

**The
Potter**
(Romans 9:21)
Thomas Bradbury

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POTTER**
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dividing to every man severally as He will" (1 Cor. xii. 11).

Listen! "It is God Which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. ii. 13).

Listen again! "Now the God of peace, That brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that Great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb. xiii. 20, 21).

THOMAS BRADBURY.

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"THOU ART WORTHY, O LORD, TO RECEIVE
GLORY AND HONOUR AND POWER, FOR THOU HAST
CREATED ALL THINGS, AND FOR THY PLEASURE
THEY ARE AND WERE CREATED" (Rev. iv. ii.).

"THE POTTER."

"Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?"—Romans ix. 21.

This morning I was privileged with a little light in my understanding, and love in my heart, and life energising and exercising my spirit, to bring before you that wonderful chapter (Isaiah lxiv.) which describes human inability and incorrigibility, and the marvellous grace of God abounding in the experience of those whom He has taken in hand to save in His Christ with an everlasting salvation—to be justified before Him in everlasting righteousness—to be preserved with that keeping which none but the redeemed and regenerate children of God can know, or truly appreciate. The words of my text on that occasion are found in the eighth verse, "But now, O LORD, Thou art our Father: we are the clay, and Thou our Potter; and we all are the work of Thy hand." That is something very precious to living souls instructed from above, whose spiritual education is wholly in the hands of the gracious Three-in-One. These are part of the new creation, and as such are formed and fashioned according to the good will and pleasure of

God, to appear as vessels meet for the Master's use, and serve as vessels to honour in the house of sovereign mercy. They are prepared and fitted beforehand, and in the set time of favour, without noise, parade, or show, are placed in the position God designed for them in His eternal counsels, a position of glory which they must occupy to the ages of eternity in blessed and blissful oneness with Himself.

Let us glance again at the description given of us by the Holy Ghost, and in the language of our own heart's experience recorded in the former part of Isaiah lxiv., where we are described just as we are, and as we must know ourselves to be ere we can prize that salvation which is all by love, blood, and power. The love of the Father in His eternal purpose. The blood of the Son in His eternal redemption. The love of the Spirit in His unceasing witness and seal. Listen to what these people have to say of themselves—"We have sinned." You will find that to be the keynote of the cvth Psalm. This Psalm describes redeemed man's selfishness and sinfulness when left to himself. The cvth Psalm on the contrary reveals the unselfishness of God, and His determination in the face of all our failings, falls, and filth, to acknowledge none of these in any one of His children, but to speak of them and deal with them, as though they had never sinned at all. Is not that wonderful, glorious, blessed? Oh, that you may know something of that set before us in Isaiah xlii. 18-21, "Hear, ye deaf; and look, ye blind, that ye may see. Who is blind, but My Servant? or deaf, as My Messenger that I sent? Who is blind as He that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's Servant? Seeing many things, but Thou observest not; opening the ears, but He heareth not. The Lord is well pleased for His righteousness' sake;

—its power—its burden, is all the working of the fingers of the Almighty Potter to a blessed and glorious perfectness, bringing us into spiritual oneness with Him Whom God makes to us experimentally, what He is unceasingly, Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification, and Redemption. Yes, and Glory also.

Job knew something of this forming and fashioning process, when he could say to God, "I know that Thou canst do everything, and that no thought can be withholden from Thee." Or, as we read in the margin, "*no thought of Thine can be hindered*" (Job xlii. 2). Or, again, as Coleman beautifully renders it, "NO PURPOSE OF THINE CAN BE FRUSTRATED." All that He has designed He does. All that He has promised He performs. All that He has purposed He perfects. Everything by the guidance of His eye and the skilfulness of His fingers. Listen to Him: "Yea, before the day was, I am He; and there is none that can deliver out of My hand: I will work, and who shall let it?" (Isa. xlii. 13). Listen again: "I will cry"—crying is a sign of weakness—"unto God Most High"; unto Him Who doeth according to His will, and where He will. "Unto God that performeth all things for me" (Ps. lvii. 2). This is God in Christ Whose glory is above the heavens humbling Himself to behold His choice things in heaven, and His sinful things on earth, raising the poor out of the dust, and lifting the needy out of the dung-hill, setting them with princes, even with the princes of His people (Ps. cxiii. 4-8). God the All-wise and All-skilful Potter does everything for us as vessels of mercy, to fill us with His grace and goodness, and to adorn us with the beauties of Christ by the power of His Spirit and the preciousness of His truth. "All these worketh that One and the Selfsame Spirit,

