



Hope for the Backslidden
Jeremiah 3:19-25

19 " But I said: 'How can I put you among the children And give you a pleasant land, A beautiful heritage of the hosts of nations?' " And I said: 'You shall call Me, "My Father," And not turn away from Me.'

20 Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, So have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel," says the LORD.

21 A voice was heard on the desolate heights, Weeping and supplications of the children of Israel. For they have perverted their way; They have forgotten the LORD their God.

22 "Return, you backsliding children, And I will heal your backslidings." "Indeed we do come to You, For You are the LORD our God.

23 Truly, in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, And from the multitude of mountains; Truly, in the LORD our God Is the salvation of Israel.

24 For shame has devoured The labor of our fathers from our youth -- Their flocks and their herds, Their sons and their daughters.

25 We lie down in our shame, And our reproach covers us. For we have sinned against the LORD our God, We and our fathers, From our youth even to this day, And have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God."

God has been addressing his people Judah as the faithful husband of a faithless wife, but now he turns to addressing them as the Father of disobedient and backslidden child.

It is very sad when parents desperately want to bless their child, but because of the child's awful behavior, all that the child gets are curses.

For instance, I put my parents through a rather long and difficult time during my school years. So I'm sure that they were looking forward to my graduation from middle school even more than I was. That week they promised that after the graduation ceremony we'd go out to dinner at Benihana (and I loved Benihana), and that I'd get a really cool graduation present. Unfortunately, *my plan* was to wreck the graduation ceremony and I succeeded well beyond even my expectations. So instead of the blessings my parents wanted to give me, my humiliated parents drove me straight home and sent me to my room. I believe I am still technically grounded from that event. It is an abiding testimony to their mercy that I survived my childhood.

It had been God the Fathers desire to give Judah a pleasant land "a beautiful heritage of the hosts of nations." He had indeed taken them out of bondage in Egypt, He had brought them through the desert into the Land of Canaan and He had given it to them and said if they would Love Him with their Whole Heart, then He would take care of them and provide for them. They would not have droughts,

or lack for any good thing, rather they would be in a land of milk and honey. He would be their Father, and they would be His Children.

But instead they had turned away from God, they had worshipped idols, and had done all the things he had told them not to. HE had offered them blessings, and they chose cursings, He had offered them Life, and they chose death. They had forgotten Him time and again, they had become practical atheists, and it had led to sin. As Matthew Henry reminds us that this “practical atheism” is the root of all sin:

Forgetting the Lord our God is at the bottom of all sin. If men would remember God, his eye upon them and their obligation to him, they would not transgress as they do.

Now their sins were different from those of the pagan peoples around them. The pagans had never known God. But Judah, they were his children, and they had backslidden. They had tasted and seen that the Lord was good, but they had walked away from Him. How many people raised in the church have done that!

So how should God respond? His people had been unfaithful in every way, they had betrayed their covenant, they had worshiped idols, committed abominable sins. And they had been warned that these things would lead to death. They only thing that they deserved at this point was JUDGMENT.

And yet, that is not what they Lord desires to give them. Instead He holds out mercy to them He says he will heal them of their backslidings. Now that is an interesting word to use. He will not just forgive them He will HEAL THEM.

The thing about sin is that we think it will make us happy, that it will make us feel better. But in the end our sins wound us, they break our hearts, and weigh us down with heavy burdens. And so the Lord tells us he will not only forgive us, but like the good physician that he is he says he will heal us.

Now the bad physicians of Jeremiah’s time that is the false prophets also offered the people healing, because you see it’s impossible not to see the consequences of sin in the disintegration of society, and the misery of the people. But they did not offer true healing, they offered quick fixes, but they couldn’t remove the consequences of sin or even the abiding presence of it. And so the Lord says of them in Jeremiah 6:14 ***“They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, Saying, ‘Peace, peace!’ When there is no peace.”***

Persistent sin had left individuals and indeed their entire society mortally wounded, and they just put a band-aid over it and said, ***““all fixed” go in peace!”***

Our own society abounds with that kind of healing. We see what a mess sin has made of us and our nation, we know something has to be done, and there are legions of politicians, psychologists, doctors, new-age gurus, and false-religions with all sorts of different band-aids they can apply to the mortal wound we have. But not one of them can truly heal us. They cannot forgive our sins, they cannot make us born-again, they cannot change our hearts. Only Christ can do that.

Now we see in verse 21 that they were sorry for their sins, but they place where they are weeping and praying is not the Temple in Jerusalem it is the **desolate heights**. The high places where they had worshipped their idols. A lot of commentators have speculated as to WHY they are weeping on the heights, are they still trusting in their idols? Do they still refuse to worship Him the way He asked?

The penitents are weeping but is the weeping sincere. Is the repentance sincere?

