

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Warning to Christians in a Dying Nation

Scripture: Jeremiah

Code: 80-42

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Jeremiah

As you know, we are in our Sunday morning study of God's word in between 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy having completed 1 Timothy and imminently to begin 2 Timothy. I had thought about doing it this Lord's day but the Lord impressed upon my heart that I should share something other than that with you and will begin 2 Timothy next Lord's day morning.

I would like you if you will to open your Bible to the Old Testament to the prophet Jeremiah. And just be ready with your Bible open to Jeremiah to look together at several selected portions built around the theme which is before us this morning. I am going to attempt in a sense to un-bear my heart to your in the context of Jeremiah and to share with you a perspective that we no doubt as a church and as those who love Christ need to have.

I am convinced that we live in a day when God is genuinely and really ignored though there are some who would give him some tacit attention. I am also convinced that we live in a day that because our society has ignored God is a day when God has abandoned our society in a very real sense. To put it simply, I think we are on the edge of the death of a nation.

We love this nation in which we live. And there is much about it to love. We celebrate its vast freedoms and benefits. But in all honesty as we compare this nation with the standard of God it comes up infinitely short. And as you look around you, you would have to be blind, deaf, dumb and without sense not to perceive the decline of every viable, Biblical, God-ordained institution. They're crumbling all around us. Standards are perverted so far from the standards of God that there are no foundations left to which to return to reassert the standards that once were ours.

Life is consumed by sentimentality and sensation and we have replaced our minds with our feelings. We are a society that has plunged headlong into the expression of what Paul calls a reprobate mind. Evil abounds and we have seen it in massive proportions even in the church and even among those who claim to be the leaders of the church and its spokesmen.

And it's my personal belief that we have gone too far to avoid judgment. I believe that we stand imminently on the brink of it when I hear as I have this past week on the news that possibly 100

million people will die of AIDS. I have to confess I am not surprised. I suppose to be honest with you for several years I've been asking myself the question how is God going to choose to judge this nation. That no doubt will be one form of divine wrath.

And as I was thinking about this, rather than being drawn to all kinds of contemporary and extant statistics as to the problem, I was drawn to the book of Jeremiah because he stood in a very similar situation. And I thought that rather than seeing the problem through the eyes of contemporary journalists and social critics and analysts, rather than seeing the problem through the media or even through the perspective of leading Christian critics, we should look at the problem through the eyes of the prophet of God who stood at a very, very similar point.

Jeremiah was on the brink of the death of the nation of Judah. Judah was the chosen nation of God. The northern kingdom Israel already had gone into captivity from which it would never return. What was left was in Judah, originally constituted by the tribes of Judah and Benjamin but now populated also by people from every other tribe of the 12. It was the last remaining vestige of covenant people on the earth and it stood in imminent danger of being carried off into captivity.

Jeremiah sums up the rebellion of his people I think in very graphic terms. If you look at Chapter 5 and Verse 22 and 23, you'll see it there. Summing up the rebellious nature of his people who have forsaken God, he says, "Do you not fear Me? declares the Lord. Do you not tremble in My presence?"

Stop there for a moment. As if to say is it nothing to you to consider who I am. Have you forgotten My power? Have you forgotten My knowledge? Have you forgotten My sovereignty? Have you forgotten who I am and what I am capable of doing? Have you forgotten My standards? Are you living under some illusion that you can continually live any way you want without divine retribution?

And then he uses a graphic illustration in Verse 22. "For I have placed the sand as a boundary for the sea. An eternal decree so it cannot cross over it. Though the waves toss yet they cannot prevail. Though they roar yet they cannot cross over it."

God says the massive, surging, rolling, storming, billowing sea is bounded by a thin strip of sand. And that sand holds the sea in check. It may roar and it may raise as it were its waves to a fierce level, but it always recedes to the sand boundary. "I contain the sea," He says, "in its surging power by a thin strip of sand."

Verse 23. "But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart. They have literally revolted and overflowed. I can't contain you," he says. "I can contain the sea. I can't contain you. I have put the boundary there," and that boundary is that boundary laid down by divine revelation and reinforced by prophets of God and teachers. "I can't hold you in check. I can't contain you. I can't put limits on

you. You overstep. You rebel. You go beyond. Its as if you ignored My power and My restraint."

In a sense what God is saying is the rebellious heart of man is stronger than the surging sea. All God's promises, or all God's revelation, all His Word, all His covenants, all His love, all His forgiveness laid down cannot restrain the heart of a man that is bent on revolting. A man who is the progeny of Adam who given every good thing and no evil thing chose to overstep the boundary, forfeit the good, inherit the evil and leave it as a legacy to every person who would live on the face of the earth.

So is the history of man the story of unrestrained sinfulness. Unrestrained rebellion. Stepping over God's boundary.

And Jeremiah is now the instrument of God to say to the people you are on the edge of God's reaction. You are on the brink of holocaust. Your rebellion has gone as far as God will allow it to go and it is now over. You are doomed.

