

## **There is Hope for the Broken Flask**

No person has a life completely void of troubles, tribulations or even catastrophes. Jeremiah's message to everyone is that there is still another chance for a new start. If you feel such a need for a fresh start, the word of God today, offers you this joyful news about His desire to renew your life. He can do this renewal if you want it and if you give Him the chance to do it. God had sent Jeremiah to teach the Israelites this lesson after they had forsaken God and fallen into dreadfully destructive pitfalls. Jeremiah says, "*The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying: 'Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words.'*" (Jeremiah 18:1-2).

Pottery, still existing to this present day, is one of the oldest arts and crafts especially in the East. A potter takes a piece of clay and turns it over and over kneading and beating it until all the air bubbles and strange elements come out and the dough becomes thoroughly pliable ready to be shaped according to the potter's artistry. Then he places this dough on the wheel, a tool operated by a paddle. While the wheel turns the dough over, the potter smoothes it out with his gentle finger artistic strokes thus turning dumb dough into a piece of beautiful art.

### **How God, the Great Potter, Works on Mankind**

*"O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?" says the Lord. 'Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!'"* (Jeremiah 18:6). In this verse, God very clearly reveals Himself as the potter and humanity as the clay dough. Therefore it is God who is the creative craftsman capable of making of you a vessel of extreme beauty provided the dough is in His hand.

### **The Beautiful Vessel in God's Hands**

Two essential elements work together in projecting the beauty of the vessel: the potter's hands and the rotating wheels; the latter symbolizing life's events and circumstances watched carefully by God and utilized by Him for the sake of producing a beautiful vessel useful for his glory.

### **The Ruined Vessel Still in the Potter's Hands**

Jeremiah says that the vessel has been ruined while still in the hands of the potter not because of the potter's fault, but because of the dough. "*And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter...*" (Jeremiah 18:4). Two things make one's life far from God's purpose of renewal and beautification. First, the dough might contain hidden impurities and concealed cracks under the surface. For, in the depths of oneself and one's life there might exist a stealthy unknown sin. Second, lack of enough flexibility in the dough is insufficient for God to mold and shape it into a beautiful vessel. Perhaps it could be rough mannerism, refusal to bow down to God's will, reluctance to give, unwillingness to forgive or unreadiness to witness to Him.

### **The Vessel is Being Renewed**

The good news with God is that nevertheless there is *hope* "...so he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make" (Jeremiah 18:4).

Your life is still in the hands of the potter, God, Who is capable of reforming the dough while it is still malleable enough. God can reach you where you are and make out of your life a whole, new beautiful vessel instead of the ruined one. God can mend the broken, rotten life if you hand over to Him all the broken pieces. All you have to do is turn to God saying; "Here I am Lord. Here is my decayed life." God wants to give you a second chance.

### **The Building is Annihilated and Wiped Out (A Warning Message)**

Along with this message of hope there comes one of warning. In Chapter 19, God asks Jeremiah to take a clay pot, "*Then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'Even so I will break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, which cannot be made whole again; and they shall bury them in Tophet till there is no place to bury.'*" (Jeremiah 19:10-11).

God wants to convey the message that people get carried away in their sins till their vessels break into pieces impossible to repair. It is true that God is the God of a second chance; but there might come times when sin prevails hardening hearts and causing God to depart.

You have transgressed all red lines; and like a broken vessel there might not be a chance for repair nor renovation. Therefore beware from now on dear reader.

Destruction is neither God's plan nor will for your life. God yearns for the flexible dough, our hearts, in order to make something new, useful and superb out of them. Therefore yield and surrender to God's compassionate, creative touches and you will become a new splendid vessel.

## Articles on the Christian History - The Fourth Century

### The Eighteenth Article

#### The Horrifying End of Arius

Evil might succeed for a time, experiencing periodical joy, believing pseudo triumph over the church. *“For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity”* (Psalm 125:3). For, the Arian’s success in exiling Pope Athanasius was followed by an attempt to bring Arius and his followers back to Alexandria. But the people’s love for Pope Athanasius stood between them and this desire. So, all the churches as well as the ones that Arius took by force closed their doors before the face of Arius. So, fearing confusion and turbulence, the governor asked Arius to leave. Upon hearing these news, Emperor Constantine called Arius back to Constantinople and asked Bishop Alexandros of Constantinople to receive Arius in his church. However the bishop sent a message to the emperor saying that whoever had been exiled by a council cannot be absolved except through a council. Aggravated by this reply, the emperor forced the bishop to comply to his order.

Describing what had taken place the night before that Sunday Socrates, the historian wrote, “Alexandros, bishop of Constantinople, of genuine piety, was saddened by all these happenings and the threats of dethronement he had received from Eusebius of Nicomedia should he refuse to accept Arius and his followers within his church. However, Alexandros, was not shaken by the dethronement threats, as much as he was grieved by the subsequent destructive consequences that would befall the Nicene faith because of the Arian teachings. So, Alexandros, considering himself a guard over the doctrine received at the Council of Nicea, and keeping this goal before his eyes, he deserted any debates and logical discussions and dedicated himself to this cause with fasting and prayer having God as his refuge. He closed himself in the church called “Irene”, went before the altar, threw himself down at the holy banquet and poured hot tearful prayers remaining in this position for several days.”

