

K-038 the Potter

by Art Katz

Art Katz's sermon explores the spiritual transformation of believers through the metaphor of porcelain making, emphasizing the necessity of trials and unity in the body of Christ.

Duration: 1:07:25

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Luke 24:44, Luke 24:46

Topics: "Potter"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of true Christianity and the costliness of following God. They highlight the need for believers to be bonded with each other and submit to God's dealings in their lives. The speaker also discusses the nature of suffering and how it is a necessary part of the Christian journey. They reference the example of Jesus, who learned obedience through suffering, and encourage believers to continually grow in their relationship with God and be willing to be refined through the fire. The sermon concludes with a thought-provoking illustration about the contraction that occurs when objects are put through fire, emphasizing the need for believers to let go of their own glory and surrender to God's refining process.

Transcript

I just feel like starting tonight with describing an experience I had only some months ago in England. I was in a place called Worcester, and I had an afternoon off, and walked around in this medieval city, and stumbled on the Worcester Royal Moslem Works. Remember I told you yesterday I was a man of the tent, and my wife is a woman of the knick-knack shelf.

So you would hardly expect a guy like me to take any delight in a porcelain factory. But I went in because as dumb as I am, even I had heard of Royal Porcelain. This factory has existed over two centuries in uninterrupted continuous production.

I took the tour, and liked it so much that I brought the English brother at whose home I was staying, who had never ever visited the place, to come with me on the connoisseur's tour. That's how fascinating it was. And we were told that not even during World War II, in the blackout days, and when fuel was scarce, were they required to diminish their furnaces.

The furnaces have continued over two centuries at 4,000 degrees Fahrenheit. So sensitive is the issue of firing as it pertains to Royal Porcelain. Well I don't think I'll ever recover from the visit, and I hope that you'll

not recover from this partial description of what I saw.

I didn't realize that so much goes into what they call fine china or porcelain. It was an enormous illumination to see the kinds of pains that men will take for fine things. And by contrast, how nondescript and shallow and casual, in matter of fact, are we with the things that pertain to eternity.

Well I showed you at first how they even formed the clay. I thought clay was clay. That's how unbenighted and ignorant I was.

But it's a mixture of many important elements. One is the purest kind of clay available, but then depending upon its use, it's mixed with quartz, with granite, with other minerals, and to produce china, bone china, they actually use bone. Did you know that? I didn't know that.

Bone china has a certain kind of tensile quality and strength that permits it to be transparent and delicate and yet very durable because bone is actually pulverized and mixed into the clay batter itself. It's a highly precise skill in shaping this clay. Men spend lifetimes at it.

I borrowed a bike and I rode around the town, and sure enough I stopped for a beer someplace where they were playing bowling, you know, and had a chat, and one or two of those men had worked in that factory over 50 years. See this isn't like America where you're continually on the move. It's transient society.

These men were born, they lived, and they're going to die in this little town. They serve an entire lifetime making china. They serve an apprenticeship so long before they even get to touch the stuff.

And there's a feel to it that's more than just science. It's art. It's hereditary.

It's a sensitivity. There's a pride. There's a tradition.

These men, when I asked them where they had worked, when they said the Royal Porcelain Works, they threw out their chest with pride. 50% clay, 50% rock, quartz, mineral, bone, pulverized, crushed, and mixed together. Without the impurities, what do you think it's going to be, just any old clay? Because if there's so much as an air bubble in a piece that is cast, it is thrown into the dustbin.

There's a standard of perfection that this factory exercises that will shame us. They really labor over that raw material before it's ever pressed into a mold. And it has got to be exactly in the right proportion.

The impurities pressed out and then allowed to set and rolled and formed into a thick cylinder. And then that itself is pressed into different molds and forms depending on what they want to make with it. And you never saw such molds in your life.

Shelf after shelf of molds of such designs. And then the clay is pressed into that mold or poured into that mold. Sometimes it's a centrifugal device that circulates to make sure that that liquid clay shoots right into every crevice, nook and cranny of that mold, that it comes out perfectly.

And then it's allowed to stand and to harden. And then these molds are opened with great care lest any fragile thing break that would render that thing worthless. And then it's taken out with great delicacy and put on shelves and allowed to stand.

I don't know how long it stands but it's a substantial time until under room temperature it comes to the place where they can begin to handle it. Then very skilled workers trim off the little edges that need to be peeled and with a little artist's paintbrush and water just blend and soften things and get that thing just right and perfect. And then if it's a teapot, a spout has got to be added to it and a lid.

Imagine if this thing that was being formed had a personality and a consciousness. And was just becoming conscious of itself and liked the form that it was enjoying and all of a sudden somebody was taking a snout of it. It would squeal, whether it likes it or not.

