

In the Hands of the Potter

by J. Glyn Owen

The sermon explores the metaphor of God as a potter, emphasizing His sovereign ability to shape and transform our lives despite our resistance.

Duration: 52:20

Scripture: Jeremiah 18:1

Topics: "Obedience"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the work of the Potter and how it relates to the Church of Jesus Christ and individual believers. The sermon focuses on two main aspects: the vision given to the prophet and the application of that vision to the people of Israel and to all believers. The preacher emphasizes that we should not rely on our own understanding when applying the vision, but rather seek guidance from the Lord. The sermon uses the analogy of the Potter shaping clay on a wheel to illustrate how God works in our lives, combining the pressure of His hands with the revolving of the wheel to mold us into vessels for His purpose.

Transcript

It is good to see you tonight and to see a good sprinkling of visiting friends among us once again. These summer days take away our own members to various corners of the world, of the earth, but there is this compensating factor that we are very encouraged by those who turn in and join us in the worship of almighty God. We're very delighted to have those of you who are with us tonight, some of you from beyond the borders of this great country to the south.

We're very happy indeed to have you. Well now, our subject tonight is clear. I shall not read again those verses from Jeremiah chapter 18, but I ask you to look at them with me, and our subject, the clay in the hand of the potter.

This episode was ordained of God, I believe, in order to reassure a bitterly maligned and fiercely opposed prophet of some very basic factors concerning God and God's rule of his people in particular. We need to bear this very much in mind as we come to consider the passage. Speaking in a strictly historical sense, therefore, the application of the principles embodied here are first of all to be made to Israel nationally between the years 626 and 527 BC, but of course these principles relate equally so to the church of Jesus Christ and indeed to individual men and women, so that they have relevance for all of us that are gathered here this evening, and I think we shall see that as we go along.

Now there are two main things that I feel we ought to be looking at in order to get the message of the Lord from this passage. First of all, the vision that was given to the prophet, and then secondly the application of the vision to the people of Israel, and to ourselves, and to anyone, indeed to everyone. So we are going to look at these two in turn, the vision and the application of the vision, and you notice that both are given us in the context.

Here we are not left to our own ideas as to how to apply the vision. If we were left to ourselves, then of course we might make nonsense of good sense. I don't know whether that sounds Irish or Scots, I'm not sure, but at any rate, you know what would happen if we were left to ourselves.

Well, we are not left to ourselves. God gives us the key and he tells us how the vision is to be applied, and so we simply cannot go wrong if we follow what we have before us. First of all, the vision given to the prophet Jeremiah.

The potter's house which he visited was no elaborate affair, of course, but a very simple shack in Old Testament times. The table or the wheel upon which the potter wrote his skill was a sort of revolving table made by himself, and so it depends on his own ability as a craftsman as to what it looked like. It might have looked a shack of a thing, but at any rate there it was a kind of a revolving table, and some means or other whereby generally using his feet he could cause the table to revolve.

He sat on a seat usually, and with his feet, sitting on his seat with his feet, he controlled the revolving of this table, and then he had the clay before him on the table or on the wheel, whatever you like to call it, and with his two hands free he manipulated. He sought to bring into existence the kind of pot or the piece of pottery that in his mind he had planned. Now, in principle, the spectacle beheld by Jeremiah was an exhibition of the prowess and the perseverance of the potter in the process of producing a vessel that would fulfill his purpose or fulfill its purpose, and at the same time satisfied of the desires of the potter and bring glory to his name.

Two or three things we need to notice here. How does it come about? How does this work of the potter go on? Where does it begin? Well, ere the potter began his work at the wheel, he had a plan in his mind. Now, my friends, this is so simple, almost too simple to be saying it, but it is absolutely vital to the truth that God has for you and for me tonight.

Before the potter sat on his seat and put his feet where he would put them and did anything, he had a plan in his mind. The potter was not a dull, daft sort of man who just sat down at his wheel for fun. He came there to do something.

