

"Like Clay in the Hands of a Potter..."

I have given you a small lump of clay today. I'm sure that the clay may prevent you from focusing on my sermon. But I try this great adventure to help you really understand the story of the Bible today.

Make a cross very quickly with the clay you have now. I am going to give you a short period of time, and I ask you not to fix the cross and redo it during my sermon.

Let us now think about why God the Creator yielded his absolute sovereignty of dominance from the beginning in the Garden of Eden to man. From then on until today, he had to suffer much anger and sorrow because of human rebellion and crime. But why doesn't he give up being our father? It is because He is content with and delights in our very existence.

That is why He is still concentrating on the work of re-creation and salvation for mankind today. He has made it known to us that it is not because of His inability that the human problem of sin and suffering is still not resolved. He sent mankind the Savior Jesus Christ, who works in us through the Holy Spirit.

I. Jeremiah:

Today, through the prophet Jeremiah, God pleads with the Israelites to understand what their existence is. One of the main causes of the constant failure of humans is that we forget that we are God's creation. This resistance and disobedience to God have always brought punishment and destruction upon man himself.

Let us think about this in today's allegory. What vision do pieces of clay have? The pieces of clay would probably think that they are their creators or potters.

But the truest vision for the clay is that it depends entirely on the hands of the potter. This is because, through the potter's skill, the clay can be reborn as a perfect work that one cannot imagine.

The reason I instructed you today to make a cross out of clay is not because I want to see your masterpiece. Your cross is made as your hands knead the clay. If I gave you the opportunity, you would have reworked the cross ten more times. Why? Because the clay is in your hands.

The reason you don't like the shape of the cross is not your clay itself, but your technique. But that is not the case for God the Potter. We are unable to make perfect creations with the clay because we are imperfect as creators, but with clay in the hands of God, any problem that arises is entirely because of the clay, us.

God, the Potter, treated Israel like the finest clay in His hands. Still, Israel continued to deceive, rebel, and forsake their own Potter. To His people who reject the true Father's love, the Lord commands them to amend their ways and doings (v. 11).

We must always remember that God's patience toward man is truly very long-lasting. However, there will be a time when that patience comes to an end at his chosen time. None of us knows that time. So, we must live under only one conclusion: "The patience of God has been granted us to this very day."

II. Philemon:

In today's Old Testament, the Israelites, despite God's continuing exhortation, did not repent of their unbelief and were eventually taken to Babylon to live as captives. But in the New Testament text, Onesimus shows how a person who hears the gospel and receives Jesus Christ as the Savior personally experiences spiritually and physically enables positive changes.

Paul, who was imprisoned in a Roman prison and preached the gospel, wrote a letter to his disciple Philemon, who lived in Colossae. This letter seemed to have been taken directly by Onesimus to Philemon.

Onesimus became a co-worker of the gospel by helping Paul, despite being a former slave of Philemon. He incurred financial loss to Philemon and fled to Rome. But he met Paul there, accepted Jesus, and began a new life.

Here, let's reflect on Onesimus standing in front of Philemon with Paul's letter. He is like clay in a potter's hand. Onesimus is still Philemon's slave without Philemon's permission of release. Onesimus was spiritually free because of Jesus, but he was still a slave in the eyes of the law.

Because of Jesus and his gospel, the master and his slave met again. Now Paul asks Philemon in Christ to give generosity and forgive Onesimus. Did Philemon forgive Onesimus at Paul's request? The answer is obviously yes. Philemon knows that through Paul he became a true free man in Jesus and a debtor of the gospel.

Onesimus, however, is not afraid if he becomes a slave of Philemon again, for he has already gained the grace and freedom in Jesus Christ in whatever circumstance. For that, he is making a courageous decision to give up all his other rights.

In Paul's letter, we see Onesimus, who chooses the joy of gaining his Savior, Jesus, even though he faces losing everything. And we also see Philemon forgiving the slave who escaped with the love of Christ and embracing him as a free man and brother in Christ. This is made possible through the lives of his disciples, who confess themselves as clay and Jesus as the potter.

III. Gospel of Luke: In his gospel, Luke introduces the way of being a disciple. I want to explain the path through the five words introduced in the text.

1. First of all, in verse 26 we meet the word "hate." "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple." (NIV) This seems somewhat harsh, doesn't it? Jesus and hate don't seem to harmonize with each other.

Let's contrast this passage with the GNT version. "Those who come to me cannot be my disciples unless they love me more than they love father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and themselves as well." That is, Jesus' disciples are those who love Jesus more than anything else in the world.

2. In verse 27, we, as disciples of Jesus, are asked to take up our own cross and follow Jesus. Did Jesus not pay off all our sins by dying on the cross? Why do we have to take the cross? This means a cross of ministry for one's own religious maturity and the salvation of others.

This cross requires sweat and effort. So, we are afraid of it and reject it sometimes. But this cross keeps us spiritually awake, and it humbles, grows, and works with the Lord and other comrades and gives us the joy of accomplishment.

3 & 4. The third and fourth words represent prudence. These are marked in verses 28 and 31 as "sitting," "estimating," and "consideration." Sometimes non-Christians misunderstand Christians as people who neglect to think when they emphasize faith. They see it as blind faith without any sharing of deep thought.

However, to be a true disciple that lives by the tenets of the word takes deep thought. Why? The reason is not only that this is not easy, but also the best value it has. It is a constant struggle, so there must be constant thought, prayer, and meditation to maintain a life as a disciple.

5. Finally, in verse 33, we meet the word "give up." Isn't this a very hopeless conclusion? That is right. But this is a necessary part of the process in order to achieve absolute hope.

Unless you give up the finite, you cannot possess the eternal. You cannot own the things of heaven unless you give up the things of the world. You can't have absolute value when you cling to what is worthless.

How is this decision possible for us? This is possible when we confess that "I am a clay-like creature in the hands of the potter, my creator and savior."

Dry the clay cross you made today and keep it for a week. Then throw the cross on the stone and break it. Can you hear it complain to you? Of course not.

Perhaps no one would want to break that cross because it is your masterpiece that you created yourself. But your God came to the world in the body of Jesus Christ and broke His body and life for your salvation. But he never complained.

We constantly seek true safety, happiness, and achievement. How joyful and blessed are we to discover and possess these in the wisdom of the Creator who made us!

Through faith, we gain true freedom in God's control. As I endure my losses in the Lord's commandments, I can give a benefit to others. When we give up human love, we become disciples of the Lord who realize divine love. Amen.

Reflections and Applications for Today's Sermon:

1) When you apply the relationship between the potter and the clay to your relationship with God, what new spiritual awakening comes to you? What gratitude, petition, or confession of repentance do you bring to God?

2) The three characters in today's Philemon text are Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus. When Onesimus met Philemon with Paul's letter, how did the conversation between the two unfold and what emotions might have been felt there?

3) Recall the five conditions for becoming a disciple of Jesus through the text in Luke. Which of these conditions do you particularly need to develop? Why?