There it goes. The ends are wet and stuck in and the edges softened around with the paintbrush until that thing is hardened. And the same thing with the lid.

And then it's allowed to stand further. And then when they have a sufficient number they put it on trays and they put it into this furnace that is roaring continually 4000 degrees Fahrenheit. You don't just shove something like that in.

It goes in in a timed sequence. It has got to approach the heat by gradation. Lest if the shock be too severe the thing will crack or an imperfection will show up later.

And then the duration in the furnace is timed exactly depending on the kind of object that it is. And then it comes out just as slowly as it had gone in and the cooling process is as important as the firing. Well you would think that it's finished but it's only the first stages of production.

But you know that something happens because of the intense heat that transforms the substance and makes it into something else altogether. What went in as clay comes out as porcelain. It becomes as it were transfigured.

There's a metamorphosis if I can use a fancy word by which the substance of the thing itself is changed by the intensity of the heat. Are you getting the message? If men will take such pains with mere bric-a-brac what will God take with us? And what, you've been complaining that the temperature is too hot? And you're in too long? Or you've been standing on the shelf and not being used? What, you complained about the spout that was added to your body and you didn't like it? Or you complained about other expressions of the body of Christ that were not like you? Not recognizing that you're porcelain and they're china? And you have different functions but you're still royal? Listen, the children of darkness are wiser than the children of light. And we can take a cue just watching their operations.

Well then comes, you see these pieces that have been added have been bonded by the fire. You just can't add a spout or a handle or a lid without putting that through the fire so that the two things that have been added have become one. Dum-da-dum-dum.

That's why we can sit like lumps Sunday after Sunday for 10,000 Sundays we've never been joined. Those that believe we're together is not a statement of mere physical proximity. It's a statement of the intensity of the quality of relationship which in heaven changes everything.

Can I teach you the Hebrew course? Psalm 133. Behold how good and pleasant it is for a brethren to dwell together in unity. It's like the ointment that was poured upon the head of Aaron and down his beard to the hem of his garments.

Like the dew on Mount Hermon. There God has commanded the blessing even life forevermore. Where's there? You better know where there is because there's no other place where God has commanded the blessing.

Where the brethren dwell together in unity. Well dwelling, I'm sorry to speak to you like idiots. It's not because you're Canadian it's because you're just believers.

And that's the way God has got to speak to us today. We're so dense that we can shame him by pushing the Sunday Christianity in his face and making that to count for the real. Thinking that we can enjoy the blessedness of which Psalm 133 speaks simply because we share a common facility.

Someone called that cohabitation. It's like a married couple who no longer sleep with each other but share the advantage of a common apartment. It's cohabitation.

It's not union. Where brethren dwell together is where they have been forged in the heat. Where you can't tell where the spout ends and the pot begins.

And the one is useless without the other for it has become one new entity altogether. We got quite a few brittle little separate pieces in this room tonight. That I've never welcomed the addition of other members of the body.

They just don't like it. Or what shall I say about actually entering into the furnace of affliction together. I made a little note to myself today.

I said I define community. Community is affliction. It ends in joy.

Suffering always does. That's redemptive. But before it's joy it is affliction.

It is trial. It is tribulation. It's heat.

And if we'll not go through that fire we need not think that our substance is going to be changed. We're still wet earth, mud. And we're not yet this precious thing that can acquire a gleam and become a trophy and a vessel in the kingdom of heaven.

See clay can't hold anything. But porcelain can contain a glory. With vessels being fitted to contain and to demonstrate and reveal and to pour out the glory of God.

But if we're clay we'll just sag and dissipate and there'll be rents and hauls and the thing will seep out. But the Lord will never use us as a divine container. It takes heat folks.

That's it. I'm sorry. That's the long and the short of it.

Whether you like it or not. Whether you'll say ouch or not. There's a necessary passing through a furnace of affliction together.

You know what I learned? The woman who took us through this tour and she was so proud of everything. She'd been employed like a quarter of a century. She said the more exquisite the piece the more firings.

She said a fairly expensive piece will go through the furnace as much as 16 times. Every time there's an overlay of color or a dip of glaze it has got to go through again. See you just don't paint the whole thing at one time.

What did you think? That it's like do it by the numbers kit and you just paint? No. You do the morph colors. You do the red tints.

And then you bake the red. Come back you do the earth colors. You bake that you come back.

You do the greens. You bake that you come back. As many color options that's as many times as it goes through the fire.

You know what I learned? It's one thing when this glaze is painted and it's another thing when it comes out of the fire. So what is waiting on God is this side of the furnace comes out on the other side as the experience of his presence. What is failure on this side comes out on the other side of the fire as humility.

You can't tell what it's going to look like until it has passed through the fire. What kind of a piece would you like to be on the Lord's shelf? Some drab monochrome one kind of gray thing. Or would you want to be one of those exquisite things that it really is a collector's item.

