

## "He Wrought His Work on the Wheels"

### T. Austin-Sparks:

"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. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought his work on the wheels" (Jeremiah 18:1-3).

We are seeing that God Himself has taken the place of a potter and is at work forming a vessel for Himself. His work has a very special and definite purpose in view, for the vessel which He is making is a chosen vessel, that is, it is governed absolutely by His sovereign will and purpose. He will have this vessel, and nothing, and no one, can deny Him. The supreme idea connected with this vessel is that it is designed to serve a special purpose throughout eternity. There is an eternal thought in the Mind of God which He is going to realize and express in this vessel, and all believers are called according to this purpose. So what we are concerned with at this time is to be led into that divine thought.

There are two vessels presented to us in the Bible, and yet these two are one in divine purpose. There is Israel, which was called to be an earthly expression of the divine Mind, and was chosen from among the nations for this particular purpose: to set forth the Mind of God on this earth in history. On the other hand, there is the Church, spoken of in the New Testament as "the elect" (1 Peter 1:1). But the Church was chosen from eternity for a heavenly purpose, not only an earthly one. Israel was for an earthly and 'time' purpose, while the Church is for a heavenly and timeless, or eternal, purpose.

Now we, of course, are called in relation to this eternal purpose. In this present dispensation God is mainly concerned with this Church. It is being gathered out of all the nations for a great purpose in the ages to come. At present it is in the process of being formed, but at the end of this dispensation it will be completed and will begin its eternal purpose.

The Lord is continually rebuking us in relation to one thing: that is, that we make everything of this life and of time. We think that this life is everything, and therefore we have quarrels with the Lord because we cannot understand Him. For instance, the Lord does a deep, deep work in some life and brings that one into a very real knowledge of Himself. We draw our conclusions from that and say: 'The Lord is going to do something very wonderful in this world through that life.' All our hopes and expectations are bound up with that one - and just at that point, when we think they are ready to do some wonderful thing for the Lord, He takes them away; and we get into trouble with the Lord over that. We cannot understand why He does that kind of thing, but He has done it very many times. The Lord is working, not for time, but for eternity; not for earth, but for heaven. All that the Lord does with us here in time is related to the purpose of the ages to come.

We had better settle this matter very quickly. Nothing in any one of our lives will be completed in time. We shall never reach the end in this life, and only eternity and heaven will make our life perfect. Just when we think that we might be useful to the Lord, He takes us away.

This is the supreme idea of the Church, and we must recognize that it is in course of formation. Nothing is going to reach an end in our lifetime. I think we had better settle that, because it touches the heart of many of our problems.

In our summary of all the references to the potter in the Bible, we said that the driving force of the Potter's wheels is the Holy Spirit, and it is very important that we should all be perfectly clear and certain as to why the Holy Spirit has come into this world. There are many aspects to His work, but what we must guard against is regarding any one aspect as the whole. It is possible to draw a circle round the Holy Spirit and over that particular circle write the word 'MUST'. 'It must be like this. If it is not this, then it is not the Holy Spirit.' So we put the Holy Spirit into a box of doctrine. The New Testament makes it very clear that we must leave the Holy Spirit out of boxes and in the open.

But when we have said that, we have to realize that there is an all-inclusive work of the Holy Spirit. However many aspects there are, there is only one purpose, and that has two things in it. In all His different works the Holy Spirit just moves along two lines, and these two lines ought never to be separated. The one line is revealing Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit came for this precise purpose. Jesus said so. He is here for the specific and inclusive purpose of revealing the Lord Jesus. Now there is a peril associated with that word 'revealing'. Many people think that they just have to sit down and let something come to them. Sometimes the Holy Spirit does show us something while we are praying or are meditating quietly, but most of you have not the time to become monks or nuns. We have not the time nor the opportunity to be recluses. This does not mean that we

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must not have our times of prayer, because while we talk to the Lord in prayer, it ought to be a time when the Lord talks to us, but in these days of so much busyness and activity, it is very difficult to be quiet and meditate. Many of the Lord's people do not hear Him speaking because they do not give Him an opportunity. They are too busy to listen to Him. so we cannot put too much emphasis upon the necessity for being quiet sometimes.

When we have said that, and said it very emphatically, for there is no real substitute for prayer and there is nothing that should be allowed to take the place of the Word of God in our lives, we must recognize that the revealing of Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit is a very practical thing.

Many of you will agree with me when I say that we have learned more about the Lord Jesus by experience than in any other way. If we have committed our lives entirely to the Holy Spirit, we must realize that everything that happens to us has a lesson in it. Each of our experiences is intended to teach us something. You see, we come back to our favourite text: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). There is no experience which can come to us as children of God that is not capable of teaching us some lesson. The very sovereignty of the Holy Spirit demands that it should be so. Our going out and our coming in under the Holy Spirit will teach us something. There is a sovereignty over all the ways in the life of a child of God. That does not mean that all our ways are right, but if they are wrong the Holy Spirit can teach us something. However, the point is that the revelation of Jesus Christ comes very largely through experience. We come to understand the mind of the Lord by experience, and that is one of the Holy Spirit's main methods of revealing Christ. We ought never to take a holiday from the Holy Spirit.

