

**Jeremiah 14: 1-22; “Like a Wayfaring Man”, Sermon # 14 in the series – “Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 16th, 2014, in the Morning Worship Service.**

There is a question that should come to the mind of every thoughtful reader of this chapter and that is this—Why is it that Jeremiah continued to pray and to intercede for this people even after God expressly told him not to, twice before? In Chapter 7, verse 16, and Chapter 11, verse 14 we find God commanding him not to pray, yet here in verse 11 of this chapter we find God telling him not to pray. Is Jeremiah being disobedient at this point? I think that we need to understand this very important truth at the outset of this message – That if people who say that they know God will not regard the preaching of His word, if they keep pushing away the truth as it comes from His faithful ministers, then they will forfeit any benefit that they might expect to receive from their prayers. The prophet of old and the gospel minister of today are men of good will to men. They would see people saved and joyfully walking in the truth. They will go as far as they believe they lawfully can, in preaching and in prayer, to stretch as it were, the patience of God toward sinful people, even beyond what God commands, because they truly believe that God’s mercy and grace are such that none can ask too much. It is because Jeremiah believed in God’s goodness, His faithfulness, His compassions, that they are so great, that he continued to intercede in prayer for that people. There are several questions that I want us to ask ourselves this morning as we think about these verses. Why is God pictured for us by Jeremiah in his prayer, as a wayfaring man? Why is He pictured as a stranger in the land, or as a traveler who turns aside to tarry for a night? Jeremiah speaks to God in prayer in verse 8 as “the Hope of Israel, his Savior in time of trouble. And yet in the next breath he speaks of God as One who will not stay and abide with them. He prays in verse 9 – “We are called by Your name; do not leave us.” Why is this?

I would like to assert to you this morning that the reason that God seems far away to people sometimes in prayer is because they are not seeking Him in the right way. And the reason that they do not seek Him in the right way is because as God answers Jeremiah in verse 10 – “Thus they have loved to wander; they have not restrained their feet.” “Therefore the Lord does not accept them; He will remember their iniquity now, and punish their sins.” But Jeremiah’s prayers to God were heard, and for this reason. He was a man who recognized God’s sovereign rights in judgment, and acknowledged them in his prayers. So this is what I want to ask you to think with me about in this hour. What are the sovereign rights of God which He exercises in judgment, which we need to recognize and acknowledge when we pray? There are 3 areas of concern which I would bring out to you on God’s behalf.

**The 1<sup>st</sup> Area of Concern is this – We should recognize God’s sovereign right to humble men by withholding from them what is essential to the continuance of their physical life because of their sin.** (Verses 1-6 and verse 22)

Would you like a shorter wording of this? It is God’s sovereign right to show men how utterly dependent they are upon Him. Shorter yet? Men must have God’s blessing to live. Men and women would have never existed unless God had created them. A person, any person and all people, cannot continue in life unless God upholds them. Moment by moment, and day by day, we are continually under the sovereign care of God. We are utterly dependent upon God’s supplying our needs. Without water, nothing of created life can continue. Man was made out of the dust of the earth, but he will return to it, without water, in a very short time. In Jeremiah 14: 1, we are told that there was a drought in the land at that time. It is called “a dearth” in the King James. “The word of the Lord that came to Jeremiah concerning the droughts.” “Judah mourns

and her gates languish; they mourn for the land, and the cry of Jerusalem has gone up.” “Their nobles have sent their lads for water; they went to the cisterns and found no water.” “They returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded and covered their heads.” Verse 22 – “Are there any among the idols of the nations that can cause rain? “Or can the heavens give showers?” “Are you not He, O Lord our God?” “Therefore we will wait for You, since You have made all these.” The summers in Judah from late April until the middle of October are generally very dry. Scarcely any rain falls and the rivers are either very low or entirely dry. The whole land becomes dry and parched and everything dries up. In the autumn, about the end of October, the early rains begin. They come on gradually, and by degrees so that the farmer –the husbandman—has the opportunity to plow the ground and sow the seed of his barley and wheat fields. During November and December rain will continue to fall, but at intervals, at first heavier, then as time goes by, a bit lighter. But at no time during the winter do the rains entirely cease. January and February are the coldest months, and snow sometimes falls to a depth of a foot or more at Jerusalem, but it doesn’t stay long. Rain continues to fall more or less in March, but it is rare in April. In the Jordan valley, the barley harvest begins as early as Mid-April, the wheat a little later. The grain is seldom ripe before the middle of June. It is the early rains that did not come for the people of Jeremiah’s day because it says in verse 4 – “The ploughmen were ashamed.”

