

**Please turn with me in your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 4. This morning we will take up Jeremiah's prophetic writing to the people of God. As just as a quick reminder, Jeremiah is writing this sometime between the late 7th century and the early 6th century BC, meaning that it is after the northern kingdom of Israel was taken into captivity by the Assyrians but prior to the southern kingdom of Judah being taken into captivity by the Babylonians. The downfall of Israel happened just over a century earlier due to their unrepentant sins against Jehovah, and now the prophet is given the task to prophesy to the people of Judah lest they experience the same fate. With that in mind lend your attention now to the reading of the infallible Word of God from Jeremiah chapter 4 beginning at verse 1.**

**\*Read Jeremiah 4:1-4\***

**\*Pray\***

**We have a problem within the church today. It is a problem that spans across denominational lines. It is one which has infiltrated pulpits and seminaries and even households. And yet this is not a new problem, but instead a very ancient one. That problem is that so many within the church today have a flawed understanding of what true repentance is. I have seen pastors and elders appeal to people's repentance because of an admission of sin and a general apology for it. I have counseled couples in which one would passionately cry, 'I said I'm sorry. What more do you want?' Perhaps you've been wronged by someone and that person says, 'I'm sorry you were offended.' And unfortunately there are those within the church, even those within leadership in the church, who would say that this is what constitutes true repentance. Friends, this is not so. This is nothing more than a worldly sorrow, one which is no different than what we see unbelievers exhibit in their lives. This is not true repentance. True repentance is when "a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience." (Shorter**

**Catechism 87) This is what God requires, not some general apology for some general wrongdoing. We must repent of our particular sins particularly. And so as Jeremiah was given the word of the Lord to proclaim unto the people of God, he was given the task of calling them to repentance, to true repentance. So we will take up this theme of true repentance by considering three headings: first, the call to repentance; next, the act of repentance; and finally, the result of repentance.**

**Let us first consider the call to repentance. "If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto me." This call from Jeremiah carries a remarkable depth of meaning. It's worth noting that Jeremiah proclaims this to Israel, a nation that has been in exile for a century, a people who have been seemingly utterly destroyed and lost. And yet, through the mouth of His devoted servant, the Lord extends His call to these backslidden people, imploring them to return to Him. This call appears to be a continuation of the previous chapter, where we encounter a similar plea for repentance in chapter 3, verse 12: "Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the Lord; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever." This continuity of the call underscores a remarkable truth – despite the apparent abandonment of God's people and their drifting away, the Lord's mercy and beckoning hand remain extended towards them. This moment in the prophecy seems to mark a transition, shifting the focus from addressing Israel to addressing Judah. Yet, it's crucial to understand that while explicitly directed at Israel, this call to repentance encompasses both the northern and southern kingdoms. They are referred to as a united entity – Israel – in this divine call, symbolizing the common need for repentance and renewal. The persistence of God's call amid adversity speaks volumes about His unwavering love for His people. The fact that the Lord implores those who have seemingly fallen beyond recovery highlights the depth of His grace. It's a reflection of His unending desire for**

restoration and reconciliation, an affirmation that no matter how far we stray, His arms remain open to welcome us back.

And the call to the people is to return unto the Lord. The covenant people of God had fallen so far away from the living and true God that it seemed hopeless for them. Israel had already been utterly destroyed, and now Judah was on the brink of it. This amplifies the gravity of the situation. Yet, even in the face of such dire circumstances, Jehovah lovingly calls to His people, assuming the role of a compassionate father reaching out to his wayward children, saying, “If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto me.” Here, the divine invitation transcends despair, carrying a glimmer of hope that God's mercy and grace are not exhausted. The voice of God calls out to His people: Come back. If you're going to turn from the ways you have made your own, don't turn from them and turn unto other vain things, turn unto me. This call is a helpful reminder that in times of wandering, God's embrace remains open. It's a beckoning to redirect our paths, to forsake the paths that lead to emptiness, and to embrace the path that leads to Him. John Calvin writes, “The Prophet no doubt requires here from the people a sincere return to God, inasmuch as they had often pretended to confess their sins, and had given many signs of repentance, while they were acting deceitfully with him. As then they had often dealt falsely with God and with his prophets, Jeremiah bids them to return to God without any disguise and in good faith.” In essence, the prophet calls for authenticity, for a return that is not a mere outward show but a genuine turning of the heart. The charge of insincerity is laid bare before the people of God. The accusation looms large – their false displays of religion were often a mere façade, a surface-level act that concealed wavering hearts. Among their outward displays of religion, their dedication to God was inconsistent, and their loyalty was compromised. And so the Lord calls out to them, declaring, ‘No more!’ If Israel is to have any hope, if they are to truly repent and find restoration, the call is for wholehearted devotion. There is no room in the life of the people of God for being double-minded.

