

**Jeremiah 18: 5-14; “The Ruler of the Nations”, Sermon # 20 in the series –
“Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God”,
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 30th, 2016,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

The proposition which I set before you this past Sunday was this – God’s Divine Government of the world shows us that all individuals, and all nations experience a dynamic display of His power to save men, and to judge men. I want to build upon what I said to you by making this further statement: There is a dynamic display of God’s power in His building a nation in righteousness, or His tearing it down in judgment. The truth that I would like to declare to you this morning is this: That just because God is sovereign, and just because He has decreed all things according to the counsel of His own will, does not mean that in His government of the world that He does not interact with individuals or nations to respond to what they decide to do in the various situations of life. God’s decrees encompass all of His actions from eternity past, to the creation of the world, to the end of the world, to the creation of the literal New Heavens and New Earth, and beyond into all eternity. In all of these works of God there is a dynamic interaction with His creature man, and all of the created universe.

Now, in this sermon I would like to give you a couple more observations which I hope will help you personally, in the way that you see God, and your responsibilities toward Him. I am hoping that this will help all of us to have greater understanding of what we should be doing in relation to our upcoming National Elections which are just a few days away. God’s great power in governing the nations is displayed in 3 further ways of dynamic interaction. 1st – God’s great wisdom in His executing His decrees by His providence. 2nd – God’s great ability to instantly change His dealings with a nation by His providential working. 3rd – God’s great help to the hopeless if they will turn to Him. Let us humbly pray that God will instruct us through these truths which flow to us from these verses.

1st of all – God’s great wisdom in His executing His decrees by His providence.

(verses 5 and 6)

Last week we went down to the Potter’s house, and there we saw Jeremiah receive a sermon in picture form. He saw the potter at work, and we came to understand this awesome truth: That even as the potter makes vessels of clay on the wheel, so the Lord God Almighty makes the lives of each and every man as it pleases Him. He is so far above man in His infinite wisdom and knowledge, so great in His holiness and His understanding, that He has decreed all that would come to pass in time and space and history, before He ever created the world. Acts 15: 18 says – “Known to God from eternity are all His works.” We also saw that He decreed that man would have free will, in the beginning, and that he would be given a test of his obedience to His Maker, of whether he would be able to stand in his own original righteousness. The test was whether he would, by abstaining from eating the forbidden fruit, thereby confirm himself and all of his posterity in his original righteousness, by his own strength, wisdom, and power. If he had been able to do so, he would have had eternal life by his own works.

Adam had been told by God that he should not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, lest in the day that he would eat of it, he would die. This one commandment, which was given to them for their own good, Adam and Eve did not keep. Eve thought that she could find wisdom on her own, by eating this fruit. Such was what Satan told her. Adam thought that he should listen to his wife’s reasoning more than heeding God’s word to him. And so, in that day when they ate, they fell from their original righteousness, and the clay was marred in the Potter’s hand. They died spiritually the moment that they ate. They were now alienated from the life of God. God was still Ruler over them, even though sin entered the world. Sin had

entered into Adam and Eve's very natures, and God full well knew what sin had done to them, and how it had disrupted the whole government of the world. Sin had entered the world, and it marred what He God had created upright and good. This marring and fall from righteousness was Adam and Eve's own fault. It was not God's fault. God was perfectly pure and righteous in all that He had decreed in relation to the fall of man. All that God has decreed concerning every man is always good and righteous. God is not the author of sin. But He is still the sovereign ruler over men and nations even though they rebel against Him.

But in this most important of situations; that of God's testing Adam, God according to His wise and holy purpose ordained that Adam would fall into sin. He determined that He would leave Adam to himself during this test. The reason for this was that God had determined before He ever created man, that it would be better for man to be dependent upon Him for every good thing. God would be glorified in man's dependence. Every good thing, indeed all of the greatest works that God would do, and all of the greatest blessings that God would give, He determined could not be given to him from the vantage point of man's being able to stand in his own righteousness. God the Father knew that man would sin if he was left to himself. But He also knew, and had ordained it for the good of everyone whom He had purposed to save, that it would be the best possible way to demonstrate His general love and care for all of sinful mankind; through the gospel of His Son. He would also be able to demonstrate His particular electing love and care to His elect people among them. It would be the best possible way to demonstrate His saving mercy to countless millions of people, through His giving His Son to save that elect people. And then, at the Last Judgment, it would also be the highest demonstration of His justice, that Christ would be the Judge and Ruler of all mankind. In John 17, verses 1 and 2, Jesus says: "Father, the hour has come." "Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him." This was God's decree, and He executed it in His providence in leaving Adam to himself in the covenant of works, and also then in giving to Adam and Eve the promise of His Son.