Everyone is affected when God doesn’t give rain. Even the nobles of Judah who had large cisterns had sent their lads, their servants, to these reservoirs, returned with their vessels empty. Because it was normally so dry from May till September, pits were dug to collect the water that fell in the times when it did rain. It was so utterly dry because God had withheld the rain, that even the animals were dying off; the wild animals, the deer and the wild donkeys. Drought brings famine because crops will not grow and everyone becomes hungry and thirsty. The people of our text were ashamed and confounded and they covered their heads. The reason that they were ashamed and confounded is that they could not do what they wanted to do. They would have liked everything to have continued on as it had been. They would have liked to have continued being blessed by God in all the material things of this life. But all the outworking of their lives and their strength was selfishness and pride, gluttony and idolatry, in following after other gods which were no gods at all. And so what good will it do to pray to God in such a great crisis as this; when they never sought Him during the times of their prosperity before this? They never gave thanks for their blessings. Why is it that men will seek God when trouble comes, but then when He answers them favorably and helps them, then they go right back to ignoring Him? Why is it that they think that God is their errand boy? It is because of the strength of sin and selfishness in them.

Let me tell you what should be done about this, by every thoughtful Christian. The godly person must explain the reasons that God sovereignly chooses to withhold His blessings, and they must pray. We must learn to speak to people plainly about God’s sovereign control over all things; that is, that it is His sovereign right as God to withhold all the blessings of life, in order that we might seek to honor Him. And that when we pray, let us acknowledge that our sins do testify against us, as it says in verse 7. Let us acknowledge that God has done these things to humble us. Let us confess that we do not keep ourselves alive; ultimately, and very really, He does. This sovereign right of God’s must be recognized and acknowledged by us in prayer if God is show mercy upon our sinful nation. Sin never brings life and blessing. It is a reproach to any people. It brings drought and languishing. It brings mourning, and shame, and confusion.

**A 2<sup>nd</sup> Area of Concern is this: Why is God a wayfarer in our land, why does He not abide with us ? (Verses 8-10)**

We should recognize that it is God’s sovereign right to draw near to us, or to remain aloof from us in our experience of Him. He is the One who regulates our sense of His presence and

power working in our heart and life. Remembering that we are not under the Old Covenant; but the New Covenant, sometimes a Christian's experience of Christ with them is far different from the wonderful promise that is given to them in Hebrews Chapter 13, verse 5 – "I will never leave you nor forsake you." It is certainly true, what it says in James Chapter 4 and verse 8, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." But the reason that God was a stranger in the land of Israel in Jeremiah's day is the same reason that He appears to be a stranger in our land in our day. In James Chapter 4, verse 3. "You ask and do not receive because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures." "Adulterers and adulteresses!" "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? "Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God." "Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously?" "But He gives more grace." "Therefore submit to God." "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." "Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts you double-minded." "Lament and mourn and weep!" "Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom." "Humble yourselves in the sight of God and He will lift you up." Now, these are not words given to unbelievers; they are words which are given to true but backslidden Christians. Where does the power come from to live your life to God? God does want us to weep and mourn over the state of our hearts if we are worldly, or if we have grieved the Spirit because of our passions of anger and pride and covetousness; or if we tolerate immoral thoughts or desires in our hearts. Our joy ought to be turned into gloom if that is the case. But is there no hope for us in that situation?