He had a scheme. He had a vision. He had a plan.

He had a purpose in his mind. Before the first movement of his deft hand or the first turn of the revolving wheel before him, the wise potter had a plan firmly set in his mind, and he came to the table, he came to the wheel in order to execute that plan in his mind. That plan determined the whole process from the nature of the clay that he would take into his hand to the manner in which he would knead it, to use a good old biblical King James word.

You use that here? The housewife kneads dough? Yeah, that's right. The manner in which he would knead it and then twist it and make it malleable and pliable, put his hand in water and soften it up a bit. The entire process of what he did with the clay was determined by the kind of thing he wanted to make of

it.

The plan in his mind determined the process he was going to undertake. A delicate ornament, something for the eye to appreciate, something artistic, something beautiful, would require a special process. Indeed, it would probably require special clay, not ordinary clay.

And the whole process would be slightly different if it was an ornament to be an ornament of beauty and attraction, something to gaze upon. If it was to be an ordinary utensil, an ordinary flower vase, well, then it might not need quite as much attention and perhaps the most ordinary clay would do. But everything was determined, every solitary detail was to be determined by the plan he had in his mind.

What's he going to do? What does he want? What is he going to make? My friends, God is no more a dabbler or an experimenter than he's a reputable potter. God does not work haphazardly or aimlessly, hoping that something or other will come out of what he's done before he's gone too far with it. That's not our God.

That's some people's view of God, but that's not the God of the Bible. The God of the Bible, according to the apostle Paul, works everything according to the counsel, the eternal counsel of his own will. Now imagine that.

What it means is this. He's been in counsel before he does anything. And that counsel of his took place not only a couple of years ago, but it goes back into eternity.

And he's not done anything in time that was not planned in eternity. Our God does not come to the wheel without a plan. He comes with a plan, and that plan goes further back than the creation.

It antedates humanity. It goes back to eternity. Now we need to remember this.

In the divine potter's mind, there is a plan to achieve, and every plan of our divine creator goes back actually before you were conceived in the womb, before I was born, before we were thought of. Now the process by which the plan in the potter's mind becomes the vessel in the potter's house is always the same in principle, though it may vary in practice. In principle, two factors combine, and they are very closely and very intimately interrelated in this matter.

The first of these is the pressure of the potter's hand. Having taken the clay that he has chosen into his hands, having kneaded it--I must use that word once or twice now--having kneaded it and softened it and made it malleable and pliable, then he puts it on the table. And there it is at the center of the revolving table.

There it is right before him. Now he is going to transform that lump of shapeless clay into some vessel or other according to what he has in his mind, and he's going to do it by the pressure of his hands. By the exerting of pressure here, less pressure there, it's the hands of the potter, the hands of the potter, that are going to do everything.

It will remain precisely that formless mass that it always was, unless and until the potter puts his hands upon it and around it and takes full charge of it and communicates to it the purpose in his mind and the pattern in his mind by means of the touch and of the pressure of his own sovereign hand. The transformation is dependent, let me repeat, upon the action of the potter's hand. But now there is something else.

The pressure of the potter's plasmic formative hands needs to be related, however, to the pace of the revolving wheel. I said there were two things. Here is the second.

The pressure of his hand, but you see, the pressure of his hand wouldn't do anything very much more than the pressure of a child playing with plasticine, were it not for the fact that as well as the pressure of his hands, there is the revolving of the wheel. And so the two things go on together. He's got his hands on the clay, and the wheel is going around and around, and as the wheel is going around and around, he puts his hand in water, and gradually he's doing something, and he relates the two things together.

The revolving of the wheel and the pressure of his hands. The pace of the wheel going around and the pressure of his fingers. And it is in the interrelating of these two factors, if you look carefully, you will see something emerging.