Whom He hath sent." When He will have faith wrought and exercised in our heart, He will speak His own word of covenant command right home by the power of His Spirit, and *our willing spirits to prompt obedience move*. There is no resisting the creating power of the Father in the production of precious faith. There is no hindering the power of Christ's resurrection when faith comes (Eph. i. 19, 20; Gal. iii. 25, 26). When the testimony of God concerning His Christ is brought to the heart by the Spirit of Christ, faith proves itself triumphant over all opposition, and crowns Emmanuel Lord of all.

Listen! Some of you were not here this morning, and I have no desire that you should miss this narration which was then told to the edification of many. It did me good. Standing by the potter at his wheel last Tuesday, at Doulton's, as he manipulated upon the passive clay, our conductor said, "Where is the life associated with the clay? It is wholly in the finger of the potter." What a marvellous lesson! Do you think it over. Yes, think of the fingers of the Almighty Potter. You can do so in the light of Ps. viii. 3, "When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers"; and Job xxvi. 13, "By His Spirit He hath garnished the heavens." God's Spirit and finger are synonymous in Matt. xii. 28 and Luke xi. 20. When the fingers, or Spirit of God, are at work in a redeemed sinner's conscience producing conviction by the truth of God, sin is known, and seen, and felt, in its enormity, vileness, and guilt, with something of its awful effects and consequences. Distance from God—enmity against God—contempt of His word and commandments. Then are experienced the fear of His wrath, and the dread of eternal banishment from His presence. Here the vessel is marred indeed. The knowledge of this is all God's work. Our sensitive apprehension of sin—its plague

He will magnify the law, and make it honourable." What a blessed, precious and Christ-exalting Scripture! To which my soul says, So be it; and so it is.

"How glorious was the work He wrought,
While dwelling on this earthly globe;
When each good deed, and each pure thought
Conspired to weave our spotless robe."

Look at this—"We all are as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags." Mark the plural of that word, "righteousnesses." Righteousness, the best we can produce. Our most perfect works that we can bring before God need washing in atoning blood. The man who appears the holiest before his fellows is but a filthy sinner in all that he does in his approaches to God. Can that be proved? Should I state it if I could not prove it? Turn to the xxviii of Exodus, where you see Israel represented before God in the person of the high priest. The title, "Great High Priest," belongs not to Aaron, but to Jesus alone. Aaron as the high priest of Israel here appears, and Israel also with their holy things. Ah! But we do well not to forget that all-important statement—"that Aaron may bear the iniquity of the holy things" (ver. 38). *That* takes the wind out of our sails, and empties us of fancied self-conceit. Have we holy things? Just because *we* have them, they need to be cleansed. Blessed be His Holy Name, a Greater than Aaron bore the iniquities of our holy things, and He will see to it that every trace of transgression, sin and iniquity shall be washed away, and we, the children of the Father, stand before Him "clean every whit"—holy as Christ is holy—pure, "even as He is pure." Is not that gospel good enough? It is for me, and nothing short of it will do. If I should live to the age of Methuselah, and have worked for the Lord all that time, I should be no holier than I now am in Christ.

Since we are partakers of the divine nature and God's command, "Be ye holy," has been enforced by the power of the Holy Ghost in our heart's experience—if Christ Jesus has been made "Sanctification" to us (1 Cor. i. 30) we are as holy as we shall be in the heights of glory. Yet we shall lament our iniquity—mourn our impurity. It would be a bad sign if we did not.

