"Alas! my mother that thou hast borne me to clash and quarrel with the whole world." Jeremiah 15:10 (Moffatt)

These are the words of a man whose life was one long conflict. This man at times was at war with himself and his God. Constantly he was at war with his own people. This was the case not because he loved to fight. I think he hated conflict with peculiar intensity. Yet it was his heartache that battle was his daily experience. It was his tragedy that though he loved his people so deeply, he was constantly at war with them.

I

This conflict finds emphasis in the prophet's call to his ministry. In his early twenties perhaps Jeremiah heard God's voice speaking in the deeps of his heart and telling him that even before his birth He had singled him out and had appointed him a prophet to the nations. Jeremiah was to a greater extent than either Amos or Isaiah an internationalist. He was statesman enough to see that the fate of his little nation was bound up with that of the surrounding nations. Therefore, he could not be in the strictest sense a prophet to his own people without being a prophet to the nations.

By exercising the office of prophet, he was going to have to tear down and destroy. This does not mean that his message was to be purely destructive. No man whose ministry is purely negative can be of any real value. There is little virtue in pulling up tares if the wheat is destroyed at the same time. God's idea of a garden is not a spot of ground that is simply barren but one that has fruits and flowers.
The purpose, therefore, of the destructive work of the prophet was ultimately constructive. He was to tear down the wrong in order to build the right. He was to tear down even the good, if such were necessary, in order to build the better or the best. In the doing of this work, he was given to understand that he would meet opposition. That is always the case. No man ever sets himself to the accomplishment of any worth-while task that he does not meet opposition. If not from without, then he meets it within himself.

But while God warns His prophet that he is to carry on His work in the midst of opposition, he is to carry it on in spite of opposition. Nothing is to be permitted to turn him aside. He is not to be afraid of any foe. God warns solemnly that if he yields to his fear that He Himself will make him afraid.

How will God do this? By natural law. God is represented as hardening the heart of Pharaoh. How did He do it? He did not do so by set purpose. He hardened Pharaoh's heart by taking appeal after appeal but Pharaoh resisted. We can refuse to use our eyes until we lose our capacity to see. In the same way we can yield to our fellows until those fellows become a veritable obsession.

"Be not afraid, lest I make thee afraid." That is a solemn warning. I am thinking now of the wise fear of a storm would be positively laughable if it were not so pathetic. How did this come about? To my knowledge, he has nursed those fears through the years, tended them with the utmost care, until what was baby fears have now grown into giants. By yielding to our cowardice in life's small tests is often to be guilty of a colossal cowardice when our great test comes upon us. But there is another side to this picture. If we are loyal in life's smaller tests, then our strength will increase through the passing of years.

God here promises to make His prophet "a fenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land."
Thus was Jeremiah warned in his call that his ministry would be one of conflict. We are not forgetting that the prophet wrote down this experience almost a quarter of a century after it happened. Naturally it was colored somewhat by the stormy days through which he had passed. But from the beginning, I am sure that Jeremiah knew that life for him was to be a stern and lonely fight. Therefore, it was with great reluctance that he took up his life's work. It was with reluctance that he pursued it through the years.

II

Why was the prophet so reluctant?

1. I think we can understand his unwillingness to undertake his difficult task by a glance at the man himself. What kind of a man was Jeremiah. He was an exceedingly shy and timid and sensitive man who had a natural shrinking from the limelight. But the fact that he was a prophet forced him into the glare of the most pitiless publicity. When he delivered his messages, he usually did so where crossed the crowded ways of life. Now he preached at the gate of the city or before the kings' palaces or at the entrance of the temple. This was distasteful to one as retiring as Jeremiah.

2. Then the prophet strengthened to this ministry because it compelled him to denounce the people and the institutions that were dearest to his heart. Jeremiah was a great lover. His was a heart of great tenderness. We find him wishing that his heart were waters and his eyes fountains of tears that he might weep day and night for his suffering people. Yet though he loved them with passionate devotion, he had to denounce them. Though he was deeply religious, he had to scourge his fellow religionists. Though a passionate patriot, he had to take a course that made him look to his people as a turncoat and a traitor.

Again and again the prophet breaks forth with angry eloquence and indignant denunciation. We can only explain the intensity of his anger by the intensity of his love. Had Jeremiah cared less, he would have been less critical.
All great lovers are capable of great anger. Perhaps the most fiery man in the Old Testament with the exception of Jeremiah was Moses. The most fiery man in the New Testament is Jesus. They were both capable of hot indignation because they loved so intensely.

Caring thus deeply, Jeremiah hurled hot invectives at his sinning people in order to save them. He had deep reverence for the temple. It was a symbol of Divine presence. But he had to warn that the temple was a sheer futility if they failed to obey the God in whose honor the temple was built. He warned that God would destroy the temple just as He had destroyed Shiloh if they persisted in their disobedience.

At times he made a tender appeal to the people to return to the God whom they had so greatly wronged. Again, he lashed out at them like forked lightning. For instance when the Chaldeans were besieging Jerusalem the wealthy slave owners freed their Hebrew slaves. Danger was pressing hard upon them. They were in need of Divine help. Therefore they offered this token of repentance. Besides food was getting scarce and it was a little difficult to feed the slaves anyway. A few days after this act of repentance, the Chaldeans made a temporary withdrawal. At once these slave owners took all their slaves back again. It was a kind of deathbed repentance where the patient got well. This shameful sin against God and man met with rebuke but from one stalwart soul and that was Jeremiah.

Not only did the prophet speak his mind on matters of religion but on statesmanship as well. He was doubtless himself a member of the nobility. He was a man who knew his king personally. Nor did he hesitate to denounce him publicly or to his face when occasion arose. Worse still, it was his lot to urge submission to the conqueror instead of fight to the death. He was wise enough to see that if Judah rebelled against (Hebrew) it was utter madness. Therefore, he found himself completely out of step both in matters of religion and statesmanship.
3. Finally he was reluctant to be a prophet because of the loneliness and scorn and hatred and persecution that loyalty to his nation cost him. He bewails the fact that he is made the laughing stock. He laments that he has ever been "borne to clash and quarrel with the whole world". The world always has a way of clashing and quarreling with the man who is different. This is the case, generally speaking, regardless of the respect in which he is different.

Take the clash between youth and age. That clash does not belong to one generation, but to every generation. Why does youth clash with age and age with youth? It is not merely because age is better than your or youth is better than age. It is because they are different. When the exiles came back to rebuild the temple under Nehemiah, they at least succeeded in laying the foundation. When this was done, there went up a great shout that was heard for miles around. But this was a mingled shout. It was a mixture of laughter and tears, of songs and sobs. Who were doing the singing? Who were shouting for joy? Why the youth. They said "What a temple". Who was sobbing? The old folks. They also said, "What a temple! It is nothing to compare with the one that was here in the days of our fathers."

This accounts for the fact that we persecute the different on general principles. Some we persecute because they get too far behind the rest of us. We call them criminals. Others we persecute because they get too far ahead. We call them idealists or dreamers. They are folks out to upset the status quo. Here are three men dying on crosses. Two of them are revolutionaries that set out to battle against Rome and were driven by sheer weakness into becoming highwaymen. They are being crucified now because they have got out of step. They have dropped too far behind the procession. Then the man on the central cross, why is He dying? Because He has gotten too far ahead. "He saved others, therefore, Himself He cannot save".
How did this timid, shrinking prophet treat his reluctance? 

He defied it. He went bravely on with his task just as if it were congenial to him. Thus defying his fears he won a victory even greater than he would have won had his ordeal been less trying. This was the case for the following reasons:

1. Jeremiah's sense of weakness and need drove him into a deep fellowship with God. A stronger man and a braver one might have relied somewhat on his strength, but not so with this timid and shrinking soul. 

   • When in the taunts and hatred and misunderstandings of men, he betook to the shelter of his understanding God. And the God whom he trusted made good his promise to make him like a "defended city".

   Living thus with God, he never lost his sense of mission. He constantly felt himself a man of destiny. He was constantly undergirded with mighty convictions that would not let him down and would not let him off. There were times a plenty when he wanted to quit. He finds himself wishing that he might leave his stubborn people and flee away into the wilderness. If every minister had actually come to that lodging place for wayfaring men for which Jeremiah longed, it would have had to cover a whole state to accommodate them all. But somehow he couldn't run.

   Shut off from escape in that direction, he sought it in another. He said to himself: "I am not going to preach anymore. It doesn't do any good. Though I rebuke and rebuke, my congregation persists in its same Godless ways. All my preaching seems to accomplish is to get me into trouble." But having made this decision, he soon found himself breaking it. He said that his words were as a fire shut up in his bones so that he just had to speak. Thus did Jeremiah's sense of need so drive him to God that he was made strong for his task.
Then Jeremiah won through this experience a radiant optimism. He has been spoken of at times critically as the weeping prophet. No doubt he did weep, but he also sang. He was given to see that his people were going into exile. He was given also to see that this exile instead of ending in slavery was going into a larger freedom. It was through these chastened sufferers that God was going to accomplish His purpose for the bringing in of a better day.