Multicolored and rich and profuse. Hand painted and all kinds of precious decoration that has gone through the fire again and again and again. You know what I have to say? Most of God's people are pretty dull.

Sometimes it's more interesting to talk to an atheist. Some of us are just little spouting machines with our little favorite cliché or scripture or doctrine. It's amazing how little variety that we have.

Like we've hit a vein and we stay there. How little we reflect the creator who is so full of glorious originality and inventiveness. You know what I suspect the fourth is not his, it's ours.

It betrays an unwillingness to be put through the fire every time he adds another color. If I come again two years from now and I'm the same condition then that I am now, would you kick me? You won't kick me, she's too lovely. You know what I'm talking about? We should be continually increasing in God.

Increasing in richness and in the breadth of knowledge of the word. And in the shaping of divine character and showing forth the glory of him who is fashioning us after his own image. And if we have been fixed at a certain plateau, as so many of us have, it's an evidence that we have been unwilling to be passed through the fire.

Interesting little thing I was told on the tour. Every piece that goes through the fire shrinks one sixth. Isn't that interesting? Exactly, one sixth.

So if you want a teapot or a saucer or some beautiful floral vase to come out a certain dimension, you've got to make it one sixth larger to begin with. Because there's a contraction that takes place in the heat. That sixth is taken out.

Glory. Let me ask you, do you still have your sixth? I bet you many of you do. Huh? You need to pass through the fire.

In case you don't understand what the people are laughing at, six is the number of men. Six is our filthy humanity. Six is all that is base and degraded and selfish and vain and ambitious.

Needs to pass through the fire, folks. That needs to be contracted out. We might come exactly into the form and the shape and the size that will reveal his glory.

God is not satisfied with clay. He wants that thing that has changed in the heat to a new kind of substance. Because they that are in the clay and in the flesh cannot please God.

They cannot. I don't care how nice you look in the clay. You cannot please God.

Well, they took us to a department that they call the burnishing department, where they actually apply the gold trim. You know, it doesn't look like anything when it's first put on. It almost looks like a dull brown.

It's almost a color that will repel you. And then it comes out, then of course, what happens? Got to go through the fire again. You all even know that? And then when it comes out, it is still a strange looking color.

It was not the original brown, but it's turned another hue, but it's not yet gold. Then it comes to the burnishing department, and there are women there who have done nothing else for 25 years or more than burnish gold. They take silver, a certain kind of a stone, and they rub this gold edge, and they rub it, and they rub it.

And then they take sand, and they rub it, and they rub it, and they rub it, until the gold begins to gleam. Hand rubbed for that final breaking forth into the effusion of glory. Where are you in the process that I'm describing? Some of you have not even yet begun to be put into the batch.

So you have to be molded together and formed with rock. And so you have been formed as clay or unwilling to be poured into a mold that was not of your choosing. You wanted to be an apostle, or at least a prophet, or I don't know what, an evangelist.

And all that the Lord wants to make of you is an intercessor and a travailer and supplicator who groans and moans, who is never seen visibly by men, but is heard of God. But you don't like that cup of tea. I tell you what, children, you can't choose your mold.

I didn't choose mine. I know you wouldn't believe this or not, I'm a very private man. But you know what I like? Obscurity and hiddenness.

Good book, get out of the way, unseen. I despise public speaking. Naturally, temperamentally, I have no delight in it.

If you could follow me around for six weeks, all you would hear is a welter of groans and sighs as I approach the microphone. I don't find any natural delight that's in agony. But I didn't choose the mold.

It is only for me to be yielded, to be poured off where he would have me. And to stand on the shelf, to set and to harden so long as it pleases him there for me to remain. How many of us are itching to get into the action and want to go directly from the mold, right out into the marketplace, and don't like the idea that God has got you on the shelf while you are setting and forming? Let alone the idea of having a spout stuck on you or being joined to something else and going to the furnace again? I could just hear you shrieking, what, again? And again? And again? Precision workers who are proud of their craft at every stage, it's inspected.

If they find in any stage, especially in the beginning stages, an imperfection, what do they do with it? They crash right into the heath and it's wetted down and it's made again into clay and they start over. Because why should they invest the expensive processes of heating and glazing and burnishing in a thing that has

so much as a spot of defect? Can I ask you a question? If these men are making things that shall turn to dust and are investing such exquisite care, to what lengths will God himself go for that which is eternal in the saints? What, you don't like being handled that many times? You don't like to pass through the hands of men and you thought it was circumstances in men? No, it was never circumstances in men, it was always God. Let me read you a letter that was written to a saint.

She says, I find myself so often having to explain to people the why of their sufferings. I know of almost no one who has come out unto the Lord who has not been attacked by parents, friends and people whom they love. That's what hurts.

