

What Have I Done?

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Bible Text: Jeremiah 8:4-12
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We'll read here again Jeremiah 8:6. Jeremiah 8:6,

6 I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle.

A few weeks ago we looked at the life, the ministry, the reign of young King Josiah. You remember that Josiah was king at the very young age of 8 and you remember too that in the 8th year of his reign, he began to seek the Lord God of his father David, and then in the 12th year of his reign when he is either 19 or 20, he begins a reformation in the land of Judah. Well, the prophet Jeremiah began his ministry about one year after this, so Josiah and Jeremiah are both in Judah at the same time, they're both contemporaries, they both know each other, they're both friends and colleagues, as it were, in the work of the Lord. Jeremiah begins his ministry in the year 627 before Christ and so you have this time when the context is really a context of generally speaking at least, of judgment, of this coming exile into Babylon, you have these two young men who are born and raised up by God into the land of Judah.

Now about five or six years after the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry, then, you have the discovery of the book of the law. You remember that from our study of Josiah, that Josiah or in Josiah's reign the book of the law was discovered in the temple and so Jeremiah, then, would have, he would have been early on in his prophetic ministry at this time. And you see also in the last chapter of 2 Chronicles how when Josiah dies in battle, Jeremiah is there at his funeral weeping for him, and that would be, we believe, 609 BC. So all this is happening, Jeremiah and Josiah together, this is all happening a little before the exile in 605 BC. About four years after the death of Josiah you have Daniel and a few other prominent men taken away to Babylon. There are at least three waves of exile into Babylon. The first main wave really begins in 597 and so on, but the point here is that this is into the context, the prophecy of Jeremiah comes into the context of the exile.

So these are perilous times that Jeremiah is prophesying into and his message is largely not a popular message. Chapter 1, verse 10 of Jeremiah, you really have the summary of Jeremiah's whole message. God says, "See, I have this day set thee over the nations." So yes, Jeremiah is prophesying in Judah but there is a sense to which he is a prophet to the

nations and over the kingdoms. Now here's the thrust of the message that Jeremiah is to bring, "to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, and then to build, and to plant." You see, God had planted, as it were, his people in this land in Judah, in this land where we read that in Judah's land God is well-known. Here in Judah you have the temple, you have the sacrifices, you have the worship, you have all the care that God has given to his people here in Jerusalem. This is the place in the temple and from between the cherubim that God will meet with his people; that now that the message that is coming through Jeremiah is this, that because of the sin, because of the unfaithfulness of the people there is going to be this uprooting, there's going to be this exile.

There has been this turning away from the Lord by the church as well as by the nations and here Jeremiah is coming with this message of the Lord coming to root up and to tear down, but there's also this message of mercy, this message of hope, this call to repentance, to rend your hearts not your garments. So you might go, for example, to chapter 12 and here's the Lord speaking in verse 15, he says, "it shall come to pass," and you notice again these words, the same words that are used in Jeremiah's initial call. Here we are again, "It shall come to pass, after that I have plucked them out I will return, and I will have compassion on them, and will bring them again, every man to his heritage, and every man to his land. And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, The LORD liveth; as they taught my people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built in the midst of my people." So here's the building up again but there's also this warning, "But if they will not obey, I will utterly," completely, finally, "pluck up and destroy that nation, saith the LORD."

So as we approach to this chapter, chapter 8. Just to give you a quick summary of the progress of thought in the book of Jeremiah in chapter 2, the Lord is really using the idea of his claim upon his people, his marriage claim. He says later, "I am married to you," and he speaks there about the way in which they have betrayed him, the way in which they have gone away and betrayed the great love that he has shown them. In chapters 3 and 4, then, have this calling them to repentance; that if they return to the Lord and if they put away their abominations, then they will not be moved, they will be planted here again. But right on the heels of this call to repentance in the rest of chapter 4 right into chapter 6, you have very much the atmosphere of alarm. The atmosphere of alarm. There is the threat of judgment that is now coming right to the doors of Judah and Jerusalem and the Lord makes clear that, "This is what you have done. You have brought this about because of your doings," he says in chapter 4, verse 18. And one of the great things, the great evils that they had done, one of the ways in which they had turned away from the Lord was their dismissal of his prophets, their refusal to listen to his prophets. So you can go to chapter 5, verse 12 and you see there that this is what they say, "They have belied the LORD," really they've called God a liar, they've spoken falsely in the name of the Lord, "and said, It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us," that that's what the prophets are saying, that's what Jeremiah is saying, that's what the other prophets are saying but they're saying it's not true, this evil won't come upon us, we won't see the sword, we won't see the famine. "And the prophets shall become wind, and the word," the word of

the Lord, "is not in them." And this refusal to listen to God, this refusal to listen to his prophets is the cause, the reason why this judgment is coming upon them.