Finally, it was given to Jeremiah to see and to teach a newer and higher religion than his own people had known. Theirs had been a religion of rules that they had always been powerless to keep. But in that better tomorrow, the laws of God were not going to be written on stone anymore, but on tablets of the heart. He foresaw a new day. One in which man should be born anew and thus come for love's sake to be obedient unto the Lord who had redeemed him.

The last glimpse we get of this great man, he is being carried unwillingly by his faithless people into exile in Egypt. When Jerusalem fell, the Babylonians gave him his choice of either remaining with his broken people in Jerusalem, or going to the King of Babylon back to his capital. Jeremiah chose to remain with his own impoverished people. A little later, these foolish people came to consult Jeremiah as to whether they should stay in the land of Judah or go to Egypt for protection. The prophet warned them to stay where they were. But true to their practice across the years, they disregarded the prophet's warning. Therefore they went into Egypt taking Jeremiah with them. Here he died hopelessly disregarded and alone without, as George Adam Smith tells us, one sun-down ray of success. Yet this man who so signally failed in his own life has enriched the religious life of the world as few others that have ever lived.
"SCRUBS"
Jeremiah 17:6

"He shall be like a desert scrub." (Moffatt)

You know what a scrub is. It is not necessarily a small
or insignificant something. A violet may be just as perfect and mature
as the giant redwood tree, under whose shadow it grows. A humming-
bird may be just as perfect as an eagle. A field mouse may be just
as perfect as an elephant. A baby of a day old may be as perfect in its
way as a mature man of forty.

What then is a scrub? It is something that fails to attain
the height of its possibility. It is something, however big and fine,
as it might have been bigger and finer. It is something that however
beautiful it is, might have been more beautiful. It is something that
however useful it is, falls short of its highest usefulness. Just in
proportion as any creature or thing fails in the attainment of its
possibilities, just in that proportion does it remain a scrub, a
dwarf, and a runt.

You have witnessed scrubby plants. I have seen corn on barren
clay fail to grow more than knee high. That same kind of corn, down in
the bottom was more than fifteen feet in height. What was the matter?
It was something happened that dwarfed this small and insignificant corn
and robbed it of its possibilities. I remember noticing a tree some
time ago, growing on the very edge of a rugged cliff. How it managed
to cling to its stern and rockbound home was amazing. But it was a dwarf-
ed and stunted thing. It was utterly useless. While it had grown a
little, life for that tree was a failure. The Japanese have a way of
dwarfing the giant of the forest. They take an oak, for instance,
and so treat it that it reaches its maturity in a small flower pot.
There it is, little more than a foot high. Yet that tree was made to wrestle with the tempest. It was made to lift its tall head far toward the clouds; but it is only a scrub.

Those of you who come from the farm, know what a scrub among the cattle or among the pigs is. There is seldom a litter of pigs that does not have at least one runt. While the others grow, he merely hardens. While the others increase, in weight, he only seems to get puffed up. As an investment he is worse than nothing. There is only one thing at which a runted calf or pig is a thorough success, and that is at eating. But sad to say

But sad to say there are even scrubs and dwarfs and runts among folks. I am not referring here to physical dwarfs, nor to those who are dwarfs mentally. That, however, is a very sad misfortune. What a heart break is the child who never grows. I used to have a neighbor with a child. The months passed by, but the little fellow continued to be a baby in arms. Therefore, he who had once been a joy, became a heartache. But dwarfs are not to be blamed. They are to be pitied. They cannot help being what they are.

Then there are intellectual dwarfs. There are times when a chile grows physically, but fails to grow intellectually. It is said that Babe Ruth, the "Home Run" king, has a mentality of a boy from twelve to sixteen. His mind did not keep pace with his body. His brawn is out of all proportion to his brain. Of course that may be at times merely a misfortune, but more often it grows out of a failure on our part to develop what we have.

But the sadest cases are arrested development in the realm of the spiritual. It is sad to see a little wizen dwarfed body, but the
sadest of all sights is a little wizen dwarfed soul. There are many men today, who are finely developed mentally and physically, but who are little more than moral imbeciles. Physically they are strong. Mentally they are weak as babes. Now for the safety of the world, God has ordained it that when we are mentally and intellectually weak, we should also be weak physically. It would be a calamity, for instance, for a six months old baby to be as strong as Jack Dempsey. His mother would not last a half day. He has no moral sense whatever. The first time he god mad, he would kick her to pieces. But he is too weak. By the time he is strong enough to injure her, he is expected to learn self control. He is expected to have developed morally and spiritually. If he has not, then he becomes a menace. The tragedy of the world today, is the tragedy of the dwarfed and stunted moral life.

PART II.

Now the prophet calls a certain type of man a scrub, a spiritual runt, a moral dwarf. Why is it so? He is a dwarf for the simple reason that he has not assimilated the food that is necessary to his growth. That is the reason that lies back of all such calamities. What was the food that this dwarf's soul needed? Answer, God.

Now when the prophet spoke this word, he was saying what Jesus christ said far more plainly and explicitly centuries later. Can a man live without eating? He cannot. Without food the body dies. But you and I are more than mere bodies. We are souls. Just as the body must have food, so does the soul. Jesus claims to be the food the soul needs. "I am the bread of life." That is, Jesus is not an extra. He is not a side dish. He is an essential. He is that which the soul becomes starved and dwarfed and stunted.
Can a man live without water? He cannot. Try it for a day and every fibre of your being will cry out for water. Try it and you will pass thru the most awful agony you ever experienced. Try it and you will get to the place that you would give your life for a drink of water. But the body gets no more thirsty than the soul. Why are there so many wrecked people today? They are tortured by burning thirsts. Jesus promises to meet their thirst. "I am the water of live."

How do you suppose this world would fare, if the sun failed to rise tomorrow? How would it fare if it never rose again? You know the flowers would wither. The trees would die. Life would be some extinct. The world cannot get on without the sun. But my soul needs a sun just as much as my body. A prison pallor comes upon my face if I stay out of the light. There is also a prison pallor of the soul. We must have light. Jesus meets that need. I am the light of the world. "He that followeth me, shall not walk in karkness." How the roses would bloom upon the cheeks if you would only let the sun of righteousness shine upon you.

Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear,  
It is not night if thou be near;  
O may no earthborn cloud arise  
To hide thee from thy servant's eyes!

Every woe and wound of the world grows out of our lack of Jesus. This accounts for every short coming. Why do I become spiritually listless and indifferent. I have no Christ. He has the hottest of hot hearts. No man can be listless and walk with Him. Why am I so stingy. No Christ is the answer. He is an eternal giver and those who possess Him, possess also His spirit of eternity. Why am I so lacking in courage? No Christ. His was the most courageous heart.
that ever beat. Why am I so pessimistic and despondent? No Christ. He is the supreme optimist.

It is also the want of Christ that accounts for every positive sin in your life and mine. Why do I swear? Because I do not know Jesus. If I knew Him, I would reverence His name. Why do I lie? Because I reject Jesus. He is the truth. If I lived with Him, I would tell the truth. Why am I unclean? No Christ. If He homed in my heart, He would make my heart He would make it clean. Every sin, whether of omission or commission has its root here. My failure to whole heartily accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Master.

PART III.

Now while the prophet faces the fact that there are mental and spiritual dwarfs, He also holds out the great and bracing fact that no man need be selfish. He may be physically dwarfed, and there be no remedy. You may be intellectually stunted through no fault of your own. You may be morally stunted because of an evil environment or because of the lack of the proper teaching in childhood, but even then there is salvation for you. There are possibilities of a full and great and buoyant life before all of us. The prophet says that we may be like trees planted by the river.

1. We may be like a planted tree. The idea carries with it that there is an intelligence back of the tree. It carries the idea that there was some one who determined to put a tree in just the particular place where the tree is growing. To look at this tree is to be impressed that there was a purposeful being back of it. That was the impression that the stars gave the Psalmist as he looked at them. He believed that he saw there something so wonderful that he could not but believe that
God had created them, Addison received the same impression.

Now the prophet tells us that you may live such a life that one cannot look at you without being in some measure convinced that there is a purposeful God that has planned your life. "What is the secret of that man" one miner asked another referring to a certain preacher that I know. There were various answers, but the miner drew his black hand across his face to wipe back the tears and answered "he is thick with God". That is, he could not explain it except to say that God was with him, that God had planned him in this world and that he was doing the will of God.

Sad to say we do not see this mark of purpose everywhere. That man that went staggering down the street last night, to make a hell with his humble home. We do not feel that God was back of that. That girl that sits down at the hotel, making a smoke stack out of her dainty nose, we cannot but feel that God intended something better for her. The scores and thousands all about us who are giving their hands and hearts to things of secondary value, we cannot but feel that they were meant for something better. What the prophet is telling us is that it is possible for every one of us to so live that those who see us will in some measure at least feel that God is back of us. Then we are here on business for the King.