And Jeremiah comes to preach judgment at the hands of Babylon. Hard to understand in a sense because Babylon was a pagan nation and yet God often used the pagans to bring retribution on His people. Babylon was to be God's agent of slaughter. God's agent of destruction. God's agent of captivity. Slaughtering and carrying away the people of Judah. It was the end of the glory days. It was the end of all the wondrous works of God in their midst and all of His protection and insulation.

The late Dr. Moreheadsaid, "It was Jeremiah's lot to prophesy at a time when all things in Judah were rushing down to the final and mournful catastrophe. When political confusion was at its height. When the worst passions swayed the people's hearts. And the most fatal councils prevailed. To see his own people whom he loved with the tenderness of a woman plunge over to the precipice in a wide, weltering ruin was Jeremiah's lot." He was the prophet in Judah's midnight hour.

Now Jeremiah preached for 42 years. That's a long time to call a people back to God. He was faithful to the preaching from the beginning to the end. He preached through the reign of five kings. Let me just have you take a brief look at them.

The one who was on the throne when Jeremiah began to preach was a man named Josiah. It was the end of the reign of Josiah. Josiah had brought to Judah a period of reform. Josiah sought to bring a revival. He sought to call the people of got back to God. But it never really quite happened. They were frankly enamored with Josiah. They were in awe of Josiah. It was under Josiah that the law of God was discovered. Josiah brought it out, read it to the people and pleaded that God would bring a great revival. And there were some initial indications that maybe the hearts of the people would truly turn to God and it would be lasting.

But then along came a woman by the name of Holda and God used her to speak His Revelation. And Holda told Josiah that no permanent result would come out of this reformation. That it was very temporary and very short lived. And the reason was - mark this - that the people were following Josiah out of love for him rather than love for God. So it was a period of reform.

And it was in the middle of that quasi-revival that Jeremiah begin to preach of doom and he seemed very out of touch with the times. From the vantage point of the people, they had a religious celebrity in power. They had a spiritual hero in Josiah whom they adored. And they had the feeling that this was real revival. And the fact was it was not at all revival. It was merely a form of spiritual celebrity-itis.

And when Josiah died the reformation was over. Within three months they had gone back into idolatry and immorality in a wholesale fashion. And the truth became obvious.

That speaks to our time, doesn't it? For someone to stand up today and say this nation is on the edge of the judgment of God. This nations stands on the edge of the brink of a divine holocaust might seem to some people a bit out of touch with reality. Since there appears to be some fast-moving, media-wide, nationwide, spiritual awakening. My own personal conviction is it's little more than a quasi-revival more like some kind of reformation movement led by a lot of spiritual celebrities. And people are more attached to the celebrities than they are to God Himself.

That can be readily witnessed in almost any local church by seeing the size of the crowd difference when you bring in one of the celebrities and when you call for people to gather to commune with the living God. See who shows up and you'll know where people's hearts are.

It was not unlike our time in Jeremiah's time. Josiah was followed by a king named Jehoahaz who only reigned for three months. He was followed by Jehoiakim and Holda's prediction came to pass. The three months of the reign of Jehoahaz having ended, in comes Jehoiakim and with him appalling evil and the people returning in a wholesale manner to every form of corruption imaginable. He was followed by Jehoiachin who also was deposed after three months. And he was followed by the last of the five kings during the ministry of Jeremiah - a man named Zedekiah, a vacillating, spineless, cowardly, milk toast weakling who saw the nation morals swiftly move down the steep slide of depravity and into ruin and extinction than any of his predecessors.

And through all of this Jeremiah was always the voice of God. It's sad to note, however, that his preaching in no way deterred the disaster. He never saw - are you ready for this - any impact on the nation from his 42 years of ministry. Yes, there were a few who believed. There is always a remnant that God calls out. Even as we saw in the sixth chapter of Isaiah when he was called to preach 80 to 100 years before Jeremiah and preached of the impending disaster to come. There was then a

remnant - a tenth it says at the end of Chapter 6. And there were a few who believed Jeremiah. But the nation never changed.

And I want to say to you I believe we stand in a time very much like that. There is a remnant. There is a remnant of God's people much smaller than those who name the name of Christ. Much smaller than those who identify outwardly with the religion of Christianity. The true church here this morning is smaller than the congregation's size this morning. There will always be a remnant.

But I'm not under any illusion that by preaching to this dying nation we can stop the death process. We continue to preach because God has called us to preach. And be faithful because He's asked us to be faithful. And because we want to call out that remnant. But it is my own conviction that the death of the nation is imminent.

How do we respond to this? What are we to do? What are we to understand?

Well, let's look at Jeremiah and see what God wanted him to understand and what he did in terms of his ministry. The responsibility of confronting a dying nation finds its focus with regard to Jeremiah in three things. First of all, a divine mandate. A divine mandate. And for that we go to Chapter 1. And I want to draw your attention to Verses 4 through 10. And we're going to jump around. And to try to cover the whole of the prophesy of Jeremiah in one message is not an easy task. And we'll make a feeble effort to do even that. But to hit the highlights is essential.