It only is a bundle of clay at the beginning, and there is no shape to it, there is hardly any meaning to it, certainly there is no beauty to it, and you really wonder, what can you make of a piece of clay like that? But he's got a plan in mind, and he's got the power in his hands, and in his feet, in causing the wheel to revolve, and in the pressure he is about to bring upon this malleable clay. Now this is the basic. This is the abidingly underlying principle that operates in all pottery, which is not completely mechanised.

The planned vessel is produced by this twofold process, whereby the pressure of the potter's hand is so synchronised with the pace of the potter's wheel, that he can bring exactly what he desires out of a piece of shapeless, miserable, one must almost say worthless clay. That's in principle. Now in practice, however, the pace of the wheel and the pressure of the hand are largely determined by the pliability, or the plasticity of the clay.

Now my wife and I have an advantage here, because we have great friends who had a family pottery which goes back, I believe, about 200 years. And a number of times we have sat there in the pottery and we've watched the members of the household sitting at the table, sitting at the wheel, and involved with the work. And it really is fascinating.

So I know what I'm talking about tonight. I've seen it happen so many times. The pace of the wheel and the pressure of the hand are largely determined by the pliability and plasticity of the clay.

You see, no two handfuls of clay respond in exactly the same way. The clay may have been taken from the same pit, but it's very strange. You may have had a bucket full of clay and you take out one handful and it will respond or it will react in this particular way.

It's quite easy. You just put it on the wheel and you carry on and make the wheel turn and you moisten your hands and you've got it there in just a jiffy. A vessel is completed.

And then you'll put your hand into the bucket and you'll take another handful of clay to make a similar vessel. Oh boy, but it isn't working as the other one did. There's something resisting.

There's something hard about the clay. There is something unyielding. It hurts your fingers.

You've got to moisten it a little oftener. And you find you've got to exercise pressure. And when you do exercise pressure, you tend to exercise too much so that you spoil what you're doing.

And when you don't exercise pressure, then the thing doesn't become what you wanted it to become. Sometimes the potter will discern therefore a hardness emerging. And that resistant hardness he has to deal with.

Now of course, he can easily deal with that if that's the only thing he's got to do. It's the easiest thing for a potter to get rid of something hard in clay. Bring a hammer out and take the clay out and hammer it if you like or put a steamroller over it or anything like that.

He can get rid of it. But you see, he's after more than just crushing it. Making the clay malleable and responsive to his formative hand is a means to an end.

He wants to bring a vessel out of it. And so he's not there to destroy it as it were, simply to crush it and make it say, well, I'm yielding. No, no, no, no.

All this yielding of the clay, if we may speak in that language, all this pressure upon the clay to make it become what the potter wants it to be is really a means to an end. The end is that out of that formless clay there shall come something, whatever is in the potter's mind for it to become. The potter has a plan in his mind and he means to produce a vessel that will be of glory to his name and of some use, whatever the case may be.

And so he proceeds. The potter therefore pursues his plan by varying the pace of the wheel and the pressure of his hand. Where there is resistance, there the wheel goes faster.

You know, my friends, the providence of God only hurts the people of God at that point where there is resistance, where the clay is unyielding to his hands, where we resist becoming what he in his mind plans to make of us, and it is only at that point of resistance to him that there is hurt in the Christian life. The duration of the process through which the clay passes, ere it becomes the finished article, is determined of course by the potter's passion for perfection. Not all potters are concerned about perfection.

Some are, some are not. And so that determines how far they're willing to go. You see, it's a tiring business, pottery.

Very tiring. It requires the undivided, undistracted attention of the potter. It drains him of energy.

His hands get tired, his feet, his legs get tired, turning this old wheel all the time and varying the pace. It's not easy. And then he's got to concentrate, he's got to think of the clay and he remembers what he's got in his mind, and he's got to relate one thing to another.

You see, there is mental energy as well as physical energy involved in this. A slipshod potter might therefore understandably stop short of perfection. And he might very well say, well here it is, it's good enough now, let's put it through the fire and all is well.

