

Jer. 18:1-8, *This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2 “Go down to the potter’s house, and there I will give you my message.” 3 So **I went down to the potter’s house, and I saw him working at the wheel. 4 But the pot he was shaping from the clay was marred in his hands; so the potter formed it into another pot, shaping it as seemed best to him.** 5 Then the word of the LORD came to me: 6 “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?” declares the LORD. “Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. 7 If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, 8 and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned.*

When describing the Christian journey, we often use the illustration found in the 18th chapter of Jeremiah of a Potter shaping clay. It’s a powerful image, but also a difficult reality. God shaped the prophet Jeremiah by placing a difficult call on his life. That is, being the voice of truth in a fallen culture.

The Scottish scholar James Stewart in reflecting upon the difficulty of the task of being a light in a culture who prefers to remain in the shadows, writes these words in his work, *Heralds of God* (1946):

Surely, there are few figures so pitiable as the disillusioned minister of the Gospel. High hopes once cheered him on his way. But now, the indifference and the incalcitrance (stubborn, 'resistant,' 'uncooperative') of the world, the lack of striking visible results, the discovery of the appalling pettiness and spite and touchiness and complacency which can lodge in narrow hearts, the feeling of personal futility. All of these have sear his soul. No longer does the zeal for God’s House devour him. No longer does he mount the pulpit steps in thrilled expectancy that Jesus Christ will come upon His people that day travelling in the greatness of His strength, mighty to save. Dully and drearily he speaks now of what once seemed to him to be the most dramatic tidings in the world - the edge and verve and passion of the message of divine forgiveness, the exhalant, lyrical assurance of the presence of the risen Lord, the amazement of supernatural grace. The urge to cry, woe is me if I preach not the Gospel. All suddenly gone. The man has lost heart. He is suddenly disillusioned and that for an ambassador of Christ is tragedy.

Is it possible that what once gave us such passion, can grow cold? The Christian life is tough. Clay in the hands of the Potter is not an easy process.

In this weeks reading we see a change in leadership from the reign of Josiah (BTW - Zephaniah also prophesied during this time), who reigned for 31 years, to the reign of his son Jehoiakim (Habakkuk who prophesied during this time) who reigned for 11 years. There were, of course, two in between, but Jeremiah fails to mention them in chapter 1 due to the fact they reigned such a short period of time.

We also see a series of **reminders** that Jeremiah recalls for the people as well as a call to **repentance**. Thus, the subtitle of this portion of our study on the top of your outline. In fact, that subtitle could be used for almost any prophetic book.

As a reminder to you of Jeremiah's calling, God says to him in chapter 1 and verses 17-19, "*Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you (I'LL NEED TO BE RESCUED?),*" declares the LORD."

Put yourself in Jeremiah's place. Not only did he have a message to proclaim, he was to proclaim to an audience who wouldn't want to hear. In fact, they wanted to put him to death. That's hostility!

The nation was out of control. Jeremiah states that they had committed two sins: (2:13)

1. *They had forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water, and*
2. *Dug their own cisterns (I shall captain my own ship. I shall be the commander of my destiny and determine the course of my life), *broken ones however, that couldn't hold water.* They had the "brazen look of a prostitute, who had continually refused to blush with any degree of shame" (3:3; 6:15; 8:12). That's the context to which Jeremiah had been called.*

Think back to where you were when the news that our nation had been attacked on September 11, 2001. As we saw the images and heard the stories over the next several days, there was something within each one of us that had died. It was a national heart attack. The war against the west had come to our shores. This was not a bus explosion in Israel, nor a car bombing in the Middle East or an attack in Europe, this was the United States. Not since the war of 1812 had foreigners attacked on our soil.

How many of our fellow citizens raced to New York, to Pennsylvania, to the Pentagon in order to aid in the rescue efforts and provide comfort to the victims?

It was wonderful to see Billy Graham 3 days later deliver a message of hope and affirmation at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.