So when we now come into chapter 8, we have in our passage here, the passage that we read, very clearly the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah telling his people that the appropriate response to God's judgments is to return to him, the appropriate response to God's judgments is to return to him. This is why the Lord is sending these judgments upon his people. Yes, he is displeased but there is also in it this fatherly care and this call really to return to him. I think Robert Murray M'Cheyne says something like this, that God has these two arrows in his quiver, he has his word and he has his judgments, and we ought to be afraid that if we will not repent after hearing his word and we will not repent after feeling and hearing his judgments, then be afraid, he says, because God has no more arrows in his quiver. Now here then with the threat of exile looming large, God is saying to Jeremiah and he's saying to us at this time too, the appropriate response to God's judgments is to return to him.

Now the Lord begins in 4 through 6 by asking a series of questions. He shows up the appropriate, we could even say the natural, the right response by asking a series of questions. You notice in the middle of verse 4, he really says if you fall down, what should you then do? What is the natural response to falling down? Well, it's to return to your feet. "Shall they fall, and not arise?" That's the natural response to falling, to get up on your feet, to return to your feet. Or then again at the end of verse 4, he gives this idea of somebody leaving home and what do you do after you leave home? What do you eventually do, at least? Well, you return. You return to your home and that's what he's saying here again, shall he turn away, shall he go away and shall he not return? That's the right response. That's the natural thing. That's the thing you expect to happen.

It's very natural to fall down and to get back up. It's very unnatural to fall down and not to try to get back up. It's very unnatural to leave home and not to return and what God is saying here, then, is this, "This is what I see in my people. Why is this," he's asking. "I am married to them. They belong to me and I'm speaking to them but they're not listening," they're not doing what you would expect someone in that relationship to do, rather you see the people's senseless, irrational certainly, rush to destruction.

Recently we looked at the sins forbidden in the first commandment and one of them is being incorrigible, being incapable of being corrected, and that's what we see here in verse 5. There's this perpetual backsliding; that they hold fast to deceit, speaking of the great effort that they have with this. They refuse at the end of verse 5 to return. It's incorrigible. They're incapable of being corrected. There's the idea of stubbornness here. There's the sense of the effort that they're putting in not to return. It's hard to resist all the claims of God. It's hard to totally put away his voice and the word and in providence and in judgment, and there's effort like Romans 1 tells us in suppressing the truth, in holding it down in unrighteousness.

But look at the middle of verse 6. This is what they're doing, "every one turned to his course, as the horse rushes into battle." This is a description of the people of God, the

professing people. They're following their own way of life. They're doing it in a way that cannot be stopped, or rather they will not be stopped, like a horse rushing into battle. You can imagine a horse is rushing into battle and you could try shouting from a distance to tell them to stop and to come back but they're not listening, they're rushing on. That's a picture God is saying of his people. "They're not listening to me. There's no turning. There's no deviating. There's no slowing down. They're rushing on into battle." They can't say they haven't been told. Josiah, Jeremiah, Isaiah before them, and other prophets too.

But here then in verse 6, God is pictured, this is what he's doing, he is looking out. He is bending his ear for the appropriate response. He is bending his ear to hear the cry or the sigh or the flicker of repentance. Verse 6, "I hearkened and heard." Even the children know that God hears everything. God hears the silent thought. God hears what you think in your mind. Of course God hears everything but God is pictured here as bending his ear, as listening carefully for the appropriate response, the desired response of God.

Well, what is God listening for? Well, he's listening for a verse 6, for someone to speak aright. He says, "no man when I listened, when I heard, no man speaks aright, and I listened for the sound of repentance," the middle of verse 6, "no man repented him of his wickedness. This is what I'm listening for. This is what I'm bending my ear for but I don't hear it. No man repented him of his wickedness." He's bending his ear to hear if there's even somebody asking at the end of verse 6, "What have I done?" Really it's a beautiful picture that God gives and Jeremiah gives of the Lord hearkening and hearing. "I hearkened and I heard." He's listening carefully for the good. He's listening, he's bending his ear to hear if there's anything that is right, if there's anything that is hopeful in his people. Spurgeon says he is so attentive to everything that is good even in the poor sinner's heart, that to him there is music in a sigh and beauty in a tear. He says, "Ah, my hearer, you never have a desire towards God which does not excite God's hope. You never breathe a prayer towards heaven when he does not notice. I hearken," says God, "I heard, I bent my ear to hear." But the thing is after bending his ear to hear, to hear if there is a sigh or a groan of his people in bondage, to hear if there is even the beginnings of a turning to himself, a calling on his name, what does he hear? What does he find? He finds nobody who repents, nobody who, as it were, comes to their senses and says, "What have I done?"

