

As Judgment Looms

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Bible Verse: Jeremiah 2-29
Preached on: Sunday, October 4, 2020

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Well, it's a delight, it's a privilege, it's a responsibility as we turn to God's word here this morning to consider what it might do to enlighten us on the days in which we live. If you're visiting, if you've just joined us recently, we are in the book of Jeremiah in the Old Testament and I invite you to turn there. We're doing a very brief survey of the book of Jeremiah because we believe that it gives us perspective that can help us understand the times in which we live.

Last time, we looked at chapter 1. We saw how God called a prophet to be the voice for him. It was a personal call, a direct personal call that Jeremiah received from God. As we saw, it was a painful call that worked itself out in his life as he suffered greatly as he sought to serve God and to be faithful to that prophetic call that was placed upon his life. What we're going to do here this morning is a little bit different. Today I want to give you a sense of the themes of the book of Jeremiah because obviously with 52 chapters, if we would try to go through that verse by verse, we would get lost in the weeds in trying to do something like that. There's a way to approach this book that gives us a sense of its message and gives us a sense of perspective about our own day if we simply approach it in a little bit different manner here this morning. We're going to look at some themes from the book of Jeremiah and I think that Jeremiah will help us interpret the times in which we live. I'm going to presuppose your familiarity with the chaos and the violence and the uncertainty and the sickness that are permeating our society. There's no need to recite those facts here this morning as we get started, those are all well-known to all of you. There's no need to recite the uncertainty that lies ahead of our own nation here in America in the weeks that lie ahead as potentially momentous changes could be in the offing for us. There's no need to talk about those things. What I want to do here this morning in keeping with our Scripture reading from Matthew 16, is for us to try to do something to discern the times in which we live as Jesus rebuked his nation when he lived for not doing that. We need to discern the times in which we live and the way that you do that is not by starting with an examination of the political processes that are taking place, you come to God's word and you understand what are the themes and what are the principles that undergird the entire outworking of the moral universe and that's what we need to consider, and as we do that, it will give us naturally a perspective on the times in which we live.

There are four themes that I want to highlight for you this morning from the book of Jeremiah and these are going to be in some ways familiar themes but we're going to see them in a different context than what we've normally done in the past for I have not taught from Jeremiah here from this pulpit at all. So as we do that, as we come to Jeremiah we find the cornerstone of the book and the cornerstone of the moral universe and the cornerstone of what our own perspective on our times should be, found in point 1 here: the sovereignty of God. The sovereignty of God. Now that's a theme that we've talked about a lot over the years and it's a theme that we will continue to talk about because, beloved, in the times in which we live, times like this, it is very easy to lose sight of the fact that God is on his throne, that while things are uncertain and contingent from our perspective, they are not uncertain and contingent from God's perspective at all. God has established an eternal plan and he is working it out perfectly according to his timetable and in his way, and that may seem to result in a lot of change and uncertainty and difficulties from our perspective, but there is a purpose and the hand of God is in absolutely everything that happens, and the sovereignty of God runs throughout the book of Jeremiah, as I will show you in just a moment.

Let me give you just a definition of sovereignty, of God's sovereignty, to get us started here. To speak of the sovereignty of God is to speak of God's independence. He is absolutely independent to do as he pleases. God is absolutely independent to do as he pleases. There are no laws that are above God that regulate him. There are no beings that are above God that tell him what to do. There is no one that he looks to for information or for instruction because he is an omniscient God. God knows everything and he is the highest power in the universe and nothing restrains him in his creation, in his subordinate creation, nothing restrains him from accomplishing exactly what he intends to do. So God's will, my friends, will prevail no matter what and we need to remember that.

Sovereignty speaks of God's absolute independence to do as he pleases and it also speaks of his absolute control over the actions of all of his creatures. God is in absolute control over the actions of all of his creatures. Men may rebel against God but they only do so within the bounds that he has established. They do not go beyond the bounds of his will, the bounds of his limitations. God holds the breath of every man, woman and child in his hands. God is in complete control over the actions of all of his creatures. He knows the hairs on their head. He knows when a sparrow falls. He forms the lilies of the field. Beloved, we see it in the details and it's of the greater magnitude of things as well. The book of Daniel speaks about how he causes kingdoms to rise and fall, so whether you're looking at a small level or the greatest level possible on an earthly perspective, God is independent and he is in absolute control. When we say God, we're speaking of the God of the Bible, the God of the 66 books of the Bible, not some god that people make up in their minds or the god of false religion. The true God. The real God. The sovereign God who has made himself known in the skies and in the Scripture. That God is the God who is independent. That God is the God who is in absolute control of all of his creatures. So we feel the threat, so to speak, of seeing things from a creaturely perspective as we see wicked people doing violent things and violating the commandments of God and all of that, and we feel our weakness and inability to do anything about it. The things that lie ahead in our nation over the next several weeks are completely beyond our control, what

you and I have to guard ourselves against is projecting our limitations upon the God that we worship. He is under no such restrictions. He is not a creature like we are. He is not destined to die as we are. He is the living God, and as a result of that, he is sovereign over it all.