This is true concerning every one of God's loved and saved ones here below. He loves them, yet they long to hear Him say, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer. xxxi. 3). He has saved them in Himself with an everlasting salvation, but their cry is often heard, "Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation" (Ps. xxxv. 3). They rejoice in the sweets of divine forgiveness, yet they *do* say, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John i. 8, 9). Does He declare them to be "His own"—"His jewels"—"*His special treasure*"—His choice ones? They will be accounted foolish—weak—despised—"things which are not"—nonentities! The world will not have anything to do with them—it will not acknowledge them—it has not one good thing to say of them. Let them acknowledge their belief in God's sovereign election, and those who profess so much, and contend so much for holy growing, will say all manner of unkind and cruel things against them. The world will hurl its withering invectives at those against whom God has not one charge. It is no mean honour to be thus owned and known of Christ. "Unknown"! As social beings we do not like to be unnoticed. "As well known"! As the children of God we delight to be recognised and acknowledged by our Father, His Christ, His Spirit, and our

However much we may try to feather our nest down here, and others may luxuriate in the thought that Jesus Christ will come to earth again, so that they may have rare times with Him according to the flesh. That will not do. "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more" (2 Cor. v. 16). He is in heaven, where He will have His people with Him. We "shall meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. iv. 17). Our home is up-yonder—"our citizenship is in heaven."

"It is not for me to be seeking my bliss,
And building my hopes in a region like this ;
I look for a city which hands have not pill'd,
I pant for a country by sin undefild."

It is our delight to be "confident of this very thing that He which hath begun a good work in us, will perform (*finish*) it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i. 6). God's work is perfect all along in the salvation, education and glorification of His people. From the beginning to the end of our spiritual preparation for glory we are the work of His hands. "It is He that hath made us, and *His we are*" (Ps. c. 3). Every point and particular of spiritual forming, fashioning, correcting, chastening, and adorning is His work alone. Does He desire the production of work honourable and glorious? (Ps. cxi. 3) Depend upon it, the same is in His design and forth it will come. As is His design such will be His work. Does He seek for precious faith in blessed exercise? He speaks: "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. x. 17). This faith is His own in exercise (Mark xi. 22). It is the faith of Christ (Phil. iii. 9). It is the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. v. 22). It is the work of God (John vi. 29). It is the faith of God's elect (Titus i. 1). "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him

they are graciously, but for the purpose of showing forth His glory. Merit of their own they cannot claim. Created in Christ Jesus unto good works of His own preparing, they walk in them. This is the prevailing theme—the burden of the whole chapter. We are created anew “to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us,” graced us, adorned us, beautified us, “made us accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. i. 6).

Indeed, the Creator in Isaiah's prophecies is He of universal creation, but that is not the bent of the prophet's teaching. As a separated and sanctified vessel of mercy, he had to do, not with the world at large, but with the elect of God as they were chosen out of it, and separated from it. As a faithful prophet he was concerned in the creation and adornment of the church and people of God, and this we see in His frequent allusions to Israel as a spiritual and ideal person. None the less real for all that. We have great cause to bless God for putting Himself in Isaiah's mind, revealing Himself to Isaiah as the Potter, and describing His people as the clay. There is more in the figures of speech than we can see at first sight. Indeed we cannot see them at all but in God's light, and by divine revelation. Clay—dead, cold, motionless. The Potter—living, glowing, moving. He has absolute authority, control, and power over His people. He forms and shapes everything as He pleases. How much more is this manifested in the objects of His covenant love, and the subjects of His reigning grace. God's universal creation exists for His glory, and for the glory of His people Israel. Dear old Jenny Nuttal once said to me in Oldham Market Place, “Why did God create the world?” “Why?” said I. “Simply to build His church upon, and when the church is completed, woe be to the world.” That is true.

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brethren, while at the same time we may say, each from the heart, “Though I be nothing”—*a thing that is not*—a nonentity—nothing in my own esteem—the world knoweth me not. Well, that is all right when I know that the Covenant God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ would sacrifice the world for me, because of what He has made me in the Son of His love. This is everything to me.

