

Jeremiah 6: 1-30; “Ask for the Old Paths”, Sermon # 6 in the series –
“Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God,”
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 3rd, 2013,
In the Afternoon Worship Service.

Jeremiah, in this chapter, is the faithful watchman who is shouting to the people of Jerusalem saying, “Listen the sound of the trumpet”. But the people are too weak, too deceived, too unbelieving to respond. The daughter of Zion, that is the Old Testament people of God in that day, is likened to a lovely and delicate woman in verse 2. She has been protected and cared for and given quietness and rest, but she did not use this blessing to the right purpose. She did not feed on God’s faithfulness or strengthen herself in the Lord her God like David did before her. Something dreadful has happened to her; something that has made her weak, something that has made her vulnerable so that she will be taken advantage of by all her enemies. Sin has wounded her, wounded her badly, and she will not go to the doctors who would tell her the truth about it. This is an awful calamity you say to me. Yes, I admit that it is so. But the reason we must look at it, square in the face, is because this may be your condition as well this afternoon. Sin is the great enemy of our souls and the Lord Jesus Christ would bind up your wounds and heal you as the Great Physician that He is. I would like us to think together now, of the truth that the Lord Jesus is not only the Great Physician, but He is also the Mighty Warrior who saves. He not only deals with the wounds that sin makes, but He also becomes our closest spiritual friend. He leads us on the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake. So, this afternoon I want you to stand in the ways of holiness with me and see; I want you to come together to the place where we will ask for the Old Paths, where the good way is in order that we might find rest for our souls. The old paths are ways that you and I must take in order to become holy, and to walk righteously through this life. 1st, when we inquire and ask for the Old Paths we will be told that sin is truly our worst enemy. And then 2nd, when we ask for these Old Paths, we will be told that the Lord Jesus Christ is our best friend.

Let’s look 1st at sin as our worst enemy.

Sin is our worst enemy for 3 basic reasons as we find them in our text. Sin wounds men deeply; sin deceives men badly, and sin destroys men entirely. Sin wounds men deeply because it strikes at the heart and soul of a man, or woman, or child. Jerusalem is here pictured as a person wounded and sick from sin with enemies coming against her in verses 6, 7, and 8. It says in verse 6 – “Jerusalem is full of oppression in her midst”. She was welling up with her wickedness “as a fountain gushes up with water”; and “violence and plundering are heard in her”. “Before Me continually,” says the Lord, “are grief and wounds”, or “sickness and wounds”, says the Lord. Now political and spiritual oppression of other people is definitely something that comes from sin working in the heart of the one who

perpetrates it. Often oppression of spirit is caused by an abuse of rightful authority. A parent has rightful authority over his family as their head, but he might be oppressing the spirits of his wife and children through his overly-forceful and controlling use of his authority. The ruler of a nation, or the rulers over cities, have a true authority, but they may use it harshly and not do the people good, or faithfully represent their needs and interests. They may think and act as though they are above the law and a law unto themselves. Business men who have money may be making their money through laying unjust burdens on their workers in their work, or not paying those people in their employ the wage that is commensurate with their work, or pay them at all in timely fashion. This was what was going on in Jerusalem. People who should have been ruled over justly, in the fear of the Lord, and shown compassion, were experiencing being subjected to unjust and cruel exercise of authority in their own midst. They were taking advantage of each other in many ways; not dealing kindly or fairly with each other in many ways. Many had turned to using violence and plundering to get what they wanted.

It was based upon covetousness if you look at verse 13. This was because, from the least of them to the greatest of them, everyone was given to covetousness. From the prophet to the priest, everyone was dealing falsely. The sin of covetousness leads people to oppress one another and to envy one another. It leads people to the place where they are never satisfied or content with the things that God gives, or their lot in life. You and I should understand that God gives us our lot in life. We should not, and need not, desire what others around us have. This is confirmed by Exodus 20: 17. God, in the 10th commandment of His holy law says, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.” The 80th question of the Shorter Catechism asks – “What is required in the tenth commandment?” “The tenth commandment requires full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame toward our neighbor, and all that is his.” “What is forbidden in the 10th commandment?” Answer – “It forbids all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbor, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.” The Apostle Paul in Romans 7: 7 said, “I would not have known sin except through the law.” “For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, “You shall not covet.” Most people do not realize how deeply sin has wounded them.” Many people did not realize then, and many people do not realize now, how deeply sin has wounded them. They are discontent with their lot in life, they desperately want more and more of what money can buy, and what their neighbor has. They are willing to do almost anything sinful to get it. But they do not realize that in the process that are wounding themselves and the other people around them as well.

