

Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 447, 10-31-2021 †† Reformation Sunday

“Credo, Domine; adjuva incredulitatem meam,” Mark 9:24.

“Domine, volumus Jesum videre,” John 12:21.

JEREMIAH 18

¹This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ²“Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message.” ³So I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel. ⁴But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

⁵Then the word of the LORD came to me. ⁶He said, “Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?” declares the LORD. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel. ⁷If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, ⁸and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. ⁹And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, ¹⁰and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

¹¹“Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, ‘This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions.’



The 95 theses which Luther posted (and presumably nailed to the door of the castle church in Wittenberg) on October 31, 1517, went through all Germany in 14 days. After six weeks they were all over Europe. At the beginning of the new year, a traveler brought them to Jerusalem. At the time, Europe had no phones, no airmail, no railroads, and no telegraphs.

After Luther began his work, a young prince made a pilgrimage from Germany to Compostela in Spain to atone for his sins. When he here now confessed his sins to an old monk and told him his purpose, the monk said to him, “Indeed, my son, why do you go so far for that which you can get close to home? I recently saw a writing from an Augustine monk by the name of Luther, in which he powerfully teaches and shows from God’s Word that man can secure salvation by no other means than by faith in Jesus Christ. Hold yourself to this, and you are delivered already!”

To think that a Spanish monk would know and love and share the gospel like this! But this just goes to show the dire need to re-form the clay of the church in every kingdom, every nation, every land of this world. Today that is the lesson of the clay and the potter. ...

THE WORD OF GOD REFORMS THE WORLD AT WILL

1. He remains the God of an unchanged will

By God's direction, the prophet went to a potter's workshop. This might have been in the southern part of the city, where excavators have discovered claypits. Here the Lord intended to give to His prophet an important revelation and a message of vital significance to His people.

The potter was just getting ready to start his day's work on the wheels; i.e., stones or disks fastened to a wooden rod, placed into a hole in the ground. The lower disk was a footwheel, spun with his feet, thus setting the upper disk in motion. The potter placed his lump of clay on the upper disk, and it is a given that he shaped it into whatever vessel he chose to make. After centering the clay in a cone-like form, he opened a hole in the center and pressed the edges. So the potter widened that hole. As it enlarged and thinned, he gave it the desired shape. But the vessel in the hands of the potter was marred in the making.

The point is that the potter can do as he pleases with the clay in his hands. He can discard it after an accident, or finish the marred vessel. He can make an entirely new vessel out of the clay, one like the last, or ... one altogether different, exactly as it seems good and right to him. He can reform it. He does reform it. He will reform it. The clay is in his hand. Every house has a builder, but God is the Builder of everything. There is no limit to what He reforms, from one sinner's heart to a whole nation of wrongdoers.

The Lord God is able to destroy a wicked nation ... and to prosper it when they repent. Think of Nineveh, whom God warned, who repented under Jonah. God built them up to destroy other wicked nations; but eventually, a hundred years later, God sent Nahum to curse them and have them destroyed in their wickedness. Think of prosperous Sodom and Gomorrah baking to a crisp under the rains of fire and sulfur. The Amorites, Babylonians, and Persians each had their day as conquerors and their day as the conquered.

Yet the Lord, although the absolute Ruler of the nations, is not an arbitrary God who destroys at random by sudden whims or fancies. He remains the God of unchanging justice. It is according to His just will by which He reforms all things, even the nations—His will to demolish the devil's work and His will that His Word is taught in its truth and purity, so that we live holy lives according to it.

You do not imagine you have a hand in your destiny, do you? So many have fallen to the scheme of works-righteousness, that we can pave our own path to eternity. You know that it is the Lord's hand who forms your way, right? Nothing you do of your own faculties or abilities can form our path to God. You are not the potter. You are only a vessel in God's hands. The same hands that form your destiny formed your salvation. What hands mold or "throw" the clay were spread and pierced on the cross. Your life was guaranteed under God when He justified you in His death and resurrection. And it is faith, not works, by which you are saved. Put down your weapons against His grace! Lay down your arms that you trust more than His arms that raise the scepter of heaven's rule! Know that the Lord does this reforming, not you. You cannot scratch or claw your way to God's good graces. You are subject to His victory and His Holy Spirit in your heart. And His tools are surprising.

2. He reforms the nations with a mighty Word

Nearly every verse in this text involves God's Word. Examples: ¹...*the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD:* ² ...*there I will give you my message.* ⁵*Then the word of the LORD came to me.* ⁶ ... *declares the LORD.* ⁷*If at any time I announce ...* ⁹*And if at another time I announce ...* ¹¹*Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, 'This is what the LORD says. So we speak of a reformation by Scripture alone, because we discover in the Word of the Lord a reformation by Scripture alone.*

This *sola Scriptura* principle does not *only* mean that every word of the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit, that men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (although it does mean that). "Scripture alone" also means that the Scripture alone is the sole rule and norm of our doctrine and practice. The Bible is both a starting point and a shutting-down place. If the Bible is never a starting point, then you have lost God's love. But if the Bible is never a shutting-down place, then you have lost the truth.

The Word of God shuts down nation after nation. Even the house of Israel, with all its special treatment as the line of the Savior, ignored and denied God's Word. So God, by His Word, tossed it out like marred clay. As a meaningless lump, God took it and reformed it into a citizenry of faith. We who believe belong not to this or that culture or skin color or earthly collective society; we who are reformed by God's Word and who believe in Jesus belong to the nation of heaven. It is no game of words, but a claim by God's Word on our souls.

It seemed like a game of words. When Duke George, the Bearded, of Saxony, the fervent Catholic who sought to extinguish Lutheranism by any means possible, was about to die, he wanted to make his brother, Henry, heir of his realm. But he included this condition; that Duke Henry should promise to never permit the gospel to be preached in his dominion. If Henry didn't agree, then the lands would recur to the emperor. The nobility lent their aid and said they themselves would deal with Duke Henry and persuade him to terms. They traveled to the Duke's brother Henry, and they gave Henry the sweetest speeches about beautiful countryside and plenty of gold, uncoined silver, and silver plate. He could secure all these things if only he agreed to George's terms. But the honest prince replied, "You remind me of nothing else than the devil with Christ in the wilderness, who said, 'All these things I will give You, if You will fall down and worship me.' If my brother may disinherit me with a good conscience, he may do so. Don't think, however, for a moment that for the sake of money or possessions I will hinder the Word of God when God Himself has set it in motion. I would rather be a poor prince than to sacrifice God and His Word."

However, what took place? What seemed like a game of words became a gigantic answer to the advance of God's Gospel in those territories. Before his noble diplomats could return, Duke George died. So they could not enact the stipulation against George's brother. Duke Henry now hastened to receive the oath of allegiance as the nearest heir, possessed the land, and from that hour, allowed the gospel to be preached.

You and I will allow that gospel, too; we will be still, and we will revel and enjoy that gospel, or we will be reformed by that gospel. The Word will work, in one way or another, in the name of Jesus. **Amen.**

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**