

Kings and Prophets 16-06-23

This is June the 23rd, 2016. We continue our study in Kings and Prophets. We're in the book of Jeremiah.

We will resume this evening in Chapter 4. Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer and we'll begin. Father, what a blessing it is to have another opportunity to spend time together as we have done so often over the years, seeking a better understanding of the truth of your Word, giving the power and truth to the Holy Spirit to minister to our hearts in a way that enables us and empowers us to live a life beyond ourselves, beyond what our nature would permit or provide. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ who has made this life possible, has given it to us by His work on the cross, by His resurrection from the dead and His ascension.

We thank you for His present ministry of intercession on our behalf. We thank you for the ministry of your Spirit. We pray that all of these will conspire together tonight to strengthen us and prepare us for application and function now and in the ages to come as we seek to live our lives in a way that is pleasing in your sight.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Jeremiah, of course, is a large book with a lot in it.

Because this is a survey and not a detailed study, we regretfully have to focus on only portions of it. And as I was musing on that situation, it occurred to me that one of the ways to do so in a way that would be helpful, in a way that would be memorable, because we can look at text and we can read chapters. We did this last time.

And it's wonderful. And when you're looking at it, it makes sense. It's clear.

I assent. I agree. I believe.

It lightens my path. But it is difficult, at least for me, to get it to stick. If you ask me to list seven points that we covered when last we met in Jeremiah, I, as the guy who taught it, would be hard-pressed to do so.

It just doesn't give us enough time to really ingrain it into our thinking. But God has solved this problem. How does God make things memorable? Let me be more specific.

How did the Lord Jesus make things memorable in His teaching? What did He do? He used parables, which are what? They're stories that involve imagery. He used comparisons. The kingdom of heaven is going to be a wonderful thing.

It's going to have an administration with a lot of levels of government, and there will be believers here and believers there, and there will be thrones, and there will be principalities, and there will be that. What does He say? The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. The kingdom of heaven is like a field.

The kingdom of heaven is like. And He gives us these images that are memorable. Well, I am here to report that Jeremiah has done the same thing.

The salient portions, the portions we want to remember out of Jeremiah that are representative of much of the material that we cannot cover in detail are given to us in images. We've got some wonderful, memorable portions of Jeremiah that will help us retain. Isn't this our goal? We're meeting.

We're investing time here. It's valuable time. While we do it, it would be great, I think, if we could remember it later.

I am becoming more and more impressed with how fun it is to remember what I want to remember and not forget it. So this is our goal tonight. Now, I'm going to challenge you now that by the end of our single session tonight, you'll be able to list four significant images in Jeremiah that you'll still remember next week.

Okay? We've got to find four. We're going to start in chapter 4 because this sets the stage. This paints the background.

This gives us what the book is about. So chapter 4, if you look in your New King James and if it is anything like mine, there's a little subtext under the heading chapter 4. Do you see it? Does yours say what mine says? God calls Israel by His promises. Does yours say that? Well, it should.

God calls Israel by His promises. He exhorts Judah to repentance and then there is a lamentation for Judah. We're going to skip the lamentation.

We did enough of Isaiah to lament the downfall of Israel till the end of the millennial kingdom. I am not going to go through the lament sections. Okay? So just get over your disappointment now.

We're not doing the lament parts. We'll notice that they're there, but I for one have had enough lamentation to last me quite a while. So we're going to look at the first part.

God calls Israel by His promises. Now, do you know some promises from God? If you've got your ring of remembrance, if you've got your GTBC verse cards made by our most excellent verse card staff, you have got promises from God, right? I will both lay me down in peace and sleep. Why? Thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety.

It's a promise. I don't have to toss and turn, wrestling with what may come. I will lay me down in peace and sleep.

You remember the reference? For eight hours of sleep, for eight, Psalm 4.8, for eight hours of sleep, I will both lay me down in peace and sleep. Thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety, Psalm 4.8. So if you find yourself tossing and turning, this is your insomnia. Actually, a better insomnia cure is get a computer, get a phone or something, go to GTBC audio archives, pull up

something, crank it up, and one of two things will happen.

You'll either get a wonderful review of a past Bible class, or if you're like me, it will knock you cold and senseless for a wonderful night of restful sleep. I've never gotten more than about six minutes in. If I, for some reason, have the wide eye, crank up an audio archive, I can put myself to sleep faster than a hypnotist.