So this is the diagnosis. Sin brings grief and wounds; it brings sickness and wounds to ourselves and others around us. The cultivation of the specific sin of covetousness shows unbelief in God's sovereign ability to provide and care for each and every person in the world specifically. It shows a great dissatisfaction with God's providential ordering of things, and that He specifically is able to bless a person with riches, or sees fit to bless them in the midst of their poverty. Covetousness when it wounds deeply like this, leads a society to a great gluttony of desire; evil desires of every sort, which are a fountain gushing up with wickedness. These desires proceed from a heart filled with sinful and selfish desires which are never satisfied with the things that God is pleased to give, but always wants more. This, then, leads to lying and misrepresentation to get what they want. It leads to discouragement, depression, and oppression of spirit, when you do not, or cannot get what you want. This is a sin that deeply wounds you and others around you. It makes the whole mind sick, the whole heart faint, and from the sole of the foot, even to the head, there is no soundness in the covetous heart. It brings wounds and bruises and putrefying sores, as Isaiah 1: 6 says. The symptoms of this are all around us in our society. The only remedy is a change of heart, through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. This only comes when the covetous person or people will believe the words of the gospel, and the One whom the gospel is about.

But, here, with Israel of old, sin had not only wounded deeply, it also had deceived them badly. We find this in verses 13-15. It says of the false prophets, "They have also healed the wound (or the hurt) of My people slightly, saying, 'Peace, peace!' when there is no peace!" I wonder if you have ever seen someone trying to comfort a wounded person with words like: "I'm sure that it really isn't as bad as you think." They are trying to heal the broken bones of the wounded person's heart with positive thinking. If you just think positively, be positive, and it will all work out in the end. Your wounds will disappear, your bruises will go away. And many people are deceived by the Robert Schullers of our day who do not want to look at the deep and frightening wounds that sin brings. They wax worse and worse deceiving and being deceived. They love the nice, the lovely, and the beautiful things that God has made; the things which He has created and the things that He has done which show His goodness and mercy. They love to speak of His goodness and His love, but not of His justice. They believe that God approves all men, and accepts all men, irregardless of their sin. They see that men need love and help and acceptance, but they do not see, nor will they acknowledge that men need to be saved from their sins by conversion to Jesus Christ; by faith in His righteousness and His blood. They believe that God is a God of peace towards sinners and sin, and that under that umbrella sin is only when men are hurt by other men, when they are treated unfairly, they they are not accepted as they are in their sin.

But sin not only wounds people deeply and deceives people badly, it also will destroy people entirely. Sin brings more and more corruption of heart as it

proceeds to work in the hearts of people who hold to it, and perpetrate it, and justify it in their own eyes. And God as a just judge must, and He will punish it with death, and judgment, and His wrath forever and eternally. Sin is corruption that leads to the disintegration of people and nations. God is the only One who gives and brings life. Sin brings misery, ruin, and destruction. “The soul that sins shall die.” Benjamin Keach says, “I do not say there is no help, nor cure for these sores and wounds, yet I must say that they are incurable, as to man.” “No man can find by all his skill and art any healing medicine.” “And upon this account the Lord said of Judah and Jerusalem, ‘Their wound was incurable, they had brought themselves into such a condition, that none could help them, nor bring them out.’” “O Israel, thy destruction is of Thyself, but in Me is thy help” (Hosea 13: 9) We not only destroy our bodies, and ruin our souls, but expose ourselves to the eternal wrath of God which is coming upon all who will not hearken to the warnings. Verse 19 of our text says, “Hear, O earth!” “Behold I will certainly bring calamity on this people—the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not heeded My words, nor my law, but rejected it. And in verse 28 – “They are all stubborn rebels, walking as slanderers.” “They are bronze and iron.” “They are all corrupters; the bellows blow fiercely, the lead is consumed by the fire; the smelter refines vain, for the wicked are not drawn off.” “People will call them rejected silver, because the Lord has rejected them.”

Let us apply this just for a moment, to our society. When the Lord heats things up in our society, as He is doing now, and we do not respond by heeding His word, to find out what we are doing wrong, and then turn away from that to ask Him to teach us the good and the right paths, we should know that our wound will be eternally fatal. It will be eternally fatal for us individually if we do not repent of our sins. And it will be fatal to the ongoing life and prosperity of the society in which we live. We will be rejected silver. Bronze and iron shall never be accepted as silver. And the fire of God’s judgment will reveal what our lives and work are all about. Sin is indeed our worst enemy. And we should not only believe this ourselves, but pray to be able to speak to others around us about it as well.