We can suffer hurt from strangers and it means nothing, but from close brothers and friends it hurts. The Lord led me through many coals of fire until it nearly took my life. I literally almost died from a broken heart more times than one and through it all I learned the reasons.

And when I knew what God was doing, not to me but for me, I could rejoice and see the results. God showed me that the soulish emotions hurt. Jealousy, revenge, unforgiveness, pride, selfishness in any form were a cancer that had to go.

And that when these were wounded, they must be wounded to death. You've got to shrink that one sixth. There's something that needs to be extracted from the very beginning when that clay is formed and drawn off.

You need to go through the fire again and again and again until there's nothing left that can be affected by the burning. And when we came to the end of that factory tour, the guide on this connoisseur tour, the second time I went, picked up one of these precious china plates and he said, you know how you can tell real china from fake? Because I always knew that where there's something beautiful and real and authentic, there's also something phony. You know that too, don't you? He said, this is how you tell.

And he held that plate up and you could see how translucent it was, why it was so gossamer thin. You thought it was so fragile that if you spoke too loud it would crack. The light just shimmered through it in such a glory, such a brilliance.

And then he took his finger and he went, I don't know that that sound has ever stopped yet. It was sounded on earth, but it reverberated and went up through the heavenlies and I think it is still reverberating through heaven still. It's an eternal sound that cannot be duplicated and sounded on anything but that which is pure, that has the precious ingredients, that has gone through the fire again and again and again.

If God were to take the body of Christ and cram it in British Columbia with his divine finger and go, what would he get? Would he get a divine heavenly sound? Or would he get thud? Thud. There are a lot of cheap imitations folks, a lot of plaster in Paris, cheapies, that look something like the real thing, but they cannot stand the test. It takes heat and plenty of it.

It takes exquisite hand care at every stage. It takes many colors and hues. And it's got to go through the furnace again and again and again.

And again and again. The writer says, how good it would be if every saint could learn early in his Christian experience that his life is as clay in the hands of the potter. Not according to his likes and dislikes, but according to the design of the potter.

From the time of our regeneration until the day we stand before the Lord complete and perfect, there will never be a day in which the Lord will rest from his marvelous work of grace and sonship. This work must continue unabated until we stand complete in him. If we submit ourselves to the fashioning of his skillful hands, we will be vessels unto honor and praise in the glory of his presence.

But if we squirm and struggle and resist, we may not be found perfect in the day of his coming. It's very easy for us to sing, have thine own way Lord, have thine own way. Thou art the potter and I am the clay.

It's easy to sing it, but it's not as easy to submit to it and to the final fiery process of tempering before this vessel is presented to him in holiness. All of these molding processes speak of suffering, pain and tribulation and every one of them is designed of God. A complaint should never be sounded from the lips of a saint for anything which they're suffering in this earth.

If they had this divine perspective, that God is shaping a vessel for time and for eternity. A royal porcelain. Can I just direct your attention to the beginning verses of the second letter to the Thessalonians? For these believers, because of your faith that groweth exceedingly in the charity of every one of you all toward each other abounded, so that we ourselves glory in you and the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which also ye suffer.

That really changes things, doesn't it? It'd be one thing going through furnaces and trials of tribulation if it were some senseless thing that was going to end on a shelf or a mere piece of bric-a-brac or idle decoration, or to be shattered somewhere in carelessness or neglect. But when it's for the kingdom's sake, how much more worthy a justification to allow ourselves to be yielded to the hands of the potter and to be put through the fires ever so many times as it shall please him. Let me read the same verses from the Amplified, because Paul is celebrating the faith and the love of these believers in Thessalonica.

And he speaks of it as increasing and abounding, about their steadfastness, their unflinching endurance and patience in the midst of all the persecutions and crushing distresses and afflictions under which you are holding up. Know what you have to say about that body of saints? They were being put through the furnace. And know what you have to say about them? As they began to come out on the other side, they abounded in faith and love.

I'll tell you what, I somehow suspect that it's not to be obtainable on any other basis. And this stuff about positive confession, if you say it often enough, if you believe it, is a hokey kind of magical incantation. It's a cheap way to obtain a real thing.

It's a plaster of Paris imitation. The only way to obtain abounding faith and love, and remember, it's only a faith which worketh by love. If you lack the one and yet have the other, it's worthless.

It's when you have passed and are passing through the furnace of exceeding persecution, crushing distresses and afflictions. This is positive proof of the just and right judgment of God to the end that you may be deemed deserving of his kingdom. That's the end of it.