Jeremiah - now, get the picture in your mind - stands as God's anointed preacher to confront a nation headed for imminent disaster with no possibility of return. Or of change. There will ultimately be return but no possibility of change. It's coming. That's how it is. That can't change. And in the midst of that, God reasserts to him at the very outset of the prophet and his ministry the divine mandate. In fact it comes in Verse 4 of Chapter 1. We hardly get started before we read these words.

"Now the Word of the Lord came to me saying."

We'll stop at that point. God first of all gives a message to Jeremiah before He gives a message through Jeremiah. He wants Jeremiah to understand what he must understand to be in the place where he must be, to speak what he must speak. There must be a compelling thing behind Jeremiah's ministry. Why? Because it will be 42 years long. It demands longevity. It will be basically fruitless. And to do it for 42 years without any measurable results is very difficult. So to under gird his faithfulness there comes this incredibly strong divine mandate.

I see three things. First of all, preparation by God. Notice it now in Verse 5.

"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. And before you were born I consecrated you. I have appointed you a prophet to the nations."

God says Jeremiah, long before you were ever conceived, long before you were ever woven as the psalmist calls it in your mother's womb, long before you were ever born, I had decided that you were to be My prophet for a unique place, a unique time. In other words, you have been prepared by Me. That's a divine preparation. God gives in these very brief words the biography of Jeremiah. In fact I believe it's eleven short Hebrew words. But it's a life history. And it extends from eternity past to the time of Jeremiah's proclamation to the nations. He is a man called by God from before he was ever conceived to a divine mandate. That's a compelling thing. That's a driving force in the life of one who belongs to God. To know that long before we were ever born we were set for a certain purpose. That sense of mission is an overpowering and compelling thing.

Theodore Lachewrote years ago Jeremiah is an intensely human personality. He is a man whom we can understand and love and yet a person endowed with such mysterious power from on high that we at times are over-awed by his grandeur. So humanly weak and yet so divinely firm. His love so humanly tender and at the same time so divinely holy. His eyes streaming with tears at beholding the affliction about to come upon his people yet sparking with fiery indignation against their sins and abominations. His lips overflowing with sympathy for the daughter of Zion only to pronounce upon her almost in the same breath the judgment and condemnation she so fully deserved. An amazing man.

When men face a crisis inevitably they come up with a program. When God faces a crisis, he starts with a baby. Always. When God wants to deal with a crisis it is a man he calls. Unique and chosen and prepared and gifted. All in His sovereignty. And Jeremiah was by divine appointment of God the preacher of that time and that place. Ian Nomanonce said that whoever does not have a sense of being predestined by God to service will never work nor ever has worked any revolution for God. People who make differences in the world are people who are on a divine mandate. Who are bound in their spirit to the call of God deep and profound.

That extends to all of us, beloved. For you were predestined in Christ before the world began. You were chosen in Him from before the foundations of it. Your name was written in the Lamb's Book of Life before ever the world was spun into space. God not only designed that you should belong to him but designed that the Spirit of God would redeem you and gift you to serve within the framework of the kingdom in a unique way that no one else could match. Every believer in the Kingdom of God is under divine mandate to fulfill a task, an obligation, a ministry. We were created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has before ordained that we should walk even in them.

And yet it's so tragic most people in the church have no sense of divine mission. Have absolutely no sense of mandate. It's as if all of life was a smorgasbord from which they could choose whatever

they wanted. There are no compelling things. No compunctions. It doesn't make much difference whether you go to church or play golf. I mean it really doesn't matter. That's your choice. There is no sense of compelling. There is no overwhelming sense of mission. And we become so busy with creature comforts and so busy with fitting into the current fashion of the world that that sense of mandate just isn't there. People often say to me, "You know, you gotta cut back. You gotta stop doing." I don't have a choice about those things. There is a certain constraint in me that pulls me into what I do. I don't sit back and calculate and write down on a piece of paper a list of dos and don'ts to affirm to myself whether this is wise or unwise. I spend my life - and it may not be normative for everyone - being pulled by these compelling forces that I have believed up to now and continue to believe are the movings of the Spirit of God to do what I do. And frankly you get to the point where all the stuff in the earth and all the stuff of life either gets in the way or can be used as a means of attaining the spiritual mission you're really after. And if you see them as anything else, you've missed the point.

God help us to get the sense of mission. I was thinking about it this week. I don't know if you brought an unsaved friend or unsaved family to the concert. Perhaps you did. Thank you if you did. Perhaps you didn't. Perhaps it never even entered your mind to do that. Perhaps it's a concession that you're even here this morning. If you name the name of Christ and ask yourself if you're compelled in your service to God. Do you know what your spiritual gift is? Are you using that gift? Are you compelled to use it? Do you feel burdened in your heart and a sense of some shame if you are not using it? Are you left with a bit of guilt because you don't do what you really believe in your heart you ought to do and what God's Word says to do?

