

The Potter

by Art Katz

Art Katz's sermon 'The Potter' emphasizes the transformative process of spiritual growth through trials, unity, and God's meticulous craftsmanship in our lives.

Scripture: Psalm 133, Isaiah 64:8, Luke 24:25-26, Romans 5:3-5, 2 Corinthians 4:7, Colossians 1:24, 2 Thessalonians 1:3-5, 1 Peter 1:6-7, 1 Peter 2:21, 1 Peter 4:12-13

Topics: "Unity in Community", "Transformation through Trials"

Description

Art Katz emphasizes the transformative process of being shaped by God, likening it to the meticulous crafting of porcelain. He illustrates how the intense heat and careful molding of clay into fine china reflect God's work in our lives, where trials and tribulations serve to refine us into vessels of honor. Katz challenges the congregation to embrace suffering as a necessary part of spiritual growth, urging them to recognize the divine purpose behind their afflictions. He stresses that true community and unity among believers are forged in the furnace of affliction, leading to a deeper relationship with God and each other. Ultimately, he calls for a willingness to endure the refining fire, so that we may emerge as exquisite vessels that reflect God's glory.

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 Porcelain Works. I told you yesterday I was the man of the intent and my wife is a woman of the knick-knack shelf. So you would hardly expect a guy like me to take anything 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; an uninterrupted continuous production. I took the tour and liked it so much that I brought the English brother, whose home I was saying, who had never ever visited the place to come with me on the connoisseurs 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. 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 and matter of fact are we with the things that pertain to eternity.

Well, they showed you at first how they even formed the clay. I thought clay was clay and that's how 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 ten style 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 of those two men who had worked in that factory for over 50 years. See this isn't like America where you're continually on the move, this transient society. These men were born, they live and they 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. It's more than just science, it's an art, it's hereditary, it's a sensitivity, there's pride, there's a tradition. These men, they went on when I asked them where they had worked when they said "the Royal Porcelain Works", they threw out their chest with pride.

50 percent clay, 50 percent rock, quartz, mineral, bone pulverized, crushed and mixed together and then they've got to squeeze out 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 roll 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 in through every crevice, nook, and cranny of that mold that it comes out perfectly. And then it's allowed to stand until hardened 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 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 paint brush 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 like the form that it was enjoying and all of a sudden somebody's thinking of just adding a spout to it. It would squeal. Whether he likes it or not there it goes "splat." It's wetted, the ends are wet and stuck in and the edges softened around with a paintbrush to 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 4,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

You don't just shove something like that in. It goes in a time sequence. It has got to approach the heat by a gradation, less if the shock be too severe the thing will crack or an imperfection will show us 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 has 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 high 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 your porcelain and their china. 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 to the fire so that the two things that have been added have become one. That's why we can sit like lumps Sunday after Sunday for 10,000 Sundays we've never been joined. Those that believe were together is not a statement of mere physical proximity, it's a statement of the intensity of the quality relationship which in heaven changes everything. Can I teach a little Hebrew course:

Psalm 133:1-3 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

It is like the ointment that was poured upon the head of Aaron and down his beard to the hem of his garment. Like the dew on Mount Hermon. There God has commanded a 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, 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 this Sunday Christianity in His face and making that the 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 when a spout ends and the pot begins. And the one is useless without the other, for to become one new entity altogether. We got quite a few brittle little separate pieces in this room tonight that have never welcomed the addition of other members of the body. They just don't like it. Well, where shall I say about actually entering into the furnace of affliction together.

I made a little note to myself today, I define community: "community is affliction." It ends in joy, suffering always does that's redundant, but before it's joy and it is afflictions, it is trial, it is tribulation, it is heat and if we will 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. When vessels being fitted to contain and to demonstrate and reveal and to pour out the glory of God. But if were

clay, we will just sag and dissipate and you'll be rents and holes and the thing will seep out. And the Lord 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 what you're say ouch or not. There's a necessary passing through a furnace of affliction together. You know what I learned? With 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 different glaze it has got to go through again. You just don't paint the whole thing at one time. What did you think? That it's like a numbers kit. That you just paint. No, you do the more colors, you do the red tint. And then you bake the red, and you come back, you do the earth colors, you bake that. You come back. You do the greens, bake that and 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 this side of the furnace comes out on the other side as the experience of His presence. When failure on this side comes out of the other side of the fire as humility. You can't tell what it's going to look like until it is passed through the fire. What kind of a piece would you like to be on the Lord's shelf? Some dread, mono-color, one kind of gray thing? 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 in 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 like 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 fault is not His, it's ours. It portrays an unwillingness to be put through the fire every time He adds another color. If I come again 2 years from now and I'm the same condition then, that I am now, would you kick me. You won't kick, she's too lovely.