2nd – I want to now bring hope. The Lord Jesus Christ is the friend of sinners, and He will be the best friend of all who will trust in Him.

This is the good news of the gospel; Jesus is the friend of the vilest of sinners who will trust in Him. The remedy, the treatment for our deep wounds of sin is found in verse 16. “Stand in the ways, and see and ask for the old paths where the good way is, and walk in it.” “then you will find rest for your souls.” A person who knows that sin has wounded them is weary with the pain of it. They cry over the oppression of spirit that it brings. They know that they have offended a holy God. They now begin to realize that they have wasted precious time pursuing that which displeases God. And so I would have all of you who are weary and heavy-laden with your burden, the crushing burden of the wounds of sin, stand in the ways and see what the gospel sign says to you. Although it most certainly is true that if you

continue walking on the paths of your own making, the paths of selfish disobedience, the paths of covetousness, the path of pride and lying, and slander and fleshly wisdom, leaving God's word out of your life so that it doesn't speak to you; you will surely perish. But stand now, for a moment, and see the glory of the gospel of Christ and His grace. If you will ask for the Old Paths, that is the directions from God's blessed word, you will find that the promises of grace and mercy and peace to you are all there. And you will find them by faith. When you exercise faith in Christ, the blessings of the eternal covenant of Grace are all applied to you by the faithful covenant-keeping God who sent His Son to be your Savior from sin; your defender and protector and deliverer from Satan's power. "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth to such as keep His covenant and testimonies. The way to keep covenant with God is not to think that you by your own wisdom, strength, and ability can keep the least of His commandments. But by faith in Christ, God sees your sins and your righteousness all through the lens of Christ's perfect keeping of His law, and His sufferings for you on the cross. Therefore trust in Him. "He was wounded for your transgressions, He was bruised for your iniquities, the chastisement for your peace was upon Him, and by His stripes you are healed," and you will be healed. He promises that He Himself will give you rest; rest for your weary soul. He will heal the broken-hearted and set the captive free! He is the Great Physician, but He is also the Mighty Warrior who saves and delivers His people from all oppression of spirit. He can do all of this because He did battle with sin and conquered it. He overcame sin and death at the cross, so that you can overcome sin and oppression of spirit in your life through faith in Him.

Listen to the gospel trumpet this afternoon! It sounds no uncertain note. The good way is Jesus Christ the Lord. And by faith in Him you now walk the path of righteousness; hungering and thirsting after the righteousness which is found in Him, not in yourself. You walk in the light as He is in the light, and His blood cleanses you from all sin. If you are trusting in Jesus Christ you have an Advocate with the Father. He is the satisfaction for all of your sins. He will defend you, in the presence of Almighty God, from all the accusations of the devil. The devil will attempt to show God all of your imperfections of obedience, all of your inconsistencies in keeping His word and His commandments. He will attempt to prove that your failures mean that you do not really have grace. But Jesus, your Advocate, says to Satan, in God's very presence, "This one is mine!". I know that God the Father and God the Son do not need to speak words to each other, but I imagine our great Lord Jesus in heaven saying words such as these, on behalf of every one of God's elect. "This one belongs to Me Satan; they are My child and My disciple." "I have completely obeyed your law, Father, so that you can justify them (declare them righteous) in Your sight." "They are now clothed in My righteousness." "I have suffered on the cross on their behalf so that they might be forgiven of every sin." "And now You have given them a New Heart." "They are

trusting in Me to change them further, so that they will no longer love their sin.” “You know, Father, that it is only My grace which can make them holy, even as You, Father are holy.” “Satan, you cannot oppress them any longer.” “All charges against them I have fully paid the punishment for.” “Father, I know that they will certainly need chastening at points, but You also know, Father that I have died so that it would be loving applied to them. “Therefore, Father, let them know the reality of Your powerful grace and do not let them receive their chastening as though it were punishment to them.” “Let them be given the power of My Holy Spirit so that they will not continue in sin, nor love it, or coddle it when they see it in themselves.” “Father, let them have joy and peace in believing in Me.” No, dear believer, you have been set free, and you shall be free indeed as you trust in this blessed word that I have preached to you today. Seek for the Old Paths and you will find that you can trust in Jesus and follow in His steps in every situation of life. You will find yourself, by faith, walking upon the path of righteousness, all the way to heaven. You will find joy in His presence as you trust in Him and all the promises of His grace.