When you fall down, you get up, you return to your feet. It's the natural thing to do. When you leave home for work in the morning, what do you do at the end of the day? You return home. It's the natural thing to do. But when God comes with his word calling us to repent, what do you do? When God comes with judgments in the land, when God shuts down the world and shuts down so many of its idols, what do you do? God is listening. God is bending his ear to hear. Does he hear you? Does he hear me? Can he hear, as it were, a difference now in our prayers? Has there been a change, a turning to himself, a calling upon his name? Isn't that the right thing to do? We would say isn't that the natural thing to do and yet that's really the point, isn't it? It's not a thing that we do by nature. This is the last thing we do. This is the thing we will never do indeed by nature.

Does the Lord look down and say of Grand Rapids Free Reformed at this time when he has sent such a clear manifestation of his hand on the earth, "I hearkened and I heard. I listened carefully. I bent my ear to hear. I heard lots of other noise but I never heard this, I never heard a cry for repentance. I never heard somebody asking, 'What have I done?' I heard plenty of people talking about what others have done, what China has done, what Russia has done, what the President has done, the sins of others perhaps a little, the sins of the nation, well, some in places but not much," but the Lord is saying, "This is what I'm bending my ear to hear. This is what I want to hear. This is the purpose of why I have done what I have done so that when I bend my ear to hear, I will hear this, I will hear the ministers, I will hear the elders, I will hear the deacons, I will hear the fathers, the mothers, the sons, the daughters, the people, they will be saying this, 'What have I done?'"

Revival does not begin with nations. It does not begin even, at least in one sense, with the church, at least not the church broadly speaking. Revival begins with individuals. It begins with me and it begins with you. It begins with a Job saying, "That which I see not, teach thou me if I have done iniquity. What have I done?" Job is asking. "If I have done iniquity, I will do no more." It begins with us crying like David, "O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest me in my down-sitting and up-rising. Thou understandest my thought afar off. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me. What have I done? And lead me in the way everlasting."

Dear friends, it's time to be asking the question not what has China done, not what has this side or that side of the government done, not what has anyone else done but what have I done? And if a response would be, "Not me, pastor. Surely we've focused our attention in the wrong place, on the wrong person. Yes, there's things I need to work out but surely there are bigger sins and bigger reasons and more pressing things that can be pointed out than coming to me." The Lord anticipates the objection and brings us back to the animals in verse 7. He says, "Yes, the stork in the heaven knows her appointed times; the turtle and the crane and the swallow, they observe the time of their coming." You see what he's saying, he's saying the animals, the birds, they know how to act appropriately. They know how to respond appropriately to the situation. They know it. They do it. They don't have the ability to think and to reason things out like you and me. They don't have reasonable souls, rational capacities for thinking, but they still act appropriately to the situation. When the weather begins to cool, when the weather suggests that winter is on its way, what do they do? They act appropriately. They fly south. They don't delay. They don't stay north. They don't hope that this will just be a warmer winter. No, they go. The birds are more observant to the signs of the times than the image-bearers of God.

The Lord says, "My people, they can see the judgment coming if they have eyes to see it. They have heard that it is coming from my word but they don't act appropriately. They think it will pass. They explain it away." And really the striking thing here at the end of verse 7 is this, it's the Lord saying that, "my people, my people know not the judgment of the LORD." You see, in many ways it's no wonder that unconverted men and women would not know the judgment of God. We can bend our ears to hear a call of repentance

from them. We're getting what we expect from them, appeals to our human spirit to stick together and we'll get through this, we'll be back, we'll be bigger, we'll be better, we'll be stronger than ever before. That's what we expect but here's the wonder to God, "my people don't know the judgment of the LORD. My people don't discern my own voice."

Yes, you see, we have calls for prayer and that's good but I think the question is this: prayer for what? Is it prayer that we can simply return back to the way things were? Is that the burden of our prayers? Is that the focus and the weight of our prayers? Yes, it's right to pray for people, for their lives, for their livelihoods, we pray for the peace of the city, we desire that the Lord in his mercy would remove this virus, but if that is all we are praying for and indeed if I could be as bold as to say, if that is the burden of our prayer, then this is what God is saying to us, "my people know not the judgment of the LORD." You're not hearing, we are not hearing the voice of God. We're not hearing as Micah says the rod and who has done it. What about asking the question in our prayers: what really caused the virus to cover the whole world? What caused this virus to shut down so many of our idols? Well, verse 6 tells us, "I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of," the cause, the cause of the judgment, "no man repented him of his," his, "wickedness saying, What have I done?"