2. Not only does this planted tree speak of purpose, it speaks of steadfastness. The tree is planted, therefore it is staunch. It is not easily moved out of its place. It wrestles with the tempest. It laughs at the rude breath of the wind. You always know where to find it. It is dependable, staunch, steadfast.

What a steadfast man was Jesus. You could not Him.
You could not bully Him, you could not flatter Him, you could not bribe Him. And He makes the same kind of men out of faulty human stuff such as we are. Those disciples of His who ran like timid sheep, came to be as bold as lions.

And is not this the prime need of our day? Do we not all admire such men? Passing thru the lake country of Scotland some summers ago, I visited Loch Katrine; I thought of Ellen, but I thought also of James Fitz James. You will remember how he found himself facing odds of scores or hundreds to one, but he put his back against a hugh bolder saying, "Come one, come all, this rock shall fly from this firm base as soon as I."

I like that, but I like even better to see young Daniel stand with nothing to his back except his convictions and declare I purpose in my heart that I will not defile myself. I like to see Martin Luther the sturdy preacher stand with no visible resource to his back, with the nations of the earth taunting him and threatening him, yet he flings out the "I cannot recant, here I stand, I can do no other, God help me." "God give us men, men whom the lust of office cannot buy, men whom the spoils of office cannot kill, men who possess opinions and a will, men who are honest, men who will not lie."

3. The third possibility that God has looked in all our lives is fruitfulness. This desert scrub bears no fruit. It makes no contribution to life. What a tragedy that is. Huxley, the scientist said that the shock of uselessness is the greatest that can come to any living organism. But it is a shock that many of us have to endure. How awful to have come and grow and go, and never to have known the majesty and mirth of being truly useful. Some time ago I put my hand upon the

Some time ago I put my hand upon the shoulder of a young man
and said. "Is there a human being in all the world, that can look you
in the eye as I am doing now and say, I am a better man because I have
known you. Life has been made richer and better because of my fellow-
ship with you." And I saw his lips tremble and his eyes fill with tears
as he answered, "there is not one." Is your home better for your pre-
sence? Is the social circle in which you move better because you move
there? You are a member of the church, may be, but are you helping it?
Is it any better off for the fact that you have taken upon yourself its
solemn vows? You are in Memphis, you are a part of it, is it made one
wit better by your being here? If it is not, you are throwing away
your chance.

But the question is more searching than that. You may say,
yes, I am making some contribution, I am helping a little. But, are
you doing as much as you might do? Are you helping as much as you might
help? When I think of one of the greatest failures that I know today,
I think of a man who stands high in his community and high in his church,
he is not a bad man, there is much that is good about him, his tragedy
is not that he is making no contribution at all, it is rather this, that
what he is doing is only a faction of what he might do. He is rendering
the service of an ordinary man when he might render the service of a
giant. Are you doing your best?m Your dead level best?

PAGE—IV.

Then the prophet tells us that this planted tree shall never
wither. A certain Psalmist speaks to the same purpose. "His leaf shall
not wither. That is, the trees that God is planting are evergreens.
The lives that are God filled do not wither. They remain fresh and full
throughout all time and throughout all eternity.
Evergreen. Is not it fine to live in the springtime always. Isn't it fine to never bid the morning tide adieu? You can't say of most men and women that they are evergreens. The most wonderful of them soon fade. Lady Hamilton was the most beautiful woman of her day, but before the sundown came, gloomy winter had settled down upon her and her life had utterly withered. The same was true of Lord Byron. Most lives soon wither.

But the prophet speaks of one whose life remains always in the full bloom of an eternal springtime. Did you ever take time to get acquainted with an evergreen tree? Did you ever notice it in all seasons of the year. I remember one that used to grow on the hill side near our old home. I have seen it in the spring when a million buds were bursting. It was so striking. It really did not look so fresh as all the other trees. Then I have seen it in the hush of mid summer. So far as you could see, it was like those about it. Then I have seen it when frost had turned other trees to purple and crimson and gold. It looked rather common place and out of style. Then I have seen it when the cold snows came and other trees waived skeleton hands in the wintry wind.

Then I have seen evergreen lives too. They were fresh and strong winsome with the springtime of life, they were vigorous and swift in life's middle passage, but they came to their very best in life's winter time. There was a fine independence about them, and fine compassion. They fed their soul on hidden resources, and troubled lives found refuge in their shadows, as the birds built their nests in the bows of the evergreen.
PART IV.

I place before you this night life and death. Blessing and cursing, and bid you choose life. You may be like the scrub in the desert. You may live a starved and stunted life. That is what many of you are doing at this moment, or you may live a life that is rich and full. You may live a life that will soon wither, or you may live a life that will never let go the hand of spring. It all depends upon what you do with Jesus.

There were two men in our Southland. One of them was largely gifted. He was called to preach, but the world got him. He said he would not spoil a good business man to make a poor preacher. A friend of mine asked him if he was pleased with the decision. He remained silent long before answering and then said that it had led him to utter disgust and disappointment.

There was another man, and his abilities were meager. His name was Bud Robinson. He tells the story in his frank and quaint way. "The Lord found him under an old ox cart, with his head on a chunk. The Lord called him and Bud responded. Since then he has had the hand clasp of spring. These choices are before you. Will you live your life in the desert or by the streams that run fresh and sing forever more?"
world of chance." And he went to sleep and waked up in a world of chance. It was a beautiful morning, and the sun was just looking over the horizon. But scarcely was it fully risen before it darted like a meteor across the sky and set. "What does this mean," he asked in amazement. "Nothing," was the answer, "sometimes it stays up a minute, sometimes ten minutes, sometimes ten days. There is no telling how long it is going to stay - it is all a matter of chance. The next morning he started to get out of bed. But, instead of hitting the floor, he hit the ceiling. And there he was pinned, only kept from flying off the earth by the boards above him. Again he inquired the reason in amazement, to receive the same answer, "In this world, the law of gravitation operates sometimes, but other times it does not." And he was glad to get back into an ordered world.

Now, every one of us is sowing, and we are sowing all the time. Also, we are reaping all the time. We do not merely sow one year and reap the next. We do not simply sow in this life and reap in eternity. That is part of the story, but that is not all of it. We are sowing every day, and reaping every day. What you have reaped today of joy, of usefulness, of blessedness, depends upon the sowing of yesterday. What you will reap tomorrow and in the eternal tomorrow will depend on the sowing of today. The choice is up to you. "He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption. He that soweth to the spirit shall of the spirit reap life eternal." Therefore, I place before you blessing and cursing, life and death. I beg you to choose life.
Jeremiah 18:4  "And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do."

When the vessel that he made of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter, he reworked it. When the prophet, Jeremiah, was commanded of the Lord to visit this ancient manufacturing establishment two objects at once drew and held his attention. He was a man at work. He also saw that upon which he worked -- a bit of plastic clay. These two held his fascinated attention. This potter and his cup do not hold the attention of Jeremiah alone. This scene in the potter's house has held the attention of some of the greatest thinkers of all time.

Naturally, all who had seen this potter and his cup have not given them the same explanation. "We see the world with our own eyes, each of us", says Thackeray, "and make from within the world we see." To Peter Bell, "a primrose by the river-brim" -- a yellow rose was to him and it was nothing more, but Wadsworth could see in that same flower thoughts that lie too deep for tears. Both believers and unbelievers have looked at this potter and the cup, but have not given them the same interpretation.

On one point, however, all agree. They agree on the meaning of the cup. The cup is a picture of man in his youth. It is everyone. But while agreeing on what the cup represents, they are far apart. For instance, the great Persian poet, Omar Khayyn, looked at the potter and his cup amidst the fumes of a tavern. He saw a man in the cup, but the potter was not a personality at all. He was fate, or chance, or natural law. Neither the potter nor his cup had choice nor responsibility.

He pictures these cups on the shelves of the potter's house talking to each other. "They laugh at me", says one mis-shapen fellow for leaning all asky. What? Did the hands of the potter shake? That is the ugliness of this vessel was not in sense the fault of the vessel. I hear of one who threatens he will toss hell the cups he mirred in making. Pich! He's a good fellow and will all be well. "Oh thou who man of base earth didst make and even with paradise divide the snake.
For all with sin whose with man's face is blackened.-- Man's forgiveness, give and take. That is, this irresponsible man no more needs the forgiveness of God than God needs his forgiveness.

Bertrand Russell speaks in the same tone in our day. He declares that this whole universe, including man, was created by forces that had no prevision of what they were creating. That is that this prophet himself, that the great leaders of mankind, that even Jesus Christ was the product of a force that had infinitely less intelligence than a fisher worm. The position of the believer may be difficult, but it strikes me that the position of the unbeliever is impossible.

I.