Jeremiah wasn't the only person who was to be a witness to the nations. The whole of his nation were to be witnessing to the nations. But they weren't doing that and Jeremiah stood out as absolutely unique. The failure of the whole nation is reiterated in Chapter 2 and Verse 18 in most fascinating terms. Jeremiah says the Word of God to them but now what are you doing on the road to Egypt? That's an interesting statement. To drink the waters of the Nile? Or what are you doing on the road to Assyria? To drink the waters of the Euphrates? Well, that's powerful stuff. You who have been chosen by God to be separated. You who have been chosen by God to be unique. You who have been chosen by God to be pure. You who have been chosen by God to confront the paganism of the nations around you. What are you doing entering into it? That's what he's saying. Why do you want free course with the pagans? Why are you traveling to Egypt and traveling to Assyria in your lifestyle? Why do you want to drink the muddy waters of the Nile? And why the muddy waters of the shallow Euphrates when you can drink the cool, fresh waters of the streams of Lebanon. That's the metaphor extended. Why do you want that? Because you have no sense of mission. You have no sense of mandate. You have no sense of separation. They fail to be separate. And so God had to raise a special voice.

It's my conviction in the day in which we live that the church has lost its separateness. The church has become "the world". We're so engulfed in it. We're so up to our ears in materialism and creature comfort and scheduling our life around the things we want to do rather than the things God wants us to do. That the Lord is going to have to raise up some special, unique people in these last days of a dying nation to speak his truth. That's one of the reasons I'm so passionately burdened about the Masters College and the Masters Seminary because I believe God has given us these as instruments to do just that. To raise up those kinds of voices.

And so you see back in Chapter 1 first of all the preparation of God. God had prepared a man to stand in the place of an unfaithful nation. Is it gonna have to be that way in the church? Is it going to be necessary for God to start picking up here and there certain chosen men who can do what the church in total has failed to do? Sense its mission? Christianity has become sort of a sick subculture in many ways. With people more concerned about their own feelings than they are about the mission.

Secondly we see not only the preparation of God but the provision of God in Verse 6. It's not an easy thing to think about confronting a dying nation. And Jeremiah admits that. He says, "Alas, Lord God. But I do not know how to speak because I am a youth." As best we can reconstruct he was probably about 30 years of age, the age of our Lord when he began his ministry. And there's a lot of anguish here. Alas, Lord God. It is very much like woe is me in Isaiah 6. I'm not adequate. And Jeremiah shudders at the thought of such a task as being prophet to the nations, doing what the people of God failed to do. I cannot! I'm unqualified! I am a child! Does that sound familiar? Moses said it. Gideon said it. And Isaiah said it. I can't do it!

I understand that feeling of being fearful and inadequate. To be in the prophetic succession as it were. But notice the response of God in Verses 7 and 8. "But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say I am a youth because everywhere I send you you shall go.'" In other words, I'm gonna make your way prosperous. You're gonna start and I'm gonna make sure you finish. "And all that I command you, you will speak." You're not gonna be without words. "Do not be afraid of them for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord." That's the very same promise the Lord gave with the command called the great commission. "And, lo, I am with you always." You're not going alone. That's the divine provision.

And I want you to notice. He says I'm young and I'm unskilled. I'm unprepared. I don't know what I'm gonna say. Now, I don't want to undo the seminary curriculum but I would like to tell you something. The success of the ministry of a man is not dependent on his voice. It's not dependent on his looks. It's not dependent on his experience. It's not dependent on his abilities. It's not dependent on his homiletic cleverness. The success of a man in his ministry believe me is dependent on the passion of his heart. And the passion of his heart will ride right over the top of all of his own personal inadequacies. And on the other hand you can have the looks and the voice and the

ability and the cleverness and the homiletics and be as interesting as sawdust. It's the passion.

So God says I'm gonna get you where you want to go and I'm gonna put in your mouth what you need to say and I'm gonna make sure nobody touches you until you've done your work. He would have fierce opposition, fierce antagonism. But he never needed to be afraid. That was the promise of God to him. Verse 19, "They will fight against you but they will not overcome you for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord." What a wonderful promise. A promise of provision. God said to Abraham, "Fear not." God said to Moses, "Fear not." God said to Daniel, "Fear not." God said to Mary, "Fear not." God said to Peter, "Fear not." God said to Paul, Acts 27:24, "Fear not." And that's essentially what he's saying to Jeremiah. Because everyone who is to stand in a unique place of service to God has a very natural fear. Paralyzing human emotions of inadequacy. And the promise of God comes I'll be there.

And that leads to the third thought in Chapter 1. Not only the preparation of God; not only the provision of God; but power from God. And notice what it says in Verses 9 and 10. "Then the Lord stretched out His hand and touched my mouth and the Lord said to me, 'Behold I have put My words in your mouth.'" See, I have appointed you this day over the nations and over the kingdoms to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. Tremendous. God is touching Jeremiah like he touched Isaiah. The symbol of the touch of God here is to indicate that Jeremiah's mouth will speak God's truth. Out of Jeremiah's mouth will come the living, burning, shattering, building, mighty power of the Word of the Living God. And, therefore, he will surpass all kingdoms and all kings, all princes and all their monarchies. I have set you - that literally means in a position of supervising. Since I am the ruler of the universe, you're my vice ruler. You're in charge. It's amazing. God picks out a little young man, very obscure, 30 years of age, from a tiny little country and says, "I set you over the whole earth." Why? Because you speak My Words. That's the issue. That's the mandate. To recognize that if we're called to confront this society we are to confront it with the Word of the Living God.