What if, however, his message had contained, in part, these words, "***the attack on 9/11 was a judgment upon the land because the way you have lived.***" He would have had a battle on his hands, don't you think? Now, I'm not saying the 9/11 was a judgment for the way we have lived, although I didn't like the way we so quickly disavow the possibility.

What I'm saying is that Jeremiah was called to deliver a message of judgment and it wasn't received well as we shall see.

Chapter 11 - A Call to Remember The Covenant - 11:1-6, 16-21

In the first five verses, God reminds him of the way in Covenants are composed. Parties, terms, and promises. Jeremiah affirms his commitment.

In verse 6, God says, "Proclaim all these words in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: 'Listen to the terms of this covenant and follow them.'" OH MAN!! This is NOT going to go well.

Verses 16-21 contain the people's response. Reminds me of the story in 1 Kings 22 of the prophet Micaiah who was put into prison for prophesying against King Ahab. Ahab said of him (verse 8), *"There is still one man through whom we can inquire of the LORD, but I hate him because he never prophesies anything good about me, but always bad. He is Micaiah son of Imlah."* (See Eccl. 4:13, *"Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning"*; Amos 7:12).

Jeremiah's Complaint - 12:1-6

Because of the plot Jeremiah left his hometown and in a moment of despair and defeat began to question God. Why would a holy God permit evil men to prosper while he, a faithful servant of God was being threatened with death? He asked several questions of God. These same questions have been asked throughout the ages of time and we are still asking them today.

"Why does the way of the wicked prosper?" "Why do all the faithless live at ease?" God, it's time for you to do something! "Drag them off like sheep to be butchered, set them apart for the day of slaughter!"

Jeremiah's human nature just jumps out at God. The men of Anathoth, even his own family were ready to kill him. Why would God not mete out justice to them?

See the book of Habakkuk; Ps. 73; 2 Pet. 3:9.

God Responds - 12:14-17

14 Now this is what the Lord says: "I will uproot from their land all the evil nations reaching out for the possession I gave my people Israel. And I will uproot Judah from among them (the captivity). 15 But afterward I will return and have compassion on all of them. I will bring them home to their own lands again, each nation to its own possession. 16 And if these nations truly

learn the ways of my people, and if they learn to swear by my name, saying, 'As surely as the Lord lives' (just as they taught my people to swear by the name of Baal), then they will be given a place among my people. 17 But any nation who refuses to obey me will be uprooted and destroyed. I, the Lord, have spoken!"

"The Christian is [merry/joyful/able to laugh], not because he is blind to injustice and suffering, but because he is convinced that these, in the light of the divine sovereignty, are never ultimate."
– Elton Trueblood

Chapter 26 – A Call To Repentance

Chapter 26 begins with Jeremiah preaching a very unpopular sermon in the city of Jerusalem.

Here we have an abstract of the longer address in chapter 7. In the abstract of chapter 26 three things stand out:

The necessity of obeying God's law (v.4) if the coming punishment is to be averted;

Jeremiah's alignment with other prophets in Judah who had preached repentance or judgment (v.5); and

The unrelieved gravity of the sentence on the temple and on the city of Jerusalem (v.6). Shiloh was not far from Jerusalem; the people could see the evidences of its destruction (c. 1050 B.C.)—a destruction that overtook it even though it had been the first resting place of the ark of the covenant in the land. At Shiloh, Israel went into idolatry (1 Sam 4:1-11); so the ark was captured by the Philistines at the Battle of Ebenezer.

Jeremiah's reference to Shiloh enraged the priests and the prophets whose livelihood depended on the temple and it enraged the people as well. They thought nothing of worshipping Baal, but did not want to hear that their national shrine was going to be destroyed. To them it was blasphemous to declare that God would allow Jerusalem and His holy temple to fall into the hands of heathen nations. An angry mob began to call for Jeremiah's death. Receiving a report of the uproar, officials came to see what was happening and gave Jeremiah the opportunity to defend himself.

Before we read his defense, let just say that there is a boldness in Jeremiah. He has made peace with his calling. A calling that would result in very little tangible fruit.

In chapter 20 and verse 7, he struggles with that calling. This is NOT what I signed up for.

