

**Jeremiah 5: 1-25; “The Man the Lord is Looking For”, Sermon # 5 in the series – “Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

The Lord is a just judge and a great King over all the earth. He knows perfectly well what sin has done to His creature man, and He understands that rebellion against Him has been the cause. But we should understand that He had been gracious to His people Israel, His chosen ones; over and over again. Now we see the Lord taking a different position. He is, in this chapter, regarding the people of Jerusalem as criminals to be apprehended, and so he deputizes Jeremiah as His Prophet-Sheriff, and He instructs him to run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem to see if there is anyone who will seek for the truth and if he finds one man he will then pardon the city. He arms Jeremiah by putting His words in Jeremiah’s mouth which would be fire to consume the false notions of the people. Jeremiah’s words would come as fire to wood, and God’s judgments would devour them. But in all of these dark and disquieting events I think we are still able to find something very instructive for us here this afternoon. The Lord would have pardoned and spared Jerusalem if He had found just one man who fit the description He was looking for. He was looking for a man in that day. And the Lord is looking for a man in our day.

Usually Sheriffs put up wanted posters for criminals, but in this case, the Lord knows that the whole city is criminal and deserving of punishment. God’s wanted poster – the kind of man that He is looking for, is described for us here in this chapter. He is looking to bring them in alive. They may be dead in their trespasses and sins, but He can make them alive. You see, it will take New Testament grace for God to find such a man. We should not fool ourselves. It will take the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to produce good qualities in the heart of any man, let alone these backslidden people of the nation of Israel. But this grace is preached to them by Jeremiah, and this grace is preached to you here this afternoon. There are 4 things which you and I need to see.

**1<sup>st</sup> – We need to see that the kind of man the Lord is looking for is one who seeks the truth by sincerity and consistency.** (Verses 1-3a and 10-13)

“Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem; see now and know; and seek in her open places if you can find a man, if there is anyone who executes judgment, who seeks the truth, and I will pardon her.” The word “truth” being spoken of here is not so much doctrinal, although it does have regard to God’s Word. The word in the Hebrew here means “being faithful, dealing with God and man in sincerity, wanting consistently for God’s will to be done”. It does distinctly imply having regard for God’s word in relation to the truth of the state of our hearts. In Psalm 51, I believe that we have a good example of what God is expecting from a person who has broken His law, and has not been faithful; one who has fallen into sin. Turn over there with me. Psalm 51, verses 1-6. “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness;

according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions.” “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.” “For I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.” “Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak, and blameless when You judge.” “Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me.” “Behold You desire truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom.” Let me make 3 brief and simple observations on the kind of man that the Lord is looking for in terms of His being able to sanctify such a man and bring him to heaven.

1<sup>st</sup> Application – The kind of man that God is looking for is one who sees his sin and desires God to wash it. And they will attempt by grace to keep short accounts with God over their sin. Sometimes we are blinded by our sin for quite a while, even as David was. David went for months concealing his sin with Bathsheba before God brought it to his attention through the Nathan the prophet. He had sinned grievously, but he had covered it up greatly in his heart. Now that he knows it, he confesses it, but notice that David is looking for more than pardon. He is looking also for cleansing. Sin not only brings guilt, it brings defilement, and pollution, and stains upon the soul, that cannot be removed except by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you confess you sins in secret prayer to God each day? Do you pray to be cleansed from your sin (the pollution and defilement) on a regular basis?

2<sup>nd</sup> Application – The man that God is looking for is very willing to acknowledge his transgressions to the Lord. And he knows that even though he is forgiven immediately when he confesses his sins, he sees that it is right that he allow himself to feel the sorrow, grief, and pain of the dishonor which his heart sins or his open sin has brought to God’s name. A godly man is one who has come to know that sin’s guilt can be forgiven in a moment, but sin’s stains and pollutions and defilements must be purged. This may take some time and effort on his part. Let me ask you if you are you willing to have real and sincere dealings with God over the many imperfections and sins in your heart and life which God sees, but which other people do not see? This is a great part of your sanctification. There will be acknowledgement of original sin as well as indwelling sin. There will be acknowledgement of inconsistencies and the wretchedness of having tolerated sin in your heart. But there will ultimately always be joy which comes to the heart of the repentant believer that God has not only forgiven, but He will also cleanse from all unrighteousness.