Think once again of verse 8 of our text. God is here called, "the Hope of Israel", and "his Savior in time of trouble." Hope – the word is Mikveh in the Hebrew. The One whom we wait for, the One whom we place our confidence in, the One who has plenty of water; not only the water of that sustains physical life, but the One who gives the water of spiritual life, so that you will not thirst. That's what this word hope pictures. Savior – Yasha (Yaw-shah) in the Hebrew. The One who keeps us safe, keeps us free; the One who defends us, delivers us, helps us, and rescues us. He is the One who brings salvation. He saves us from physical and spiritual calamities. But even more, He saves us from ourselves. He waters and restores your soul, when you cry to Him. He is knocking on the door of your heart, dear Christian. Will you answer and open the door? If you don't answer, He may leave and go away for a while, and your soul will be sad. "Here we are", says Jeremiah in prayer. Here we are in great trouble and though our sins testify against us, still we would call upon You reminding You that not only are we utterly dependent upon You for this water which we need, which only You can bring, but even more we are utterly at a loss to know how we can find your favor at all, if you do not come and take us under your wing, unless You have pity upon us." "Why", he says, "should You be like a stranger in the land?" The only way that we ever come to know God is if He draws near to you. Otherwise He is a stranger to you, and you to Him. The Lord has every right to leave us in our sins and under His wrath, but in salvation through Jesus Christ He shows us mercy. Wrath is what is what we so richly deserve, if we do not come to know Christ, the Hope of Israel. If God were only to consider His justice, there would be no mercy. It is His sovereign right to draw near your soul, or to hold Himself aloof from you; to reveal Himself in mercy or to distance Himself in justice. But in His great compassion He has someone share the gospel with us. Our being in love with our sins has been entirely our own fault. Our turning every good gift that He has given us into an idol because we wanted to misuse the good things He gave us, is not His fault. The reason that God seems distant to us is often because we are unwilling to prove Him to be true to all of His promises; we are unwilling to draw near and confess all that is wrong with our heart's attitude.

There was a time when God pretty much confined Himself to revealing Himself only the Jewish people. How utterly sad that the only people He had revealed Himself to, would so sin

against their privileges that He would draw back and become a stranger to them, because of their sin. It is no doubt true that there were many in that time in the nation's history that really did not know God at all. But it may have been equally true that there were many who did who did not really have the kind of relationship with God that they were tenderhearted before Him; that they were sensitive to His Spirit's leading. In Ephesians 2: 11 it says, "Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." This is what Christ has done for all of His people. He has brought them near to God so that they are no longer strangers to Him. But what these verses are telling us is that these people who had been given such great promises and great privileges sinned against God that they had estranged themselves from Him. God no longer wanted to draw near to them to help them and to save them from their calamities because their backslidings were so many as it says in verse 7. Can this be something that can happen in New Testament times to people who have been given New Covenant grace? I believe that it can.

**And this leads us to our 3<sup>rd</sup> Area of Concern – It is God's sovereign right to answer in mercy for His Name's sake.**

Each of us needs to ask ourselves, "Am I a stranger to God?" And then if we are not altogether a stranger, and have believed in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of our sins, we need to ask ourselves, "Am I developing a personal heart relationship with the Hope of Israel, my Savior in time of trouble; or is He in your experience, One who seems to be like a stranger in the land of your heart, like a wayfaring man who only comes to commune with you occasionally when you are in some great difficulty? And even then you wonder if He is really there to help you? This is a very important question. I have been trying to give you the major reasons why God seems to be far away from us, or like a wayfaring man in our experience. It is because either we are not walking uprightly, or we do not believe, or we are worldly. But I have also been trying to show you that God's the sovereign right to show mercy to sinners through Jesus Christ our Lord. There are a couple things which you need to remember if you feel that God has been a wayfaring man to you in your experience of Him. If God has not lately shown you His presence and power in your heart so that you are enabled to walk closely with Him and rejoice in His Spirit's working in your life, then you need to remember the words of verse 7. "O Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do it for Your name's sake." Do it for your name's sake. Do what? Send the rain for the dry ground of Judah so that the people would die. But to apply it to ourselves: Send the water for our souls so that we will not languish and be sad and unbelieving spiritually. These are the words that God is looking for from you in prayer; do it for your own name's sake. There is nothing in you, you see it now, don't you? Why should God show you mercy after all the sins that you have committed in your heart, or in your actions? Do you have anything to bring Him to show Him your sincerity? Are there any works that you can do to satisfy His expectation and His justice. No, but He will show you mercy for His name's sake, when all other prayers fail. He will hear this prayer and show you mercy because of Jesus Christ your Lord. For He has satisfied God's justice, and He has overcome sin and death and is alive forevermore. You see, your religious works, your fasting and your praying even, may not avail to persuade God to come and water your dry and thirsty soul. Verse 12 says: "When they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them." But if you pray for God to do it, to bring the rain for His name's sake, then He will consider the matter and answer in accordance with His great compassions which do not fail.