Do you see the end for your life? Do you have a divine perspective about your own life? Or is it just the casual collection of days? Do you see church as just the total Sundays? Or do you see it as some kind of glorious organism given of God by which the spirits of just men are made perfect? Is it a place just to come

for a netifying message? A few choruses of praise and hallelujah and a pleasant afternoon or sing to saints? Or is it some vital laboratory, a place of affliction itself, a place of the dealings of God by which you are perfected? That when God will take his divine finger, there'll be a sound that's worthy to be heard both in earth and in heaven, and not mere dull thud only. To the end that you may be deemed deserving of his kingdom, that you should be made and counted worthy of the kingdom of God for the sake of which you are also suffering. I'll tell you, if I know why I'm suffering, it takes the sting out.

If suffering seems to me senseless, if I can't see any rhyme or reason, if I can't fathom why, then I feel much more the pangs of the pain of it. If I see some ultimate purpose in God, if I understand that there's something being fashioned in my character, if there's something that needs to perish in the heat, that God may have a clear sound out of this vessel, I can much more readily lend myself to going through it. I'll tell you children, God is wanting royal porcelain.

And to recompense you who are so distressed and afflicted by granting you relief and rest along with us, your fellow sufferers, that when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in a flame of fire to deal out retribution upon those who refuse to obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Note the heck of it is, it's going to be fire in the end, one way or the other. God's going to judge the earth by fire.

It's something for which you need not tremble if you have experienced the fire of God in the redemptive dealings of God. That when he comes in vengeance to take his retribution on those who have rejected him, that fire need not for you have any terror. You have passed through the divine fire.

It's only a fight for those who have avoided it. I'd rather submit to God now and let him put me through it at his own pace, than I should be some untempered piece of mortar and find myself caught up in the fire that God shall bring upon the earth as judgment. I'd rather submit to God now and let him put me through it at his own pace, than I should be some untempered piece of mortar and find myself caught up in the fire that God shall bring upon the earth as judgment.

There's something about the nature of suffering that seems to be at the very heart of the mystery. It was true for the first son, and it's true for every subsequent son until the end of the age. Even though he was a son, he learned obedience by the things which he suffered.

How then shall any son learn obedience less? Maybe if you'll turn with me to Luke, the concluding chapter of that gospel, you'll see something there which we need to be reminded. And that is that suffering is not an option. Sometimes when people hear us speak of community of the kingdom of God, they say, well, do you think that this is for all believers? And there was a time when I used to hesitate and feel, well, it would be presumptuous if I said yes.

But I'm not hesitating longer. It's not an option. It's a kingdom requirement.

Anything less than intensive and earnest, real relationship with God's people on a daily basis is less than the standard of His kingdom. It's mere churchianity. I don't care if you've got all the charismatic trappings or even have the finest end-time teaching.

It's more than teaching. It's also dealing. It's also relationship.

It's also the furnace of God. I've never been so dealt with except in the fellowship in Minnesota where I am. Can I give you a for instance? Humiliation after humiliation, 4,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

See, we meet every day for prayer. We begin our day in prayer. Well, we decided that one of the mornings should be exclusively a men's prayer meeting and a women's prayer meeting.

So the middle of the week Wednesday was given to that. I'll never forget the first one. Well, it was the wintertime, and before we trudged off in our 20 degree below zero weather to the quarter mile place where we were having it in one of the trailers, I found out that my son allowed his mother to make the wood fire in the basement, though his room is right by the furnace.

You know the way mothers are, how they'll patronize their sons especially and let them sleep in and always seem to favor them and always infuriate fathers who want to emphasize discipline, especially all the more as the end times are upon us? And so I found myself having an argument with Inger because this was a repeated pattern of her. And as the argument was going on, I found that my voice was increasingly rising and that the invective and the heat of it was much greater than the issue itself. And pretty soon it was a nasty kind of a thing, and I had to leave for the prayer meeting and the door slammed behind me, and boy, it was just a charged atmosphere, and I thought, wow, good thing I've got about a quarter of a mile to walk, get my spirit sorted out in time to get spiritual for the prayer meeting.

So I got there by that time, had my face fairly well adjusted, and I said, okay, fellas, well, the Lord has really given us a precious opportunity to really let our hair down and loose our ties and really face each other as men and have the kind of intense and earnest conversation and sharing that perhaps we could not have in just the mix for a time. Anything on anybody's heart? That song about, have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way. Make me and mold me after thy word.

And so after a moment's silence, one of the brothers cleared his throat, and he said, I have a problem, Mark. Oh, I said? Yeah, he said, it's you. I said, Gulp, what do you mean? Well, he said, you're an elder, and according to the qualifications that Paul gives for an elder, one is ruling your own house well.

He said, I couldn't help but notice. See, that's what happens when you live close together. You can't help but notice that you have a little irritation there with your wife from time to time and especially with your son, your elder.

And I said, wow. Well, as a matter of fact, fellas, just this morning, strangely enough, before I left the house, we had this little tussle over my son. And that was the beginning, and the heat increased.

