

Title: Clay in the Potter's Hands: Recognizing Good and Evil in the Light of God

Sermon Summary: Drawing from the lives of the prophet Elijah and the wicked king Ahab, this sermon calls believers to honestly examine their lives through God's eyes rather than their own. The pastor warns against the subtle creep of evil into everyday life, noting that what feels comfortable or acceptable to us may still be ranked as evil before God. Using the image of the potter and the clay from Jeremiah 18, the sermon emphasizes God's sovereignty and his desire to reshape his people. The pastor challenges the congregation to move beyond mere goodness into genuine godliness, trusting God completely and surrendering to his will as modeled by Elijah's radical obedience and ultimately by Christ himself.

Key Points:

- Christians are susceptible to blind spots when it comes to recognizing evil in their own lives, which is one reason belonging to a community of believers matters
- There is a dangerous difference between being good and being godly; goodness can be shaped by the people around us while godliness is shaped by the Spirit within us
- Ahab is presented as a warning of how a person with godly heritage can progressively embrace evil by surrounding himself with the wrong influences and treating sin as trivial
- God's sovereignty over nations and individuals is illustrated through the potter and clay image; he reserves the right to reshape, uproot, or restore according to his purposes
- Elijah's obedience under extreme circumstances, including being fed by ravens and directed to a foreign widow, serves as a model of trusting God completely even when circumstances seem to worsen
- The question every believer must answer daily is whether they will trust God's understanding or lean on their own
- Evil is not always dramatic or obvious; familiarity with sin dulls our conscience and makes wicked things feel acceptable over time

- God's character does not change, and his standards of good and evil remain constant regardless of cultural shifts or popular opinion

Scripture Reference:

- Jeremiah 18:1-12, in which God instructs Jeremiah to visit the potter's house and uses the image of clay being reshaped to illustrate his sovereign authority over nations and his call to repentance
- Jeremiah 13:23, which uses the rhetorical question of whether a leopard can change its spots to describe the difficulty of turning from deeply ingrained evil
- Jeremiah 4:22, in which God describes his people as fools who are skilled in doing evil but do not know how to do good
- 1 Kings 16:29-34, which introduces Ahab as the most evil king Israel had yet seen, who married Jezebel and established Baal worship in Samaria
- 1 Kings 17:1-9, in which Elijah announces a drought to Ahab and is then sustained by God through ravens at the Kerith Ravine and later directed to a widow in Zarephath

Stories:

- The potter and the clay from Jeremiah 18, used to illustrate God's right to reshape individuals and nations according to his purposes and their response to his warnings
- The life of Ahab, king of Israel, who despite his Hebrew heritage progressively embraced Baal worship under the influence of his wife Jezebel and surpassed all previous kings in provoking God to anger
- Elijah at the Kerith Ravine, where God supernaturally provided food through ravens and water through a brook, followed by the brook drying up and God redirecting Elijah to a widow in Zarephath, illustrating radical trust in God's provision
- The rebuilding of Jericho by Hiel of Bethel, which fulfilled the ancient prophecy spoken through Joshua and cost him both his firstborn and youngest son, demonstrating that God's word always comes to pass
- A reference to the high-profile murder trial of a mother accused of killing her three children, used to illustrate the difficulty of standing alone in one's convictions and the importance of not taking jury duty or moral judgment lightly

- The childhood game of hot potato, used as an illustration of how people handle evil carelessly, passing it along without recognizing the harm it causes