A couple of verses in closing. Hosea 6: 1 – "Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up." "After two days He will revive

us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight.” “Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.” The NAS says, “Let us press on to know the Lord.” “His going forth is as certain as the dawn.” “And He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain watering the earth.” **I like what John Calvin says here:** “Now this passage teaches us, that when God hides his face, we act foolishly if we cherish our unbelief; for we ought, on the contrary, as I have already said, to contend with this destructive disease, inasmuch as Satan seeks nothing else but to sink us in despair.” “This his device then ought to be understood by us, as Paul reminds us, (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 2:11;) and the Holy Spirit supplies us here with weapons, by which we may repel this temptation of Satan, “What? Thou seest that God is angry with thee; nor is it of any use to thee to attempt to come to him, for every access is shut up.” “This is what Satan suggests to us, when we are sensible of our sins.” “What is to be done? The Prophet here propounds a remedy, We shall know; “Though now we are sunk in thick darkness, though there never shines on us, no, not even a spark of light, yet we shall know (as Isaiah says, ‘I will hope in the Lord, who hides his face from Jacob’) that this is the true exercise of our faith, when we lift up our eyes to the light which seems to be extinguished, and when in the darkness of death we yet continue to promise to ourselves life, as we are here taught: We shall then know; further, We shall pursue after the knowledge of Jehovah; though God withdraws his face, and, as it were designedly, doubles the darkness, and all knowledge of his grace be, as it were, extinct, we shall yet pursue after this knowledge; that is, no obstacle shall keep us from striving, and our efforts will at length make their way to that grace which seems to be wholly excluded from us.” Dear Christian will you not take this to heart? One other set of verses.

Psalm 84: 8-12 – “O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob!” “Selah” “O God, behold our shield and look upon the face of Your anointed.” “For a day in your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.” “For the Lord God is a sun and a shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly, O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in You.” You will notice how the sons of Korah pray, asking that God would look favorably on the face of His anointed. They loved the temple worship and wanted to see David restored to it. But actually in this prayer they are asking not that they would be heard for David’s sake, but for the greater David’s sake, our Lord Jesus Christ. Never think dear Christian, that the merit of your prayers, your tears, your fasting, or even your obedience merits favor for you with God. It is only Christ and the merit of His righteousness and blood that avails to open the ears of God to your prayers. Remember the faithfulness of God to Himself and to His word. The Lord God is a sun and a shield, the Lord gives grace and glory. **Listen to Calvin once again:** “The idea conveyed by the comparison derived from the sun is, that as the sun by his light vivifies, nourishes, and rejoices the world, so the benign countenance of God fills with joy the hearts of his people, or rather, that they neither live nor breathe except in so far as he shines upon them.” “By the term shield is meant, that our salvation, which would otherwise be periled by countless dangers, is in perfect safety under his protection.” A little later on he says - “So long as we are deprived of God’s benefits, we must necessarily groan and be sad in heart.” “But, that the sense of our distresses may not overwhelm us, we ought to impress it upon our minds, that even in the midst of our calamities we do not cease to be happy, when faith and patience are in exercise.”(End of Quote) Do you believe this dear Christian? Does this mean that your obedience is unimportant? No, it matters very much, because no good thing will God withhold from those who walk uprightly. Is this a perfect obedience? No, but it is the obedience of faith in Christ. How blessed is the person who trusts in Him, the Lord of Hosts.