And that takes us to the second major point that I want you to note. Not only the divine mandate but the divine message. And what is it of the Word of God that we speak? What do we say to this generation? What do we give them? Well, if we listen to the people out there we're supposed to give them a little bit of self-esteem and we're supposed to soft soap and skirt issues and try to be popular and make them feel good and give them a lot of sensation and some sentimentality. But what did Jeremiah give them? What are they to hear from us?

Chapter 14, Verse 7 sets it in place I think. In that one verse and another one which I will read to you in a moment, we get a general insight into the message. In Chapter 14, Verse 7 we read, "Although our iniquities testify against us, oh Lord act for Thy name's sake. Truly our apostasies have been many. We have sinned against thee." That's the message. The message is to confront sin. That's the message. Jeremiah 17:9. "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately wicked."

We are to confront a dying nation with its sin. The message needed today is not a message of self-esteem. It's not a message of sentimentality. It's not a message of psychological self-help. It's not a message of positive thinking. It is a message of sin. The society in which we live needs to be blatantly indicted for its false religion. That's the first sin that Jeremiah is concerned about that I would mention to you. False religion. The people have drifted away from a covenant of God into idolatry. They left that quasi-revival under Josiah and in a matter of three months were wholesale into immorality and idolatry. False religion.

Chapter 3, Verses 9 and 10. Jeremiah confronts it. "And it came about because of the lightness of her harlotry that she polluted" - in other words, she treated it lightly - "and polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees." How do you commit adultery with a stone? How do you commit adultery with a tree? You make an idol out of it. You carve it out of wood or you make it out of stone. And then you worship it. You say, "Is that adultery?" Spiritually, yes. Because you have a covenant with the Living God and you go after a false god. That's harlotry. Spiritually speaking.

In Verse 10, "Yet in spite of all this her treacherous sister Judah didn't return to me with all her heart but rather in deception." That's a deceitful religion. A religion that says oh, yes God. We worship you. We worship you. We worship you. But the heart is after false gods. Sounds so familiar to me. The false gods of our society. The false religions of our society are myriad. Everything from the worship of self, materialism, clear to the false religious systems that are highly defined and high in profile and well known to all of us. That all along the way, people are in all of these affirming that they believe in God. Deceitful, false religions.

Chapter 5, Verse 7. So many different passages on it but Chapter 5, Verse 7 comes to mind. "Why should I pardon you? Your sons have forsaken me and sworn by those who are not gods. When I had fed them to the full they committed adultery and trooped to the harlot's house." You went after your harlot gods. You left.

The sum of it is in Chapter 2, Verse 12. I think this sums it up graphically. "Be appalled oh heavens at this." What a statement that is. "And shutter. Be very desolate, declares the Lord, for My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken Me the fountain of living waters." That's evil No. 1. They forsook the only source of water, the one who gave the living water, Jesus Christ. The one who is the fountain of life, the Living God. The second thing they hewed for themselves cisterns or wells, broken cisterns that can hold no water. They hold dirt, dust, dead animals, debris. No water. Man endeavoring to work out his own salvation by his own self-styled religion leaves the clear, fresh water of God for empty, broken wells. False religion. One of the major sins I believe of the death of our own nation is the proliferation of false Christianity, the proliferation of liberalism, cults, self-worship, atheistic humanism, and false evangelicalism. Parading as everywhere the truth. False religion is

not anything new. But it inevitably dominates a nation headed for judgment.

Well, I would like to say more on that but let's go to the second sin, Chapter 5, that Jeremiah is particularly concerned to confront. By the way, what I am saying to you, I guess, is that I want to be in a place to confront false systems and false worship and deceitful kinds of Christianity. And I think we all need to do that.

But notice the second sin in Verse 13 of Chapter 5. The prophets are literally windbags. The prophets are windbags. Hot air folks. And notice the next line. "And the word is." What? "Not in them." "The Word is not in them." The prophets are windbags. They preach a lot of platitudes and a lot of sermonettes for Christianettes. And a lot of possibility thinking and a lot of other stuff. Psychology and whatever. They give their own ideas. They consider them more important than the Word of God. No respect for truth. Where is the teaching and proclamation of the Word? The delusion is so pervasive in that land of Israel and of Judah, the delusion is so pervasive that even the prophets are deluded. Much like our own land. Much like our own land.

Look at Verse 30 of that same chapter. "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land. The prophets prophesy falsely." They don't tell you the truth. Member what I told you two weeks ago? That the real sin of the PTL scandal was not how they handled their bodies and it was not how they handled their money. But it was how they handled what? The truth. It was how they mishandled the truth of God. How they mocked the truth and taught error and created a health, wealth, prosperity theology that confused and alienated people from the true Gospel. That was the real travesty. Nothing new? The prophets prophesied falsely. The priests rule on their own authority. They pontificate. They don't want accountability. And then my people love it so they all send millions to support it. But what will you do at the end of it? How are you gonna stand against the judgment of God?