Jeremiah chapter 4, God calls Israel by His promises. Now, do you have promises? Yes, you do. Where are they? Among other places? Bring a remembrance in your heart.

Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin. I need power to not sin. I'm tired of sinning.

I'm tired of giving in to my besetting sin. Where's the power? If I might not sin, what helps me? The word I have hidden in my heart. You start feeling yourself going down a bad road? Think of a verse.

We've got a lot of them. Think of any one. Thy word have I hid in my heart.

Pull it up. Think about it. Did you know, this is perhaps a little known, it's actually a well-known fact, but it's little thought of.

You cannot contemplate sin and your memory verse at the same time. Now, does the darkness overcome the light, or does light overcome darkness? Light overcomes darkness, right? You don't have a flash dark. It's not a bright sunny day, and you go grab a little thing with 2D batteries in it and hit the switch, and suddenly you've got a beam of darkness.

It doesn't work that way, does it? Light overcomes darkness. If you're having trouble with worry, fear, depression, anxiety, consternation, impatience, friction, pressure, stress, too much too soon, too late, too little, pull up a memory verse. Just put a comma wherever you are, put a semicolon, put a full stop, stick a period there, and think of a verse.

Thy word have I hid in my heart. It's a promise, right? Promises. Now, God uses his promises.

They're not just aphorisms. They're not, I think that I shall never see a poem as lovely as a tree. You know, I never hope to see one rather see than be.

They're not just aphorisms. They're not just pabulum. They are power.

God's promises are power. Now, look at Jeremiah chapter 4. If you will return, O Israel, says the Lord. When God says if, a promise is in the offing.

So God is calling his people with a promise. He says, here's a promise for you. And like virtually all promises I know of in scripture, it's conditional.

If, if, if you have hidden God's word in your heart, it's going to be a lot easier to might not sin

than if you have not. Now, what's the thing about hiding something? I hid a pair of shoes for myself the other day. They do me no good.

As long as they're hidden, I need to find them. So if you have hidden God's word in your heart, you need to go back and find it at the point of use. If it stays hidden, you know, you, you can say, Oh yes, of course, when we do review on Sunday mornings, I can remember them.

That's not when you're supposed to remember them, right? God calls us. God empowers us with his promise. His promise is a call to action.

It is a call to claim. It is a call to believe. It is a call to trust.

Okay, here's a promise. If you will return, Oh, Israel says the Lord returned to me. And if you will put away your abominations out of my sight, then you shall not be moved.

Wonderful old gospel song. I shall not be, I shall not be moved. Just like a tree planted by the waters.

I shall not be moved. Jesus is my savior. I shall not be moved.

I'm in his love and favor. I shall not be moved. I'm like a tree planted by the waters.

If I am a tree planted by the waters, if I have returned, if I have identified and eliminated that which displeases God in my life, I've got a promise from God. I cannot tell you how many people cry the blues and say, well, you know, the word of God doesn't work. I prayed and nothing happened.

It doesn't say pray your way through the day. We trust our way through the day. We power our way through the day, fueled by the word of God, guided by it, enlightened by it, energized by it.

That and God the Holy Spirit. If you will put away your abominations out of my sight. Okay.

You got distracted. You got consumed. You got enamored.

You got deflected in some way. Fine. Chop it out.

Get rid of it. Set it aside. Abandon it.

Push it out. Clean it out. Sweep it out.

Put this stuff out of my sight, God says. And if you will, if you shall swear the Lord lives in truth, in judgment and in righteousness, notice you shall swear the Lord lives. What kind of a proposition is that? Of course the Lord lives.

So what does that have to do with anything? Don't do this out loud, but mentally, are you prepared to swear the Lord lives? If you think about that, what are you really saying? This is the fundamental question of human existence. God consciousness, looking at the evidence in

creation, the eternity that is in our hearts, the awareness that there's more than meets the eye, and we make a choice, don't we? We either go with the popular book selling obnoxious atheism of the modern day, the anti-theism of the day, there is no God, or we say what? There is a God. The Lord lives.

Now, we are people who say the Lord lives, right? If you can't say the Lord lives, you need to go back and revisit the foundation. We covered this, by the way, in the beginning of our foundational study. What about the existence of God? It's so unscientific to believe in an invisible God.

You might as well believe in flying teapots and spaghetti monsters and so on. Nonsense. This is clever dissembling, and it is false, and it is fallacious.