The other line of the Holy Spirit is conforming us to the image of Christ. You can see these two sides in the potter's house. The clay on the wheel is going through experiences, and they may be very difficult for it to understand. The potter may give it a hard blow, or he may use the strength of his hands to bring pressure upon it, or he may gently work it with his fingers. The clay goes through many experiences. Well, the experiences are not everything. You may not understand them, or know what the potter means by these various activities. Many of them seem to be difficult, but the potter is not just doing this because he wants to. He is not doing something hard just because he wants to be hard. Be patient and watch, and you will see that something is taking shape: a vessel is being formed. In the end there will be something which has a design in it. "He wrought his work on the wheels." He did not just put some clay on the wheels and knock it about - he wrought his work.

To use a New Testament phrase, the Lord is "working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight" (Hebrews 13:21), and you all know so well what is the design: "For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29) - the revealing of His Son by the Holy Spirit, the working of the Holy Spirit by experience and the perfecting of the vessel which is the image of God's Son.

I want to stay just for a little while with one other aspect of this formation. When the potter puts the clay on the wheel it is composed of a great multitude of particles which could just fall apart at any moment and the clay come to pieces. They are individual particles. But do you notice what is happening on the wheel? By pressure and manipulation these particles are being pushed together so that they are losing their independence and becoming parts of one whole. If the particles could speak, they might say: 'Well, I don't think I like this idea. I am being robbed of my independence and am having to accept a life in relation to other particles. I don't think I like that other particle. I would sooner have some other kind of particle next to me, and here is this potter making me live with other things that I don't like! "Oh, for the wings of a dove! Then I would fly away and be at rest!"'

The Potter is forming a body, a vessel, and every part of this vessel has to come into vital relationship with all the other parts. He never consults our likes over this matter, never says: 'Now, would you like to be here and have So-and-so put next to you?' You see, this is one of the great factors in divine sovereignty. The Lord never consults our wishes in this matter, because one of the great manifestations of His grace is going to be in our ability to live with people we do not like.

I wonder what you would do if you had the choice of your relationships! But the Lord does not give us that choice, for this vessel is called, says the Apostle Paul, "to the praise of the glory of his grace" (Ephesians 1:6). It does not want much grace to live with people whom we like, but it does take a lot of grace to live with some people. This is the formation of the Holy Spirit - the relatedness of the particular particles of the clay in the vessel is through His discipline.

And yet there is another aspect of this. The Lord very rarely puts together two parts which are exactly alike, but He does put parts together so that they can be the complement of each other. This is divine wisdom.

Have you ever asked any questions about your physical body? Have you ever asked why you have two eyes

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instead of one? Why you have two ears and not only one? Why you have two hands and not only one, or two legs and two feet? Why is there duplication in our bodies? Well, see how you would get on if you only had one leg! You would very soon lose your balance, for you need the other leg to keep you balanced. You put one foot forward and, unless you are just going to hop along with much difficulty, you must have another leg to come up and help. Of course, there are some people who, not having a second arm or leg, have learned to use the one very well, but that is not natural, and they must often feel the loss of that other limb. There is always some weakness and some lack. Well, if you like to try, you can put this to the test. You can go out from this place (I don't want to see you do it!) and try to get along with one leg. Do you see the point? God has constituted our bodies on this principle of mutual helpfulness, the one member making good what is lacking in the other.

When I was a little boy I used to be taken to church and, not being very interested in the sermon, I had to find some little ways of getting through that awful long time. One of the things I did was to see how much I could see through one eye, and then how much I could see when I closed that one and looked through the other. I found that I had only half a life when I used one eye! You see, my nose was like a line, and when I closed an eye I could not see very much on the other side of my nose. It was the same the other way, but when I used both eyes I could see everything. Well, of course, that is just a boy's silly little game. If I closed one eye I did not see some of the things I did not want to see!

We need the two sides to make a perfect life, so God has given us two eyes, two hands, two legs and two feet, and each side contributes something to the other side.

Here we are back with this vessel that the Lord is forming. All the particles, while retaining their personality, are to become one vessel.

There is one thing that I feel I must say before we conclude. The real formation of this vessel is taking place in heaven. We are always trying to get a perfect expression of the Church on the earth, but we shall never do it. Make no mistake about this! You will have to learn this lesson sooner or later.

At the end of the Bible this vessel is represented as the new Jerusalem and is seen coming down out of heaven. All the ages have been occupied in forming this heavenly vessel. Nevertheless, what is heavenly has to become more and more real in us while we are here. We shall never know what the Lord has been doing with us until we get to heaven, but when we do see all the meaning of His work with us here we shall be very surprised. There is a larger meaning than we can see in those words of the Lord Jesus: "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shall understand hereafter" (John 13:7). Why it is that the Lord puts us together as He does: why has He called us to live in certain relationships which are not what we would choose? The full explanation of that awaits us in heaven, but that does not mean that we have to wait until we get there to express the relationship. It is a mark of something being wrong spiritually when members of the Body of Christ separate themselves from other members. Our great peril is to live an independent spiritual life. There is something of a Thomas in most of us. You will remember that when the others were together enjoying the presence of the Risen Lord, Thomas was not there. Fellowship is a spirit before it is anything else. It does not necessitate our always being together in one place. It is a very precious thing to be able to be together as the Lord's people, for many of them live a very lonely spiritual life. Nevertheless, fellowship is a spirit more than it is geographical. When the Apostle said: "Giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3), he was not only localizing that. It is an exhortation to the whole Church, scattered over all the earth - "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit". It is the "unity of the Spirit" - fellowship is a spiritual thing.

Now the Potter, by the energy of the Holy Spirit, is seeking to form a heavenly vessel, and the formation is a progressive day-by-day expression of the Lord Jesus.