Those of you who are parents or those of you who have been children no about feigned repentance. *“I am soooooo sorry I didn’t do what you told me to. I will never, ever, ever, do it again!”*

Even when someone IS genuinely sorry for their sins. There is the worldly sorrow that someone who is hurt by the consequences has, and the genuine sorrow that someone who is grieved that they sinned has. Paul explains the difference this way:

2 Cor. 7:9 Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.

10 For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Judas was sorry, but his sorrow led to despair and self-murder. Peter was sorry for His sins and it led him to repentance.

Here I believe that while the repentance obviously wasn’t nationwide some were indeed expressing a genuine repentance for three reasons.

1) Because they it led them to return to God: In verse 22 we hear their response to God’s offer: **“Indeed we do come to You, For You are the LORD our God.”**

2) They confess that their idols are empty and that the Hills really are a place that is desolate of salvation and that only God can bring salvation: v. 23 **Truly, in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, And from the multitude of mountains; Truly, in the LORD our God Is the salvation of Israel.**

3) They don’t minimize their sins, but confess them openly and admit their shame: v. 25 **“We lie down in our shame, And our reproach covers us. For we have sinned against the LORD our God, We and our fathers, From our youth even to this day, And have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.”** Now THAT is a confession of sin! So many people deflect the blame or minimize when they are confronted by their sin, but these penitents don’t. Like David when confronted by Nathan, they say **“I HAVE SINNED!”**

I have no doubt that they felt the bitterness of separation from the Father and desired to be restored.

Applications: To have known the sense of the sweetness of God’s grace and to have lost it through backsliding is often an even greater pain than that of the unbeliever. It is why David cried out, in Psalm 51:11-12 **“11 Do not cast me away from Your presence, And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.**

12 Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.”

But in order to have it restored, you must not stay where you are. Your only hope is to get up and go back:

Luke 15:18 'I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you,

19 "and I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants." '

20 "And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

We must repent therefore:

Our attitude towards sin should be one of true sorrow, not flinging the blame on others, regarding it as fate, or a sickness, or natural

And there are many things that can stop us from truly repenting, for instance thinking sin isn't sin, or that there are other ways to be forgiven, or that there will be time to repent later, or simply loving our sin so much we won't let it go.

Then again it is sometimes the case that we just don't understand the Grace of God given to us through Christ. Some people honestly despair because they feel that grace is something that they have to be good enough to deserve, and deep down they know they aren't worthy, because they aren't good.

David Nasser, Jumping through Fires, muslim refugee from Iran

Big Sinner, bad boy in High School

Christians kept visiting Him

Took him out to eat

They went out to a diner and he notes that the waitress gave them lousy service:

"She was tired and in no mood to deal with a bunch of high-maintenance, dessert-only kids. We finished and left. As they always did, somebody paid for my food. These nights out never cost me a dime.

When we piled back into Larry's car, I ended up sitting on two people, scrunched against the back seat window on the driver's side. As Larry started backing out of the parking space, I heard a loud tap tap tap an inch from my left ear. I turned toward the sound and saw our waitress right in my face at the window, our noses separated only by the thick-ness of the glass. Larry slammed on the brakes, rolled down my window, and then craned his neck around to look at the waitress. Because of the car next to us, she couldn't get to his front door to talk to him, so she poked her head through my window, as Larry twisted around to face her. Now our three noses were almost touching.

"Get out of the car!" she yelled. If only she'd been that energetic when she was waiting on us.

"Get out of the car!" she repeated, short of breath from her run outside.

"What is it?" Larry asked.

She said she'd just been chewed out by her boss for not stopping us. We'd made a big mistake and overpaid. By a lot. The bill was thirty dollars, and we left more than one hundred and thirty; She held up a wad of bills.

Larry smiled. "Ma'am, that wasn't a mistake. We know

it's nearly Christmas, and we know you're working hard. We got you at the end of a long and tiring day; We just wanted to

and bless you, so we emptied out our pockets. If we'd had more we'd have given you more. And we'll be back next week."

The waitress yelled right in my ear. "Make sure you my table!" Big tears welled up in her eyes and... came down her her face. I looked at Larry, that massive hulk of a linebacker, and he was crying too. Everybody in the car was crying, I was crying! I couldn't help it. We left her in the parking lot clutching the tip of a lifetime. Watching her as we pulled away; I thought to myself, so that's grace.

Grace is getting the opposite of what you deserve.

Jesus doesn't love you because you're good, he loves you because he's good.

The Father *knows* you are a sinner, knows it better than you do yourself, and yet he is still willing and able to offer you forgiveness because of what He has done through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ:

1 John 4:10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

“The soul believes God’s promises. It recognises God’s claim. It returns to Him. We are attracted by His grace. The sunflower turns to the sun. ... The consciousness of sin remains and is even deepened and yet is different. A light of hope is in it.” – Alexander McLaren

I hope if you have that sense of your sins and you have come to His Son Jesus.