And another brother said, well, he said, I noticed I had the same kind of difficulty with my wife. And he said, I noticed also that I get much more heated over it than the issue itself demands. And there are certain things she does that makes me climb the ceiling, like not being able to read a map or some other silly things.

And another brother said, you know, he said, just this morning before I left the house, I was reading this scripture where it says in Matthew that if any man call another fool, he's in danger of a judgment. And when he said that, something in my heart went snap. The Lord stabbed me because I was convicted in that moment that that's what I've been doing to my own wife.

That my spirit was saying, fool. And before I got out of that prayer meeting, quote, unquote, that morning, the Lord had shown me that there was a pattern that had been going on in my marriage toward my wife by which there was a certain contempt that I was expressing toward her far above the issues that, now, I don't even know, maybe I don't have to know what the root of that contempt is. Is it because I've imbibed

with my mother's milk an ancestral disdain for Gentiles as a Jew? And something about that sandy, complected, light-complected, snub-nosed face, that symbol of a Gentile world, started to wrinkle something in the depths of my inner man that comes out as spite and anger.

Or is it that she's female and I'm male? And earlier in my life, I've had some painful experiences with the opposite sex, which I think I have forgotten, but they've left a residue that still lingers and causes me to react in a certain way to my wife because she's a woman. I'm just, or it's both or it's more, but this much I know. I repented that morning.

I was caught with my face sticking out. There was no place to run. I was found out.

I had been rushed into the furnace and I fell before these men for whom I was supposed to be a leader, whom I was offending by my failures. And I asked their forgiveness and I apologized and repented and went. And when that meeting was over, a broken and chastised man, not chastised by men, but by God through men.

You see, the church itself is the furnace, if we really are the church, exhorting one another daily while it is yet today because tomorrow is too late. If you guys think that you're unaffected by that dealing last winter, you're mistaken. Because God took something out of me one-sixth because I went through a fire, which if I did not, who was to say that as I have been speaking to you night by night, on such sensitive subject like suffering, something of the taint of that earthly thing that clay would have come out in the message of the spirit.

Everything, every human admixture has got to be taken out by the heat. That when his voice is sounded, it is his voice. I can't think of any kind of ministry where this is more crucial than the prophetic ministry, which is often the requirement of bringing a fierce, if not an altogether destructive word, because there's a tearing down, a plucking out, and a destruction before there's a planting in the building.

But supposing that there's something in me that still lingers as a Jew toward Gentiles, and there you are and I'm looking out on you and I'm bringing a destructive word. Won't I take a little bit extra relish and delight in doing you in? Won't I go beyond the purposes of God, enjoying this opportunity to turn the knife one more time more than God intended, where it's no longer redemptive, it's just simply cruel? And then you know what happens to you? You recoil and shrink back, and then you nullify the entire message. I can't tell you how many times God has told me prophetically that I'm a threshing machine with sharp teeth, but I can't tell you how many times I myself have been threshed.

You want to be a prophet? You'll go through the furnace again, and again, and again, and again, and again. The question that God wants to put before you tonight, have you shrunk from the furnace which true apostolic church, which is the community of God, is? Have you satisfied yourself with something less and something more convenient that heals you and saves you from the necessity of going through such trials and through such heat? Because you're a coward, because you want to be spared humiliation, because you have no desire to embrace a cross. You like the teaching, you like the fellowship, you like the Sunday enjoyment, but you don't want to get any more involved with the saints of God, less it costs you.

I went from that prayer meeting having repented before men to go to my house and repent before my wife. And you want to know what I can tell you? Our relationship has never been better. She's gone through a few burnings herself, I can tell you that.

And the process is not over yet. You see, guys, we're so utilitarian, we think of a plaster of Paris thing that works, that that's good enough, but God is wanting something much more than utility. He's wanting excellence and He's wanting an eternal weight of glory.

It's worth all the fire. It's worth being ground and pulverized and mixed together and pressed into molds that we didn't desire to be and have slapped onto us handles and spouts and lids and things because God has designed it. It's not for us to choose the mold or the form, but to submit it to you, to the process of God, that we might be a glory to His name.

There's not an option here, there's a must. Luke 24, in my well-being speaking to this generation, O fools and slow of heart in the 25th verse to believe all that the prophets have spoken? Ought not Christ who has suffered these things and to enter into His glory? I challenge you to look up the references to glory in the New Testament, and perhaps anywhere in the scripture, and you'll not have to look far before you'll find the word that precedes it, suffering. These words are twinned, they're joined, they're inexorably connected.

You'll never hear God speak of glory without first we find the suffering. You'll never have an exquisite piece that doesn't first go through the furnace. There's an ought that is not an option.