So God is absolutely independent to do as he pleases, he is in absolute control over the actions of all of his creatures so that, here's the outworking of it, so that nothing thwarts his decreed will. People may violate and break his moral will but they cannot stop what God has determined to happen and nothing acts outside the bounds of that will that God has determined. In Ephesians 1 it says that God works all things after the counsel of his own will. God determined, God decreed before the beginning of time what would happen, and everything that happens is an outworking of that and God is directing it all to accomplish his purposes. Whether it's disease, whether it's elections, whether it's other kinds of rebellion in the church or in the world, God is over it all. God is over all. He is over man. He is over sin. He is over nature. He is over everything and you and I must remember this as we look at the book of Jeremiah, we'll see it illustrated in a moment, and we must remember it as we go through life. The contingency that we see around us from a human perspective is not the way that it works in the mind and in the power of God. His hand is on the wheel and his hand is steering it all to his purposes.

And so we must start there and the sovereignty of God is the theological foundation of the whole book of Jeremiah. As Jeremiah went to the nation of Israel, the nation of Judah more particularly, the people of God, he called them. God called the nation of Israel into existence. Jeremiah says that the time was soon coming from their perspective that he would scatter Israel, and yet beyond that scattering God would bring them back. And so God formed the nation, God scatters the nation, God restores the nation, and over the course of the outworking of decades and centuries and millennia of time, God is sovereignly working it all out without being restricted by time or the actions of men.

Let's look at a couple of passages here that will only take us a moment here. First of all, we see Jeremiah telling Israel in their day that God was raising up the nation of Babylon to chastise his people for their sin. Look at Jeremiah 5:15. Jeremiah 5:15 where God is speaking and he says,

15 "Behold, I am bringing a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel," declares the LORD. "It is an enduring nation, It is an ancient nation, A nation whose language you do not know, Nor can you understand what they say.

Notice what God is saying and you'll remember that Jeremiah was called to prophesy to a sinful rebellious people, and notice what God says and notice again, notice subject, verb and direct object. Subject: I, God. God is saying, "I am doing something." What is he doing? What's the verb? I am bringing. And what is he bringing? Direct object: I am bringing a nation against you.

Now just step back. You know, we read this in the comfort of our homes or in a comfortable place like this and it's easy to lose sight of the meaning and the significance of these words. This is God speaking, speaking to a nation and saying, "I am going to raise up, I am bringing up another nation to come upon you." These international movements of nations were happening at the purpose and the hand of God. He was sovereign, he was independent to do what he pleases even with nations.

Look over at Jeremiah 25. Jeremiah 25:11. In Jeremiah 25:11, God says,

11 'This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.'

So God raises up the king of Babylon in his sovereign power and prerogative. He directs the actions of the nation so that it brings pain and desolation upon the land of the sinful people. And not only that, God establishes the time length in advance of how long this captivity will last. He limits the time of captivity in advance. He says, "You will serve the king of Babylon for 70 years." And so watch this, God sees his sinful people, he raises up a nation to come down upon the, he says, "This will execute judgment upon you and it will last for 70 years." He determines the time before it even begins.

So he brings judgment, he limits the time of the judgment, and he says he will bring them back. Now looking over at Jeremiah 32, a very familiar and important passage in this book and in really the whole of the Bible. Jeremiah 32:17. Here you see expressed in chapter and verse the theological things of which we have been speaking about the sovereignty of God, the sovereignty of God forming the foundation, the theological foundation of the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah's praying and he says in verse 17,

17 'Ah Lord GOD! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You, 18 who shows lovingkindness to thousands, but repays the iniquity of fathers into the bosom of their children after them, O great and mighty God. The LORD of hosts is His name; 19 great in counsel and mighty in deed, whose eyes are open to all the ways of the sons of men, giving to everyone according to his ways and according to the fruit of his deeds;

26 ... the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, 27 "Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything too difficult for Me?"

