

Jeremiah's job was to preach to sinners. In chapter 7, he preached the temple sermon, and then he preached in the valley of slaughter. Here Jeremiah was the mouthpiece of God to again tell the people about their sin – this time, their sin of stubbornness. As always, there is hope for sinners, and that hope is Christ showing us both our sin and our salvation.

So intense is the poetry and so seamless is the way these verses switch back and forth from one speaker to another, it is hard to determine whether we are reading the voice of Jeremiah or God. But the voice of one expresses the heart of the other. Only at the cross do we hear more of the heart of God.

**Christ digs beneath our stubbornness, and shows us the lies we are believing (unknowingly, which is being deceived).**

**1. A stubborn and meandering bent is standing against The LORD Himself (v.4-7).**

The passage starts with two questions when God tells Jeremiah which questions to ask in verse 4, *“You shall say to them, Thus says The LORD, When men fall, do they not rise again? If one turns away, does he not return?”*

Of course people get up after we fall down. Young children get up as many times as they fall down. So do adults.

Whenever we go away, we come back. It is true of a trip to the grocery store, to work, to school, or on a longer trip.

That is the surprising part of this scene. The people had fallen down in their sins, and would not get back up. The people have left and would never come back home. Something has gone wrong. People always get back up and people always come back home.

Thus Jeremiah's concern in verse 5, *“Why then has this people turned away in perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit; they refuse to repent.”* The people had turned away from God, and would not turn back. They had left God, and would not return. Their backsliding was perpetual. Consider these selected words from verse 5, *“perpetual” “hold fast”* and *“refuse.”* What has gone wrong? Even the prodigal son eventually came to his senses. What is the problem with these wandering people? They will not repent.

In verse 6, God described what was missing in the process of their return. God was watching for them to return, as usually happens, but they did not return. Listen to God describing them in verse 6, *“I have paid attention and listened, but they have not spoken rightly; no man relents of his evil, saying, ‘What have I done?’ Everyone turns to his own course, like a horse plunging headlong into*

*battle.*” They ought to be pausing, reflecting, realizing, and then asking What have I done? Where is the pausing? Where is the reflecting? When will they realize?

Even the prodigal son knew the heart of his Father was gracious and welcoming even to his servants. The son knew that being a servant of the Father is better than being out in the world. The son knew that he did not deserve to be a son, but that he wanted to come back home to his father. No more pain. No more hunger. No more loneliness. Come back to the Father, to the fold.

Why weren’t the people in Jerusalem having a moment of awakening like that? They were believing some lie. They were deceived. As verse 5 said, they were holding fast to deceit. They were lacking the truth.

They were showing a remarkable ability to stay in deceit and falsehood and pain and discomfort, despite knowing what God is like and how pleasant it is to come back home.

God says this is the same as taking a stand against God Himself. God tells us when it is time to come back home. To stay out after it is time to come back home shows something is off in their vertical relationship from sinner to Savior.

It is obvious what they need to do.

Listen to verse 7, *“Even the stork in the heavens knows her times, and the turtledove, swallow and crane keep the time of their coming, but MY PEOPLE know not the rules (or decrees) of the LORD.”* What rule? The rule when it is time to come home. The decree that says for your own good, come home to God.

SI – I grew up in the country. Small town Wisconsin. Rural. Our house was one of 30 houses in an unincorporated town that had one Catholic church, one cemetery, one tavern. We would go out and bike around and race our bikes and catch frogs, and find the drain tunnels that go under the road, and we would skip rocks and climb trees, and pretend all sorts of battle scenes. There were 2 rules from home. 1) when the church bells ring at 6PM, come home for supper. 2) go back out again, and when it gets dark, come home for the night.

Now if you did not come home for supper, you only made that mistake once. The lie that you believe was that you would be fed later. No. Supper is at 6. There is no supper at 7:05, unless you make it yourself, and graham crackers and peanut butter are not much of a supper when you have been biking around all day.

About not coming home at dark, well there are all sorts of lies surrounding that. 1) that the parents did not want you to have any fun, and the real fun must be after dark. But that was a lie. The parents cared about us and wanted us to be fun and live to have more fun the next day. It was built on the second lie. The second lie is that there was no danger. Listen, even the dogs came home at dark. There

are real dangers of snakes and coyotes and raccoons, oh my. Even the mosquitoes are enough of a problem to prevent you enjoying your rebellion of refusing to come home. Obeying parents is part of obeying God. Believing that our parents want what is best for us, is a part of believing that our God wants what is best for us.

Everyone falls down in sin, but we must get back up.

Everyone wanders away in sin, but we must come back home to God.