2nd – God's great ability to change His dealings with a nation instantly, by His providential working. (verses 7-11)

We, who are descendants of Adam, are by nature, sinners by birth and by practice. We confirm our sinnership in many ways every day. We do not love God with all of our heart. We do not love Him with all of our soul or strength. We do not love our neighbor as ourselves. Each one of us deserves an eternal punishment; and because of our sins, we certainly cannot expect mercy to be shown to us from our holy God. All men and women are under His just wrath, and they would most definitely stay there, unless God had not purposed to intervene. But we can thank and praise Him that He did purpose to intervene. As we look at these verses we see that it was Israel as a nation that was as clay in God's hands. That is the particular reference here. God was evaluating His ancient people Israel. And it was a moment by moment evaluation of His looking for repentance. He says to them in verse 7 – "The instant I speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it." I believe that God uses this kind of language to communicate to us how decisive He is in His judgments, and yet how dynamic and fluid His dealings can be, with nations as well as with individuals. He can change things in an instant, either in judgment or in mercy.

Yes, it is true that God has decreed all things, whatsoever comes to pass. From all eternity, and from the foundation of the world, He has had these decrees in His holy mind. But let us understand as well, that He is intensely interested in what goes on in the heart of a nation, and in the hearts of each of the people in that nation as well. God takes it all in; as His watchful eyes gaze into our hearts. All things lie open and bare before Him. This nation of Israel had received

many privileges. God had planted Israel a noble vine, a seed of highest quality, and yet they had turned before Him into the degenerate plant of an alien vine. There were many things sinfully wrong with the nation. Look with me over at Jeremiah 17, verse 1. “The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with the point of a diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of your altars, while their children remember their altars and their wooden images by the green trees on the high hills. It says here that the sin of Judah was written with an iron stylus; with a pen of iron which had the point of a diamond. Their sin was graven on the tablet of their hearts.

The Lord, as He looked at their hearts, He saw how hard they were, and what it had taken, for them to write the names of their favorite gods there. They had to take for granted all of His working and all the privileges that He had given to them. They had to forsake Him the true and living God for the false gods of the nations around them. The writing of their sin upon their own hearts was durable; it was lasting, and its impression would not wear off easily. We know from the rest of this passage and the rest of the book, that He was intending to bring judgment upon Judah and Jerusalem. He could bring down the whole nation quite quickly when it was His time. Verse 9 – “And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.” Sin is not a superficial mark in God’s sight. It is a falling short of His glory; a failure to think about what we have been given by Him. We forget the wonderfully good, spiritually profitable truths of the Scripture and we mark up the walls of our hearts with the graffiti of sinful thoughts; pride, and foolishness, covetousness, sensuality, and having other gods before the true and living God.

Some people in our day tattoo their bodies, and by it they may be showing their independence from parental authority and even Biblical authority. Their self-expression in this inappropriate way according to the Scriptures is something that the Lord does not approve of. Leviticus 18: 28 – “You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the Lord.” I would think that you all must know how difficult tattoos are, to remove afterwards, if you want to undo what you have done. But long-practiced, self-justifying, God-defying sin is much more difficult to erase than a tattoo on your body. I am speaking to you now about the fact that many people in that day, and many people in our day as well, tattoo their hearts with their sin by practicing it as though there will never be a judgment, and as though God will never hold them accountable. They are wrong. They are provoking God to anger with their sins. They have kindled a fire in His anger which burn forever if they do not repent. In the case of Judah, God said to them – “Behold, I am fashioning disaster and devising a plan against you.”

Let us be mindful of the fact that the same is true for all people in all generations. You are writing what you worship upon your heart, but you need to understand that God is writing too. God has what the Scripture calls books; books in which He records all that you do throughout your whole life. Now, you ought to know that God does not have a need for such books. His memory is flawless. He can remember your sins from way back in your youth, just as clearly now as when you committed them then. His understanding is infinite and it is impeccable. But it is written down in the Scriptures in this way so that you and I will better understand, how everything that we have said and done is recorded by God. Revelation 20, verses 11 and 12 – “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away.” “And there was found no place for them.” “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened.” “And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life.” “And the dead were judged according to their works by the things which were written in the books.”