Now beloved, step back with me. We see the theological theme of sovereignty in the book and let's just step back and remember a couple of things as we contemplate the day in which we live, as we seek to discern the times in which we live. God is immutable, meaning God does not change. The God who was like this 2,500 years ago in the book of Jeremiah is the same God who is ruling and reigning over the world today. There is nothing too difficult for him. And so as seemingly adverse things come upon us, as change comes upon our families or change comes upon the world, as it seems that wicked

people are gaining ascendancy and violence is prevailing in the streets, what you and I must do and start with, our perception and our understanding and discernment of such things is this: we must always start our thinking and assessment by remembering the sovereignty of God. God is in sovereign control of this and no one is acting outside the ultimate purpose of God in what is happening. God has the perfect power to stop it instantly if he wishes because nothing is too difficult for him, and if he chooses not to do that, then apparently there are other purposes that he's working out. Apparently we're meant to live under the specter of violence in our country, the uncertainty, the disease, all of these things. God intends for us to live under these things for the times in which we live because he's sovereign and none of this is coming to us apart from the outworking of his purposes.

Now look, beloved, I know that most of you are here because you believe the Bible, you believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, in theory you believe the things that I am saying and that's good and we want to strengthen one another in that faith, what I want you to see is that you need to take the mental realm of those things that you assent to in your mind and apply them and discern the world that you live in in light of that sovereignty. In light of the family issues that you are facing, you interpret it all that, "Somehow in one way or another a sovereign God has brought this to me. I don't need to worry about the uncertainty from my perspective because God is in absolute control and He has, nothing has compromised His independence or His ability to deal with the world or to deal with life as I see it." You see, we read Jeremiah from 2,500 years ago in round terms, we read it from 2,500 years ago and see the sovereign God at stake, at work, being proclaimed by his prophet, what you and I must understand as we look at our times is that God is still sovereign today. He is still sovereign in the day in which we live, and so we keep that in mind.

If you looked at your bulletin before you came in, you realize that the title of the message today is "As Judgment Looms." It's kind of a dual purpose: judgment was looming in Jeremiah's day as we'll continue to see, and perhaps we're in days, we're approaching days of judgment here in our own world and in our own country. How are we to think in light of these things as judgment looms, as things seem to be, you know, as things seem to be coming apart at the seams. You and I must come back to the fact that God is sovereign in it all and we never never never never let go of that principle. We lay hold of that principle and we hold it no matter what else comes. If the mountains fall into the sea, we stand firm and say, "No, God is still sovereign. I can't see it. This is a little bit frightening to me. I don't know what's going to come. I feel the churning in my stomach just like the prophet Habakkuk did. But God is sovereign over this," and you hold onto that and you do not let go of it.

Now secondly, why would judgment come upon the very people of God? I mean, in one sense you wonder how, you know, you could ask, "Well, why would God judge His own people?" We're talking about the Jews in the Old Testament in the days of Jeremiah here. God had established covenant with them, with Abraham and with Moses. They were the people of God. They were to be a kingdom of priests and God was their God and they were his people. Why would God judge his own people? Why wouldn't he just deliver

them from all of their problems? Well, point 2 is the sin of the people. The sin of the people. The Jews had broken covenant with God in so many many ways and I'm just going to show you two themes to help illustrate this. These people upon whom judgment was coming, they were guilty. They were guilty as sin. They were guilty with sin. Their lives and their nation was black with darkness and rebellion, and this was undeniable and Jeremiah courageously proclaimed it to them as you see in the book that bears his name. God had made a covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob, with the people that would come from their loins, but despite that privileged status that they had, they pursued idolatry and in that had multiple manifestations.

Look at Jeremiah 2:11-13 to start. And again, this is just kind of like going to a restaurant and getting a sampler platter. You know, this is not the full meal or the full course, we're just getting a sampling of what the full course of things in Jeremiah would be if we pursued it in a deeper verse by verse study. Jeremiah 2:11. Remember, God had formed Israel as a nation and given birth to them. He had established covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He delivered them from Egypt and established them in a land. He went before them and drove out nations before them to give them their own land, a place flowing with milk and honey where they would be able to live under his laws and be a people and experience his blessing. It was a gracious act of God upon an unworthy, undeserving, small, tiny people that he blessed them like that in the centuries beforehand. And what had they done? They had turned their back against him. Rather than giving thanks for being in such a wonderful land and being the people of God with the revelation of God, rather than giving thanks to him what did they do? And God convicts them. God as it were, calls them into the courtroom and reads charges against them that could not be refuted.

Jeremiah 2:11,

11 "Has a nation changed gods When they were not gods? But My people have changed their glory For that which does not profit.

They traded their position as the people of God to pursue Baal and false idols and God says,

12 "Be appalled, O heavens, at this, And shudder, be very desolate," declares the LORD. 13 For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns That can hold no water.