In the 44th verse He said to them, These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all the things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the psalms concerning me. The 46th verse, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer. There's an ought, there's a behoove, there's a must.

For that Son and for every Son who will follow Him in the way. It's not an option, it's a must. Turn with me to 1 Peter.

I'm always doing this at random. I say just turn to the next page, turn to the next chapter, turn to the next book. The theme is woven, interwoven through the whole fabric of the Holy Writ.

Because what is bliss in heaven is first suffering on earth, and there's no two ways about it. It's the very nature of the thing. In a world that is inimical and opposed to God, anyone who stands for God and resembles God and is serving the purposes of God must suffer.

Those that live godly lives in Christ shall suffer persecution. No ifs, ands or buts. And the fact that we have not yet suffered that is an indication to the degree to which we have missed the godliness of God.

But it's coming. Because my God is forming things that are exquisite and shall be an eternal glory. I just want to jump into 1 Peter 6, verse 1. Wherein you greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, you are in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, may be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love, and whom though now you see him not yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

If need be. Is there any need in your life? Any lingering fleshliness? Any self-will? Any subtlety of rebellion and idolatry? I can tell you flat out with complete authority that the two principal problems of godliness people are idolatry and rebellion. That's it.

The sum and the substance in one form or variation of the other. Probably one of the most subtle idolatries practiced by Christian families is the doting affection and concern and time and energy given to their own families to the exclusion of all else. How many men will shrink from their commitments in God because, well, the family, you know, the family.

I think we have done the family in by turning into itself and not being adequately related to other families in the communities of God. Our kids are bored and restless and sickly. They're pampered, ungodly, seething with rebellion in subtle ways.

So look at gesture and we let them get away with it. We turn around and choose not to see what their faces and voices are clearly saying. It's a judgment because we have made of the family an idolatry, an excuse for keeping ourselves from the full employment and the purposes of God to which he calls us.

And from the proper relation of Christian family to Christian family, which is a definition of the community of God. We have allowed the world to pattern our lives rather than the king. There are subtleties of idolatry and rebellion that are shot through all of us.

If someone is suffering an affliction, they say, but how come me, Lord? How about this other one? You would think that she would be the one to have something like this. Of course, I know that she has a terrible attitude toward God. But how come me? Rebellion.

But why me? Rebellion. The very raising of a question why is already the evidence of a rebellious heart. Because we're not the victims of circumstances.

We're being shaped at the hand of God and the things that he chooses, knowing the depths and the deep-seatedness of the subtleties of idolatry and rebellion. He's putting us through a fire of furnace of affliction and it's going to... As a matter of fact, the end-time habit that is going to come upon the world and the unmasked hostility of the world against God's people, the persecution for which the entire body of Christ is tending, God will employ for a final purification by which you shall have a bride without spot, without... But what is our attitude toward this ought, this must, this... Are we welcoming it? If need be. Yes, it needs be.

That the trial of your faith which is more precious than a gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, should be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ. It's interesting that Peter is so much the spokesman for the theme of this rambunctious... Who do men say that they are? I know, I know. They're what the Christ has said to God.

A for the day for you. And then from that day forth he told them that they must go to Jerusalem and to be apprehended by men of tribe and suffer. And Jesus said, Oh Lord, let this be far from you.

No, he's really saying, P.S., let it be far from us also. What parades as condoling concern is really naked self-interest thinly gilded over and that has got to be purged. It's the spirit that says, Come down from the cross and we will believe you.

We'll join you. And you're going to hear that cry in the end times. Come down from that suffering.

Why do we have to go through this? Aren't you a king's kid? Come down and we'll join you in a great charismatic festival and a Jesus rally and one great ball. Come down from that suffering. Something must be wrong with you.

Are you masochistic, sick, a little demented? Prosperity, I mean, he's done it all. Well, he's not quite the Paul spoke about. Rejoicing in my sufferings for you to fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake.

Which is the church? And that is not yet filled up. Until the last taint is taken out. Until the last selfishness is dealt with.

Until the last carnal, fleshly, clay, earthly thing is still to be found in a son or daughter of God. Those sufferings must continue until all is filled up and all have come into the perfection and the stature of Jesus Christ unto a perfect man. That suffering was not yet full but must continue until all the sons are presented in perfection.

I'll tell you, you ought to see these pieces when they are finished and ready to be put on the shelves for sale or to be packaged and boxed and shipped all over the world. A piece of exquisite royal Worcester porcelain. You never saw such a gleaming beauty.

You never saw such a masterpiece. You never saw men scrutinize it for any kind of the slightest defect. It is exquisite in every detail or it does not go out.

How much more will God do than men for the things that are eternal? For even here unto where you're called it says in 1 Peter leaving us an example that you should follow his steps. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you as though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings that when his glory shall be revealed you may be glad also with exceeding joy.