In God's evaluation, the first part of God's divine interacting with us, and with the nation that we live in, is to warn us. He warns nations of impending judgment. He warns unbelievers and believers alike. He uses preachers and teachers of His word; men who are called to speak on His behalf, and He warns sinful people of the judgment to come. He warns not only gross and negligent sinners in the nation, but also those who are secret sinners or presumptuous sinners; people who may be consciously continuing to sin and who profess to be believers. He warns them of His great displeasure with all sin which they continue in; and that if they would consider themselves His people, they must turn from their evil ways. He threatens, our text says. If sin is widespread and deeply entrenched in a nation or a society, He speaks, and warns that nation that He will pluck up, pull down, and destroy them. And if they turn from their evil, He will relent or repent of the disaster that He thought to bring. The instant that He sees repentance, He relents.

Verse 7 – “The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it.” God can instantly change His mind providentially in His interactions with people in time and space. This is something which should give us hope in this time where we think that our nation may go down to judgment because of our sins. It is surely true that we deserve it. But it does not have to be. Certainly we are seeing God's judgments coming upon our land. But even in bringing these things, He is ever faithful to Himself and to His word. He can instantly change His dealings with a nation if He sees repentance. This is what it means for God Himself to relent, or repent. He never changes His eternal decrees; He never changes in His essence of being, but providentially in the instant He speaks, He can change everything related to His blessing and building men up, or pulling them down and destroying them. Matthew Poole says: “Repentance in man must be, not only a change in action, but a change of heart; repentance as attributed to God never signifies a change of heart, or purpose, or counsels, but only a change in action, an alteration in the course of His providence.” And this is true.

You can see this kind of national repentance in the book of Jonah. God threatens Nineveh – the city state of Assyria, and He says: “Yet 40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown!” They were indeed very great sinners, and had grossly mistreated the people of God in the years previous to this. But here we find an amazing thing; the greatest revival which the world has ever seen thus far. They received the preaching of the word from God's reluctant prophet. Humanly speaking they think that they can change God's mind by their actions, and so they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth from the least to the greatest of them. The king of Nineveh proclaimed a fast. He covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. Then he published a decree that man and beast be covered with sackcloth and cry mightily to God. And he exhorted the people to each turn from their evil way and the violence of their hands. He then says – “Who can tell if (perhaps) God will turn and repent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we will not perish.” There was no uncertainty, no perhaps, in the decree of God. God knew what He was intending to do. But it was entirely right for those people to think in these terms. Who knows? Perhaps God will relent.

Well, it says in Jonah 3: 10 – “Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. Now, I want you to think about our own country. What do you think that God thinks, as He evaluates us? I think that as He looks at us, as a nation, that He knows that we are a sinful and an unrepentant people. We say, and our Presidential candidates say: “God bless us all, and God bless the United States of America.” And yet one of them is a murderer, a person who sanctions a woman's supposed right to abortion. And furthermore, because she failed to respond to the appeals of the Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens for help and protection for our

U.S. embassy in Libya, 4 men lost their lives. The other candidate, although his stance on many of the issues is conservative and good, he has had many women accuse him of sexual impropriety in his speech and actions, and although he is sorry that these things have happened, he does not repent of them before God and turn to Christ for forgiveness; rather, he says that he is embarrassed by them. He clearly sees the sins and mistakes of others and will attempt to degrade them with contemptuous speech, but he himself does not know how to repent.

We must ask ourselves in all seriousness: How is it that with 350,000,000 people in this country that we cannot raise up 2 candidates for the Presidency of this great land who meet the qualifications for leadership? Because neither of these candidates meet the qualifications. I believe that it is because God is increasingly bringing our nation under His judgments, and He has ordained that these two candidates come to the floor at this time. The problem, you see, is not simply the candidates; it is the people. The people who are living in this country, at this time, to a large degree, have departed from the true and living God. They have rejected the truth of the Bible; that they should live for Him and not for themselves. They do not care to be told that they are all sinners who need a Savior. And they have said: We do not desire the knowledge of your ways, God. Why should God bless us as a nation if this is so? Why should God give us good leaders when we are pleased to sin against Him? Why shouldn't the Lord bring His judgments against us?

With these thoughts in mind, what then should we do in regard to this election? The implications of it are very great. Well, I think that first of all, we must see that God can change things for the better, for a nation, in an instant, if there is wide-spread repentance. If God's people who are called by His name will humble themselves and pray and seek God's face, and turn from their wicked ways, then He will hear from heaven, and He will forgive their sin and heal their land. His eyes will be open, and His ears attentive to prayer made in this place. If we will determine that by His grace we will walk before Him uprightly, God will come to our aid and help us, even in the midst of these judgments. This is surely what we desire, but we must pour out our hearts before Him, and let Him know exactly what the greatest of our desires are. Do we desire to know Him better, or will we take for granted all the truth and grace that we have been given? Will we so let our light shine before men that they will see our good works and glorify the Father in heaven? Let us resolve that, by Christ's grace, it shall be so.