**Friends, this call to repentance is to you as well. You are the true Israel, the true people of God. Are you putting on a show of religion and yet wavering in your devotion to Jehovah? Have you formed unholy alliances with the wicked people of this world, being drawn away from the living and true God by the temptations of the flesh? If that is you, then know that the call remains for you this day: “If thou wilt return, O Israel, saith the Lord, return unto me.” It's a summons to turn from the ensnaring grip of sin and fix your eyes upon your Savior, Christ the Lord. This call is an invitation to shed the hypocrisy of false displays of religion and embrace a wholehearted devotion to the Lord. In a world teeming with distractions and compromised values, you must not be like the double-minded man described in James 1:8 – one who is unstable in all his ways. Instead, let your dedication to the Lord be unwavering. Jehovah is calling to you this day. The Lord's arms are extended, waiting to receive those who humbly return. Just as He stood ready to embrace His people in the days of Jeremiah, He stands ready to welcome you back today. The promise of restoration and renewal still holds true. Consider where you stand before the Lord. Are there areas where your devotion wavers, where your allegiance to God is divided? Today, make the decision to heed the call. Turn from the entanglements of this world and turn wholeheartedly to the one true God. Embrace the transformative power of repentance and restoration that only He can provide. Heed the call to repentance.**

**And in heeding that call to repentance we see the act of repentance. “And if thou wilt put away thine abominations out of my sight, then shalt thou not remove... For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem.” There must be an external act of repentance. The call of the Lord to Israel was to put away their abominations from His sight. They had turned from Jehovah to false gods, idols which were deaf and dumb, that were powerless to actually provide or care for**

them. And those who had not fully embraced false gods had so perverted the worship of the Lord with their pagan practices that they had turned the true religion into a false one. And so the Lord tells them to put those abominations away, out of His sight. It's similar to the the outward actions of reformation that took place during the reign of King Josiah during the early years of Jeremiah's ministry in 2 Kings 23, "And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest, and the priests of the second order, and the keepers of the door, to bring forth out of the temple of the Lord all the vessels that were made for Baal, and for the grove, and for all the host of heaven: and he burned them without Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron, and carried the ashes of them unto Bethel. And he put down the idolatrous priests, whom the kings of Judah had ordained to burn incense in the high places in the cities of Judah, and in the places round about Jerusalem; them also that burned incense unto Baal, to the sun, and to the moon, and to the planets, and to all the host of heaven. And he brought out the grove from the house of the Lord, without Jerusalem, unto the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron, and stamped it small to powder, and cast the powder thereof upon the graves of the children of the people."

But this external act of repentance, this putting away of their abominations out of the Lord's sight, would have been nothing but hypocrisy if there is not internal act of repentance. And so the Lord uses the imagery of a farmer working ground which had laid barren. "For thus saith the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns." The people of God had allowed their vices, their sins, to so permeate their lives and hearts that it became as fallow ground. Most of you may not be familiar with this imagery, but fallow ground is hard and compacted and has very little use for growing crops. The Lord is saying that they must do the hard work to break up that fallow ground in order to make it yield fruit once again. They have hardened themselves so much that the need they have is to plow it all up, to go deep into the heart of the earth and bring to the surface what little nutrients are left, and to cultivate that. And

then the thorns, the weeds of sin which had taken root in that fallow ground must be uprooted so that when the new seeds of faith take root they do not get choked out by the old wicked sins. Obadiah Sedgwick, the Westminster Divine, puts it beautifully, “Even so the sinful heart is broken up when the Almighty and gracious God (whom Christ calls the husbandman) comes with his Word and Spirit and enters the heart or soul of a sinner by irresistible convincings and by efficacious humblings (which are as rentings and tearings to the ground) and by rooting up the dominion and love of all sins.”

The Lord goes on to use the imagery of circumcision, one which the people of God ought to know all about. “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem.” God underscores the profound symbolism that lies within this practice. It's a symbolism that reaches far beyond the physical act and directs us toward a spiritual transformation of the heart. Physical circumcision, the ordained sacrament of the covenant people, was always intended to signify a deeper truth—circumcision of the heart. Just as the flesh's foreskin was ritually cut away and discarded, so must the sins of the heart be severed and cast aside. This imagery captures the essence of true repentance. It conveys the necessity of cutting off the sins that entangle our hearts. Circumcision, in its spiritual significance, serves as the sins being removed by Jehovah. This was a truth these people of God should have understood intimately. Having undergone physical circumcision, they bore the external sign of the covenant. But once again, this was but an outward false sign of their holding onto religion. The sign they bore was but a hollow shell, a facade that concealed a crucial deficiency—the absence of true spiritual transformation, the removal of their sins.

And so I ask you dear friends, have you borne the acts of repentance? Are there aspects of your lives, either hidden or apparent, that are abominations in the sight of the Lord? Are there idols that you elevate—be they material pursuits, worldly ambitions,

or selfish desires—that detract from your relationship with the Almighty? Are there practices or attitudes that have subtly seeped into your worship, tainting your genuine devotion? If so then you must put them away. Remove them from the Lord’s sight, knowing that nothing is hidden from Him. Anything that is in your life which is contrary to the law of God must be put away, for Jehovah will not permit those things to remain standing. Be as those in Josiah’s time which utterly destroyed the idols which perverted the land and the people. But it must not stop there. Do not be a hypocrite by showing forth external acts of repentance, but not doing the hard work of true repentance in your heart. Have your sins so hardened you that it seems nearly impossible for the seed of the Word to take root? Then break up your fallow ground. Heed the wisdom of Matthew Henry, “Plough to yourselves a ploughing (or plough up your plough land), that you sow not among thorns, that you may not labour in vain, for your own safety and welfare, as those do that sow good seed among thorns and as you have been doing a great while. Put yourselves into a frame fit to receive mercy from God, and put away all that which keeps it from you, and then you may expect to receive mercy and to prosper in your endeavours to help yourselves.” And circumcise the foreskins of your hearts. Cut off any remaining sin which is hidden within the secret places. Cut it off and cast it aside, and endeavor to live according to the law of God. Without this act, both external and internal, there is no true repentance.