What is the second sin? Corrupt leadership. Corrupt spiritual leadership. It starts out with false religion and then it includes corrupt spiritual leadership. Very short-sighted. What will they do at the end of it? What will they do when the judgment of God moves in on their corruptions?

The third sin, Chapter 3, should not surprise us. We see it. Verse 1, 2. God says if a husband divorces his wife and she goes from him and belongs to another man will he still return to her? In other words they were just dumping their wife without just cause and when she didn't like the next guy they were getting back together again. Will not that land be completely polluted? Take it further. "You are a harlot with many lovers that you don't come back to me, says the Lord. Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and see. Where have you not been violated? By the roads you have sat for them like an Arab in the desert and you polluted the land with your harlotry and your wickedness. From the mountains to the desert sexual sin is rampant. It's rampant. No place in the land was untouched by sexual vice." Jeremiah likened the national preoccupation with lewdness to an Arab bandit hiding in

concealment on the road waiting to plunder a passing caravan or to a wayside prostitute soliciting clients who walked along the road. Gross immorality.

Sound familiar? We have a sick, sick preoccupation with sex. We have sexologists for the first time in human history. Sex therapists. A chapter in a book I read this past week - [Erotica Gone Mad](#)-talked about the bizarre nature of our sexual behavior to the extent where a man in Silver Springs, Maryland recently had to have rabies treatments because he made love to a raccoon. What kind of perversion are we living in? What kind of bizarre behavior and conduct have we come to? And when the Pope recently made a pronouncement against homosexuality, homosexuals marched against him in Holland and screamed, "Kill the Pope! Kill the Pope!" to the tune of "Rock Around the Clock." We are so perverse and so sexually deviated that it's beyond description. Is there any greater sexual sin imaginable that was committed by Judah that we have not committed? And Judah was judged.

There's a fourth way to look at sin and Jeremiah does that in Chapter 3, Verse 24 and 25. It says here this is a very interesting thing. "The shameful thing has consumed the labor of our fathers since our youth." Isn't that amazing? Our fathers have been wearing themselves out doing shameful things. Instead of wearing themselves out with work, they've worn themselves out with sin. General wickedness. "Since our youth, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. Let us lie down in our shame and let our humiliation cover us for we have sinned against the Lord our God. We and our fathers since our youth even to this day and we have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God." General wickedness. They were just wicked. They lived from birth to death in sin. They lived to their own shame, to their own humiliation. Just incessant sin. And when I look at our society if I were to catalog the sin of our society, I wouldn't even know where to start. We are so messed up in our thinking it's beyond belief.

I read yesterday in a book that just fascinated me about the animal rights movement. I don't normally read books about animal rights movements but I have been getting a little bit concerned about it lately because I read a statement by one guy who said, "If I ever saw someone hurting an animal I'd kill him." And I read about a couple of doctors in this thing who have had their life threatened because they anesthetize dogs. What kind of sickness is that? Where we want to kill people and forget dogs? Now if that doesn't show you how perverted this thinking is. And all of these experimentations attempting to do what they can to lengthen human life. What kind of perverted minds do we have? In this country? So much evil dominates our thinking that we've lost touch with everything. And then just take the issue of drugs. A whole society is about to be sunk into the pit of crime from which we will never be able to extract ourselves because of the proliferation of people roaming the streets who are so compelled to fulfill their habit that they'll murder anybody in sight to get what they have to get. It's a frightening time to live. And we have been drowning in wickedness of every kind and people start at the beginning of their life and go to the end of their life living a whole life full of shame. Just as Jeremiah chronicles the people of the past.

There's another factor that Jeremiah dealt with and their sin. It's in Chapter 5, Verses 1 and 2 just touching it briefly. See if this doesn't sound familiar. "Roam to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem." In other words, look everywhere. Look now. Take note. And seek in her open squares. If you can find a man, one guy, if there's one who does justice, who seeks truth, I'll pardon her. Just find me one guy who's not a liar. Just one guy. This is the sin of lying and deceit. Are you a little weary of that? In our society? I think if we have another gate thing, Watergate, Iran-gate, Contra-gate, PTO-gate, whatever kind of gate it is, the Watergate thing seems like child's play now to the kind of horror stories that we read constantly in the newspapers. And you're at the point now where everybody lies. We are scandalized day in and day out by the lies of everybody. And where do we find anybody who tells the truth? Who really speaks the truth? Who really says what is exactly right and true? No different in Jeremiah's day. You see, the sins are always the same when a nation stands on the brink of the judgment of God because God has never changed. And frankly if God doesn't destroy America he'll have to apologize to Judah because we've done the same things they did and that brought their judgment.