*O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. 8 **WHENEVER** I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long. 9 But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.*

Reminds me of Paul's words in 1 Cor. 9:16, "...When I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me *if I do not preach* the gospel!

*Jer. 26:12, Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. 13 Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you. 14 **As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right.** 15 Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing."*

In an unexpected turn of events, Jeremiah was spared death when the elders of the land remembered that many years before the Prophet Micah had spoken similar words against Jerusalem and the temple. King Hezekiah listened to Micah and led the people in confession and repentance. But even though the elders remembered this long ago incident, there was no change of heart.

Chapter 35 – The Faithful Recabites

Booker T. Washington told a story of an ex-slave from Virginia who had made a contract with his master two or three years prior to the *Emancipation Proclamation*. The agreement was that he would be permitted to buy himself by paying so much per year to his master, and while he was paying, he could work for whomever he pleased. Finding he could get better wages in Ohio, he went there. When freedom for the slaves came, he still owed over three hundred dollars to his former master. At this time he was a free man with no obligation to his master, but he walked from Ohio to Virginia and placed every last dollar, with interest, into his master's hands. The old former slave told Booker T.

Washington that he knew he did not have to pay the debt, but he had given his word and his word had never been broken.

AMAZING! And such were the Recabites

As we come to the end of our study today, we find the narrative of a family of nomads known as the Recabites. This clan of people was loyal to their ancestor, Jonadab, and followed a way of life that was very simple. They had followed this nomadic lifestyle never wavering in their

commitment to the teachings of Jonadab. When Babylon began to terrorize the land, the Recabites took refuge in the city of Jerusalem and for a time lived there. As they came into Jerusalem, they must have been quite a sight. This rag-tag band arrived with their tents, and animals, dressed as simple desert people, and you can imagine that there great interest in them and their lifestyle.

After they had settled in, God told Jeremiah to invite this family to the house of the Lord and to serve them wine. When the Recabites arrived at the party and saw what was being served, they graciously turned down the wine and explained that they had made a vow to their forefather Jonadab that they would never drink wine, build houses for themselves or plant crops or vineyards.

And it seems strange that this story is just right here in the middle of the book of Jeremiah. **WHY?** God has used the Recabites to call attention to His own family - His own children. He used them as an object lesson for the Jews.

The Recabite family had faithfully obeyed the commands of their earthly father for over 200 hundred years! In contrast, God's own had consistently failed to listen to the prophets or obey the commands given by their Heavenly Father. If these people were so faithful to a family tradition, why did God's own people treat His law with such disrespect? God used this story to pronounce condemnation upon His own and to pronounce blessing upon the Recabites. He rewarded their faithfulness and said that from that day forward, the Recabites would never fail to have a man serving God.

The Call to Repentance In our Time

Sin is not just something "out there" in the pages of Jeremiah. Sin is also "in here." Every other worldview claims otherwise. "It's the government's fault," say the anarchists. "It's the wealthy capitalist's fault," say the communists. "It's the inferiors fault," say the racists. "It's the culturally powerfults' fault," say the postmodernists. We live in a culture of the victocrat (according to Larry Elder). It's always someone else's fault.

Purportedly, G. K. Chesterton responded to a London newspaper: Dear Sir: Regarding your article,

"What's Wrong with the World?"

I am.

Yours Truly,

G. K. Chesterton

We who are followers of Christ are continually to call each other back to His authority in all areas.

Theologian T. M. Moore Puts it bluntly:

*The Lord opposes His people from time to time, subjecting them to oppression, futility, division, want and other forms of distress. He does this in order to bring them back to the path of righteousness (Hebrews 12:3-11). When such situations arise, or whenever the people of God find themselves to be in distress, they must first look to themselves, and not to the world, for the cause and thus the remedy of their ills. Our concern must be to discover, not how we may relieve the pressure against or upon us from outside sources, **but where we have strayed from the Lord's agenda and purpose.***

The way out of distress is not, in the first instance, via political change, but by repentance, leading to revival and renewal. We will spend our energies and resources in vain if we think we can bypass repentance in order to secure what we consider to be our rights or freedoms or blessings.

