as a surprise to us. Neither should it have come as a surprise to the people of Judah. Jeremiah has been prophesying at this point for more than twenty years and the message has not changed. God has been calling for repentance and return, but the people refuse to hear. Likewise, God is calling for repentance and return for this country and the world and, so far, we refuse to hear.

Tonight, we encounter a common analogy of potter and clay. Jeremiah is not the first to write of this relationship between God and man. Isaiah used it 130 years earlier. Job used the analogy a thousand years earlier. In fact, Genesis 2:7 speaks of God making man from the dust of the earth. The Hebrew for dust can mean clay. From the beginning of time, God has been saying to us – I Am the Potter and you are the clay. God is shaping us. How are we responding to His shaping hand?

Verses 1-4 *The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: 2“Arise and go down to the potter’s house, and there I will cause you to hear My words.” 3Then I went down to the potter’s house, and there he was, making something at the wheel. 4And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make.* Jeremiah now receives a new prophecy from the Lord. God instructs Jeremiah to arise. We’ve studied many times God telling His disciples to arise and go. We are not to delay – we are not to dally, as my grandmother used to say. Arise, go to the potter’s house. The potter is not named, but Jeremiah knows where to go. God knows the house and Jeremiah knows the house. There, Jeremiah will be caused to hear God’s words. God will provide a revelation there. He will reveal His mind to the prophet and the prophet is to reveal this saying to the people. God continues to teach us. Jeremiah does not delay. He is obedient and goes. The potter is working at the wheel making something from clay. In these days, the potter’s wheel would have consisted of two circular stones. The bottom is stationary and the top turns. The potter pumps a pedal and the stone spins, This is the scene Jeremiah walks into. The potter is shaping clay into a vessel. Something goes wrong and the vessel is marred, found to be imperfect or spoiled. The potter sees that it is not a fit vessel for what he designed. It is still clay and has not yet been fired and baked. The potter takes the wet clay and reshapes it into another form. He doesn’t discard the clay, but reforms it with his hands. Praise God that, when He sees our imperfections, He reshapes us and reforms us, finding us fit for His purposes as long as we remain malleable and pliable, open to His shaping hands.

Verses 5-6 *Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 6“O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?” says the Lord. “Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!*Then the word, which God had promised Jeremiah, comes. God instructs Jeremiah and all of us. He is in complete control. He has absolute authority over our lives. He provided life, provided Salvation, is He not our Master? In fact, through the purchase that Jesus made, God has clear title to our lives. He is more in control than any potter at any wheel. Potter’s form clay to lifeless things. God gives form and life to His children. We must ask ourselves, “Am I yielded and still for God?” Am I pliable and available to the God that purchased me by the blood of His Son. As the clay in the hand of the potter, so is Judah and so are we in the merciful hand of our God. We are blessed to be in His hands.

Verses 7-8 *The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, 8if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.*God continues His word to Jeremiah. By His prophets, He speaks concerning nations and kingdoms. God plucks up and pulls down. He allows destruction. Wickedness and evil draw the righteous wrath of God, but He is long-suffering and very loving. In the instant God speaks, judgement is executed. Likewise, if that nation, against which He has spoken repents, God will relent and show mercy. We saw that with our study of Jonah and Ninevah. Jonah spoke, the people repented, and God forgave. When people fully and truly repent, God relents. He is infinitely merciful. We are so very blessed that He is quick to forgive and slow to anger. Otherwise, we’d be quickly consumed due to our sin and rebellion. He does not change toward us. We change toward Him.

Verses 9-10 *And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, 10if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.* In the last verses, we saw that God roots out, tears down, and destroys. What He speaks happens. Now, we see the opposite. The instant God speaks about a kingdom or a nation to build it up and to plant, it will be established and planted. If, after receiving God’s blessings, this same nation or kingdom does evil in God’s sight, if it loses it’s focus on God and becomes profane and morally depraved, like the US and the world today, God will relent in His blessings and that same nation will lose it’s divine protection. God will not bless the profane and perverse. God is God and He changeth not. It is we that change and sin. We take for granted the blessings He sends and begin to believe we deserve or have earned. People believe they no longer need God when times are good. Israel had this issue. Judah had this issue. The people of Jerusalem had this issue in Jesus day and we have this issue in the world today. Man is man and, unfortunately, our sinful nature changeth not.

Verse 11 *Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, ‘Thus says the Lord: “Behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Return now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good.”* God now gives Jeremiah a command. He commands him to make known how these words apply to the men, meaning the people of Judah. A general doctrine has been given – potter and clay, planting and rooting up. Now, make this general saying specific to the men of Judah. God now says – I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. He is working at the Potter’s wheel and the result will be Judah’s ruin. God is inviting the people to hear and repent. Apply wisdom and understand that these are gracious and loving warnings. Return now every one from his evil ways and do good.

Verse 12 – Let’s now hear the people of Judah and how they respond to God’s graciousness, mercy, and long suffering. And they said, “That is hopeless! So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will every one obey the dictates of his evil heart.” It is hopeless. They are responding that God is wasting His love talking to them. It is in vain. We will walk according to our own plans. Everyone will follow the dictates, or the imaginatuions, of his own heart. The people are not responding by their words, but they are responding by their conduct. The proof is in their walk not in their words. The same is true today. Our proof is in our fruit, in our walk, not in the words we say or the plans we make. Well did Jesus prophesy calling men hypocrites in Matthew 15:8-9 when He quoted Isaiah 29 - *Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 8 ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.* Too often, we tearfully draw near to God with our words, but our actions are far from Him – our conduct does not reflect our words.

So we will leave Jeremiah tonight. He will once again deliver the remedy to the people with the disease. Repent and return and God will relent and revive. We know that the people will not hear. They love their sin more than they love their Savior. So it is today. Many love their sin more than they love the Savior. Let our conduct reflect our faith. Let the meditations of our lips flow from the truth in our hearts. Let us draw near to Him in spirit while He may yet be found.