Another one of their sins was to ignore Scripture. Chapter 11. And these are all intertwined of course but Chapter 11, Verse 8. "Yet they did not obey or incline their ear but walked every one in the stubbornness of their evil heart, self-will. Therefore, I brought on them all the words of this covenant which I commanded them to do but they did not." This disobedience. "Then the Lord said to me, 'A conspiracy has been found among the men of Judah, among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They have turned back to the iniquities of their ancestors who refused to hear my Words.'" That's it. What place has the Bible in our society? What place has the Word of God? What is the authority? Certainly not Scripture. No, they have abandoned Scripture. So there's a little catalog of their sins. The same kind of sins in our society today. What's frightening about that last one is we even have seminaries that produce men to go into churches who don't believe the Scripture.

How can we sum it up? I think Jeremiah sums it up in Chapter 13. This is an amazing visual aid actually. One of the living illustrations, several of them that were carried out by Jeremiah. This is a pretty vivid one. "The Lord said to me, 'Go and buy yourself a linen waistband.'" You know what that is? It's a pair of shorts. Go buy yourself a pair of shorts. Actually underwear. Which is what they wore around their - the linen waistband around their loins. Put it around your waist. But do not put it in water. You've heard of wash and wear? This is wear and don't wash. Put it on and this is your intimate undergarment. Put it on and leave it on and don't ever wash it. What in the world? Verse 11 gives you a little bit of explanation. "For as the waistband," or the underwear, "clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah cling to Me, declares the Lord, that they might be for Me a people for renown, for praise, for glory. But they didn't listen." And God had chosen them, designed for them, a relation of intimacy. The most intimate garment a man wears. And that's like my relationship to you. I remember the advertisement of an underwear company a few years ago. You don't see it too often any more. It said next year _____

you'll love BVDs. And that's in a sense what God is saying here. He's saying next to himself, closest to himself, in the most intimate relationship possible, He wants His people in order that they might be a people of praise and renown and glory. You see it all there. But that's not the way it turned out.

Go back to Verse 2. "So I bought the," underwear, "in accordance with the Word of the Lord and put it around my waist. The Word of the Lord came to me a second time saying, 'Take the thing that you have bought, the underwear which is around your waist and arise and go to the Euphrates.' Wear it all the way to the Euphrates." You know how far it was? Two hundred miles. Walking. "And hide it in the crevice of a rock.' So I went and hid my underwear by the Euphrates as the Lord had commanded me." I told you it was a strange illustration. Verse 6. "It came about after many days the Lord said to me, 'Arise. Go to the Euphrates and take from there the waistband,'" - or the underclothes - "'which I have commanded you to hide.'" Now he's gotta go 200 miles back. He's gone 400 already. He's gotta go 400 more. "I went to the Euphrates. I dug." Can you imagine what this looks like? It's had a 200-mile trip. It's been buried in a rock. "And when I found it the waistband was ruined. It was totally worthless. Then the Word of the Lord came to me saying, 'Thus says the Lord just so will I destroy the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem, this wicked people who refuse to listen to My Word, who walk in the stubbornness of their hearts and have gone after other gods to serve them and to bow down to them. Let them be just like this underwear which is totally worthless.'" God says, "I wanted it to be the most intimate thing. I wanted you to be close to Me. I wanted you to be that which is the nearest to me and instead of that you will be worthless." That's the judgment of God. That's the heart of the matter.

And we don't even have to claim the covenant relationship that they had to claim. So what would ever convince us that we are protected from something God's covenant people were not protected from? So this was the message. It was a message of sin. And we are called to confront a sinning society. Not make it feel good about itself. But make it feel bad about itself.

But it doesn't end there. There's a third point. And I'm glad for this. Because we might be a bit brash, uncaring, superior feeling, compassionate-less except for the third point. Not only is there a divine mandate. And a direct message. But there's a deep mourning here. Chapter 13 where we are. Verse 17. Jeremiah says, "If you will not listen my soul will sob in secret for such pride. And my eyes will bitterly weep and flow down with tears because the flock of the Lord has been taken captive." Jeremiah says, "I don't like what you're doing. It breaks my heart. It makes me weep." Chapter 8. Familiar words. Verse 18. "My sorrow is beyond healing. My heart is faint within me. Behold, listen. The cry of the daughter of my people from a distant land. Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her king not within her? Why have they provoked me with their graven images and with foreign idols? Harvest is past. Summer is ended. And we are not saved. For the brokenness of the daughter of my people I am broken. Boy, there is compassion. I mourn. Dismay has taken hold of me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has not the health of the daughter of my people been restored?" And then in Chapter 9. "Oh, that my head were waters and

my eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people."

Part of him is filled with wrath. Part of him is filled with sorrow. Verse 2. Part of him wants to run. Oh, that I had in the desert a wayfarer's lodging place that I might leave my people and go from them for all of them are adulterers and assembly of treacherous men. He could have been the original monastic. The first monk. Split to the desert. Contemplate your navel. Forget society. But he couldn't do it. As much as he wanted to be separated from them, he had too much compassion for them. He was all alone. In Chapter 16 God told him not to take a wife and so he bore his sorrow all alone. And when he looked at the coming judgment he wept because particularly he says he could see the fate of the daughters of Jerusalem, the women, the young girls.