Let us look, then, through the eyes of Jeremiah. He sees a man who is working. "This man," said Jeremiah, "was a picture of God" -- not a perfect picture, of course, but a picture, nonetheless. As the potter is working, so God works. "My Father Worketh even unto now," said Jesus, "and I work." Not only is God working, but as this potter, He is working constructively. He is seeking to make something. He is bent on realizing a dream. Jesus affirmed that he had not come to destroy. He even said, "resist not evil." What is he urging? Not an easy tolerance of wrong. He resisted evil more effectively than anyone else and resisted it to the death. He is urging that we resist evil in the only effective way -- that is constructively, as the only real foe of darkness is light, so the only real foe of evil is good.

Not only is the prophet's potter working constructively, but he is working intelligently. That is, according to plan. Had Jeremiah touched this potter on the shoulder and asked, "what kind of vessel are you making?", do you suppose this potter would have answered with a sneer? -- "Don't make me laugh, I'm not making any kind of vessel in particular. I simply put the clay on the wheel and turn. If that clay becomes a thing of beauty "all right". If it becomes a monstrosity "all right". As to what I'm making, I neither know nor care. Anybody
potters who would work after that fashion would be less than sane.

That bit of ugly clay is being changed according to the purpose of the potter into something of usefulness and beauty. It is far from a finished product, but there is a place that it is finished. That is, in the mind of the potter. He has dreamed a beautiful dream for that bit of clay and he is doing his best to realize that dream.

Since this potter is working according to plan, we can certainly not expect less of the Divine Potter. He has dreamed a beautiful for each one of us. He has a purpose for us. He is doing all that infinite skill and ingenuity can do to realize that purpose. God is doing his infinite best to bring you to your best right now. That high purpose engages his infinite love in wisdom and skill at this very moment. God has a dream for everyone of us -- a dream of unspeakable worth. He is doing all that he'll let him do to realize that dream.

II

Now, as Jeremiah watched this skillful worker shaping this clay into a vessel of beauty, something happened that took him by surprise. That clay that a moment ago seemed promising suddenly lost its promise. The vessel that was beginning to take shape was spoiled in the hand of the potter. This paragraph brings us on familiar ground. We live in a world that in some measure has been spoiled. It is a beautiful world, but it is not so beautiful as God planned -- not so beautiful as it could be. Ours is in some measure a spoiled nation -- full of sores where there should be songs -- marred with hate and contention where there should be brotherhood.

Our church is spoiled in some measure. The Heavenly Father planned that it should be a gracious church without spot or blemish, but we have spoiled it. How many of our homes have been spoiled? We had a beautiful dream for those homes, but they were never realized. All these things have been spoiled because you and I have spoiled. We know that we are not what we ought to be. This is the case, because we have thwarted the Will of God.
III

Why was the bit of promise in clay spoiled by the hand of the potter. It was not spoiled because he was lacking in earnestness. He had not lost interest. He did not cease to care, whether this clay came to its best or not. Why then did he fail? He failed because there was something in the clay that resisted the potter.

How has God failed with you and me? It isn't because He has ceased to care. It isn't because He has refused to put all He has into bringing us to our best. He has spared himself no pain, not even the cross. He has failed as did the prophet's potter because we have resisted Him. We have refused to pray that prayer that is the sum total of all prayer -- "Thy Will Be Done".

Here is where we differ from the clay in the potter's hand, but a difference wider than the space between the stars. The clay has no will, not so with us -- we have the power of choice. We can say "Yes" to God, or we can say "No" to Him. To say "No" is to spoil our lives, regardless of the infinite love and skill of the potter. To say "Yes" to God is to guarantee victory, regardless of what life may do to us.

IV

Here comes another surprise, when this bit of clay resisted the potter. When it became a bit of wreckage, instead of the possible poem, What did the potter do? I know what I should have expected him to do. I know what I should have done had I been in his place. I would have said to that stubborn piece of clay as I tossed it aside "all right there is plenty of more clay where you came from. Since you resist, I will get a piece that will yield," but this patient potter refused to give up. He kept working at that bit of stubborn clay as if it were the only bit of clay that he had ever had. So, he re-worked it. Surely that is a picture of our Lord. When we fail him, he refuses to throw us away. He is always ready to start over again. He always gives us the second chance -- a hundredth chance. It would seem at times an endless chance. When the shepherd counted his sheep and missed one, he went in search of it. How long did he seek?
Jesus said, "he sought till he found it." How long did this potter work on the clay? According to Moffatt's translation, "till he was satisfied with it."

That almost sounds as if God would never give us up through all the eternities. We could believe that from this passage, but there are so many others to the contrary. As this patient potter worked with his stubborn clay, bear this in mind, the clay was getting a little less plastic, a little more difficult to shape, moment by moment. Step out the door of this little shop and you will hear a crunching under your feet. Yes, you are walking on broken earthenware. Why is this shattered crockery here? Not because the potter made a vessel just to break it. It is here because the clay had hardened too hard. It would no longer bend to the potter's touch.

Here is God's question to you and me, "Can not I do with you as this potter?". "As the clay in the potter's hands, so are you in my hands." We all are in His hands. We are all the objects of His constant love. He is seeking to bring every one of us to our best. But if He made us, we must cooperate with Him.

This means far more than mere resignation, it means active cooperation. "Thy Will Be Done", is not a passive petition, but one that is aggressive and full of battle. God can never remake you without you consent.

But is He not Almighty? He is. But He resigned some of that Almightyness when He made you. All He needs to create a billion suns is to say "let there be you". But He has no power to remake the weakest of us if we are not willing. He never resorts to force. All He can do is to stand at the door and "knock". If you will open the door, He will come in. He will become at once your guest and your host and He will remake you.

This He will do, however young and plastic you are. This, He will do - however warped and twisted and ugly you are. How vast was the difference between our Lord's plan for Judias than what Judias planned for himself. But what wrecked Judias? What flung him among the broken earthenware of the potter's field? --Not his treachery, but his failure to come back and give his Master a chance to remake him. If he had only done that, he would have been one of the radiant saints of sacred story. No man has ever spoiled because of what he does, but because of
what he fails to do. To say to the Heavenly Potter "Thy Will Be Done" and mean it is an open road to victory as sure as the fact of God.
THE PATIENT POTTER

Jeremiah 18:4 "And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do."

When the vessel that he made of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter, he reworked it. When the prophet Jeremiah was commanded of the Lord to visit this ancient manufacturing establishment two objects at once drew and held his attention. He was a man at work. He also saw that upon which he worked -- a bit of plastic clay. These two held his fascinated attention. This potter and his cup do not hold the attention of Jeremiah alone. This scene in the potter's house has held the attention of some of the greatest thinkers of all time.

Naturally, all who had seen this potter and his cup have not given them the same explanation. "We see the world with our own eyes, each of us," says Thackeray, "and make from within the world we see." To Peter Bell, "a primrose by the river-brim" -- a yellow rose was to him and it was nothing more, but Wedgeworth could see in that same flower thoughts that lie too deep for tears. Both believers and unbelievers have looked at this potter and his cup, but have not given them the same interpretation.

On one point, however, all agree. They agree on the meaning of the cup. The cup is a picture of man in his youth. It is everyone. But while agreeing on what the cup represents, they are far apart. For instance, the great Persian poet, Omar Khayyam, looked at the potter and his cup amidst the fumes of a tavern. He saw a man in the cup, but the potter was not a personality at all. He was fate, or chance, or natural law. Neither the potter nor his cup had choice or responsibility.

He pictures these cups on the shelves of the potter's house talking to each other. "They laugh at me," says one mis-shapen fellow, for leaning all ask. What? Did the hands of the potter shake? That is the ugliness of this vessel was not in sense the fault of the vessel. "I hear of one who threatens he will toss hell the cups he mirred in making. Pish! He's a good fellow and will all be well." "Oh thou who man of base earth didst make and even with paradise divise the snake.
For all with sin wherewith man's face is blackened.—Man's forgiveness, give and take. That is, this irresponsible man no more needs the forgiveness of God than God needs his forgiveness.

Bertrand Russell speaks in the same tone in our day. He declares that this whole universe, including man, was created by forces that had no provision of what they were creating. That is that this prophet himself, that the great leaders of mankind, that even Jesus Christ was the product of a force that had infinitely less intelligence than a fisher worm. The position of the believer may be difficult, but it strikes us that the position of the unbeliever is impossible.

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that he fails to do. To say to the Heavenly Potter "Thy Will Be Done" and
mean it is an open road to victory as sure as the fact of God.
"He reworked it into another vessel." "He reworked it." That to me is surprising. It is not what I think I should have done in his place. I should rather have said to that spoiled bit of ugliness: "I'll waste no more time and energy on you. There is plenty of clay at hand that is plastic and capable of being shaped into beauty and usefulness. Therefore I will throw you away and give my skill to clay that is more promising." But this patient potter refused to accept defeat. Instead he reworked that stubborn clay as if it were at once precious and priceless, indeed all he had in the world.