"Here I am a fountain of living water and they turn their back on Me." And what did they get in exchange? They got broken pots that can't hold water. "They had an ever-living source of blessing in Me. They rejected Me to pursue that which could only bring their own harm and destruction." And it was personal. Look at what he says there in verse 13. This isn't simply a matter of outward conformity to rules and regulations. He says, "They have forsaken Me. They have personally rejected the God who gave them their life and nation." Now you and I need to view this from the perspective of God, not from the

perspective of people. This is not right. This is unjust. This is utterly wicked. This is utterly inexplicable. This is utterly unjustifiable that they have done this. They deserve to be judged if they've rejected their God.

Chapter 5, beginning in verse 7. The living, holy, gracious God has been spurned by the people to whom Jeremiah spoke and God asks a rhetorical question in chapter 5, verse 7.

7 "Why should I pardon you? Your sons have forsaken Me And sworn by those who are not gods. When I had fed them to the full, They committed adultery And trooped to the harlot's house. 8 They were well-fed lusty horses, Each one neighing after his neighbor's wife. 9 Shall I not punish these people," declares the LORD, "And on a nation such as this Shall I not avenge Myself?"

"Here I have blessed you, I have given you everything that you could possibly need or want and I love you, and you have spurned Me and you have pursued sin and rebellion and other gods." What can we say about a people like that except that they are wickedly deserving judgment? They deserve punishment from a holy God who had been so good to them despite their undeserving and for centuries they had pursued this course.

Look at Jeremiah 16:10-12. There's this disbelief amongst the people as Jeremiah carries the message of judgment to them. There's this self-righteous indignation amongst them, "Why would we suffer like this?" Verse 10,

10 "Now when you tell this people all these words, they will say to you, 'For what reason has the LORD declared all this great calamity against us? And what is our iniquity, or what is our sin which we have committed against the LORD our God?'

Do you understand that they're not really asking for information here? They're not asking for information. Jeremiah, as you saw, has laid it all out to them. They're accusing God of injustice. They're accusing God of unrighteousness. "By what right does God bring calamity upon us?" Verse 11,

11 Then you are to say to them, 'It is because your forefathers have forsaken Me,' declares the LORD, 'and have followed other gods and served them and bowed down to them; but Me they have forsaken and have not kept My law. 12 You too have done evil, even more than your forefathers; for behold, you are each one walking according to the stubbornness of his own evil heart, without listening to Me.

You see, beloved, their idolatry was about more than statues, stone statues in religion, it was a way of life for them. They had betrayed allegiance and trust to Yahweh and exchanged it for foreign gods who were no gods at all. They had turned their back on their own God who had brought them into existence and they were guilty of the worst kind of spiritual hypocrisy.

Look at Jeremiah 7.

8 "Behold, you are trusting in deceptive words to no avail. 9 Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely

There are four of the 10 Commandments right there. God brings his moral law to bear upon their conscience.

9 "Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, 10 then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered!'--that you may do all these abominations? 11 Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your sight? Behold, I, even I, have seen it," declares the LORD.

You see, in their lives they had pursued this spiritual adultery, they had pursued this rebellion against God and yet they maintain the outward form of Mosaic religion and wanting no accountability for their past actions in life and their past rebellion and sin, saying, "I'm not going to deal with the past. I'm just going to come in here and claim the blessing of God on my life." God says, "I'm having none of it. I'm having none of this hypocrisy." No, the worship of God is from a true and sincere heart, a true and repentant heart, and so this outward form means nothing to God and yet they pursued in the show of religion without the real heart of it.

Look at chapter 8, verses 4 through 7. God tells Jeremiah,

4 "You shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD, "Do men fall and not get up again? Does one turn away and not repent? 5 Why then has this people, Jerusalem, Turned away in continual apostasy? They hold fast to deceit, They refuse to return. 6 I have listened and heard, They have spoken what is not right; No man repented of his wickedness, Saying, 'What have I done?' Everyone turned to his course, Like a horse charging into the battle.

They were so bent on sin they just pursued it with abandon; like a stallion running into the pasture, they ran after their sin. Verse 7,

7 Even the stork in the sky Knows her seasons; And the turtledove and the swift and the thrush Observe the time of their migration; But My people do not know The ordinance of the LORD.

Spiritual adultery they were guilty of. They had forsaken God but were outwardly still claiming his name. God says, "Enough. Judgment must come. I'll bring a nation for 70 years upon you and you will feel the pain that your sin deserves."

