

## Sermon for November 11, 2012 - Reformation

Jeremiah 18:1-11

### Theme: Reformation is all about . . .

- 1) *Recognizing the Lord's sovereignty over us. (1-5)*
- 2) *Receiving the message of salvation in faith. (6-10)*
- 3) *Repenting of our sins. (11)*

*This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: <sup>2</sup> "Go down to the potter's house, and there I will give you my message." <sup>3</sup> So I went down to the potter's house, and I saw him working at the wheel. <sup>4</sup> But 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. <sup>5</sup> Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>6</sup> "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. <sup>7</sup> If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, <sup>8</sup> and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. <sup>9</sup> And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, <sup>10</sup> and 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. <sup>11</sup> "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.'*

Brothers and sisters in Christ: do you know what the word “reformation” means? To “reform” something literally means “to form again” – to change something so as to improve it by getting rid of the bad. Back in the 1500’s, the church was so corrupt with false teaching that it had to be reformed – and this is exactly what God did through his servant Martin Luther.

But a church is not the only thing that needs to be reformed. Over time our Christian hearts can become corrupt with false ideas, beliefs and sin. Our hearts can become complacent and callous towards the Gospel. Yes, our hearts are in constant need of reformation, and it is this kind of reformation that we will be considering this morning, under the theme: **learn what reformation is all about:** 1) *Recognizing the Lord's sovereignty over us.* 2) *Receiving the message of salvation in faith.* 3) *Repenting of our sins.*

### Part One: Recognizing the Lord's sovereignty over us.

Our sermon text is taken from the book of Jeremiah. Who was Jeremiah? He was a prophet sent to warn Judah of a coming disaster: The Babylonians were going to conquer Jerusalem, destroy the temple and take all but the weakest citizens captive to Babylon. And why was God going to allow this? Because Judah had forsaken Him and turned to other gods – all the while pretending to still be interested in the LORD.

The Jews, however, felt that this threatened punishment was unfair. They were God's people - how dare Jeremiah tell them that God would reject them. God had no right to reject them - they felt.

And so God uses an illustration to teach the Jews - and us - what is fair in His eyes. Jeremiah writes:

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A potter is someone who makes anything out of clay: dishes, plates, vases, etc. . . . To do this, he would take muddy clay and, when spinning it on a wheel, form it with his hands into whatever he wants to make.

The potter Jeremiah saw was working with clay that just wouldn't cooperate because of some flaw in it. So what does the potter do? Instead of throwing it out, he forms it into something else

Now, no one would argue that the potter had no right to do this. He had every right to do what he wanted with his creation. And this is the point of comparison the LORD wished to make.

<sup>5</sup> *Then the word of the LORD came to me: <sup>6</sup> "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?" declares the LORD. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.*

Dear Christian, think of your relationship to God. You're a descendant of Adam and Eve, right? Why yes - all humans are. And how was Adam formed? Out of the dust of the ground. Yes, humans are nothing but lumps of muddy clay that God forms for his purposes. Because God is our Creator, He can do with us whatever he wants. Do we have any right to complain to God that our life is not what we want it to be? Do we have any right to change his Word to make it more palatable to what we think it should say? Do we have any right to demand things from God or ignore his call to come and study his Word? No we don't. And yet our sinful hearts try to do all these things.

"But," St. Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "*who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"*" (Roman 9:20) I know you don't want to hear this, but it is the truth: you are nothing but clay before God. Actually it's worse than that: according to your sinful nature, you are nothing but difficult clay that resists him. None of us deserve anything from God. Realize this about yourself. Recognize how much greater God is than you. And why? Because it is the truth. And also because such humility before God is the first step in having our sinful hearts reformed.

#### Part Two: Receiving the message of salvation in faith.

In our account, the potter decided to use the clay differently than he originally intended. Why? Because the clay would not allow him to do what he first wanted to do. And here is another point of comparison: Just as a potter can change his mind regarding how he will use his clay, so the LORD can change his mind as to how he will use us. "But wait," someone might say, "Doesn't God say in the Scriptures: *I the Lord do not change* (Malachi 3:6)?" Yes, God does say this. He does not change. His loving purpose for us stands forever. But part of that loving purpose is to get us to repent and believe in him if we fall away. Part of that loving purpose is to judge those who refuse to repent and believe in him as a warning to others so that they do not fall away. And so the LORD may change his intent towards us in order to fulfill his unchanging loving purpose.

The LORD said to Jeremiah: *If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed,* <sup>8</sup> *and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.*

A good example of what God is taking about in found in the story of Jonah, who was sent to the city of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria at that time. The Assyrians were a godless, violent nation and an enemy of Israel. God, wanting to show his justice, intended to destroy them. He sent Jonah to give them the warning. But what did the Ninevites do? They repented by showing sorrow over their sins, and trusting in God for mercy. And what does God do? Instead of destroying them, he forgives them and does not send the disaster he threatened. He changed his original plan for them.

The LORD continues: <sup>9</sup> *And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted,* <sup>10</sup> *and 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.*

Now consider the example of Judah. God chose and intended to bless them. But Judah became arrogant and godless. They began to worship other gods. They ignored the prophets' warnings about their sin. They turned away from the LORD. And so the LORD changed his intent regarding Judah. He would send Babylon to punish them. They would be sold into exile. His purpose for Judah would be to show his justice and holiness.

But God would rather show his mercy. This is why he warned Judah about what was going to happen. He wanted them to repent. And if they would have repented, God would have changed his intent for them yet again. Why? Because our God is a merciful God, who sent his Son to die for the sins of all people. Every sin is paid for. Receive this message in repentant faith, and you will have eternal life. God's purpose is to save his chosen people - all those from every nation who believe in him. All God's actions work toward that purpose - even the punishment of those who refuse to repent and believe in him.

Dear Christian - having recognized sovereignty of God, recognize also his mercy towards you. Our God is forgiving. <sup>9</sup> *He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever;* <sup>10</sup> *he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.* <sup>11</sup> *For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;* <sup>12</sup> *as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.* (Psalm 103:9-11) God wants to you to repent so that He can forgive you – this his intent, as is clearly illustrated by the last verse of our text:

Part Three: Repenting of our sins.

*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 LORD did not want Judah to be destroyed. Through Ezekiel - a contemporary of Jeremiah, He says: *'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?'* (Ezekiel 33:11)

What the LORD said concerning Israel and Judah is also true concerning us. God does not want us to die. He does not want us separated from him. This is why he threatens us with his law that we might see our sinfulness and repent. He wants to forgive us. He want us - lumps of clay that we are - as his dearly loved children. How much does God love you? So much that He sacrificed his Son, his only Son, for you. God loves you, so repent and turn to him in faith. Then you will be able to worship him with a true heart - not merely going through the motions of worship - but truly enjoying every aspect of it. Then Bible study, family and personal devotion time and prayer will become a top priority in your life - not because you have to do these things, but because you will want to spend time with God in His Word.

And if you refuse repent? If you, like the Jews, let your heart turn away from him and towards the thing of this world? If you ignore his message? Then his intent towards you will change as a warning for you. And if you still refuse him? Then he will fulfill his intent to do you harm so that others may take warning from your fall. God takes not pleasure in doing this, but he will do it if you – clay that you are – force his hand. He will do it to save others from experiencing a similar fate.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: Reform your hearts! How? *By Recognizing the Lord's sovereignty over you. By receiving the message of salvation in faith. And by repenting of your sins.* Do this and the LORD will look down with favor on you and bless you. He will do everything in his power to protect you, and bring you safely into His glory - all according to his merciful love. Amen