And he might pack up before all the resistance has been dealt with, and before all the stony hardness has been taken out of the clay. And he might say, let it go through the fire. But of course he would have a very imperfect piece of pottery then.

And that's how we have our rejects. That's how we have our seconds. Some of you may like to go around the shops buying seconds.

The only rejects I ever liked purchasing were, I shouldn't tell you this, I don't suppose, but my wife and I used to enjoy the rejects of Cadbury's chocolates. Now you may wonder where you get rejects from Cadbury's chocolates. Well I'll tell you.

You know the lovely chocolates you have in boxes. If they're not perfectly, if not of exactly the right size, and if they don't look right, they're called seconds and rejects. And those who work with Cadbury's have them at a couple of pence a pound.

And we had a friend who brought some rejects home from time to time, and you know they were very nice. Perhaps because they were so cheap. However, you've got the point, don't you? If the person at the wheel, if the potter here gets tired or thoughtless, or thinks that he has come to the end of the road when he hasn't, that he's dealt with all the resistance in the clay before he has, then when the piece of pottery has gone through the fire, aha, it'll come to sight.

It'll come to light. Rarely will that happen with a reputable potter who takes pride in his work, and who sees that his own good name is at stake. Such a potter will see his glory at stake in every vessel he produces, and not until he's quite sure that there is no resistance in the clay.

It is absolutely malleable and pliable, and he can do with it exactly what he wants, and the vessel that will emerge will be to his own glory, and it will perform what it was meant to perform. Only then does he allow it to go through the fire, bearing his name. It would appear that verse 4 describes something that did not simply happen once, but probably many times.

Listen to what it says. But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in the hands of the potter, probably marred over and over again. So the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.

I believe the Lord had well arranged the prophet's visit to coincide with something that the prophet really needed to see. Our God is the great stage manager, and he had arranged the visit of the prophet into the potter's house on this day because he wanted him to see this, that when the potter is at work and the piece of pottery is about to do doesn't really respond to the pressure of his hand. It's not the end of the story.

God is not beaten. God is not cornered. He doesn't have to abandon the whole project and say, well I've failed, poor me.

No, no, no. What he does is this. He takes it off, and he crushes it again, and he breaks it, and he puts his hand in the water, and he moistens it again, and he squeezes it, and he turns it, and he kneads it, and he does all sorts of things with it in order to make it more pliable and get the resistance out of it, and any stone or gravel out of it.

And this time he'll make sure, and then he'll put it back on the wheel, and the process will start again. Ah, but it happens again. What will he do next time? He'll do exactly the same the next time, and it may happen three times, four times, it may happen many a time, but because he means to get something out of that piece of clay, he will make a new thing of it each time.

Now that's the vision given to the potter. What's the application of it? Oh, let me repeat. Merely seeing the potter at his work was not in itself adequate, even for the prophet Jeremiah.

The vision needed to be divinely explained and divinely applied, so that it could be thereafter declared with authority to those to whom it was meant, whom it was meant to instruct. The prophet needed to be as sure of the explanation and the application as of the vision itself. Then what is it? One, the reassurance which God imparted to the prophet, and which he would make known to all the readers of this book.

That's the first thing. There is a reassurance which God would give the prophet, and he wants all the readers of the book to have the same kind of reassurance. What is it? God would assure the prophet and the nation at large, and those of us sitting in our pews in Knox tonight, and the one standing in the pulpit, that he can do with man exactly what the potter is doing with the clay.

God can do with human clay what the potter in Jeremiah's setting did with actual clay, material clay. Look at verses 5 and 6. Then the word of the Lord came to me, O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does, declares the Lord? Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. Oh my friends, let me put it more personally to you.

As the clay in the hand of the potter, so are you sitting in Knox tonight, in the hand of the divine potter. What a potter can do with material clay, God can also do with human beings and with nations. God is the potter supreme.

When his original and eternal purpose is frustrated, and the vessel in the making is marred, what happens? God is not beaten. God is not defeated. You see, God is working against the backdrop of eternity.