Now let's stop for a moment, think about our own country, think about our own world in which we live. Let's do that, shall we, for just a moment in light of these things? And let's not forget something very significant at the start. This is profoundly important for you to recognize as we look upon our own nation and the times in which we live. Everybody wants to talk about, "If My people humble themselves and pray, then I'll return and heal their land." Do you know what? That's not written to the United States. We are not the people of God. There is no covenant with the nation of America and yet we are guilty and more of all of the same sins of which God convicted his own people. We're not the people of God and we're more guilty than they are. What possible hope is there? Do you understand, do you realize how much we need to abandon our self-righteousness as though we deserve something good from God? I'm speaking nationally here. Our nation has no covenant with God. We are guilty of the same sins. Let me ask you and you answer me honestly. You go to Exodus 20 and you read the 10 Commandments and you tell me which of the 10 Commandments we do not violate repeatedly in our land with abandon and with no sense of shame and no sense of repentance. Which one of them? You won't find one. You won't find one either in the first table dealing with the worship of God, or in the second table dealing with the nature of man and love for man, I should say. It reveals the nature of man. You know, our whole entertainment industry is built on glorying in sin against God and that's what our people drink and that's what they love.

Now on what basis, then, should we expect to escape judgment if God's own people didn't in their day? We need to discern the times. We need to understand that spiritually speaking in terms of our vulnerability to the imminent judgment of God, we're in a far worse situation than Israel was in the Old Testament. At least they had covenant with God. At least he was their God. We have nothing like that in our nation. There is no covenant between God and the United States of America and our guilt is greater than this.

The question is not, our realm of thinking should not be, "Oh, I hope that God fixes all of this for us." The question that should be in our mind is, "Why hasn't God judged us sooner? Why have we still received mercy when we're not even His people?" We're speaking nationally not speaking as the church here this morning so far. I'll let you know when I'm shifting to address it differently. Do you see? We've got disease and uncertainty and all of these problems that are facing, some of it in a Romans 1 sense, not an indication that God needs to judge us but that God is already judging us. This things are a manifestation of the judgment of God and our people, our nation, rather than resenting it and saying, "Why this on us," as the Israelites do, the only proper understanding is, "Of course these things are coming upon us. We deserve this because we have so thoroughly violated the righteousness of God as expressed in His law."

But do you know what? It gets worse. It gets worse for Israel. It wasn't just their spiritual adultery, it was in their religious life as well. So point 2 here, we're talking about the sin of the people. We've looked at, first of all, their spiritual adultery, there's a second aspect to it and that is their false prophets and their false leaders. Their false prophets and their false leaders. This is so abominable and it is such a mirror of much of what passes for spiritual teaching in our world today. It's frightening to me to say these things because to lay this out before you, it's frightening because we're just as a nation, we're just, we're

opened and laid bare before him with whom we have to do. This strips away our outward appearance and exposes how spiritually naked we are before a sovereign righteous God, and God systematically brings this to bear on the people of the Jews in Jeremiah's day.

Do you know what, it wasn't just that they had this spiritual adultery going on in their lives, they had false prophets who affirmed them in their lifestyle, who affirmed them in what they were doing, said, "It's okay. God promises you prosperity in the midst of it," utterly ignoring their vast need for repentance. Chapter 5, verse 30. Jeremiah stands humanly alone against all of this with the exception of a few contemporary prophets of his day, including Habakkuk, part of his day anyway. The Bible says,

30 "An appalling and horrible thing Has happened in the land: 31 The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule on their own authority; And My people love it so!

The religion was corrupt. Everybody knew it and they liked it that way. There is no possible merit in these people to turn away the righteous judgment of God. None. Zero. They were spiritual adulterers, their religion even was corrupt, and they liked it that way, they loved it that way. They caressed their own sin.

Verse 13 of chapter 6. Chapter 6, verse 13,

13 "For from the least of them even to the greatest of them, Everyone is greedy for gain, And from the prophet even to the priest Everyone deals falsely. 14 They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, 'Peace, peace,' But there is no peace.

Beloved, if you see anything of the significance of that, it out to just send shivers down your spine. The prevailing discourse in the nation at that time was that, "We are a people that are under the peace of God. God is going to bless us." The reality was an underlying corruption that was undeniable and so prophets, men speaking in the name of God, mind you, promising peace to a wicked people and God simply says, "I see it all. I hear them proclaiming peace to these guilty lawbreakers but there is no peace. Judgment is looming. Judgment is imminent. Don't buy the promise of peace. Judgment is right on the doorstep." And in our day, especially in this age where everything's measured by polls and what majority opinion is, you go by majority opinion in that day and everything's just fine and it is a small minority report saying, "No, everything is not fine. Judgment is right on the doorstep. God is bringing judgment and you need to repent." That's the minority report. So what do we do? We measure things by majority opinion today and the majority's right and contrary voices are wrong. Don't be fooled, God has never determined truth by majority opinion. Not once. Never has, never will. Truth is measured by God himself. Christ himself is the truth. The word of God is the truth and that which contradicts it is false lie and sinful.