In our relationships such as those.

This picture of the potter and his cup has gripped the attention of some of the greatest thinkers of all times. That is natural. "We see the world with our own eyes, each of us, and make from within us the world we see." To Peter Bell "a primrose by the river briz, a yellow primrose was to him and it was nothing more." But Wordsworth could see in this same flower thoughts that lay too deep for tears. Generally speaking men have given this potter and cup two widely different interpretations.

I.

That have these varied men seen? All of them, whether they were men of faith or not, have given the same interpretation of the vessel on which the potter was working. It is a picture of man. It is YOU. It is everyone. But as to who the potter
represents, believers and unbelievers are vast distances apart.
To the latter the potter is FATE, or CHANCE, or NATURAL LAW.

To Jeremiah this potter was a picture of God - not a perfect picture, of course, but a picture nonetheless. As the potter is working, even so is God working. That is the assertion of our Lord. "My Father works even until now and I work." Not only is He working, constructively; He is seeking to make something. He is working intelligently. That means that He is working according to plan.

The bit of ugly clay that this potter was seeking to shape was far from a finished product. But there was a place where it had reached its highest possibilities, had indeed come to perfection. That was in the kind of the potter. He had dreamed a beautiful dream for that particular piece of clay. He had a definite plan for it. Had you asked the prophet's potter, "What kind of vessel are you making?", he would not have said in answer, "I am not making any kind in particular - I just put the clay on the wheel and turn it. If it becomes a thing of beauty, all right. If a thing of ugliness, all right. It is all a matter of chance."

Any potter that would work in that fashion would be less than sane. Therefore, we may count upon it that God, infinite in wisdom, is also working according to plan. He is no sad God. We may believe that he is working according to plan for one reason, because this whole universe bears the marks of plan. Science could not move one step forward in a world of chance. It can only advance in a law-abiding world. There are marks of plan in the infinitely small as well as in the infinitely great. To the poet all the planets are singing: "reason's ear they all rejoice, and
utter forth in glorious voice; forever singing as they shine, "The hand that made us is divine."

This is the plain teaching of the word of God. The men who walk across its pages rise or fall, helped or hindered according to their willingness to fulfill the plan of God. The marks of plan are blazingly written across the life of our Lord.

His was the one perfect life that was ever lived on this planet. It was perfect, not because he was divine, but because he lived from the cradle to the cross completely within the will of God. "My meat is to do the will of God and to accomplish His work." When he stood at the end of the journey he was able to say to his Father, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."

Now it is this Jesus who lived his life completely within the will of God, tells us that God no more planned his life than he plans yours and mine. "As the Father has sent me into the world, even so sent I you." Every man has a definite mission. Therefore, no human soul has a right to think meanly of himself. We ought to think grandly of ourselves. We are made little less than God, and we are here according to his plan.

II.

Now as the prophet watched this ancient potter, he doubtless received a shock. In spite of the potter's skill, something went wrong. The cup was spoiled in the hands of the potter. That too is a picture of ourselves. Here is one fact about which there is no argument. Something has gone wrong.

This world of ours is a beautiful world. God himself called it very good. But there is no denying this - we have spoiled it. We have reddened its rivers with blood and covered its
valleys with graves. We have caused hunger and injustice to make human life a hell for many. Our own nation is spoiled in some fashion. Our churches are making a contribution, but they are not measuring up to their possibilities. Multitudes of our homes have been spoiled. All this because we ourselves individually have been spoiled. Some of us are making a worthwhile contribution, but we have all fallen short - we have failed in some measure.

Now contrary to what so many believe, this failure is not the fault of the potter. Why did the prophet's potter fail? There was something in the clay that resisted him. Why does God fail with you or me? We resist him. Remember, he never compels. Here is where we differ from the clay by spaces wider than that between the stars. The clay has no will. It has no power of choice. We have such power. We can say "Yes" to God, or we can say "No" to Him. The weakest man in the world can shut God out of his life if he wants to. Is not God almighty? He is, but he gave us some bit of that almightiness when he created you. All he has to do to create a million stars is to say "Let there be light". But he has no power to make a bad man into a good man without that man's consent.

The fact that we resist God is back of all the tragedy that comes to our world. God never plans what is truly evil. Yet there is nothing more false than the assertion often made, even by religious people, that everything happens for the best. That is not true at all. There are countless things that happen every day that are not for the best, but are contradictory to the will of God. Yet there is no possible worst that God cannot change into good, if we meet that worst within his will (Romans 8:28).
God runs his world in an orderly fashion using as few broken heads and as few broken hearts as possible. But when things go finally wrong it is not his fault, but ours.

II.

What was the potter's reaction to failure? Though his dream had been spoiled, he did not give up. Instead he started over again."He reworked it." How many times? How long did he keep at this seemingly hopeless task? He kept at it, according to Moffatt's translation, "until he was satisfied". This is the Gospel of the Second Chance. It is Gospel of the 100th chance. It would almost seem to be the Gospel of the Endless Chance. It was Jesus who said that the shepherd went after the sheep that was lost until he found it.

But, be that as it may, however you have spoiled your life through rebellion, you can be made over. You can be made over beginning exactly now. In fact, that is the only time - "NOW is the accepted time - NOW is the day of Salvation".

Here is something that we all long for, that we all need. How many are saying, Everybody has said wistfully, "I wish there was somewhere a wonderful place called the Land of Beginning Again - where all our mistakes and all our heartaches and all our poor selfish griefs might be left like a ragged old coat at the door, and never put on again."

There is such a place. That place is the holy ground on which you now stand.

IV

What then is our Supreme Wisdom? Surely it is, to know and do the Will of God. This is the case, first, because, if we fail
to do the will of God, we make victory in the here and now impossible. Since He has made us for Himself, we never find rest apart from Him. However calm the day, I have never seen the ocean when it was at peace. Always it is heaving and tossing as a patient with fever. What is the matter? The voices of the heights are calling to that sea, but when it undertakes to respond, the muddy world throws its arms around it and says "stay with me". Therefore it is always restless. It is even so with ourselves. Before our Mother's lips kissed us, God was there. All through the years He has been wooing us — inviting us to do his will. To refuse is surely to miss the highest.

In the second place, we ought to put the will of God first, because if we do, nothing can rob us of ultimate victory. To live within the will of God is certainly to live life here and forever and at its radiant best. This does not mean that if we put God's will first we shall escape all the tragic winds that beat upon other lives. The road of the will of God led Jesus to a cross. But though that cross was the worst that the fiendish ingenuity of man could do to him, it turned out to be the best. That is, God does not propose to keep us from getting hurt, but He does propose that our very wants may be changed into wealth.

Some of you here present know this out of your own experiences. The worst calamity that ever came into your life has been made by the Grace of God into capital. Your darkest day has become your brightest. You never dreamed that it could happen perhaps when you were passing through it. But "as the mountains hard-by look jagged and scarred but in the distance repose in their soft mellow robe of purple and haze, so the rough present fades into the past, tender, sweet, and beautiful."
What then is the Will of God without which there is no victory and with which there is no defeat? This much we know - through our own common sense - we are here to help and not to hurt - we are here to be courageous rather than cowards - we are here to do a little lifting and not too much leaning - we are here to laugh at least as much as we sob - we are here to make the world a little more beautiful and not more ugly.

Then we can be sure of the FIRST STEP. What is God asking from you? Not your tears, not your prayers, not your money. First of all, he is asking for YOU. If he gets you, he gets everything. If he fails to get you, he gets nothing. He created and redeemed each of us for himself. He longs for our fellowship in the here and now, and in the eternal garden. "Father, I desire that they also whom thou hast given me may be with me where I am." Take this FIRST STEP. Be wise enough to sing - "I do not ask to see the distant scene - one step enough for me".

Suppose you were to give him yourself TODAY - what would happen? God would doubtless call some of you into the ministry. After an experience of more than a half century in that great adventure, I can think of nothing finer. Some he would call to represent him on the Mission Field. Some would do full time work here at home. The majority of us would do the same tasks we are today doing, sweeping the same floors, dusting the same furniture, going to the same office, yet while doing these tasks under His eyes, with a new sense of mission, we should live day by day under brighter and roomier skies.

Here is an old story, so old that most of you have heard it.
About a half-century ago, Frank Gonzales was preparing a sermon. His young nephew who lived with him asked, "Uncle, what is your text for Sunday?" To which his Uncle replied, "Here it is - 'To this end was I born and for this cause came I unto the world'." At this the young fellow became thoughtful. "Uncle, why was I born?" he asked. "I cannot tell you in full," his Uncle replied, "but if you will take the First Step, God will show you." At that the young fellow went onto the street where he saw an excited crowd gathered about a theatre. He heard the report that the Iriquois Theatre was burning - a terrible disaster costing five or six hundred lives.