I can't do that. You and I have got to work against the backdrop of 40, 50, 60, 70 years, and we don't know how many we're going to have. And so we have to hurry a little in case our time is gone.

But you see, our God is working against the backdrop of eternity, and he's got you and he's got me for the whole length and breadth of our lives. And he determines the length of it. Working against the canvas of eternity, he will unhurriedly crush the clay in his hands, make it more pliable than before, so that the next time he will register progress.

And ultimately his planned vessel will emerge. God cannot be frustrated. And that's a great comfort for those of us who believe in God.

And you and I need this vision. You see, the concept of God abroad today, generally speaking, is of a God who can be beaten right, left, and center. He's at the mercy of the nations.

He's at the mercy of his people. He's at the mercy of sinners. He's at the mercy of everybody.

You can put poor God in a corner, and really he needs to be bailed out of his trouble half the time. And much of our endeavor is to bail God out of trouble. Poor almighty God.

No, no, no, says the prophet. You are the clay. Nations of the world are the clay.

His people are the clay. Man, woman, you're the clay. He's the potter.

And he cannot be frustrated. And if he needs to crush you the second time to make you pliable, he'll do it. And the third time, and the fourth time, and the fifth time.

Now that reassurance has both a challenging and a comforting aspect. It's very challenging. It challenges the rebellious in that it assures such that God will not abandon his original purpose or plan.

And you see, this is a terrible thing really. When God calls you to be a certain kind of person, then God will not forego that plan. And that means that he's going to continue with you.

That means that he's going to mold you. That means he's going to pursue you. That means he's going to break the clay in his hands.

That means he's going to be with you until he gets what he is after. And he alone has the right so to do. And you can't just shrug your shoulders and say, well God, leave it to me.

Many people have done that. I've heard, I've heard saints of God in rebellion say, oh God, leave me alone. I've had enough of it.

I've been in the fire. Your hand has been heavy upon it. Job was one of them.

But there are many others. We were thinking of Job last Wednesday evening. Oh God, leave me alone.

But you see, God won't leave you alone if he plans you to be a vessel unto honor, meat for his use. For his glory, he's not going to give up, my friend, until he's got you there. And he will break us in order to make us.

He will thrash his people, says William Still of Aberdeen, to within an inch of hell to make them what eternally he purposed them to be. And William Still is right. He's the potter.

And he's after something in you, man, woman. Something of value, something of glory to his name, a showpiece for angels and principalities and powers. He will make devils tremble by what they see in you.

You think he's going to give that up? When he spilt the blood of his son on the cross of Calvary and sent his Holy Spirit into an unholy world, do you think he's going to give up? Not on your life. Our God is a pursuing God. By the pace of the wheel of providence and the pressure of his formative hands, he will persevere.

That's the story of David. That's the story of Joseph. That's the story of Peter.

That's the story of Paul. That's the story of the early church. It's God in pursuit, and he won't give up his plan.

He's had it from eternity, and in eternity to come, it will be fulfilled. Of course, do I need to say this? Let me say it anyway. The Creator always fulfills his sovereign purposes without doing despite or damage to the individual's will or personality.

He can do that. I can't do that. We can't do that for one another, but God can.

He can break us, and the very breaking is our making. We are never more whole than when in the potter's hand we are but plasticine. That which we have noted is of comfort to those who respond to God's will because it reassures such that despite our innate coarseness, our inbred weaknesses and frailties, God will not abandon those in whom he has begun a gracious work, and this is a great comfort.

As we grow in the Christian life, and as we try to do any service for God, I'm sure your experiences, my experience, it is this amazing thing that God continues with us. Will he continue to continue? Oh, the wonder of it that the apostle could write to the Philippians and be so assured assured that he who has begun in you a good work will continue, will pursue it, and bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. He won't give up, says Paul.