And there will be results that come forth out of this true repentance. One of these results is your own spiritual growth and continued perseverance in the faith. The Apostle Paul in Hebrews 12:1-2 says, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Those cares, those worldly concerns, and those idols that often entice us off the path of righteousness must be cast off. They

are nothing but hinderances to spiritual growth. They act as anchors, holding us back when we should be pressing forward. They are but dead weight upon the soul, that pulls it down when it should ascend upwards, and pulls it back when it should press forward. True spiritual growth cannot flourish in the presence of persistent sin. Just as plants cannot thrive in the shadow of a dense canopy, the growth of your faith is stunted when you carry the weight of your sins. Thus, the call of true repentance is also an invitation to liberation—a liberation from the chains of sin that bind you, hindering your growth and impeding your progress. Cast off these burdens. Discard the weight that pulls you down and holds you back. Repentance involves not just turning away from sin, but also letting go of the attachments that hinder your growth in Christ. It's a process of shedding the old and embracing the new, of trading the heavy load for the freedom of a transformed life in Christ.

Another result of true repentance is that others will see your repentance and be compelled to do likewise. “And thou shalt swear, The Lord liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory.” This verse paints a picture of the transformative power of genuine repentance—a power that extends beyond personal salvation and reaches the very heart of community and nations. Your repentance becomes a light shining forth on the path of truth and righteousness for others to follow. As they witness your sincere turning towards God, they are prompted to reevaluate their own lives and choices. When they see you swearing by the living God in truth, judgment, and righteousness, they are drawn to the source of such unwavering conviction. Why is it that the nations do not bless themselves in God and glory in Him? Why is it that pure religion does not flourish through the whole world, and that all nations do not come and unite in the worship of the only true God? It is because of our impiety and wickedness, our insincerity of heart; that is the reason why God is not glorified, and why He is not everywhere celebrated among the nations. When we fail to genuinely seek God, our witness is diluted, and His glory is obscured. The question arises: How can we call

**upon others to repent if we ourselves have not done so? If you want to see mass revival, true repentance on a grand scale, it must begin with here with us. Let your life proclaim forth in word and deed, in truth and sincerity of the heart: Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand. In your repentance, others may find the courage to follow suit, ultimately igniting a movement of revival that springs forth from hearts transformed by grace.**

**And lastly there is a result of failing to bear true repentance. “Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.” Jeremiah is telling the people of God that they must not to wait until God came forth as an avenger, because then it would be too late to repent. He says that the time is coming when the judgment of God will be at hand, and once His fury has gone forth, it would burn like fire so as to consume them, and there would be no extinguishing of it. But if they repented, there was hope to still be found, because the fury of the Lord had not gone forth yet. Friends, this is true today as well. The day is coming in which the wrath of God will be poured out upon all the ungodly, upon all the unrepentant. Do not be caught up in the that flood of fury. It will consume you just as the fire which fell from heaven consumed the sacrifice on the altar. And in that day, there will be no more hope for repentance. But praise God that day has not yet come. There is still time. There is still hope. Heed the call of the Lord Jesus Christ, “Repent ye, and believe the Gospel.” Do not wait another moment, for the next is not guaranteed. Put away all your abominations out of the Lord’s sight; break up the fallow ground and pull up the thorns so that the seeds of the Gospel might take root; circumcise the foreskins of your hearts so that your sins may be removed. The time has come, repent and return to the Lord.**

**Brothers and sisters, we have seen that true repentance is not merely a superficial act or a fleeting emotion; it's a transformation that reshapes our hearts, our lives, and our relationship with God.**

**God's call to repentance is unceasing and unwavering. Just as He reached out to Israel, even after their waywardness and exile, He extends the same call to you today. His arms remain open, ready to embrace you as you turn from sin and return to Him. Just as a farmer must prepare the soil for growth, you must cultivate your hearts, removing the barriers that hinder your walk with Christ. The call to circumcise the heart underscores the need to cut away the sins that entangle, creating room for true transformation. And this true repentance leads to true results. Your growth in Christ and perseverance in faith are nurtured when you cast off the weights of sin and run the race set before you with endurance. And your repentance serves as a beacon for others. When the world witnesses your genuine transformation, they are drawn to the authenticity of a faith that extends beyond mere words. So let us heed the call to repentance, embracing the invitation to experience growth, transformation, and revival in our lives. May our hearts be constantly open to God's convicting and guiding Spirit. As we journey forward, let us walk in the light of true repentance, empowered by the grace of our loving God.**