The young man ran to the scene, not as a spectator, but as a helper. He ran into the burning building bringing out one victim and then another until he had saved 13. As he started in again a falling timber struck on his head and he was unconscious, and taken to the hospital. It so happened that as his Uncle came in and took his place at his bedside, the gallant young chap had a brief moment of consciousness. "You did magnificently," his Uncle said. "You saved thirteen." At that the dying boy smiled, "I understand now - for this cause was I born and for this cause came I to the world that I might save these thirteen".

If you will give yourself to God, he will accept you, regardless of all your spoiled yesterdays. If you will give yourself to God, he will so remake you as to be satisfied with you. If you will give yourself to God he will use and guide you. This is the way to victorious living, HERE AND FOREVER, and there is no other way. What then is our highest wisdom? It is so to dedicate your life that you will be as clay in the potter's hands.
THE SPOILED DREAM

"And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter."

Jeremiah 18:4

This story begins as follows: "The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words." This seems a strange command that was laid upon the prophet. He was to attend church that particular day at an ancient manufacturing establishment. He was sent to the potter's house.

This book has an amazing way of taking commonplace and familiar objects and transforming them into messengers of truth. In obedience to this command Jeremiah went down to the potter's house. Upon entering this house three objects at once arrested his attention. First, there was a man who was working at something, a potter. Second, there was that upon which he was working, a bit of clay that was being fashioned into a cup. Third, there was that with which he worked, the wheel.

Now, this potter with his clay and his wheel has somehow worked his way into the literature of the world. Men, far separated in thought and faith have looked at this potter and have been unable to forget him. The prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah both saw the potter and his wheel and his cup and could not forget them. Paul looked at the potter, and was also unable to forget. The Persian poet Omar Khayyam saw the potter and the wheel and was also unable to forget. The great prophet-poet of the nineteenth century, Robert...
Browning, was unable to take his eyes off the potter and his cup.

"He placed thee in this dance of plastic circumstance,
To give thy soul its bent, and turn thee forth sufficiently impressed."

The Persian poet saw his vision amidst the fumes of a tavern. He had a mug of wine at his lips. He did not see in this potter what his fellows saw. To him the potter was fate, blind, stupid, heavy-handed fate. This dull creature was engaged in making a cup that could see and know and feel. But the maker of the cup could neither see, nor know, nor feel. The atheist of today would call fate natural law. Whoever reckons without God is forced to believe that something without either intelligence or will can make a creature with the genius of a Shakespeare and the moral and spiritual sublimity of Jesus Christ.

But Jeremiah saw more in this potter and his vessel and his wheel than did the Persian poet. To him the potter represented God. The vessel upon which he was working was human personality. It was you, it was I. The wheel represented all his providences, the joys, the sorrows, the losses, the gains, all those things through which God seeks to make us and bring us to our best. This then is what the prophet saw and what his fellow-prophets saw also. God the potter, man the cup, the wheel all the agencies and instruments through which he seeks to make man into his own image.

I.

Let us look then at this potter as a picture of the Divine Potter.

1. Immediately upon entering the potter's house, the prophet saw some-
body at work. This was the potter. The Divine Potter is also at work. He is an 'unresting toiler'. "My father worketh even unto now," said Jesus, "and I work." From eternity to eternity God is working unceasingly. If we are to be like Him we too must work. Labor is not a degrading something, it is a high privilege. Unless we are workers it is impossible for us to be God-like. God is the eternal worker.

2. Not only does God work as this potter was working, but God works constructively. This potter that the prophet saw was trying to make something. So is God. Jesus, Who is the supreme revelation of God, disclaimed again and again all purpose of being destructive. "I am not come to destroy the law and the prophets," he declared. "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that you might have life." His was a positive mission. When James and John wished to destroy those Samaritans who had refused their Master a night's lodging, Jesus rebuked them saying, "The son of man has not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Our God is a constructive God. We must be constructive if we are to be like Him. Remember there is nothing that requires less of heart and less of brains than merely to destroy.

3. Not only is God working and working constructively, but the something that He is undertaking to build is manhood, it is womanhood. This is the one absorbing work of God throughout the years. This is the one task that taxes His infinite energies. The creation of a universe, the broadcasting of stars, these are small chores for the infinite God. When He wants a million suns to flame in the skies He does not have to agonize, He only has to say, "Let there be light."

But there is a task that does tax His energies. That is the task of building Christ-like characters. It is the making of the wayward world into the kind of world that He yearns for it to be. God can have his way throughout
His universe but He cannot always have His way with you and me. Sometimes we thwart Him. But He is ever seeking to make even the most wayward of us into God-like creatures. When we even give Him a chance to make a beginning, it brings a thrill of joy to His heart. "There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner that repenteth." God is working to make us like Himself.

4. Then God, as this potter, is working intelligently. Suppose Jeremiah had said to this artist of the long ago "What are you making?" "Nothing in particular," the potter answers carelessly. "I have taken this bit of clay and put it on the wheel. I am going to spin it around a bit and see what sort of a vessel it becomes. If it is a good and useful vessel -- all right. If it is a bit of a monstrosity, that is all right too. I have no plan, no purpose, I am just working away in a haphazard fashion hoping for the best." But no intelligent potter would act in such a fashion. Any man who would undertake a work of art in that fashion would be insane.

What would be the potter's answer? "That is an ugly bit of clay you have in your hand, what are you going to do with it? Will it always be that shapeless and ugly?" "No," said the potter. "I am going to make it into a vase of beauty. As unsightly and shapeless as this bit of clay, there is a place where it is beautiful. There is a place where, from a smudge of ugliness it has become a poem. "Where is that?" "It is in the mind of the potter." He has dreamed a lovely dream for this piece of clay. With flying wheel and busy fingers he is seeking to make his dream into a reality. If this is not true of the potter then, I repeat, he is less than sane.

Now, just as this potter is working according to plan, so is the Divine Potter. Surely we would not expect this worker with clay to be more sane and intelligent than the infinite God who works with human personality. He, too, has a plan. He has a definite purpose in every life. However greatly
I may have failed, however shapeless and ugly I may be at this moment, there is a place where I am winsome and God-like. There is a place where self has died under the stroke of the Cross. There is a place where the beauty of my Lord rests upon me as the sunshine rests upon the hills. That is in the mind and heart of the Divine Potter. He knows what He would make of me. He knows what He would make of you. He is working according to a definite plan.

5. As Jeremiah watched this potter work constructively and intelligently, he saw him work with mingled success and failure. As his skillful hands plied their task something went wrong. The clay that was taking on a form of beauty and usefulness suddenly began to destroy its possibilities. The potter shook his head in the realization that he had failed at his undertaking. The beautiful dream that he had for this bit of clay had been spoiled.

Even so the Divine Potter sometimes fails. That sounds shocking I know, but it is tragically true. Our Lord could not do in Nazareth what He longed to do. He had to turn away from His hometown in bitter disappointment. One day a princely young chap ran down the road to kneel at His feet. Jesus saw the finest of possibilities in him. But He could not realize those possibilities because the young man went away. What dreams He dreamed for Jerusalem, but that city broke His heart. "How oft would I have gathered thee together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but you would not."

Just as these of the long ago, we have it in our power to thwart God, to disappoint Him. We have it in our power to make impossible the great dreams that He has dreamed for us. God is working today in His world, God is working in His church, God is working in the heart of the individual, but He is not completely successful. As this potter that the prophet saw, He is working with mingled success and failure. We are, most of us, a bit of disappointment. We are not nearly so beautiful, so strong, so gallant of heart, so useful, as
our Lord dreamed we would be, and made it possible for us to be.

II.

Why does the Divine Potter thus work with mingled success and failure? Why is He not wholly successful?

He does not fail of set purpose. No intelligent potter would set out to make a vessel, saying to himself, "I am going to make this clay into the most ugly and useless vessel imaginable." To do so would be bad economy, to say nothing of the morals involved. Neither has God ever planned a single wreck. Now and then when we go wrong we turn bitterly upon our Creator and say "I am like God made me." That is a rather ugly and stupid lie. God never made one single moral monstrosity. Individuals are wrecking themselves all about us, nations are thirsting for each other's blood. But this is not according to the divine plan. This is in utter contradiction of that plan.

If the Divine Potter does not fail of set purpose no more does He fail through ignorance. This ancient worker might have misjudged the clay with which he was trying to work. He might have credited it with possibilities that it did not possess. But the Divine Potter makes no such mistakes. He knows you and me just as we are. He never asks more of us than we can perform. When He tells Simon that he is going to be a rock one day, He is not making bigger plans for Simon than the blundering fisherman is capable of realizing. The God Who plans your life and mine knows that through Him we are able to realize that plan.

No more does the Divine Potter fail because He grows weary and indifferent. This potter that the prophet saw might have failed for that reason. You and I often fail at our task because we are not willing to pay the price of success. We sometimes fail in our homes and in our church through sheer indifference.
I read not long ago that fifty-six parents were arrested in Chicago for neglect of their children. This no doubt represents only a small fraction of those who were guilty. But our God never forgets us. There is no price that He is not willing to pay in order to bring us to our best.