“Now, O LORD,” though Thou hast consumed, melted and reduced us because of our iniquities—“Thou art our Father: we are the clay, and Thou art our Potter, and we all are the work of Thy hand.” Oh, how blessed to know ourselves thus. Operated upon according to the Father's design. Beautified in the graces and glories of the Beloved. Exercised inwardly by the witness and seal of the Holy Ghost. Mark well that word “exercised” in the New Testament. See Heb. v. 14, “Those who by reason of use have their senses *exercised* to discern both good and evil.” Also Heb. xii. 11, “nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are *exercised* thereby.” What a blessed privilege it is to be exercised in the hands of a Sovereign God! “We are the clay.” What is clay? Earth dead, inanimate, lifeless, motionless. What a striking illustration of the deadness and dullness of universal humanity! Yet from it and in it God is pleased to display His wrath and His love in His fitting vessels of wrath to destruction, and “making known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy which He had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles.” Whatever the formation of the clay in the Hands of the Potter, it has no right to object, or say, “Why hast Thou made me thus?” Whatever grace or gift the Father bestows upon His child or withhold

from it, that child as the workmanship of God, under the gracious guidance of the Ever-Blessed Spirit, will not call in question the Father's righteousness, wisdom, or power in His bestowing or withholding.

Now here I would ask you to turn to Jer. xviii. 1-6, "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." You notice that the word came to Jeremiah, not that Jeremiah went to the word. Look at that word, "Arise." In it we discover resurrection—life—power. The prophet hesitated not—did not consult his fleshly ease. "Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels." The potter's work was to Jeremiah one of great wonder, hence his expression of surprise—"Behold!" "And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter; so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it." The potter took counsel with none as to what he should do with the marred vessel. He cast it not from him but proceeded in his own time and way "to make it again another vessel." "Then"—when he was obedient in the way of God's commandment—"Then the Word of the LORD came unto me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand"—marred, and not meet for use in the Master's house—"so are ye in Mine hand, O house of Israel." Man with his fleshly free-will arrogance would deny God the privileges of a common potter; but, "There is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel, against the LORD" (Pro. xxi. 30).

Here we learn how we first came out of our Great Creator's hands. "Lo, this only have I found, that

esteemed as the potter's clay: for shall the work say of him that made it, He made me not? or shall the thing framed say of him that framed it, He had no understanding?" Here puny, proud man is rebuked for arrogating to himself the authorship of his own being. Come with me now to chap. xlv. 9—"Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherd of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands? Woe unto him that saith unto his father, What begettest thou? or to the woman, What broughtest thou forth? Thus saith the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker, Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons, and concerning the work of My hands command ye Me." Think of that! The Great and Glorious Designer and Creator of all things descends to be commanded to attend to, and look well after, His eternally loved children, whom He loves even as He loves His Christ. Turn back now to that precious xliird chap, 6th verse: "I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back; bring My sons from far, and My daughters from the ends of the earth; even every one that is called by My Name; for I have created him for My glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him." Come to the 19th verse, "Behold, I will do a new thing: now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. The beast of the field shall honour Me, the dragons and the owls, because I give waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people, My chosen. This people have I formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise." Here we have the reason given, why God's elect as His workmanship exist upon the earth, namely, that, not only does He make them what

potter. Where are you to-night? Subject to the will of the Potter? I hope so. I pray God it may be so. "Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour?" And, as though the apostle would not for a single moment be misunderstood, he adds, "What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction"—*made up* to destruction. Who did that? God Himself, for none other could accomplish so awful an end. "And that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory." Does that suit you? "Afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles."