We all must repent.

A stubborn and meandering boy out in the rural Wisconsin Summer night, is a boy who is taking a stand against his parents, and is taking a stand against God. It is a boy who is deceived about the most basic and most important things in life. It is a boy who would not listen Dad, Mom, brothers, preacher, prophet, or even God Himself. The boy believes that he knows better than everyone else. The boy thinks that he is being so smart, but he is being so silly. That brings us to our 2<sup>nd</sup> point.

## **2. A stubborn and defiant heart is rejecting the Word of The LORD. (v.8-12).**

Let's say the boy survives and grows up and becomes a man. Let's say he keeps on believing that he knows better than anyone else.

Listen to God confronting the man who thinks he is wise. Actually, God is speaking to a whole city of people who think that they are wise in verse 8, "*How can you say, 'We are wise, and the law of The LORD is with us'?* But behold, the lying pen of the scribes has made it into a lie. (v.9), *The wise men shall be put to shame; they shall be dismayed and taken; behold, they have rejected the word of The LORD, so what wisdom is in them?*"

The problem is not with The Holy Bible, but rather the problem is with unholy ministers who will not teach what the Bible truly teaches. The difference between the truly wise, and those who think that they are wise, is their acceptance of God's Word, and the revealing of God's will, instead of their own will. The difference between Christians and non-Christians is repentance. Both fall down, but the Christian gets back up. Both wander from God, but the Christian returns to God. Both say that they are doing what God wants them to do, but only the Christian truly follows God's Word.

Christians are regular in repentance. Christians stay close to the Bible. Christians correct themselves based on the wisdom of the Word of God. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul taught all future generations of young Timothys that the Bible is *profitable for correcting* us. Wise people are open to correction.

But those who reject the Word, are driven by greed. Verse 10, “... *from the least to the greatest everyone is greedy for unjust gain; from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.*” Being called to the ministry is not a protection from the temptation to greed, as we have seen from the scandals of the televangelists. Everyone in ministry must resist the temptation to seek the applause of people, or to seek money. Why? Because wrong motivations start to influence teachings.

Verse 11, “*They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.*” We already heard this in chapter 6:14. A people were desperately in need of repentance, and God was sending strong warnings for them to wake up and heed and turn, but the false teachers do not take God seriously, and tell the people that all is well.

People who do not take God seriously ought to be ashamed of themselves, but especially those who are ministers. Verse 12, “*Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed; they did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among the fallen; when I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says The LORD.*”

When ministers say that homosexuality is normal or loving, or when ministers say that abortion is acceptable, or that a person can migrate from one gender to another, they have forgotten how to blush, because the Scriptures roundly condemn such sins. These are the people who fall down, but stay there. They have rejected the Word of God, and will not repent and will not blush. Eventually, God is coming to punish them.

That brings us to our third point.

### **3. A stubborn and fractured sinner is declining to gather for a time of healing. (v.13-17).**

Verse 13, “*When I would gather them, declares the LORD, there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree; even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them.*”

The lack of grapes and figs to gather is a picture of the lack of a remnant left of God’s people left who will gather. Is there any wisdom left in them to fortify the faith of their ancestors and stay true to the God of the covenant by restoring their covenant bonds with God?

Instead, they gather in another way. Verse 14, “*Why do we sit still? Gather together; let us go into the fortified cities and perish there, for the LORD our God has doomed us to perish and has given us poisoned water to drink, because we have sinned against The LORD.*”

When they see God is coming to punish them, they try to save themselves.

All their efforts to save themselves would fail.

Eventually, the army attacks, and they will say in verse 15, “*We looked for peace, but no good came; for a time of healing, but behold terror.*”

Social breakdown is tied to corrupt religion. The people look for peace. They consulted someone for religious advice.

They were hoping for healing from God, but only according to their own preferences. They will say, ‘my spiritual advisor said God would accept me as long as I did my best.’

This judgment of God is an early rendition of the final judgment of God. People will be shocked and surprised.

They missed the true times of healing. They would not read God’s Word. They would not worship God and change their ways. They would not listen to true spiritual advice.

And so the result is explained again so clearly by God in the last two verses – 16 and 17. “*The snorting of their horses is heard from Dan; at the sound of the neighing of their stallions the whole land quakes. They come and devour the land and all that fills it, the city and those who dwell in it. For behold, I am sending among you serpents, adders that cannot be charmed, and they shall bite you,*’ declares The LORD.”