I believe it's important to remember that the Scriptures speak corporately to God's people even more than they speak to us personally. All of the New Testament letters, except for four (Titus, Philemon, and 1 and 2 Timothy), were written to churches, not individuals.

Think of Nehemiah's quest to restore Israel's dignity, worship and defenses after their captivity in Babylon. When he learned that the walls of Jerusalem were in disrepair and the remaining Israelites were "in great trouble and shame," he courageously took his concern to the king of Persia. But first, he "sat down and wept and mourned for days, and [he] continued fasting and praying before the God of heaven" (Nehemiah 1:4).

What he prayed is VERY instructive:

"O LORD, God of heaven, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with those who love him and obey his commands, 6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel. ***I confess the sins we Israelites, including myself and my father's house, have committed against you. 7 We have acted very wickedly toward you. We have not obeyed the commands, decrees and laws you gave your servant Moses.***

8 "Remember the instruction you gave your servant Moses, saying, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the nations, 9 but if you return to me and obey my commands, then even if

your exiled people are at the farthest horizon, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place I have chosen as a dwelling for my Name.'

10 They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great strength and your mighty hand. 11 O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of this your servant and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give your servant success today by granting him favor in the presence of this man." I was cupbearer to the king. (Nehemiah 1:5-11).

Note how Nehemiah personally shared in the responsibility for Israel. He willingly embraced the guilt of his nation, though his brief footnote after the prayer ("Now I was cupbearer to the king") indicates he may have held no direct guilt for their disgrace. Sin is personal, but never private. God's people corporately share in both God's blessings and the Church's failings.

God's Gracious Gift of Repentance

The Bible describes repentance as one of God's best gifts, to be embraced

with gratitude, not resisted out of fear or shame. It is proof, Paul wrote to the church in Rome, of God's kindness (2:4 - "God's kindness leads you toward repentance"). By leading us to see our failures, God graciously leads us to restored lives.

Through it, God provides three things we can never achieve on our own.

First, through repentance we are made right with God. It's beautiful that the God we offend enables us to be reconciled to Him. When we are, it exemplifies to the world that God is real and present and has not abandoned the broken cultures or broken lives that have so long denied him.

Second, repentance reconciles broken relationships. This is more than "I said I was sorry, so you should forgive me." Those who otherwise would be enemies actually can be reconciled to one another. This pleases God.

We must remember that people are never our real enemies. Might it be possible to maintain our convictions while building bridges instead of walls?

Chick-fil-A president Dan Cathy proved it is. After his comments about gay marriage on a radio program created a national uproar, Cathy personally reached out to Shane Windemeyer, the man who had organized a national campaign against him and his restaurant chain. Windemeyer revealed their surprising friendship (as well as his decision to suspend the national campaign against Chick-fil-A after he attended the Chick-fil-A Bowl Game as a personal guest of the Cathy family:

Throughout the conversations Dan expressed a sincere interest in my life, wanting to get to know me on a personal level. He wanted to know about where I grew up, my faith, my family, even my husband, Tommy. In return, I learned about his wife and kids and gained an appreciation for his devout belief in Jesus Christ and his commitment to being "a follower of Christ" more than a "Christian." Dan expressed regret and genuine sadness when he heard of people being treated unkindly in the name of Chick-fil-A but he offered no apologies for his genuine beliefs about marriage.

This sort of bridge building requires humility. There is too great of a difference in the morality that is being demanded by the Church and the morality that is seen in the Church. There are discrepancies in the love and forgiveness we proclaim and the love and forgiveness we portray.

Third, repentance strengthens our own moral convictions. We are much more likely to cave in to wrong thinking and wrongdoing when we sweep our failures under the rug. Repentance not only restores us to God and repairs our relationships with others, but also in a very real sense, it is the only way to be our true selves. Through repentance, we become more like the people God calls us to be.

I love this prayer that has guided God's people for many generations:

Most merciful God, We confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed, by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We are truly sorry and we humbly repent. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on us and forgive us; that we may delight in your will, and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Name. Amen.