"None of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed;
Nor how dark was the night that the Lord passed through
Ere He found His sheep that was lost."

Why then, I repeat, does the Divine Potter fail? Let us look a moment at the prophet's potter. Why is he failing? Not of set purpose, not through indifference. He is failing because there is something in the clay that resists him. Some defect that makes the realization of his plan impossible. That is the reason, and the only reason, that God ever fails. That is the only reason that He fails with me, in so far as He has failed. That is the only reason He has failed with you. God is always seeking to bring us to our best. He is always trying to give us life in abundance. The only reason we do not realize our best is because we resist God. He seeks to lead us in one direction, we go in another. He seeks to have us share his unselfish devotion, we cling to our selfishness. The supreme tragedy of mankind is just this:—Our refusal to accept the will of God.

III.

When this prophet saw the potter's failure, when he saw the clay refusing to become what the potter longed to make it, what did he expect to happen? I know what I should have expected. I should have expected to hear the potter say to himself, "Well, there is plenty of clay where this came from. If this bit will not fall in with my plans, if I cannot realize my dream, if I cannot make it into the cup that I planned, then I will simply
toss it aside and get some more." But that is not what happened. "And when the cup that was made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter he made it again."

Here we come face to face with the gospel. You and I, all of us, have thwarted and disappointed God times without number. The wonder is that He has not given us up and thrown us away. But this He has refused to do. Having disappointed Him He still persists. We call this the gospel of the second chance. It is far more. It is the gospel of the third, and fourth, and the thousandth. It is the gospel of a million chances. However long we have been spoiling God's dream for us, He is still ready to make us again.

But there is one fact about this beautiful picture that we sometimes forget. When this cup of clay was marred in the hands of the potter he made it again. But he did not make it according to his original plan. He had to choose the second best. "He made it again another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make it." However long we disappoint and rebel against God He will still make us again if we give Him a chance. Though we may have thwarted Him for three score years and ten, He will still remake us. But, of course, He cannot make of us what He could have made if we had come to Him in our young and tender years. Keep in mind this solemn and arresting fact:—Not even God can do as much with a fraction of a life as He can with the whole of a life. "He made it again another vessel."

Now, suppose the clay resists his second effort and thus spoils His dream? The potter still persists. But all the while the clay is becoming a little less plastic, a little more difficult. Inevitably there must come a time if it keeps resisting when it cannot be utilized at all. If you step out of the potter's house, you will find yourself in the potter's field. As you walk about you will hear the crunching of broken bits of earthenware. Why are these shattered bits of crockery here? Does the potter make vessels
in order to break them? By no means. This shattered crockery is made up of clay that hardened in the hands of the potter beyond all use.

Is it possible for God to fail with you and me? Speaking in terms of the life that now is we must answer in the affirmative. I am not able to tell what the pursuing love of God may do beyond the grave. But of this I am sure, it is possible for us to persist in our resistance of the love of God till we defeat His holy purpose for us altogether. It was Jesus Himself who spoke of us as salt. But this same tender Christ said it was possible for the salt to lose its savor, to become good for nothing but to be thrown away and to be trodden under the feet of men. I know of no more solemnizing thought than this, that I may persist in my resistance of God till I become mere bits of shattered crockery incapable of being used.

But no man need experience that grim tragedy. The patient potter is here this morning. He is still longing to realize the dreams for us that some of us are spoiling. How can we make this possible? All the clay has to do is to remain plastic in the hands of the potter. But you and I are different from the clay in that we have a will. Before God can make us He must have our consent. We must cooperate with Him. How then, I repeat, can we make God's dream for us a possibility?

1. Begin here and now to follow Him. Give Him yourself. If you will give God your life He will accept it. This, He will do regardless of what yesterday has been, regardless of what tomorrow may be.

2. If you will give God yourself, He will not only accept you, but He will remake you. That is what He has done in the lives of countless millions. That is what He did with Simon. That is what He did with Paul. That is what
He will do with you. If you will give God yourself, He will make you into the beautiful creature of His dreams.

3. If you will give God yourself, He will not only accept you and remake you, but He will use you. He will use you in the highest possible way. This potter that the prophet saw is making a cup that may hold sparkling water to thirst parched lips. God will make you and me into vessels that will do something even better than that. We are capable of being made into vessels that will hold the water of Life to thirst parched lips. Those who touch us will feel that they have touched God. I can leave you no higher promise than this.
GOD'S PLAN FOR YOU

As the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand.

The prophet Jeremiah was commanded to go down to the potter's house with the promise that there he would hear the deadly word of God. Having arrived at the potter's house, three objects at once drew and held his attention. First, there was the potter, A man at work. Second, there was that upon which he worked, a truck or vessel. Third, there was that with which he worked, a wheel. He looked with fascinated eyes upon this scene, the potter, the truck, the wheel.

Now, this scene of the potter and his truck cup has somehow gripped the earnest thought and attention of some of the greatest thinkers of all time. These men have looked upon this same scene but have given it different interpretations. "We see the world with our own eyes," says Thackeray, and make from within us the world we see.

First, there is the interpretation of the atheist, Of the man who has no God. To him man is the cup, but the potter is not a person at all. He is natural law. He is something that has less intelligence than a fishing worm. Bertrand Russell voices this conviction as he declares that man and his whole universe are the product of blind forces that had no provision of what they were creating. Omar Khayyam voiced this same conviction centuries before. When he visited the potter's house, he heard the vessels that the potter had made talking to each other as they set upon the shelves of the potter's house. One mis-shapen and cynical vessel was saying to his fellows:
"They laugh at me for leaning all away,  
That did the hand of the potter shake?  
I hear of one who threatens he will toss to hell  
The cups he mugs in making.

Fish: He's a good fellow and will all be well  
That is, whether the cup is a dish or a thing of beauty  
Depends solely upon blind chance, or griny handed fits.

Now this believer, Jerim, along with Isaiah and St. Paul  
and drowning in our day, and countless others take a different  
view. In them, men is still the cup. The wheel is all the  
providences and agencies that God uses to bring man to his best.
The potter, is none other than God himself. Here is the sky  
drowning puts it. "He placed thee in this dance  
Of plastic circumstance  
To give thy soul its bent  
And turn thee forth sufficiently impressed."

Now, as Christians we must share the conviction of the Prophet.

Part I

The potter is God.

As this human potter is working, as he is working constructively  
and working according to plan, even so God is working. Had you  
made this visit to the prophet and had watched the potter at his  
work, you might have touched him on the shoulder and questioned, "I  
see that you are making some kind of vessel. What kind?" Had the  
potter answered you with a sneer, "Don't be silly, I'm not making  
any kind of vessel in particular. I simply place the clay on the  
wheel and begin to turn. If the vessel become a poem, all right.  
If it becomes a monster, all right. If so, had the potter  
given such an answer you would have regarded him as less than sane.
Now if this potter is working constructively and according to plan, we should expect no less of God. We can believe this because our whole universe bears on it the marks of plan. If ours is not an ordered world, then no science is possible. That would the discoveries of science be worth in a world of chance? What anyone in a world could learn that was at a certain temperature, boils one dry and at the same temperature the next, dry-freeze. God's infinite planes that fly through the heavens fly according to plan. "

reasons here all as

"In reason are they all rejoice
An utter forth a glorious voice
Forever singing as they shine
The hand that made us is divine."

If God so plans the things that can neither know nor love, will he not plan our lives who are made in his own image and who are little but little less than God.

That he does plan our lives is the plain teaching of the Bible. Jesus emphasize over and over that his was a planned life. He constantly affirmed that the index finger that pointed to the hour that he was to act was that of no human hand but of God himself. He affirmed that at the end of his journey that he had finished the work that God had given him to do. He further affirmed that as God has planned his own life, so he plans yours and mine. Therefore, he said, "Therefore as the father has sent me into the world, so have I sent you".

Horace Bushnell preached a great sermon years ago on the subject, "Every Life The Plan Of God". A better statement would be "God Plans Every Life". That is true of the greatest, it is also true of the least.
Therefore, as prophet watched this potter working on an ugly bit of plastic clay, he saw that clay as crude and unfinished. But he knew that there was a place where this ugly and useless bit of clay had come at once to usefulness and beauty. That was, in the mind of the potter. This potter, even as the heavenly Father, was working on each individual cup according to plan.

But though this potter was exercising his utmost skill to realize his dream for this particular cup, he at first met with failure. The cup was spoiled. Nor is that a fact about which we do not need to argue. There is much all about us that has been spoiled. Ours is a beautiful world, but we have spoiled it in some fashion. The church is the best of all institutions, but it is not the church that might be. It should be fair as the moon, bright as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners. But we have spoiled it in some fashion. Satisfy of all we have spoiled ourselves. However much we have attained we have fallen far short of our highest possibilities.