That's a great comfort for the obedient and the humble, for those who want to be for God's glory, for those who want to do what God meant for them when he made us in the first place, and when he remade us through the Spirit at the price of the death of Christ. The great Augustus Toplady puts it very beautifully in words that are very familiar in some places. I think we ought to familiarize them here too.

The work which his goodness began, the arm of his strength will complete. His promises, yea, and amen, and never was forfeited yet. Things future, nor things that are now, nor all things below or above can make him his purpose forego or sever my soul from his love.

The potter's good name is involved in all his handiwork. A God of glory cannot afford to pack up halfway through and say, I've done enough, I can't do any more. He can't do it without losing his character.

Either he was foolish to begin, or he was impotent to carry on. A God of glory must pursue the work that in wisdom he began, for his character is at stake. That's why God won't give you up, so that for God's own glory, he must persevere with the work he has begun.

Of course, there are other reasons for that. There is the grace of his heart, there is much else, but God will pursue the work he is set about to do. And hence the history of men and of nations, whom God is molding to his will, is punctuated with new beginnings all the time.

New beginnings. Have you noticed how in scripture some people tell you about eras, epochs, or dispensations? Now, I don't agree with that myself, but I can understand it. There are new beginnings in scripture from time to time.

Scripture starts again with Abram, scripture started again with following upon the judgment of Noah, started again with Abram, and it starts again with David, and it starts again somewhere else. And you can mention new beginnings to which I'm not referring. Now, there are so many of them.

And of course, Pentecost was a new beginning. Why is this? Oh, my friends, it is because the sovereign God will fulfill his purpose. He, the potter, has full control of the clay by the pressure of his hands and the progress of providence he will bring to pass what is in his mind and in his heart.

The reassurance God gives. The rule by which the divine potter pursues his work upon the coarse clay of the human life he has taken into his formative hands is very clear. In principle, what God does with human clay is morally conditioned.

This is about the last thing I want to stress. But there is something very important here for our understanding of scripture, of biblical history, and of much, much else. In principle, what God does with human clay is morally conditioned.

What does that mean? That is, with his eternal plan in mind, God will always act according to certain moral conditions. He deals with us according to certain principles or a large overriding principle. And that principle is moral.

What do we mean? Well, in practice, this inflexible principle will appear to vary in its application. God will appear to change his mind, but as a matter of fact he never does. For example, the repentance of sinners evidently averts God's threatened judgments.

God says to sinners or God says to his rebellious saints, I will bring my judgments upon you. And then suddenly he changes his mind and he doesn't do it. Have you noticed that? I know many people were puzzled by this in scripture.

Jonah was puzzled by it and indeed that's why he didn't want to go to Nineveh. God said you go to Nineveh and preach repentance or there is going to be trouble within a limited number of weeks. And Jonah didn't want to go.

Why didn't he want to go? Well, he knew that if they repented, God would forgive them and he would look a fool. You see, God seems to change his mind, doesn't he? No. God is working according to moral principle.

Not just according to principle, but according to moral principle. What is the moral principle? This, his ultimate goal remains eternally unchanged. When you and I somehow resist to move towards that eternal goal, he will warn us and he will threaten us.

But when we accept his threats seriously and then repent and turn back and realign our lives with him, God will forget his thunder and he will say, that's very well, you've repented, you come back, I will forgive you, we'll carry on where we were and he will not judge us. But says the prophet, the principle has another side to it, the kind has another side to it. When I say to a nation, oh nation, I'm going to make something wonderful of you.

You're going to be very highly privileged. I'm going to call you for a purpose, a noble purpose, a great purpose. You're going to be the greatest people in the world.

And then you sin and in my hand you prove resistant and hard and unyielding. And to change the metaphor, you kick against the pricks and you're irresponsible. Then says the Lord, what I have promised to do for you, I will not do.

My promises are in vain. I will not carry on. The promises are not for you.