Look over at Jeremiah 14:13-15, and Jeremiah feels the heat here. He feels the heat because the public is against him and other prophets speaking, mind you, in the name of

Yahweh, claiming to be a servant of the living God and contradicting Jeremiah's words, Jeremiah feels the heat of it and he goes to the Lord and he tells him about it. Verse 13,

13 But, "Ah, Lord GOD!" I said, "Look, the prophets are telling them, 'You will not see the sword nor will you have famine, but I will give you lasting peace in this place.'"

Jeremiah says, "God, look at the environment of my ministry. Everything that I'm saying is being contradicted by people claiming to speak in Your name, multiple prophets saying exactly the opposite of what I'm saying. I'm standing alone here, God. How's this message ever going to cut through all of that?" Verse 14,

14 Then the LORD said to me, "The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds. 15 Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the prophets who are prophesying in My name, although it was not I who sent them--yet they keep saying, 'There will be no sword or famine in this land'--by sword and famine those prophets shall meet their end!

God, watch what's happening here. Jeremiah says, "God, look at this chaos all around me and look at what the religious teachers are saying." And God says, "Pay them no heed. I am sovereign over all of this. They are teaching falsely. The judgment that's coming broadly on the nation, sword and famine, it's going to come to them in particular. I will vindicate My word," God says.

Those spiritual counterfeits were not sent by God. They challenged Jeremiah repeatedly. They lulled the people into a false sense of security which the people wanted anyway, just the same thing today that the New Testament talks about, people gathering teachers to tickle their ears to just tell them what they want to be told. There's no concern for actual truth and obedience and real faith in this, "Just give me the outward form of religion, that's all I want. Don't step into my space. Don't confront me in my sin or I'll walk away and I'll just leave it all behind. Don't do that. We'll have religion on my terms or we won't have it at all." God says, "I'm not having any of it."

Now look, stepping out of Israel 2,500 years ago into our land today, our land is filled with false teachers, beloved. This is undeniable. You look at Trinity Broadcasting Network, you look at radio airwaves, you look at the propagators of race-based so-called gospel, prosperity preachers, charismatics speaking their visions of their own mind as God warned Jeremiah about in one of the passages that we looked at. They're just speaking the futility of their own mind. Out on the table today there's a cd album, "Deception Close to Home," about what I've mentioned repeatedly since I preached it moralistic therapeutic deism, 80-90% probably of the churches that count as Christian in our day, this is the very message that they're preaching and it's utter deception. It's devoid of the holiness of God or a call to repentance, warnings about hell. "God's your friend.

God's your buddy. Just cuddle up to him and it's all going to be okay." No. No, this is not the God of the Bible. This is not true Christianity that I just described. Our land is filled with false teachers just like Israel was.

Now look, shall a people who do not have covenant with God escape judgment under circumstances like that, when the covenant people themselves were judged? I'm frightened. I fear God in this time, is what I mean by that. How shall a land like ours escape if Israel did not? You see, many of you, if not most of you probably, are just praying, "God, help our country through this time." That's okay. You know, we ask God for help, we ask him to help us, but what I want you to see is that there is far greater things at stake in our day than what this next election might bring to us. This election regardless of who is elected is not going to address these underlying problems that make us ripe for judgment. It's not until a whole people come repentantly to God pleading with mercy, that there's going to be any change and politics is not able to introduce that change to the human heart and so we need to stop putting our hope in that.

And so you see the sovereignty of God, you see the sin of the people in their spiritual adultery, their false prophets. Well, what does that mean? Point 3, it means the judgment of God. The judgment of God. Their history generation upon generation of rebellion, their history of rebellion made judgment inevitable upon them.

Look at Jeremiah 5:14.

14 Therefore, thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, "Because you have spoken this word, Behold, I am making My words in your mouth fire And this people wood, and it will consume them.

God is telling Jeremiah that he will preach judgment and this judgment will consume the people to whom he speaks. Verse 15,

15 "... I am bringing a nation against you from afar, O house of Israel," declares the LORD. "It is an enduring nation, It is an ancient nation [we saw that earlier]... 16 "Their quiver is like an open grave, All of them are mighty men. 17 They will devour your harvest and your food; They will devour your sons and your daughters; They will devour your flocks and your herds; They will devour your vines and your fig trees; They will demolish with the sword your fortified cities in which you trust.