3<sup>rd</sup> Application – The man whom God is looking for knows that God desires truth in the innermost parts of his being. And so this is what he strives for, by faith in Jesus Christ. He has come to know that God is not pleased with hypocrisy, and each of us should consider the thoughts of our heart and the working of our minds, lest we be deceived by the deceitfulness of sin. God is not pleased with those who are double-minded; those who say to themselves today I will serve sin, tomorrow I will serve God, in repeated cycles. And neither should we think that the Christian life is tolerating our sinful weaknesses. No, Christ died to bring to a halt these repeated cycles of sin and partial obedience. He died to bring us to the place of sincere obedience. We are all

going to fall short in many ways each day. But we must also be prayerful each day, that we would be becoming more consistent Christians in our obedience unto Him. Let us understand that we will not come to consistently have the joy of the Lord be our strength if we are tolerating one known sin in our life. But through repentance the joy of the Lord can be our strength.

But here in our text in verses 11-13 we have an example of hypocrisy and the denial of the need to have truth in the inmost being. “For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously with Me,” says the Lord. “They have lied about the Lord and said, ‘It is not He.’” “Neither will evil come upon us, nor shall we see sword or famine.” “And the prophets become wind, for the word is not in them.” “Thus shall it be done to them.” Here we see the sins of taking the Lord’s name in vain, and lying; violations of the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment and the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment. They were saying, “The Lord lives” with great solemnity and vehemence, using His Name as an oath to emphasize their strong feelings about whatever subjects were important to them. They would make their lies convincing by making their strong assertion – “As the Lord lives.” Yes, God lives, but He will have no other gods before Him. Yes God lives, but He wants integrity of heart, not false words.

This taking of these oaths was a great aggravation to their already existing sins. They had dealt treacherously with God, they had lied about God as though He was not the One who was providentially ordering events so as to bring judgment on them. They had deceived themselves and lied about God saying, ‘It is not He; neither will evil come upon us, nor shall we see sword or famine.’ Their attitude was, “Yes, God lives, but He would never bring judgment upon us. Even so, there are many people today who are in this same camp. They believe that God lives, they believe that because they use His Name that they are all right; that He will never bring judgment, never bring disaster. But this is lying about the Lord. “O Lord, are not your eyes on the truth?”, it says in verse 3. A man who has the grace that God gives to him through Jesus Christ our Lord, seeks the truth of God’s word to be applied to his or her heart every moment.

Let me ask you now whether this is characteristic of you? God’s eyes are upon the truth of your heart, and therefore, should not your spiritual eyes be examining your own heart to see if your thoughts and your feelings are glorifying to Him? This is something which you and I who know Him can grow in, and we will grow in, provided that we are sensitive to His Spirit’s working in our hearts.

**2ndly – We need to see that the man that the Lord is looking for is one who responds to the Lord’s corrections with submission.** (verses 3b-6)

Verse 3b states, “You have stricken them, but they have not grieved; you have consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction.” “They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to return.” I think that it is good that you and I understand this subject more closely. When God sees that we are clinging to a sin or sins, He as a faithful Father will bring discipline. God not only forgives our sins when we confess them, but He also disciplines us for them if He perceives that we do not intend to repent of them and forsake them. He does this, in many cases, by His providential dealings with us personally. He uses things like our health, our

relationships with relatives, our jobs, our desires for safety, convenience, or peace – to be a staging ground for His dealings with us. In the case of Israel God says in verse 15 – “Behold, I will bring a nation against you from afar.” He exactly measures the correction to achieve His ends. Verse 18 says, “Nevertheless in those days,” says the Lord, “I will not make a complete end of you.” He knows just how far to take us in discipline. He is also patient and He gives time to repent, but if we will not, He knows just what to do. If you will turn over to Psalm 39 I will show you an example of responding to the Lord’s corrections with submission.

“I said, ‘I will guard my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will restrain my mouth with a muzzle, while the wicked are before me.’ “I was mute with silence, I held my peace even from good; and my sorrow was stirred up.” “My heart was hot within me; while I was musing the fire burned.” “Then I spoke with my tongue: ‘Lord, make me to know my end, and what is the measure of my days, that I may know how frail I am.’ “Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, and my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is a vapor.” “Selah.” “Surely every man walks about like a shadow; surely they busy themselves in vain; he heaps up riches, and does not know who will gather them.” Here is King David who is troubled about what he might do when he was around wicked men. He was afraid that he might sin with his tongue. But he is a good example to us of how we should respond to the Lord’s corrections. We respond by prayer, asking that He would help us to guard our ways; that He would restrain our speech lest we sin with our tongue. He even prays that the Lord would make him to know his end and what was the measure of his days so that he might know how frail he was. This probably seems to you a very strange way to pray. Do we not pray just the opposite many times? We pray to be strong physically and that we would live many more years, and perhaps even that we would become rich or great. But David prayed that God would show him how vain these things were, and what he truly wanted God’s help in doing.