They are morally conditioned. That's what God says to Jeremiah. If at another time I announce that a nation or a kingdom is to be built up and planted and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

God works on a moral principle and if we do not accept his judgments and yield to his sovereignty and become pliable in his hands, then God's ultimate purpose will continue but we shall have no place in it. And if we are to understand the history of the word and the history of the world, then we've got to see that these principles apply. They apply to every nation under the sun.

There's not a nation to whom these principles do not apply. Now I must draw to a close. Let's apply it to ourselves.

It's all very well to look at these principles objectively. It's all very well to think of a situation in Israel six, seven hundred years before Christ, isn't it? Now wait a moment my friends. We are talking about

principles that are eternally valid.

You and I here in Knox tonight are like clay, human clay, in the hands of the sovereign potter, the almighty God who made us. Whether we like it or not, we're not the potters, we're the clay. He's the potter.

If you do not yield to his hand as he seeks to make you into what he planned you to be from all eternity, God's very promises will become threats. It is in vain then to plead and to pray. Prayer will not change matters, only repentance.

And there is one thing I've discovered, that we can pray without repentance. And it's a deadly prayer, but it appears to be a prayer. And saints of God can pray and pray and pray without changing their minds about sin.

Praying will do nothing unless the prayer is shot through with the kind of repentance that says to God, I'll yield to you, I'll come your way. Thou art the potter, I am the clay. If we return and repent and yield ourselves to him, God's very threats lose their thunder.

He will continue to work in us and he will perfect what he has to do. Until that day when he'll say the work is sufficiently finished here, it will be concluded at the coming again of my son. He will bring to consummation what has gone on in your life.

How responsive are we to God's word and spirit as they come to us today, as they come to us tonight. God's very passion for perfection is either a challenge to us or a comfort to us. Either the greatest conceivable challenge or the most wonderful comfort ever given to human beings.

Which is it? See, if God put up with less than perfection, it'd make it so much easier for some of us, wouldn't it? But he won't. But he won't. His glory is at stake in every child of his gathered here tonight.

And he won't give up his passion for perfection. And he's working with that eternal day in mind when his son will come and consummate and bring to completion that which has already begun in every believing heart. Oh, brothers and sisters, what can we say to these things? There's only one thing to say.

Let God be God. Don't try to play God with the Almighty. Let God be God.

Let us be what we are. His creatures, his frail creatures, his human creatures, his creatures who are only here for 60, 70 years, and his creatures who are answerable to him for what we do with our time and how we respond to him in time. But nevertheless, his creatures for whom he has the most glorious purpose in mind, and whom he has prepared to thrash in order that we should not miss the glory prepared for us before the foundation of the world.

Are you prone to say that the wheel on your table or the table which is your wheel, whichever you like to think of, however you like to think of it, is going around a little too fast? Does providence make you a little bit giddy from time to time, and are you prone to shout to the Almighty to stop it? Don't. Let him carry on with the work which his goodness has began. Express your confidence in him.

Offer him your worship and your obedience, even though it hurts, so that your life and mine may be embossed with his glory and beautified by his grace, and we be in this world a means of beautifying and commending the gospel of his saving grace. Amen. So let it be.

Let us pray. O Heavenly Father, we bow and adore your holy name in contemplation of your sovereign grace and glory. Forgive us, our Lord, that our concept of you is so unworthy and so often unworthy.

Forgive us, our Heavenly Father, that we have our ideas more from the newspapers and the books that are published, sometimes bearing Christian titles but often without Christian content. Then they are influenced by your word, your infallible word, and your spirit working within us. Forgive us, we pray.

We ask that you would bring us to be exactly what you require of us at any given point in our human experience, yielded and still when we need to be yielded and still, active and buoyant and busy when you need that of us. We pray that you will make of us not just a vessel to be on the mantelpiece, to be admired, but an instrument in your hand that you can use even as we are in the making, and all to the glory of your name and the furtherance of your purposes, and that through Jesus Christ, your glorious Son, our Lord, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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