I believe that every Christian still ought to vote in this upcoming election. I understand that every person has to do whatever they will do according to their own conscience in this matter. Since it is apparent that our Presidential candidates are for the most part both morally unqualified to lead our nation, it might seem to some people to be a good reason not to vote at all. Some perhaps have decided to vote for a 3rd party candidate or to write in a candidate. Although their conscience may be clear in relation to not voting for an obviously sinful man or woman to put them into a position of authority, the issue of the decisions made by the person who will be elected to government will determine the course of this country's public policy in regard to many important issues. In looking over the 4 candidates who will be on the ballot, as to where they stand on the issues, there is only one candidate who holds to the right of the unborn to live. There is only one candidate who will take steps to strengthen our military and strengthen our economy and really attempt to deal with illegal immigration. There is only one candidate who will deal with the health care issues that we have been weighted down by. There is only one candidate who will nominate morally responsible people to the Supreme Court.

I will admit that this candidate is a very flawed person in many respects. I fully understand why Christians feel reluctant to vote for such a man. But I think that we should understand that the life of our nation does not ultimately depend upon whether we will have a Christian person in the White House. It rather will be determined by whether the people themselves will repent of their sins, and then pray for their President and others in public office. If they themselves will

focus on the issues of righteousness and Biblical truth and will try to elect the person who will best reflect those issues in the way that he leads, then I believe that those vital issues of concern will be addressed by this man. I believe that God Himself will help him to do so. And so I would hope that you will vote accordingly. As one fellow pastor told me, we should weep as we vote, for we know what a morally weak man he is. May the Lord hear our cries, and may each of us repent of our particular sins, and who knows – The Lord may have mercy upon us as a nation.

3rd – I want you to think with me in closing, of God’s great help to the hopeless if they will turn to Him.

Verse 12 of our text says: And they said, “That is hopeless!” “So we will walk according to our own plans, and we will every one obey the dictates of his evil heart.” “Therefore thus says the Lord: ‘Ask now among the Gentiles, who has heard such things?’ “The virgin of Israel has done a very horrible thing.” “Will a man leave the snow water of Lebanon, which comes from the rock of the field?” “Will the cold flowing waters be forsaken for strange waters?” Let me ask you now whether you think our situation as a nation is hopeless? Sometimes when things do not turn out the way that we want them to, we think that all is lost. But God asked the nation of Israel, and He is asking us as well, “Will you really leave me, and the cold refreshing waters of what I can give you spiritually? Will you leave the counsel of my word for the opinions of worldly and ungodly people? Will you leave off seeking Me, for those cold refreshing waters of my Spirit? For you should remember that these are the waters which will refresh you, and strengthen you, and lead you to the wisdom which is from above; that wisdom of truth which will provide for you and give you a future and hope. Will you really give that up all this pure and fresh spiritual water for the strange waters, the reasonings of unbelieving men and women who worship other gods?

You see, we really do have a choice to make. And the choice is between looking to God in faith; letting Him instruct us through His word; letting Him be our guide into how we ought to think and how we ought to live. All the spiritual blessings, all the earthly blessings flow to us from God, from His Spirit through the Rock – our Mediator – the Lord Jesus Christ. We wash and cleanse ourselves with the pure water of His word. We drink from the flowing stream of the waters of everlasting life. Many people forsake the pure, for the defiled and impure burning of incense to worthless idols. Even some who are Christians seek for what does not profit. The Christian who would know God’s richest blessings must ever drink from the pure water of God’s word. When you drink deeply of God’s wisdom and when you are refreshed and strengthened by His grace, then you will be able to see what the right thing is to do, in the various situations of your life. Where you could not at first see how you could go forward to glorify God, or what it will mean to do His will, you will come to understand.

The dictates of our own evil hearts may deceive us sometimes, but ultimately we will not heed them if Christ is helping us. In closing, let us ask ourselves this question: Will we walk according to our own plans and obey the dictates of our hearts, or will we trust in the Lord and follow the dictates and directions of His word? For our Lord has all the nations in His hands. He is the Ruler of the nations. Isaiah 26: 7-12 says: “The way of the just is uprightness; O Most Upright, You weigh the path of the just.” “Yes, in the way of Your judgments, O Lord, we have waited for You; the desire of our soul is for Your name and for the remembrance of You.” “With my soul I have desired You in the night, yes by my spirit within me I will seek You early; for when Your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” “Let grace be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he will deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord.” “Lord, when Your is lifted up, they will not see.” “But they will see and be ashamed for their envy of people; yes, the fire of Your enemies shall devour them.” “Lord, You will establish peace for us, for You have also done all our works for us.”