Then in verses 8 through 12, the Lord essentially says that it's not enough to have my word, that my word must be obeyed. Now remember that Jeremiah, he would have been there when the law was found in the temple and brought to Jeremiah, no doubt he would have rejoiced over this and this law, the book of Deuteronomy had been a means of bringing this great reformation in the land, but you see, it wasn't simply the finding of the book of the law that resulted in the reformation. Josiah, you remember, had gone to Huldah the prophetess to ask what does the law mean, and Jeremiah as the prophet of the Lord is now the one who is going forth in his ministry applying the law, saying not only this is what God says but this is what God means, giving the sense of it, as Ezra says. And there's false prophets coming in. There's so many people around Jeremiah, numerous it seems who are prophets of the Lord and yet they're false prophets claiming to be prophets of the Lord.

And in verse 8 they're saying, "We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us." We have the Bible. We have the Bible and can't we say that? We have the Bible in our homes. We have it in our churches. We read it here every week, I trust you read it every day. The law of the Lord is with us. We are safe. We are good. God says that's not enough. The pen of the scribes is in vain. They've twisted it. They've altered it. Then in the middle of verse 9 he says that they have rejected, the wise men, "they have rejected the word of the LORD, and," says the Lord to the wise men, "what wisdom is in them?" Well, may the Lord give us wisdom to apply rightly what he has said.

What was the message that the false prophets were giving in this time of impending judgment? When God's judgments were in the land, what was the message that the false prophets told the people? Verse 11, "they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace." More and more this is what convicts me. The biggest problem I have, the biggest problem in the church today is

this: we don't fear God. We don't fear God. We don't tremble at his word. We don't take his judgments seriously. We want to hear the message that says, "Peace, peace." We want to hear a message even today that says, "Don't worry, don't fear, everything will work out fine and right." Well, that message will heal you slightly, superficially is the idea, it's a kind of patch-up, a band-aid on the disease. Now of course, it's true that for God's people personally in their own lives, that there is this glorious message of hope, there is this covenant faithfulness of God. He will never leave his people. He does give his peace to his people. He does say, "Let not your heart be troubled," and that is true and that is glorious, but we ought not to see that and to see the fear of God as two things that are somehow opposite or incompatible with one another.

Habakkuk, who is another contemporary just a few years after Jeremiah, he has words of tremendous hope even closer to the exile than we are here. He speaks about rejoicing in the Lord. He speaks about joying in the God of his salvation, but in the beginning of the same chapter, chapter 3, when he sees the judgments of God in the land, when he hears the voice of God's judgment, there is no inconsistency in Habakkuk when he says, "I heard thy speech and I was afraid."

"What have I done?" Well, dear friends, God is listening. God is listening to us. God is listening to me. God is listening to you and this is what God is bending his ear to hear. Who is repenting? Who is on their knees? Who is coming to their senses in all this and asking this question that nobody seems to want to ask, "What have I done?" Can we press that on you? Have you not heard the gospel preached some of you thousands and thousands of times? Have we not heard of Christ coming in our nature, of his death on Calvary's tree, of his resurrection, of his ascension? What have you done? Have we not heard of his gospel through his messengers earnestly pleading with you saying, "We pray you in Christ's stead be reconciled to God"? What have you done? Have you believed? Have you repented? Have you believed in the name of his Son? What have you done with this?

We have heard of the judgment seat of Christ which makes everything we're saying now pale into insignificance, we have heard that time is short, we've heard so recently that God's Spirit will not always strive with men, and we've heard an echo of that sermon in this almost complete shutdown of our worship here. What have we done with that? Have we listened on with indifference? Has God been able to listen into our lives and to detect a change, a response, an appropriate response to these messages? Where we've heard that it is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment, we've heard that now, now is the accepted time, now is the day of salvation. What have I done, you ought to be asking. We've heard of others dying, some with a good hope through grace going into Emmanuel's land, we believe, but we've heard of others dying with either little or no hope. What about you? Ought you not to be saying, "What have I done? I too must die. I too must go to the Great White Throne. I too must meet with God. What have I done?"

We've heard his voice again with this pestilence, this virus. We've heard his voice shutting us in our homes, shutting down our idols. Can God hear, can God hear as he hearkens and as he listens in to you in your homes when you're in your prayer closet, in

the depth of your own heart is there even the beginning of this, "What have I done? What have I done?" And let that question, then, move into this: what are you doing? What are you doing? Are you repenting? That's what God's looking out for. That's what he desires. That's why he's doing all that he's doing. Does this make us look to the Lord our righteousness, as Jeremiah goes on to speak about? God says, "I'm listening. I'm bending my ear."

And you look at the end of this chapter and I'll leave you with this, isn't this a place to go, isn't this a thing to do in a time like this? "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is the hurt of the daughter of my people not healed?" What have you done with the balm of Gilead? What have you done with the physician of souls, the physician of the disease of sin? Oh, may God hear this very night from the bottom of your own heart these words, "What have I done?" And may he see this turning to himself in repentance and in faith to the Great Physician and to the Great Balm of Gilead. Amen.

Let us pray.