Chapter 16, verse 10, remembering I'm just giving you samplings here. This is a sample platter, not the entree. Verse 10. You've done this evil. Why has God brought this upon us? Verse 13, we look at that earlier and so what's God going to do in response?

13 '... I will hurl you out of this land into the land which you have not known, neither you nor your fathers; and there you will serve other gods day and night, for I will grant you no favor.'

And in chapter 25, beginning in verse 7.

7 "... you have not listened to Me," declares the LORD, "in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. 8 Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Because you have not obeyed My words, 9 behold, I will send and take all the families of the north and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. 10 Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp.

Everything that had brought them joy was going to be gone. They were going to be carried off into exile by the king of Babylon. It's impossible for us to imagine this but imagine a greater nation than America coming and uprooting all of our people and transporting us down to South America where we have to reestablish our lives. Something like that, the idea of a total disruption of life.

Now beloved, you look at the violence in our streets, the chaos in our land, the false religion, all of this, and you have to ask the question, "How shall our nation escape judgment if the favored people of God in covenant with Him did not?" You see, our problem goes far beyond a presidential election, a vaccine, or anything else that you might want to lay up on the table to discuss because a new president or the same president, a vaccine or no vaccine, nothing is going to address the hearts of men who are generating all of this wickedness on such a continual basis. It cannot change the underlying situation that we face, that we are a people, a nation that deserves greater judgment from God than what we've already seen. We cannot escape that reality. When I say we can't escape that reality, what I mean by that is that we cannot escape that assessment of our condition, that diagnosis. It's not that we're suffering so much, is that we haven't suffered more judgment than we have.

Well, that would be a pretty depressing note to end on, wouldn't it? I'm not closing in prayer just yet. Here's what we need to see. We need to see how bad the situation really is and come to the end of any expectation that we deserve something better so that we're humbled under the weight of it, that that might cause us to turn to the living God in repentance. That brings us to our fourth and final point here: the promise of God. The promise of God and we'll talk about this more next week. When you realize how just God's judgment upon that nation would be and if you have been trained and brought up under the idea that the Old Testament God is just an always angry God who's just a God of wrath and judgment and that's all that he is, and you kind of hate him for it, and you brought all of these things together, you'd just assume that there was nothing left to be said, but in the midst of the holiness of God, the righteous judgment of God, in the midst of these proclamations of judgment against a wicked people, the mercy and kindness and grace of God is still being manifested as you read through this book. God has said there is

judgment coming and he meant it, and there was, historically it worked itself out that way, but mingled with those warnings were promises of restoration, restoration beyond the judgment.

Jeremiah 29:14, and we need to do this somewhat quickly but I don't want to skip over the many many many places that this wonderful phrase is used. Jeremiah 29:14. Remember, we're looking at things thematically here. God has said, "I'm going to drive you out of your land," and then he says in verse 10, Jeremiah 29:10, "When seventy years have been completed for Babylon." So God's got a big picture in mind here. It's far more than who the next king was going to be in four weeks. God had a plan that encompassed decades in its outworking in this particular manifestation, and so he's looking beyond the judgment that had just been threatened and he says this,

10 "...When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. [It's in this context that God says,] 11 '... I know the plans that I have for you, plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.

That's spoken to the people of Israel, not to our country or Christians today even is not the direct application of this particular verse. Verse 12,

12 'Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you....14 'I will be found by you,' declares the LORD, 'and I will restore your fortunes, [that's the phrase that we're going to see again and again and again,] I will restore your fortunes and will gather you from all the nations and from all the places where I have driven you, and I will bring you back to the place from where I sent you into exile.'

Chapter 30, verse 3,

3 '... behold, days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah. I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it.'"

Verse 18,

18 "Thus says the LORD, 'Behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob And have compassion on his dwelling places;

Do you see it? "I'll restore their fortunes. I'll restore their fortunes. I'll restore their fortunes."

Chapter 31, verse 23,

23 ... "Once again they will speak this word in the land of Judah and in its cities when I restore their fortunes, 'The LORD bless you, O abode of righteousness, O holy hill!'

Chapter 32, verse 44,

44 'Men will buy fields for money, sign and seal deeds, and call in witnesses in the land of Benjamin, in the environs of Jerusalem, in the cities of Judah, in the cities of the hill country, in the cities of the lowland and in the cities of the Negev [geographically it's just an expanding concentric circles starting in a locality and then expanding out]; for I will restore their fortunes,' declares the LORD."

Verse 7 of chapter 33,

7 'I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and will rebuild them

Verse 11,

11 the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, those who say, "Give thanks to the LORD of hosts, For the LORD is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting"; and of those who bring a thank offering into the house of the LORD. I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were at first,'

And finally 25 and 26 of that same chapter,

25 "Thus says the LORD, 'If My covenant for day and night stand not, and the fixed patterns of heaven and earth I have not established, 26 then I would reject the descendants of Jacob and David My servant,... But I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.'"