The invaders will destroy Jerusalem. The judgment of God destroys everything in its path. After that, snakes will be sent back and forth across the city. Why are we repulsed by that thought? It goes back to Genesis 3, when Satan used a serpent to tempt humanity, and then God cursed the serpent to crawl on its belly. Satan is always crawling around, always biting. When Satan’s work is sent by God, the snakes cannot be charmed, the judgment cannot be escaped.

But God is more gracious than the stubbornness of man. After the snakebite, Christ is the antidote. After the influence of Satan has damaged people, they can still come to Christ. After people have died that spiritual death, they can be raised to life again through Jesus. Our Savior takes away the sting of death.

In the day of the prophet Moses, God sent snakes to punish the people for their sins. But then, after judgment, there was salvation. God told Moses to make a serpent, put it on a pole, and those who were bitten by snakes, if they looked up to the snake on the pole, would live.

That gives us hope that after the Satanic destruction of our society, there can still be a time of healing. John 3:14-15, “*as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*”

## **Conclusion:**

### **1. Don't miss the opportunities to meet with God to be fortified in the truth and softened in your heart.**

These passages have a lot of rhetorical questions, graphic images, fierce accusations, dire predictions of destruction, and anticipated lament for a doomed society. Here we find insight into the destructiveness of sin. False gods always fail, and they drag their followers down in a baffled rage and suffering. And in the middle of the nuclear destruction, we hear the pleading heart of God in Jeremiah's cries. And we hear the pleading heart of God in the tears of Jesus.

Just as Jeremiah wept over Jerusalem, so did Jesus later. Luke 19:41-44, *"And when [Jesus] drew near and saw the city [Jerusalem], [Jesus] wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."*

God was there in the person of Jesus, but they stubbornly would not turn to Jesus.

Same today. At what point has a society become so committed to immoral paths, that it has passed the point of return? Western culture may have already done so. But hear the pleading heart of God for you. God sets appointments to meet with you here in the worship services and in the Bible studies, and in your home each day with your own Bible. God visits His people by His Spirit and His Word. God provides healing through times of prayer and fellowship and service together. God replaces falsehoods with truth. God saves people out of a crumbling society. You are living in a time when what God calls an abomination, the culture says is finally the civilized way to live that must be embraced. You need a steady diet of truth to offset the steady deception of the culture in which you live. Where are you getting that steady diet of truth from your God?

SI – in a survey in 2020, the American Bible Society asked about personally reading the Bible on your own - only 9% said that they read it every day, the lowest figure in the 10 years that the American Bible Society has been conducting the survey. The report says that 'From 2011 through 2019, the percentage of people who claim to read the Bible daily has remained fairly steady, averaging

13.7%,” the report outlines. “A decrease of 5% in a single year of 2020 is unprecedented.”

Not to leave you only with bad news, the report also showed that 68% of American adults are ‘Bible curious,’ meaning they want to learn more about Scripture. So that is good. Even animals outperform humans in behaving sensibly. Jesus taught that the birds do better than we do in conquering worry. A donkey knows where to find food better than we know how to find food for our souls. But there are more people curious about the Bible. Why? Because they see that something is wrong. They know it. Call it animal instinct. They understand intuitively that our society is doing things contrary to nature. People don’t change gender, because animals don’t change gender, because God created things the way they are. God created a man and a woman to be married to each other, and the other ways are contrary to nature. It also goes against nature for parents and doctors to end pregnancies with murder. They could come to a Bible study of Romans 1, and when they get to verse 26, would read how people, “*exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature...*”

People are realizing that something is terribly wrong in our culture. This is a time of opportunity for us to gather people and teach what God says, so that people can be blessed with a true time of healing. Will the people gather? Will they embrace what the Bible teaches? The birds still follow their migration patterns, but will humans follow the promptings of their Creator? Will the people who were raised in the church follow the promptings of the Savior in His covenant love?

Jesus said in Luke 13:34-35, “*O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’*”

Your Savior wants to gather you and to heal you. If you are not coming to worship morning and evening, start today. If you are missing out on the excellent teaching on Sundays at 9:30 here, start attending. If you are not reading your Bible every day, start reading. If you are reading your Bible, but not very carefully, get a pen and start underlining, and writing in the margins. If you are not in a weekly Bible study, start attending one. And the more you study the Bible, the more you will realize that you need to actually put it into practice. The healing is in the changed life. Gather with God’s people and worship God, learn from God’s Word, and make consequent changes to your pattern of living. Don’t be deceived

anymore. Don't be stubborn anymore. Gather with Christ and His people. Be disciple, and then disciple others.

John 15:2, "*Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.*"

**Don't miss the opportunities to meet with God to be fortified in the truth and softened in your heart.**