You know I'm talking about? We should be continually increasing in God, increasing in richness and in the breadth of knowledge of the word and shaping of divine character and showing forth of the glory of Him Who is fashioning us after His own image. And that we have been fixed at a certain plateau as so many of us have, it's 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 1/6. Is it that interesting? Exactly 1/6. 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 1/6 larger to begin with, because there's a contraction that takes place in the heat. That six is taken out. Glory.

Let me ask you. Do you still have your sixth? I'll bet you know that you do. You need to pass through the fire. In case you don't understand what the people were laughing at, six is the number of man, six is our filthy humanity, six is all that is based 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 in 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 called 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. And then of course what happened? You got to go through the fire again. You didn't 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 into another cube, 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 burnished 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 infusion of glory.

Where were 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 some who have been formed as clay are unwilling to be poured into a mold that was none 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 travailleur and supplicator, who groans and moans who has never been 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 don't know if you would believe this or not, I'm a very private man. 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 wealth of groans and sighs as I approach the microphone. I don't find any natural delight. It's an agony, but I didn't choose the mold. Because 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 one 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're setting and forming. Let alone the idea having a spout stuck on you or being joined to something else and going through the furnace again. Like I hear you're shrieking, "what again and again and again."

Precision workers who are proud of their craft at every stage is inspected, if they find in any stage especially in the beginning stage an imperfection. Do you know what they do with it? Trash, right into the heat 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 and the 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 like to pass through the hands of men and you thought it was circumstances and men. No it was never circumstances and 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 relatives 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 1/6. There's something that needs to be extracted from the very beginning when the 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 we went, picked up one of these precious china plates and he said "you know how you can tell the real china from fake?" Of course I always knew that where there's something beautiful, 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 can see how translucent it was, it was so gossamer and thin. You thought it was so fragile, if you spoke too loud it would crack. The light just shivered through it in such a glory, in such a brilliance.

And then he took his finger and went. I don't know that sound has ever stopped yet. It was sounded on earth, but it reverberated, it 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 would have take the body of Christ in Cranbourne, British Columbia with His divine finger and go. What would He get? Would He get a divine heavenly sound? There are a lot of cheap imitations folks, a lot of plaster in Paris cheapies, that looks 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 and the glory of His presence, but if we squirm and struggle and resist we may not be found perfect and the day of His coming.

It is very easy for us to sing, have thy own way Lord, have thy 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 with anything which they are suffering in this earth, if they had this divine perspective that God is shaping a vessel for time and for eternity. A royal porcelain if you will.

Can I just direct your attention to the beginning verses of the second letter to the Thessalonians, where Paul in the third verse thanks God always for these believers.

2 Thessalonians 1:3-5 Because of your faith that groweth exceedingly in the charity of every one of you all thought each other abounded so that we ourselves glory in you in 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 be one thing going through furnaces and trials and tribulation if it were some senseless thing that was going to end on a shelf or be a piece of bric-a-brac or Idol decoration or to be shattered somewhere in carelessness or neglect, but when it's for the kingdom's sake. How much more worthy of 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 of Thessalonica. He speaks of it as an 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. You know what you have to say about that body of saints? They were being put through the furnace. And you know what you have to say about them? As they began to come out on the other side they are bounded in faith and love.

I'll tell you what I somehow suspect that's not to be obtainable on any other basis. And this stuff about positive confession if you say it often enough and loud enough and 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 a bounding faith and love. 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 justified 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 of 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 an edifying message, a few chores of praise and a Hallelujah, a pleasant afternoon or seeing the saints. Or it is 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 will be a sound that's worthy to be heard both in earth and in heaven.

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 be senseless, if I can't see any rhyme nor reason if I can't fathom why. Then I feel much more the pangs of the pain of it, but 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 could much more readily lend myself to going through it.

I tell you children God is wanting royal porcelain

2 Thessalonians 1:7,8 And to [recompense] you who are so distressed and afflicted [by granting you] relief and rest along with us [your fellow sufferers] when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in a flame of fire, To deal out retribution (chastisement and vengeance) upon those who do not know or perceive or become acquainted with God, and [upon those] who ignore and refuse to obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You know what the heck of it is, it is going to be fired in the end one way or the other. God's going to judge the earth by fire is 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 made 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 in His own pace and I should be some untempered piece of mortar and find myself caught up with the fire that God shall bring upon the earth as judgment.