This is completely humbling to realize how merciful and how gracious this God is. He convicts these people of their sin, he brings judgment to them, but based on the covenants that he had promised in the past he says, "I won't abandon you completely. This time of judgment, 70 year's worth, I'll put an end to it and when it is done, then I will restore your fortunes." And everybody who hears this in that day should say, "But we don't deserve that. Why would You be gracious to us when we deserve Your judgment and You're bringing it upon us?" And we see the key to hope in our day as well. The God of the Bible is a longsuffering merciful God even upon sinful people. Israel had sinned for centuries and God would send judgment but beyond that he would bring blessing back. Here's what I want you to see, is that God did not lack a willingness to forgive and bless them. Even in the midst of the judgment upon his own people was embedded the promise that he would restore them later on. Israel just wouldn't have it.

Now it seems to me that we understand these things in our day today. We have no such promise of a national restoration. We are quivering like a shaking bowl of Jello, we are just quivering in a condition in which we deserve the judgment of God as a nation and we're just quivering under it, just waiting for it to happen, and we have no such promise of restoration that Israel did. We can't predict the future. I don't know, I don't know one way or the other. Maybe God will be merciful, maybe he won't. I don't know. I don't know. I'm not a prophet, neither is anyone else in the world today in the sense that Jeremiah was. But here's what you and I need to understand: we are in a like condition of deserving judgment and yet here we are without a covenant promise of restoration. Then what should we do? Well, we should humble ourselves and just call upon God for mercy. "I've heard, God, that You're a merciful God and I know we have no claim on You whatsoever in our guilt, there is no claim on You, we don't have any promise to our nation to ask for mercy, and so I'm just asking according to Your unchanging character, You're the God who restores fortunes, You're a God of mercy. Have mercy on us even though we don't deserve it, and mercy not so that we can have a comfortable profitable nation to live in, have mercy on us that we might repent and be forgiven before You no matter what happens within our national boundaries."

Speaking nationally but speaking to you individually, yeah, there's no promise of national restoration but there are promises for sinners just like you, sinners just like you that God would be merciful to one like you that would call upon his name, confessing not national sin but confessing personal sin. "God, all of my false worship, all of my ignoring of You, all of my lies and my thefts and my adulteries and my double-mindedness and my double life and my coveting and all of that, God, have mercy on me the sinner!" And God is still merciful. He freely offers Christ to sinners just like you. He warns of judgment. He pleads for repentance. He promises eternal life for those who would come to Christ and it's all in the most sincere of love for rebels just like you, so that Jesus could say in John 6:40,

40 "...this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."

Friends, I can't promise you what will happen to our country one way or the other. I can promise you what God will do for a repentant sinner who comes and asks for mercy. He'll save them. He'll forgive them. He'll cleanse you. He'll give you eternal life. And it's as individuals within our nation turn to Christ for mercy that is our only hope. So I invite you to come to Christ and to be saved and to understand that there's no excuse for you if you refuse. There is no just reason for you to refuse an offer of mercy from the living God. Your unwillingness is the only barrier between you and heaven through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.

Father, we've covered so so much ground, such heavy material, and yet it seems like such an inadequate word that we've given. I pray that You would bless Your word to our

hearts by the power of Your Holy Spirit, that You would take all of the weakness of this morning and display Your power through what goes forth. We pray for our nation, Father, not for a political outcome, we pray for repentance, we pray for sweeping, Spirit-inspired repentance in the hearts of millions, Father, in response to the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and nothing less will satisfy our prayers, Lord, except that You grant that. But we're done praying for particular political outcomes, Father. We confess our sins. We are a people of unclean lips, we live among a people of unclean lips, and there is no covenant promise to our nation that we might appeal to to be saved. We simply have the bare promise of a merciful God, "Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest." It's on the word which Your own Son spoke, Father, that we rest our entire and only hope. Be merciful to us in Christ. Strengthen Your people to teach the true Gospel. Have done away, Father, do away with the multiplicity of false prophets and false teachers and false apostles in our day. Clear the path so that there might be a way forward for the Gospel to go forth with unhindered power, and in a spiritual revival of true conversions, Father, may we find the rebirth of our nation because we know that the path we're on is one that just deserves the stark reality of Your judgment. Father, the fact that You have not yet brought it upon us tells us that perhaps there's still room for mercy, still room for You to stay Your hand and to bring many to Yourself. Start it here in this room today, Father, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen.

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