The royal porcelain company of Worcester has not... What do you think about the furnace of God? Out of the furnace of much affliction he says, I have chosen you. But unlike those dumb inarticulate pieces of clay we have a will. And we shriek and we holler and we want to get off it and we don't want that and we chose something else.

We don't like that mold. We don't like that composition. We don't like that color.

We don't like that dealing. We don't like to be joined with this one. We don't like that furnace by which we're bonded.

When is God going to have a people who recognize that there's a must? O fools and slow of heart, not to believe the prophets that must suffer before he ascends up to his glory. There's a coming down and an ascending up. Isn't that what it says about that precious ladder that's suspended between heaven and earth? No man hath ascended up who has not first descended down.

Submitting his will to God, bending, yielding and welcoming the processes of God by which the divine finger can sound a heavenly chord. The true article. Royal China.

Will you be willing? And are you willing to go through a fiery trial and think it not strange that your faith might be tried as gold that it would not be found wanting in the day that to God be the glory that you'll be a vessel unto honor not something porous and fragile that can easily smash when the first pressure comes but something that is not only exquisite and a beauty revealing his glory but durable and substantial that can stand the strains and the tests and the tremors of an age in which the demands shall increase.

Are you a vessel unto honor that can contain the glory of God? And if once fashioned in form that so exquisite a cost and much expense and detail to which I'll please him to smash you and to pour out the divine content to make known the knowledge of him by us in every place the fragrance of the knowledge of him will you yield to the smashing knowing that in the day it is appearing every particle shall be gathered up? It's an expensive process. And we begin to catch a sense of it how cheap is our conventional Christianity how slapdash, how glib how careless anything goes any little cheapy thing that parades as a prophecy or a tongue interpretation is accepted without question any fleshly thing that appears and parades itself as a gift of the spirit is accepted the repeated chorus is trying to drum up some kind of charismatic atmosphere an assault upon the ears of God how little respect we have why I tell you that it wouldn't last a day in the royal porcelain factory in Worcester by even those earthly standards how much then by the standards of him who is the royal father may God give us a heart to see what he's after and a yieldedness to submit to it but Art, my husband has left now three times don't you think that's enough?

I mean how far must one go? well, if you're going to be an exquisite piece it'll go through the fire 16 times every time a new hue is added there's another burning I want to be a vessel unto honor in the house of God I don't want to be a little cheapy plaster of Paris imitation that just brings a dull thud and cracks at the first application of pressure I'm willing for God to invest in me what it shall please him trials, tribulations, demands strains and tensions and firings to be joined and bonded with an Art B.B. those that are different from me and unlike me in wife and fellowship and brother and elder that it might be down to the honor and the glory of God to God be the glory hallelujah let's bow our heads before God and thank him that he's preparing saints men and women for eternity

oh children if you only could see from the vantage point of eternity endless time and a people also that shall rule and reign with him that shall not be fragile shall not break and not bust under the first pressure ruling and reigning with him for eternity oh it's worth it all glory to God give yourself to the press of God be bonded with each other submit to the dealings of God and the heat of God hallelujah precious Lord thank you thank you precious God for such exquisite attention to our life how many times will we have been satisfied long ago that it was much better than what we were before and we were satisfied with our life now things are relatively harmonious and the fellowship is going nicely we have no special problems but you are not satisfied you have a standard in heaven my God

that makes the royal factory in Worcester to pale by comparison thank you precious God that you're relentless that you'll not give up on us that you bid us to go again and again through the hand of God Lord I pray for the body of Christ in Cranbrook British Columbia that it not be a dull thud either in the world or in your ears for when your divine finger shall summon my God a test there shall be found to be a heavenly reverberation that shall turn the ears and the attentions of men to the divine part of himself who fashioned it even unto their own eternal salvation my God let there be a bonding and adjoining let there not be a people who will shrink from the heat and be satisfied with mere Sunday Christianity only bring forth precious God an eternal masterpiece that reflects the genius

that you are as great creator bring forth precious God according to your own design your own hues, your own colors your own glazes your own composition, your own form a vessel for thy use to God be the glory if you have been a little island unto yourself a little fortress of individualism that has been unwilling to be mixed into the batch unwilling to be poured into the mold unwilling to be joined and unwilling for inconvenience unwilling for trial confront the potter and not yield to his hand how dare you be satisfied with that with which how dare you think that you can just paint by the process of heat becomes this cosmetic Christianity these religious faces these outward or seething inwardly give a yes to God mold it anew if it

shall please him it's a holy thing that he's speaking into

the earth you have a responsibility I want to ask you with whom are you can you show me with whom are you joined and bonded in the vessel that God is bringing forth in your locality you don't have much option if you'll not submit to this heat you'll have to face another fire

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