Something about the nature of suffering that seems to be the very heart of the mysteries of God. 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 will turn with me to Luke the concluding chapter of that gospel. We'll see something there which we need to be reminded of, that is that suffering is not an option.

Sometimes when people hear I speak of community, the kingdom of God they say "what do you think that this is for all believers?" And there was a time I used to hesitate and feel well presumptions if I said yes, but I'm not hesitating any longer. It's not an option, it's a kingdom requirement. Anything less than an 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 only 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 soaked up except in the fellowship in Minnesota, where I am. I give you for instance, humiliation after humiliation, 4,000 degrees Fahrenheit.

See we meet every day for prayer, we begin our day in prayer. Well, we've decided that one of the mornings should be exclusively a men's prayer meeting and a woman's prayer meeting. So, in the middle of the week, Wednesday was given to that, I will never forget the first one. Well, it was the wintertime and before we trudged off in our 20 degrees below zero ended up through the quarter in one place where we were having at 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? How they'll patronize their sons especially and let them sleep in and always seem to favor them and always infuriates fathers who want to emphasize discipline, especially all the more the end times are upon us.

And so I found myself having an argument with Inger, because this was a repeated pattern of her indulgence toward this son. 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 a prayer meeting and the door slammed behind me. And boy, was just a charged atmosphere. Wow, good thing I've got about a quarter of a mile to walk to get my spirit sorted on time, to get spiritual for the prayer meeting.

So I got there, by that time I made my face really well-adjusted and very well served with these men. 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 happen just for a mix for a time. Anything on anybody's heart? Wasn't we singing about that song, "have Thy Own way Lord, have have thy Own way, make me and mold me after Thy way."

So after a moment's silence one of the brothers cleared his throat and he said "I have a problem Art", "Oh" I said, "yeah", he said "it's you." I said "what do you mean?" Well he said, "you're an elder and according to the qualifications that Paul gives for an elder, one who is ruling your own house well. He said "I couldn't help but notice" (Art speaking - 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 oldest son." 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 increased and increased."

Another brother said "well" he said, "I notice I have the same kind of difficulty with my wife", he said, "I notice also that I get much more heated over than the issue itself demands there are certain things she does that makes the climb the ceiling like not being able to read a map or some other silly thing." And another brother said, "just this morning before I left the house, I was reading the scripture where it says in Matthew that if any man calls another a fool Raca he is in danger of the judgment." When he said that something in my heart went "snap", the Lord stabbed me, because I was convicted in that moment, 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 that quote that was quoted from 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 be up above the issues that elicited the arguments.

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 abide with my mother's milk an ancestral disdain for Gentiles as a Jew and something about that sandy complected light complected snot-nosed face a symbol of a Gentile world started to rankle 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 pain full 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 hypothesizing, I don't know whether it's that at all 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 wept. 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 are mistaken, because God took something out of me ■, because I went too far. Which if I did not, who was to say that as I have been speaking to you night by night on such a sensitive subject like suffering something of a taint of that earthly thing that clay would have come out in the message. Everything, every human admixture has got to be taken out by the heat. That when His voice 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 in a fierce if not an altogether destructive word, because there's a teardown and a plucking out and a destruction before there's a planting and a building. But supposing that there's something in me that still lingers as a Jew towards Gentiles and there you are, I'm looking out on you and I'm bringing a destructive word. What if I take a little bit of extra relish and delight in doing you in. Once I go beyond the purposes of God and enjoying this opportunity to turn the knife one more time for that God intended, where it's no longer redemptive, that it's just simply cruel and then you what happens to you? You have to 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 to 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 with true apostolic church, which is the community of God is. Have you satisfied yourself with something less than something more convenient that shields

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 the cross. You like the teaching, you like the fellowship, you like the Sunday enjoyment, but you don't want to get anymore involved with the saints of God less it costs you a burning.

I went to that prayer meeting having repented before men to go to my house and repent before my wife and you 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 are so utilitarian, we think of a plaster of Paris thing works, that that's good enough, but God is wanting something much more than utility, He's wanting excellence and He is wanting an eternal weight of glory. It's worth all the fire. It's worth being grounded and polarized and mixed together and pressed into molds that we didn't desire to be and have slapped on to 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 and to yield to the process of God that we might bring glory to His name.

There's not an option here, there's a must. Luke 24 you may well be speaking to this generation.

Luke 24:25,26 Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have 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 a word that precedes it "suffering". These words are twinned, their joined, inexorably connected. You'll never hear God speak of glory without first defining 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 and the 44th verse.

Luke 24:44 And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all 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.