Verse 7 – “And now, Lord, what do I wait for?” “My hope is in You.” “Deliver me from all my transgressions; do not make me the reproach of the foolish.” “I was mute, I did not open my mouth, because it was You who did it.” “Remove your plague from me; I am consumed by the blow of Your hand.” “When with rebukes You correct a man for iniquity, you make his beauty melt away like a moth; surely every man is vapor.” “Selah.” O how good it is when you, as a believer, have learned to respond the Lord’s correction like this. When you see the brevity of life, and when you learn to sort out the issues of your obedience to God; these are very great advances in holiness indeed! To submit to God when you are under His chastening hand means that you will be praying for deliverance from all of your sins. It is not wrong to remember in prayer all the weakness that His chastening has brought to you. It is not wrong to ask in tears that God remove His plague from you. Ask yourself this afternoon whether, when God’s corrections come, does it bring you to sorrow and grief over your sins or whether your face is like a rock? “Whom the Lord loves He disciplines.” And He disciplines us “for our profit, that we might share in His holiness. This is the man whom the Lord is looking for; the man who will learn to submit to His discipline.

**Then 3rdly – We need to see that the kind of man the Lord is looking for is one who gives thanks for God’s good gifts by pursuing purity.** (verses 7-9)

Verse 7 says, “How shall I pardon you for this (their sins and their backslidings increasing)?” “Your children have forsaken Me and sworn by those that are not gods.” “When I had fed them to the full, then they committed adultery...” What great unthankfulness was in their sinful hearts. When God blessed them with abundance of food, abundance of material blessings, then they took it as a signal to abuse and pervert His good gifts, His best gifts. God had supplied all their needs and instead of a spirit of thankfulness and a desire for pursuing holiness, these people encouraged themselves in fleshly lusts, and in dealing treacherously with their wives by going up in troops to the harlot’s houses. But you and I must understand that the depravity of man has not changed at all in the thousands of years that intervene between that generation and this. In this country we seem to be doing the very same thing. We don’t need to go out of our houses to do such a thing, we simply assembled before the television or the computer and indulge all of our fantasies. God says in verse 9 – “Shall I not punish them for these things?” God has given us marriage. He has given the beauty and exclusiveness and the true joy of sexual enjoyment within the bonds of holy matrimony. As Christian men, we must ask ourselves whether we are enamored with the true beauty of our wife. Why not be ravished with her love? And if you are a single person, why not ask God to give you grace to be pure of heart before marriage; to cultivate that holiness of heart and life which be such an asset when it does come your time to marry?

If we pray that God would give us our daily bread, and then we are thankful we He does, why can’t we pray that we would use the strength which that food will give us, in order to pursue purity of heart? Can’t we pray to be fed with spiritual things and be satisfied with them? We are living in a day of video harlotry, and will you participate or flee it? 2 Timothy 2: 22 says, “Flee youthful lusts, but pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. If your heart has been defiled, pray the prayer of David in Psalm 51: 10 – “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.” Do you have a steadfast spirit? W.S. Plumer in his commentary on the Psalms says, “He who rests satisfied with a fitful religion, and has no stability of character, does but deceive himself.” “A right spirit is a fixed spirit.”

**And then 4thly and finally – The Lord is looking for a man who recognizes His Sovereign Right to Rule over him.** (verses 14-25)

Verse 22 says, “Do you not fear Me, says the Lord?” “Will you not tremble at My presence?” We find God reasoning with sinners, reasoning from His rule over the physical creation to His rightful rule over men. He is saying – “Don’t you see that I have placed the sand as the boundary of the sea by a physical decree?” “I have bounded it so that even if the waves toss too and fro, yet they cannot prevail; though they roar they cannot pass over.” He is saying – “The sea knows its place and my rightful rule over it, but sinful man still believes that he shall prevail in his sin and disregard the boundaries of My Holy Will.” But God says, “This people has a defiant and a rebellious heart.” “They have revolted from Me and departed from Me.” The man that the Lord is looking for will reason rightly. He will conclude that since the Lord gives the rain in its

season, the former as well as the latter; since He reserves for us the appointed weeks of harvest, He can also change my heart. He can change my sinful raging heart. Let us now fear the Lord. These people in Israel did not say this – But this afternoon by the grace of Jesus Christ – You may say it. Because Jesus Christ is the man whom the Lord our God was looking for. God the Father was, and He is, well pleased with His Son. If you will trust in Jesus you will draw the right conclusions. You will recognize His sovereign right to rule over you, to put His holy boundaries around you as the sand does the sea. Job 28: 28 says, “From where then does wisdom come?” “God understands its way.” “He knows its place.” “He looks to the ends of the earth, and see under the whole heaven, to establish a weight for the wind and apportion the waters by measure.” “When He made a law for the rain, and a path for the thunderbolt, then He saw wisdom and declared it.” “He prepared it, indeed He searched it out.” “And to man He said – “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.”