Do you believe that if I turned a radio on right now, I would hear broadcasts in Dallas all across the dial? Here's some news, here's some talk, here's some music, here's some espanol. Do you think if I turned on a radio right now, I could get that information? Sitting here right now proved to me that there are radio signals in this stuff we're breathing, in this space, in this room. Where's your empirical evidence? Well, if I just had the right equipment.

Yeah, but you don't. Unless you turn on a radio, you can't prove to me that this absolute invisible reality is there. I am thinking right now of a piece of furniture.

Is my idea real? Does it exist? Of course it does. Can I prove to you that I'm thinking of my favorite chair? It's real. Think of your favorite chair.

Think of your favorite person. Think of your favorite pet. Think of your favorite activity.

Think of anything that you enjoy. Is that a real thought? Well, science can measure electrical activity. They have no idea what you're thinking of, and they never will.

There are invisible realities, and materialists who say, if it isn't material, it isn't real, lie. And they lie out of their own mouths because they themselves accept all kinds of things that are intangible. They have to.

You can't get through life if you don't. So don't buy this satanic lie that, well, since there's no scientific evidence for God, quote unquote, and by the way, there is scientific evidence for God, but you define it out. There are realities.

They are invisible realities, and those invisible realities elevate us from the muck and the mud and the dust from which we are made, and they center us in the focus of God's plan and purpose. It is our decisions. So do you swear the Lord lives? That puts you in a category of humanity, and there is another category that says the Lord doesn't live.

This is not an idle statement here. This is central. This is where it begins.

You've got to swear. You've got to believe. You have to assent.

You have to trust. Is there an element of doubt? Of course there is. We grow up from infancy believing in the evidence of our senses, but if you stop and start thinking about the evidence of your senses for very long, you'll realize that that's not real either.

What we see and what we hear is a mental interpretation. Red isn't really red. It just looks red.

Blue isn't really blue. It just looks blue. Things aren't solid.

They just look solid. Everything around you that you look at that's solid is actually vast galaxies of empty space punctuated with little infinitesimally small points of something, but it's mostly empty space. How come one hand won't go through another? It's the design of God, but this is mostly space.

This is mostly space, and yet when they collide, thankfully one won't go through the other. You must believe, swear the Lord lives in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness. This is where it moves from belief to action.

Your belief makes a difference. This is also an extremely important concept. Think about this.

Okay, I am one of two kinds of people. I am the kind of person that trusts and believes and will swear, as far as I'm concerned, as for me and my house, the Lord lives. All right, that's an intellectual decision, but that's not where the promise condition ends.

You shall swear the Lord lives in three areas, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness. Now these are practical areas. Because I swear that the Lord lives, and not just any old Lord, this is the Lord of the covenant.

This is the Lord of my salvation. This is my creator. This is the God I hope to meet through the way, the truth, and the life.

This is the one that I will stand in the presence of when I am taken before the throne by my Savior. And because of that, in other words, there's a consequence. It isn't just an intellectual assent.

It isn't just a belief, like I believe there's a continent that has Australians living on it. I believe there's a New Zealand. I've never seen either one of those, but I believe it.

I have no tangible proof. I've got some evidence, but it's all indirect. People say it's there.

I've never seen it, but I believe it. But my belief in New Zealand doesn't really make a difference in my daily life. But my belief in God makes a difference in these three areas.

In truth, I strive to be a truthful person because the Lord lives. And there are connections between Him and me, and I have responsibilities, and He has expectations of truth from me. What is it, O man, that the Lord requires of you? But to do justice, to love mercy, and to be faithful, and to walk humbly with your God, right? He has expectations of us.

We need to do justice. Well, to be just, you have to be true, right? Truth is inherent in justice. We get at the truth.

We're fair. Truth, judgment, and righteousness. The nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him they shall glory.

We're pretty much of the Gentile persuasion. We're of the nations. And yet, these things apply to us.

We bless ourselves when we recognize the reality of God and when we live in that light. Our faith makes a difference in how we act. That's the essence of chapter 4 here.

So look at verses 3 and 4. Thus says the Lord to the men of Judah and Jerusalem. To the men. Why doesn't He say it to the people? Is God a misogynist? Is He bigoted? Why is He speaking to the men? Why do you think He's speaking to the men? The men have been assigned responsibility.

If He was talking to the Marine Corps, this would be the Lord talking to the officers. Or He might be talking to the non-commissioned officers. He's talking to those who are in charge.

They are the decision makers. They set the policies. They have subordinates.

