

Fact Sheet for **"The Potter and the Clay"** **Isaiah 29:15-16**

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I come to this sermon with a bit of fear, not because of what God says, but because of the inadequacies of my communication. I can explain the passage well enough, but I may not be able to adequately address the strong emotions that can be ignited by the words found here. I see challenges that lie in two areas. The first is theology. I want to let you know up front that I have not wavered from my theology on the sovereignty of God in the slightest. The second challenge is in the application of this passage to our lives. All of us have deep hurts that have come our way in life. Also, we all have unfulfilled goals that **MAY** continue to go unfulfilled. Then again they may not. I think you can already sense the emotional challenges here.

In addition with a sermon like this, where I am traipsing on emotional minefields, there is the tendency to judge on the basis of what *I do not* say instead of what I do say. I can multiply my words but I cannot address every hurt that everyone has. No one can possibly do this in one sermon.

Isaiah 29:15-16

¹⁵ **Ah, you who hide deep from the LORD your counsel,
whose deeds are in the dark,
and who say, "Who sees us? Who knows us?"**

Chapters 28-33 are marked by six exclamations of alarm ("Ah" 28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1)

"Your counsel" might refer to the advice that royal counselors were giving Hezekiah, who at first attempted to free himself from Assyria by making alliances with Egypt (Isaiah 36:4-6). The people were conspiring to do things in secret, but God saw everything.

Rather than demonstrate a forthright openness inspired by trust in God, the leaders of Judah are reduced to the secrecy of underhanded human politics. For them, the sovereign God might as well not exist. God can hide things from man (verses 10-12) but man cannot hide things from God.

¹⁶ **You turn things upside down!
Shall the potter be regarded as the clay,
that the thing made should say of its maker,
"He did not make me";
or the thing formed say of him who formed it,
"He has no understanding"?**

The Lord's sovereignty is beyond challenge. Scripture does not discourage questions to God, but there is no place for resistance to God's will. "He did not make me" and "He has no understanding" demonstrate a total unwillingness to recognize God's intimate involvement with every aspect of a person's life.

Similar Passages

Isaiah 45:9; 64:8; Jeremiah 18:1-6

Romans 9

The Apostle Paul is not making reference to Isaiah 29 in the sense of fulfillment. Isaiah illustrates God's sovereignty by a reference to a potter and clay. Paul uses the same example to illustrate God's sovereignty (Romans 9:1-23). I am impressed that God here says **what** He does, but doesn't say **why** He does what He does. There is much about this passage that doesn't sit well with many people, but it is God's Word.

Application

Here's the tough part.

We sing songs with this illustration. The most familiar to us is "Change my heart O God" which speaks about the potter and the clay. There is a glaring difference between what we sing and these passages... The song speaks of what we are asking God to do with us. These passages are speaking of what already is. That includes my past joys as well as my past hurts, my fulfilled goals as well as my unfulfilled goals. God is sovereign in the intimate details of our lives.

We want to shout, "**NO!**" We don't want to rest in God's sovereignty. Someone else, other than God, is to blame. And the proper response seems to be anger and attack. I can't even begin to address all of your hurts here. Let me illustrate this two ways.

The first is with Joseph (dreams, cistern, slavery, Potiphar, cupbearer).

ESV Genesis 50:20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

The second way is from my own life.

There are three unfulfilled goals I have. They are sharp and continue to challenge me. None of them may ever be fulfilled. Here is one.

Harmony of the Gospels

My passion

D.Min. not Ph.D. – I have the wrong degree for easy publishing

Church, not seminary – I work in the wrong place for easy publishing

Translation and copyright – Tough to get

Publishing and profit – A harmony is not a big seller

I know what is true – But it is not the standard approach

Why did the potter make me this way? He should have...

There has also been great pain. The path to the pastorate has been paved with hurt.

Why did the potter mold me this way? He should have...

Illustration: needlepoint – the front is beautiful, the back looks like a rats nest.

God is sovereign in the intimate details of our lives. He is the potter, we are the clay. I have immense trouble trusting this at times, but this is what God says from His perspective.

If I have interpreted or applied this passage from Isaiah wrongly please speak with me about it and let me know where I went wrong. I am open to hearing from you.