Luke 24:46 And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer

There's a behooved, 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 first Peter. I am almost doing this at random, just turn the next page, just turn the next chapter, turn the next book. The theme is woven, interwoven through the whole fabric of the Holy Writ, because what is bliss in heaven and there's no two ways about it. It's the very nature of the thing, in a world that is admanic and opposed to God. Anyone who stands for God and resembles God and they're serving the purposes of God must suffer. Those who 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 that godliness of God, but it's coming, because my God is forming things that are exquisite and shall be an eternal glory.

I am just looking, jumpin in the first Peter the sixth verse of the first chapter.

1 Peter 1:6 Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye 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, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus

Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye 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 flatout with complete authority that the two principal problems of God and His people are idolatry and rebellion. That's it. The son of 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 of 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 a gesture 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 judgement, 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 subtle things of idolatry and rebellion that has shot through all of us. If someone is suffering affliction they say, but "how come me Lord, how about this other, you would think that he would be the one they have something like this, because I know that she has a terrible attitude my God, 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 in the things that He chooses knowing the depths and the deep seedness of the subtleties of idolatry and rebellion. He is putting us to the fire of furnace of affliction and it is going to increase. As a matter of fact the end time havok 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 pending God will employ for a final purification by which you shall have a bride without spot without blemish without wrinkle. But what is our attitude toward this one, this must, this behoove. Are we welcoming it? If need be. Yes, it needs be. That the trial of your faith which is more precious than of 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 suffering. This rambunctious hotshot, "let us build you three booths." "Who do you men say that I am?" "I know, I know, thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." A for the day for you.

Then from that day forth He told them that He must go to Jerusalem and to be apprehended by men, tried and suffered. He said, "Let us be far from you." He was really saying PS, let this be far from us also. Let parades as condoning concern is really naked self-interest thinly spilled over and that has got to be purged in the fire. It's the spirit that says come down from the cross and we'll believe you, we'll join you. And you're gonna hear that cry in the end time. "Come down from that suffering. Why do you have to go through this aren't you a King's kid? Come down, we'll join you, we'll have a great charismatic festival and a Jesus rally and one great ball. Come down from that suffering. Something must be wrong with you man, sadistic sick of independent, prosperity. I mean He's done it all.

Well He's not quite done it all. Paul spoke about:

Colossians 1:24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and 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, to the last selfishness is dealt with, to the last carnal fleshly clay earthly thing is still to be found in a son or daughter of God. Our sufferings must continue to all is filled-up and all have come into the perfection of the stature of Jesus Christ unto a perfect man. That suffering was not yet proven, but must continue until all the sons are presented in perfection.

I'll tell you ought to see these pieces where 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 for men for the things that are eternal.

1 Peter 2:21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps

1 Peter 4:12,13 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 ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

The Royal Porcelain company in Worcester has not suspended its ovens for over two centuries. 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 and articulate pieces of clay we have a will. And we shrink, holler, we want to get off it and we don't want that, 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 are bonded.

When is God going to have a people who recognize that there's a must. Oh fools and slow in heart not to believe the prophets that must suffer before he ascends up to His glory. There is a coming down and ascending up. Isn't that what it says about that precious ladder that is suspended between heaven and earth. No man has ascended upward without first descended down. Submitting his will to God. Bending and yielding and welcoming the processes of God by which the divine finger could sound a heavenly chord, the true article, Royal china.

Would 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 of Jesus Christ. That to God be the glory. That should be a vessel unto honor. Not something porous and fragile that can be easily smash when the first pressure comes, but something that is not only exquisite and a beauty in His glory, but durable and substantial that can stand the strains of the tests and the tremors of an age in which the demand shall increase.

Are you a vessel unto honor that can contain the glory of God and if once fashioned and form that so exquisite a cost and much expensive detail that shall 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 of His appearing every particle shall be gathered up. It's an expensive process.

Will we begin to catch a sense of how cheap is our conventional Christianity. How slapped dash and 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 course is trying to drum up some kind of charismatic atmosphere and assault upon the ears of God. How little respect we have. What I'll tell you that 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 Potter. May God give us 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, how far must one go?" Well if you want to be an exquisite piece it will 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 cheeky plaster-of-paris imitation that just brings a dull thud and cracks at the first application of pressure. I'm willing that God too invested in me that shall please Him, trials, tribulations, demands, strains, and tensions and firings. To be joined and bonded with an Art Beebe, those who are different from me and unlikely me and wife and fellowship and brother and elder that it might be down to the honor and the glory of God. For God to be the glory.

Thank Him that He is preparing saints, men and women for eternity. Oh children if you only could see from the vantage point of endless time and a people also they shall rule and reign with Him. That shall not be fragile, shall not break or shall 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.

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