Now the fact that so much has gone wrong in a world where an infinitely loving God has perplexed many an earnest soul. We do not wonder that to a certain poet it seemed that some lesser God had made the world and had not power to make it as he would. Old Omar was not the only one who has felt that he would like to wreck the whole business and would it were to the hearts desire. Some of us in our desperation blame the whole tragic mess on God. But before we do this, let us ask whose fault it is that the cup is spoiled.

Part II

Who spoiled the cup? It was not spoiled by the potter, certainly no human cup is spoiled by the divine potter. God never grows impatient
nor discouraged. Neither is there any sacrifice that he is not willing
to make to bring you to your rest. He works always even at the cost
of an eternal cross, to realize his dream in you. This cup was spoiled
because there was something in the clay that resisted the potter.

This puts the finger on the reason for every spoiled thing in
our world and our lives. The clay on which this human potter
works had no will. Hence, we are separated from it by spaces wider
than those between the stars. We can say yes to God. We can say no
to God. All God has to do to create a million suns is to say, 'let
there be light' but he cannot create a single good man without the
consent of that man. God is almighty, but he resigns some bit of
that almightiness when he made you. The weakest man in the world can
force God out of his life if he so desires.

Thus all evil that comes into the world comes through our
resistance to God. Yet even good people often blame God for tragedies
that grieve him for more than it grieved the sufferers. My associate
pastor at First Church had a lovely son killed by a drunken driver.
Had I tried to comfort that father by saying, 'It all happened
according to the will of God', whatever comfort I might have brought
to the bereaved I should have certainly been slandering God.

When I was Pastor in Houston a good woman gave her son a second-
hand Ford. He drove recklessly. He loved to turn corners at high speed
in order to hear the tires screech. One day as he went speeding around
a curve a telephone pole met him. He was hurried to the hospital.
When I reached his bedside his mother gripped my hands frantically,
and said, 'Why should this happen to me?'
at the risk of sounding harsh and flippant. I answered, "It didn't happen to you, it happened to him". But don't you dare blame this accident on God. If God were to snatch a telephone from in front of your son when he was driving recklessly, he might put one in front of my son when he was driving carefully." All I was agreeing for was that every man must hit his own telephone stake. Such wrecks are not the fault of God any more than those wrecks we make of ourselves by our willfully wrong choices. The Lord knocks, but we must open the door. Every tragedy is born fundamentally of our resistance to the will of God.

Part III

Now what was the reaction on the potter when the cup was spoiled.

It was not the one that I should have expected. Had I been in his place I would have tossed the stubborn clay aside and said, "There is plenty more where this came from". But the potter did not do this. He started over again. Indeed every failure served not for destruction, but for a new endeavor. He kept on according to Moffatt translation until he was satisfied with the cup.

If this human potter was so patient and persistent can we expect less from the heavenly potter who is our friend and our Father. Over and over we refuse his will, but he never looses hope, he never grows discouraged. He never confesses that we are hopeless cases. We call this the gospel of the second chance. It is in reality the gospel of the endless chance. "Each day is a new beginning.

Each morn is the world made new

0 you who are weary of sinning
here's a hope and a chance for you.

The fact that we are here this morning, is because in spite of our failure the Lord has not turned us away. That is true of myself, in particular. When I first entered the ministry
I flunked it miserably. I went back into the work for which I had been trained. I never made a more firm resolved than this, "Whatever happens, Never will I enter the pulpit again." Yet two years later I was on a circuit out in Texas and there I stand at this moment with fifty years of joyous ministry behind me, a monument to the endless patience of our Lord. When we spoil ourselves, when we lose heart and hope he continues to hope for us. He never leaves off his loving effort to bring us to do his will.

Part IV

So what. This brings us face to face with our supreme wisdom, our highest possibilities. That is to know and do the will of God. "Thy will not thine be done" is the sum total of all rebellion and tragedy. "Thine will not mine be done" is the sum total of all high achievement and victory.

This is the case because if we fail to find our place within the will of God, though we might meet with many a triumph life will never come to its best. It must be lived in restlessness, it must end in a tragedy as deep and dark as that woven out of the warp and woof of mystery and death.

On the other hand if we give ourselves to do the will of God, nothing will defeat us. Such a dedication will not deliver us from pain and suffering, but it will mean that man and devils cannot do to us will be powerless to impoverish us, it will only add to our wealth. Paul discovered this in his own experience, as he became sure that to them that loved God and lived within the will of God all things can be made to work for good.

There are two words that come together in the New Testament over and over. They are these, "But God/". No other book faces so frankly the stark tragedies of life as does the Bible. Yet no other book is so
of courage. Always over against the worst that man can be and do is the best that God can be and do. The fathers of Joseph sold him into slavery, thus they sought to condemn him to a living death. His road was to end in the oblivion of a slave's pen, but he met his tragedy within the will of God. God was with him and that road ended not in oblivion but in the mortality of usefulness.

Now I agree with all that you may say, but what is the will of God for my life. It is not easy to give a full answer to that question. Of course, you know the part of the answer of what we know of God through Christ. We know for instance that if it is his will that we should help and not hurt. That we should be courageous and not cowardly, that we should love and not hate, that we should be clean and not unclean.

Then we know the first step that we ought to take. That is the step of dedication. "Follow me" he is saying. Take the first step and he will show you the second. "Sing to him," keep thy feet, I do not ask to see the distant scene, one step is enough for me. " Our Lord himself affirms, that if any man is willing to do his will, he shall know. He will not always have a blueprint of the whole journey, but he can be sure of the next step.

Suppose you were to turn your life wholly over to our Lord this morning. What would it mean? For some, it might mean a call to the ministry. That you could say that the Spirit of the Lord is upon me as he as appointed me to preach.' Others he might call to the mission field. Others still to full time work in your own home church. For the majority it would mean doing the same commonplace task but doing them under wider horizons and roomer skies because of the consciousness that you were living the will of God.
But there is no question as to the fact that he did know that the cross was a necessity. I am not forgetting that for a brief moment in Gethsamene he had a faint hope that there might be some other way. Therefore he prayed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me."

But his second prayer indicates that he has discovered the impossibility of his request. Therefore it is a prayer of acceptance;--"If this cup may not pass from me except I drink it, thy will be done."

As Jesus looked upon the cross as a necessity when seen in prospect so he did when he looked upon it in retrospect. After he had passed through the black tunnel of crucifixion, he did not regard his suffering as a meaningless tragedy. He did not regard it as the result of the too shrewd planning of the religious leaders of his own people. No more did he regard it as a result of the too great cowardice of Pilate. He still saw it as a necessity anchored within the will of God. This he affirmed, to take a single example, by the question that he put to his two friends on the road to Emmaus, "Was it not necessary that Christ should suffer?"

Thus in the mind of our Lord the cross was not a misfortune but a divine necessity. So it came to be regarded by those who knew him best. It is a striking fact that the very men who loved him well enough to die for him never once lament "The deep damnation of his taking off."

They never hint that his was a heroic, but mad adventure born of somebody's blunder.

As these intimate friends did not bewail the cross, no more did they heap abuse upon those whose wicked hands had engineered this ugly tragedy. These saints became so sure of the necessity, and also of the infinite worth of this sacrifice on the part of their Lord that they could never regard it as a calamity. It was something that had so transformed and transfigured all life that they could sing centuries
Once more I bring you to the sweet simplicity of it all. You do not have to venture the whole journey, venture the first step. Here is a story that is so old that to almost all of you it will be new. More than fifty years ago Frank W. Gunsaulus, founder of Armour Institute of Chicago and pastor of Central Congregational Church of that city was preparing his Sunday sermon. His young nephew came into his study and touched him. "Uncle, what is your text for Sunday." "Here it is said the minister "To this end was I born and to this cause came I into the world." The young chap became thoughtful and asked rather wistfully, "Uncle Frank, why was I born and for what cause did I come?" "I do not know, was the wise answer, but if you will take the first step, God will show you."

That young chap went out from his uncle's study on to the street. Soon he saw a commotion. It was a fire. The Iroquois Theater was burning. The young fellow ran, not as a spectator, but as a rescuer. He dashed into the burning building and brought out victim after victim until he had saved thirteen. Then he was struck by a piece of falling timber and was knocked unconscious and rushed to the hospital.

When his uncle Frank arrived he had recovered consciousness though he was close upon the crossing. "You did Magnificently," said his uncle, "you saved thirteen." This the young smiled and said, "I understand now, to this end was I born and to this cause came I unto the world that I might save those thirteen."

God has a plan for your life. It is to your interest and the interest of your fellows and to God himself that you find that plan and fulfill it. I am not asking you to make the whole journey. Take the first step. Let this be the song of your soul.

"Have thine own way Lord".

"What wilt thou have me do? What shall this mean—do? Mind your own business—follow me.