**BCM Bible Study – September 22/23, 2022**

**Jeremiah: The Potter and the Clay (Jeremiah 18-20)**

God’s work through the prophet continues as Jeremiah here offers another symbolic action to serve as a real-life parable hopefully helping the people of Judah to come to repentance. Interwoven with this, we see the people’s persecution of Jeremiah for his prophetic words continuing.

Ice breaker: If you could be instantly amazing at any art medium, what would you choose? (Potter, painting, sculpture, another?)

A Broken Pot Remade: **Read Jeremiah 18:1-10**

* In what ways does Jeremiah say that the metaphor of the potter and the clay is analogous to Judah and God?
* In verse 4, what happened that caused the potter to have to remake the pot?
  + *The art of making pottery was such that the potter applies pressure to the clay to form it into whatever shape he desires. In this instance, something was wrong with the clay that caused it to take a shape other than what the potter intended. Several commentaries use the language of the clay resisting the hand of the potter.*
  + *Note*: *The tense of the verb “spoil” is passive – the potter didn’t spoil the clay, it simply became or was already spoiled.*
* What is the interpretation of this analogy for the nation of Israel in verses 6-10?
  + What does it mean that God is sovereign? A popular passage relating to both God’s sovereignty and this passage is **Romans 9:19-21**. (read this)
  + How does this passage in Jeremiah relate to God’s sovereignty?
    - *There is an oft-talked about tension here between God’s sovereignty and human free will. Suffice to say, we will not resolve this centuries-long issue today. But we do learn from this passage that God is sovereign even when, in his sovereignty, he chooses to act in response to the actions of people.*
    - *Some promises of God are unconditional:* **Read Gen. 15:1-5**
    - *Other promises, particularly the covenant under which the Israelites were living under Jeremiah, are conditional:* **Read Exodus 19:3-6**
  + When the people disobey his covenant, what does God do?
  + If the people were to repent, what does God say he will do?
  + What does this passage in Jeremiah (as well as those in Genesis & Exodus) reveal about God’s character and the relationship between judgment and forgiveness?
  + How does the image of the potter reworking the clay change the way you think about God’s response to disobedience corporately or on a personal level?
  + How does the bigger picture of God’s plan for the redemption of all creation change the way you think about God’s formative activity in your life? In what way does this shift the focus off of you?
    - What parts of your life have you seen God use for his glory?
* **Read Jeremiah 18:11-17**
  + In verse 11, God uses the language of “each one” or “every one,” suggesting that every person in Israel had a choice to make in response to God’s call for repentance. What does God say is the core reason for their disobedience? (v.12)
    - In what ways do you tend to be stubborn with regard to God’s desire for your life?
    - Why does it seem easier to resist the forming hand of the potter? What are your desires that compete with God’s desire to form you?
  + *The answer to the questions in verse 14 is “no.” The point is, we expect nature to act in a certain way, and it would ridiculous to expect otherwise. On the contrary, God’s people are acting totally contrary to nature, “willing to enjoy God’s blessing but not willing to obey the laws of God that governed those blessings.” (Warren Wiersbe Bible Comment.)*
    - Why do you think it sometimes feels unnatural to obey God’s commands?
    - How does our culture rebel against this kind of thinking? How can we as Christians engage with this type of postmodern thinking in a meaningful way?

A Broken Pot Unmade: **Read Jeremiah 18:18**

* What is the response of the hearers of Jeremiah’s prophecy?
  + Those listening clearly preferred the happier, less harsh words and teachings of others. What does that reveal to you about human nature?
  + How can we seek to grow and lean into potential areas of conviction like this within our own lives?
  + Specifically, how can we grow in not being defensive about our sin, but instead owning what we have done?
  + In the passages that follow, Jeremiah prays against the people who ignore God’s word. God sends Jeremiah to buy a pot from the potter, and this time, after listing the abominations of the Israelites, does something different in the sight of the very elders and priests who rebuked him. **Read Jeremiah 19:10-15**
* This image stands sharply in contrast to the re-shaping of the pot in chapter 18. Why does God bring this judgment on the people? (v. 15)

Jeremiah’s Persecution: **Read Jeremiah 20:1-6**

* Even though it has come up several times before, this is the first time that we read of Jeremiah physically enduring persecution. This leads Jeremiah to cry out to God and lament as he has at many different points, but with a notable glimpse of hope present (20:13).
* Pashhur was clearly a high-ranking religious official at this time. What does Pashhur’s action suggest to us about the behavior of religious leaders?
  + How should we then view and interpret the actions of leaders?
* Just like the Israelites, we as believers now should be impacted by the word of God: **Read James 1:19-25.**
  + In what ways are you prone to be a mere hearer instead of a doer of God’s word?

How have you experience freedom from God’s word (James 1:25) when you thought it would bring confinement?

**Challenge:** Over the next week, seek to be a doer of the Word. Not just to read it, but to actively live it out daily (or notice those places where you aren’t doing so).