Now let us go again to the prophecies of Isaiah, which Paul seems to have used as his text book in reference to the counsels, designs, pleasure, purpose, and deep things of God. Turn to chap. xxix. 13. It is applicable to the present day—"Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men"—the precepts of causes, churches, cliques and systems; Popish and Protestant tradition, by which the Word of God is made of none effect—"Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid. Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark, and they say, Who seeth us? and who knoweth us? Surely your turning of things upside down shall be

God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Eccles. vii. 29). God made man, but man unmade himself, yet with all his unmaking he was still in the hands of the Potter, to be disposed of according to His sovereign will and good pleasure. Man in the fall was marred thoroughly. His thoughts and imaginations were evil. His understanding was darkened. His memory treacherous. His will depraved. His passions wholly corrupt. As God looked upon His own choice—His own Israel—He took of every part thereof "and made it again another vessel." Such are "chosen vessels—vessels of mercy—vessels unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work." Look at this: "Thus saith the Lord, Who redeemed Abraham, concerning the house of Jacob, Jacob shall not now be ashamed, neither shall his face now wax pale. But when he seeth his children, the work of Mine hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify My Name, and sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and shall fear the God of Israel" (Isa. xxix. 22, 23). As we contemplate these productions of His infinite wisdom and consummate skill, we may well sing:—

"Before JEHOVAH'S gracious throne,
Ye ransom'd bow with sacred joy;
Know that the LORD is God alone;
He can create and He destroy."

Time beat me this morning, and the things which I hoped to say were crowded out of my mind by others precious and profitable, no doubt. Do we see things made to honour? Yes, God's elect are redeemed, regenerated into spiritual life—God's own workmanship. Do we see vessels made to dishonour? We cannot close our eyes to the sight of them in the solemn and awe-inspiring declaration of the Spirit in this ixth of Romans. But turn to Prov.

xvi. 4, "The Lord hath made all things for Himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." Not one of these made in vain, but every one to fulfil the purpose for which it was designed in all wisdom and prudence. What is "the day of evil"? Some—many—say, "You believe that God makes men to damn them." Well, that is what you say. I believe that God made all men to glorify Him, and that He will be glorified in their being, ill-being or well-being. God in all-wisdom made Cain for Abel's evil day—Pharaoh for Israel's day of evil—Ishmael for Isaac's—Esau for Jacob's—Judas for that of Jesus. It is a rich mercy to know that all the evil Jesus bore was that His elect members might be sustained in and through the evil days that overtake them, and affect them. Come with me to the end of our chapter—"For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counsellor? or who hath first given to Him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things, to Whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. xi. 34-36). "All are Thy servants—All things serve Him—All things are of God—All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. viii. 28; Psa. cxix. 91).

Now let us look at a few portions of God's most holy Word in the light of our text. What a mercy it is that God by His distinguishing and discriminating love and grace has brought us to bow in profound subjection to all that He says to us in His Book, whatever the nature of the communication may be. Here I stand before you to-night, not according to the line of ecclesiastical systems, nor the whims of those who have separated themselves from them. It is a great privilege not to be the servant of men, but as the Lord's servant doing His

will from the heart, and knowing that His "service is perfect freedom." But to the point! After the declaration of divine sovereignty illustrated in the case of Pharaoh, Paul says, "Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth." That is God's undisputed right. The sun which shone so brightly to-day would harden clay; but wax exposed to the same heat would be melted and rendered susceptible of impressions. So God in His gracious operations works on whom He will. "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth He yet find fault? for who hath resisted His will?" Do you think that is fact? I know it is. When I was a sinner left to myself—to plan and to perform, to desire and to do, to form and to fulfil, this was "fulfilling the desires of the flesh and the mind." Awful state! Yes, awful indeed, to be wrathful when questioned as to one's right to sin, and to insult a Holy God by saying, Why should God make me with certain desires which are sinful to gratify? "The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes" (Psa. xxxvi. 1). Here I learn afresh that I have no stones to throw at the vilest in all God's creation. What makes the difference? Grace to be sure. "Sovereign grace o'er sin abounding." "Grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." Grace which reigns over imperious lusts and vile affections annoying and distressing to me.

"Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God"—or *answerest again, or disputest with God*—"shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus?" The vessel marred in the hands of the potter last Tuesday morning could not talk thus. It could not talk at all. It was passively subject to the will of the