Arius expected to enter the church the night before Sunday but God’s revenge took place against his crimes. Along with his followers and some of Eusebius', Arius walked out of the palace into the centre of the city trying to gather the attention of the people. As he neared the so called “Constantine’s Court” he was caught up in great fear of conscience and severe diarrhea. In the toilet behind the court his intestine gushed out of his stomach. After severe bleeding he gave up his soul and died. To this day, this place is known in Constantinople.

The best comment on this incident is in the Holy Book of Psalm 125:1-3 *“Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people from this time forth and forever. For the*

*scepter of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, Lest the righteous reach out their hands to iniquity.” And Holy Book of Psalm 91:8-9 “Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked. Because you have made the Lord, who is my refuge, even the Most High, your dwelling place.”*

### **The Death of Emperor Constantine**

A year after the death of Arius, the emperor got very sick. So, he wrote his will and ordered that it be given to his son Constantius to whom he had given emperorship over the eastern side of the empire. Constantine died in his palace called “Achyron” on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May 337 AD, at the age of 65 after having ruled for 31 years. Constantine, (the emperor’s most capable and talented son) opened his father’s will which enclosed an order to have Athanasius returned to his see in Alexandria after the protective exile. (According to many historians Emperor Constantine aimed at protecting Athanasius from the Arians by sending him in exile). This episode is proved through a letter dated July 17, 337 AD sent from Emperor Constantius to the people in Alexandria right before the return of Athanasius to his see. The emperor wrote, “I think that it has not escaped your pure mind that Athanasius, the explicator of the law of worship was sent to Spain for some time as a result of his enemies’ brutality and thirst for blood deeply anchored in them. They have pursued him with their persecution to death. In order to save him from such a conspiracy not possible to get rid of, my father pulled him out of his enemies’ jaws. I know it was the intention of my father Constantine Caesar to return him back to you, dear beloved; but death had taken him to his eternal share, the ultimate destiny of all humankind before he could implement his desire. Therefore, I deemed it appropriate to implement my intention and the intention of the well commemorated emperor.”

Pope Athanasius supported this statement saying, “This was the reason why I was sent to Spain. Who would not realize clearly the emperor’s intention to stop the Arian’s futile conspiracies?”

Athanasius returned before the end of the year 337 AD after having spent almost two years in exile. All of Alexandria stood on the shore waiting for the arrival of this angel who seemingly had come down from heaven to bless them. Most of the historians recorded this reception and the Copts’ deep love for their pope.

The following section is a description of the reception of Athanasius in Alexandria by the bishops of Egypt; “There is joy and jubilee everywhere; people are running together to find a good spot whereby they can see him clearly. The churches are filled and the voices of joy, praise and thanksgiving to God are everywhere. All the servants and clergy lined up to see him with hearts overwhelmed with joy, considering that day the happiest day in their life. As for us, bishops, we cannot even attempt to explain the unexplainable joy that is prevailing among us. For, as we have said, we considered ourselves partners in his pain.”

### **Tribulations Gather Once Again**

If Jesus Christ was overtly tempted three times, “Now when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from Him until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13); it would not be strange for Satan to always be seeking opportune time to attack human beings. No soon did Pope

Athanasius return to his see supported by the emperor and his people, then the Arians started another round of conspiracy.

Socrates, the historian, describes the scenario at the arrival of Pope Athanasius in Alexandria saying, “Upon his arrival in Alexandria, he was received by the people with great jubilation. However, those who had followed the Arian teachings united against the pope in opposition and overt antagonism creating a wave of disobedience and defiance; thus paving the road for Eusebius of Nicomedia to fabricate a charge against Athanasius and present it to the Emperor Constantius (son of Constantine). St. Athanasius was accused falsely of having taken control over the church despite the decree against him dispensed by the Synod of Arian bishops. This way they succeeded in arousing the emperor who ordered Athanasius to be exiled for the second time.”

These incidents shed light on the compulsive, irrational personality of the emperor on which the Arians capitalized and utilized to convince the emperor of the possibility of troubles that might arise in Syria and Palestine.

At that time, the governor of Alexandria Theodorus, who respected Pope Athanasius and the Orthodox faith, considered the turmoil by the Arians a challenge to his civil authority; and therefore, he opposed the movement forcefully. However, the emperor took a counter action by sending another governor Philogorius, by name, in lieu of Theodorus. Philogorius, an enemy of Athanasius and who governed Alexandria before (335-337 AD) was loved dearly by the Arians and the pagans alike for his eloquence. Therefore he was received with great joy by the Arians.

However, all these earthly sufferings did not make Pope Athanasius oblivious of the heavenly joy present in the commemoration of the Lord's Resurrection ruling triumphantly over death. In the year 338 AD festal message, revealing the great pain and anguish he and his congregation were going through, he wrote; “And now let us rejoice with voices of praise with the saints without forgetting any of these duties considering these trials and tribulations by Eusebius as nothing especially during these holy days of the holy fast, the holy week and the Holy Feast of Resurrection. They want to offend us and by their accusations, they conspire to kill me. My piety is my shortcoming and my only support is God. As faithful servants, we know our salvation comes during our hard times. In addition, it is the Savior's word that persecution does not befall everybody except those who have true sanctified fear of God. Accordingly, the more the enemies surround us, the freer we are. The more they offend us, the more we should be united. The more they strive to disturb our worship, the more we should teach and admonish saying “ *All this has come upon us; but we have not forgotten You*” (Psalm 44:17). Therefore, brethren, because of this we have to keep the feast celebrating not with sadness and tears; nor by uniting with these heretics. These transient trials came upon us because of our righteousness.”