That's the heart of the prophet. The heart of compassion. It's not a heart of indifference. God calls us to be compelled by our calling, our mission, our mandate. He calls us to speak of sin to an evil society. But he calls us to compassion and it all goes together. And I ask myself can we sit by speculating about the date of the rapture? Can we sit by speculating how to get a better program cranked up to deal with already saturated saints? Do we need to have another long Bible study to figure out some theological obscurity when the world is perishing? I mean where is the balance? Where is the grief or the loss that comes along parallel with the love for the truth? Do we like Jesus weep over Jerusalem or are we evangelical eggheads stone cold, preoccupied with our own indulgence in our own Christianity? Stockpiling our Bible studies, amassing piles and piles of data? Which has no impact on the lost. People are perishing while we're figuring out better forms for sending things through the mail. While we're doing all we can to pad our seat, that our lot be more comfortable, more successful and have little regard for people on their way to hell.

Not Jeremiah. He wants to weep and he's got nobody to weep with him so in Chapter 9, Verse 17 he says, "Call for the mourning women that they may come and send for the wailing women that they may come and let them make haste and take up a wailing for us that our eyes may shed tears and our eyelids flow with water." Let's get a lot of folks weeping about this. "For a voice of wailing is heard from Zion. How are we ruined?" Jeremiah wept and he wept alone. He didn't want to weep alone. He says, "I wish my eyes were fountains so I could release what I feel inside." He didn't have enough tears to get it out. I remember reading what Spurgeon said once. He said, "I hate my eyes. I feel as if I could pluck them from their sockets because they will not weep as I desire over poor souls who are perishing." I hate my eyes.

Well, mere weeping is not enough. There must be preaching. Against sin. And there must be the compelling mandate of the call of God. Jeremiah was faithful 42 years. What kept him at it? Results? Not results. Chapter 7, Verse 24, "Yet they did not obey or incline their ear but walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart and went backward and not forward." No, it wasn't results. Nobody bothered to listen to him. In fact tradition says Jeremiah died in Egypt

killed by his own countrymen. It wasn't results. What was it? Well, he loved the Word. "Thy Words were found and I did eat them. And Thy Word was in me. The joy and rejoicing of my heart." He says in Chapter 15, Verse 16. I mean the compelling Word drove him.

But also God gave him hope. God gave him hope. Chapter 24 and in Chapter 29, don't turn to it. God said the captivity of the people is only gonna last 70 years. It's gonna be brief and I'm gonna bring them back. I'm gonna bring them back. And there was hope. And so Jeremiah preached with hope. There would be a remnant. There would be some who would believe. There would be a recovery in the future. God was not permanently through with Judah. God had not alienated Judah ultimately. God had not violated his covenants. He would bring them back and there would be restoration.

And then as he gets into Chapters 31 and 32 and 33, he begins to look way ahead to the Messiah and he sees the new covenant. The time when God writes the law in the hearts. Chapter 31. Not on stone. The coming of the new covenant in the Messiah. The Redeemer. The branch he talks about in Chapter 23. What compelled him? Was it results? No. He wasn't counting heads. What compelled him was the love of the Word and hope that there was a remnant. Now there would be a remnant in 70 years and then later the whole of the nation. The new covenant. Chapter 31 gave a promise that must have caused the heart of Jeremiah to be glad even in the midst of his tears. Because it promised such home. Verse 17 of Jeremiah 31. "There is hope for your future, declares the Lord." Oh, what a great promise. Verse 31. "The days are coming declares the Lord when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Not like the covenant I made with their fathers the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. That is not a law covenant on stone. My covenant which they broke although I was a husband to them. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days. I'll put my law within them. On their heart I'll write it. I'll be their God. And they'll be my people." Jeremiah didn't know how far ahead that was. He couldn't see into the chronology of the future. But that hope compelled his heart.

What does that say to us, beloved? We're not driven by results. I'm not driven by results. I don't see the whole world repenting and turning to Christ. I preach here. I preach on the radio. We send out millions of tapes. Write books. Send material. I don't see the world bowing the knee to Jesus Christ. But I have hope in my heart because I know there is a remnant. And I also know there is coming a day when God is going to bring the full effects of the new covenant in millennial glory. And it's to that future that we look.

What does this say to us? Well, we have the message by now. Look at your life. What's it all about? Where's the focus? Where is it centered? If it's true in our nation that the harvest is past and summer is ended and we are not saved and judgment looms on the horizon, how can we spend our time best and our energies and our gifts?

We have a mandate. We have a message. And we have a mourning. A compassion. And I trust God that His Spirit will work in our hearts all these things to make us faithful. For the one who deserves it - even our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's bow together and pray. Father, help us not to be concerned with being a success but be concerned with being a servant. Help us not to be preoccupied with how far we go in the world but how strongly we speak against it. Help us, Father, not to be pursuing the things that pass but the things that last. Help us not to spend ourselves on ourselves but on those without the Savior. God, help us to come to grips with the time in which we live and not be deluded by the false impressions that everything is good when the foundations are rotted and judgment must be near. Use us as a church, O God, to bring the saving truth of Christ to thousands and even millions.

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