

Sunday School Notes: 8 September: Jeremiah 18 and 19

Jeremiah often saw things in pictures. Perhaps that was why God gave him the picture of the Almond tree in blossom to encourage him as he set off on his work for God. And time and time again, just as Jesus did, Jeremiah saw something in everyday life which could help to get his message across.

One of the key images is that of a pot. In those days clay pots were the only real means of storing things

Right at the beginning of his ministry, Jeremiah saw in his mind's eye a clay pot full of boiling water. This was tipped over so that the hot water was pouring out in the direction of God's people. God explain to Jeremiah that this showed him that disaster was on its way. That hot water was the armies of the enemy who were gathering at the northern border, ready to attack them. (Those enemies thought they were doing what they wanted, but in fact they were going to help God teach his people how mighty he is.) Jeremiah was to warn the people that there was immanent punishment for their disobedience.

After he had been preaching for some time, God told Jeremiah to go down to the potter's house. Everyone knew where that was because the potter was one of the most important people in the village. More pots were always needed and pots were always being broken. Obediently, Jeremiah went to the house and stood watching the potter make a clay pot on his potter's wheel. (Explain how this process works.) The potter was shaping and decorating the clay – every pot would be differently shaped and decorated because he was an artist as well as a handyman.

Suddenly something went wrong – maybe there was a bubble of air in the clay; maybe a piece of clay dried too quickly and broke off; maybe the potter could feel the clay stretching too much. Whatever it was, the potter knew that the pot wouldn't be worth anything so he screwed up the clay into a ball and started again to make a different pot out of the same clay.

“See,” said God. “There are two lessons here. First, this is what is happening to my people: I am shaping them to be useful for me – making them beautiful – but, like the clay, they aren't co-operating so I shall destroy them and start again.

Secondly, God reminded him of the pot of boiling water. “I am shaping the pot of trouble for my people because they won’t listen to me. But I would love to have to smash it up and start again because they have turned and started to listen to me.”

But the people didn’t change. Instead they decided that they must make Jeremiah stop giving scary warnings. The only way to do that was to kill him. Jeremiah knew what they were plotting and was angry with them and with God for letting this happen to him. But he wasn’t about to give in!

So he followed God’s next instructions. This time, Jeremiah was told to buy a clay jug and to take it with him as he went just outside one of the city gates. I can imagine the crowd following him as he strode through the city carrying the great big jug. “What is this mad man going to say now?”

The message God gave him was even more scary. Jeremiah was to warn the people that the disasters were coming were so horrible that their ears would ‘tingle’ as they heard about them. The place where he was standing was going to be full of blood soon, full of dead bodies. The city was going to be destroyed. And as he said this, Jeremiah was to break the jug – making a huge crash - and say “This is how God is going to break us because you won’t ask for forgiveness and go back to him.” But it was clear that even now, God would have forgiven them, if they had listened.

Instead the authorities grabbed poor old Jeremiah and he ended up in the stocks where all the passers-by humiliated him and hurled insults at him. They liked living their own ways. They didn’t believe his messages. In fact, they didn’t think God would be hard on them. And Jeremiah? Well, he complained to God – but he didn’t give up. Jeremiah knew God was with him and he knew that what God wanted to save the people.

I am not sure we are very different from those people. We hear God’s word, but we don’t realise that following him will make us happy and so we keep on doing what we want. How silly we are! God will break us like that pot. Our lives will be useless when we could have been so loved and so useful. Let’s decide not to make that mistake.