It doesn't mean they're any better. It just means that's their assignment. To the men.

Break up your fallow ground and do not sow among thorns. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord and take away the foreskins of your hearts, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Now what's He saying here? Circumcision is a sign of the covenant.

And He's saying this covenant should not just be external, it should be an internal reality. You should look at yourself as separate and dedicated to God, marked as such by an external sign. But it is an inward circumcision of the heart.

Paul talks about this. Circumcision isn't external. You don't please God just by an external ritual.

It is the internal sense of dedication. I swear the Lord lives. And because of that, I am truthful, my judgment is fair, and I strive for righteousness.

It makes a difference. Your faith has to make a difference. You can ask yourself at the end of the day, well, I traveled the paths, the groove into which my needle was set, like a turntable, but how did I do what I did? Could some unbeliever have done what I did? Was any portion of that, did I internally dedicate it to God? Did I do it not as unto men, but unto the Lord heartily? That's how we redeem the time.

If the Lord lives, then there ought to be truth and judgment and righteousness in what we do. That is our circumcision of the heart. And of course, it's not just men.

But remember, Old Testament, nation, New Testament, individual believer. Who is the man when it comes to the individual believer? This is our intellect. This is our decider.

This is our logical processes, our reasoning. We take into account facts and data. We arrive at a conclusion, and we make a decision.

We say, all right, I'm going to do this. That's the man. Women have a man in the soul.

It's your intellect. It's your logic. It's your reason.

It is your decider. It is not just some random switch that, whoa, that was a no, and that was a yes. It's based on things.

We think our way to a yes or a no, or to, I will choose A, or I will choose C, or I will choose none of the above. Circumcise yourselves to the Lord. This is an inward dedication.

That's all it means. Lest my fury come forth like fire and burn, so that no one can quench it because of the evil of your doings. There's a promise of prosperity.

There's a promise of blessing. There's a promise of presence. If we do what is right, there is a promise of a certain fearful expectation of judgment, as it says over in Hebrews 10.

A certain fearful expectation of judgment. This is a contract. If you do well in the military, you'll get a commendation.

You'll get a well done sometimes. If you do poorly, you will get a reprimand or worse sometimes. There's a system of, it's an imperfect one, but there's a system of reward and of rebuke in our human authority structures.

Even in school, in companies, do well, you're commended. You get a recognition. You're in this bracket of scholars, or you're the anchorman.

You just barely made it above the cut. God has the same thing, only much more so because His justice and righteousness are perfect, and there's nothing hidden from His sight. So it's absolutely fair.

That's chapter four. So what do you see in chapter four here? I set before you life and death, blessing and judgment, right? And there's a very clear choice. Now, so that this will be memorable, so that we'll remember that this is what's in Jeremiah, flip over to chapter 17.

Do you remember the two big sections of the book, broadly speaking? We've got an introduction, then we've got two through 25, then we've got 26 through 51, and then we've got 52, right? You've got two big sections. First part focuses on Judah. Second part broadens out and talks to the kings, talks about the nations, got some history of Jeremiah's treatment and so on.

But broadly speaking, there is the internal, and then there is the external. And this is what we have to do. We often get enmeshed in circumstances.

There's a lot going on. We have requirements, we have deadlines, we have things that need to be done, things that aren't getting done, things that are annoying, people that are annoyed because of the annoying things that aren't being done, things that are being done that shouldn't be done, things that should have been done but never got done by others that perplex us, all kinds of stress, right? And we tend to think if I can just fix these externalities, if I can get these tasks done and these problems solved, I'll break out into the clear. Wrong, wrong, wrong.

Look at the structure of Jeremiah. Square away the inside first. When you reach the point of peace without changing any of the circumstances, you get peace first.

You get squared away internally first. You look for truth and judgment and righteousness first, internally. Nothing outside changes.

It is our attitude. It is our view. It's our perspective.

Now, not easy to change your perspective when you're in the thick of it, right? How do you change your perspective? How do you get a hold of something solid in the maelstrom of windblown circumstance? What did it say in chapter 4? I am one of those who swears what? The Lord lives. God is in His heaven. I'm His child.

Jesus is my Savior. I'm a tree planted by the rivers of water and I will not be moved. Go back to your fundamental knowledge.

Where does Jeremiah begin? You got to stick your hand up and say, I swear the Lord lives. And as soon as you start looking at the Lord, His eternality, His power, His Godhead, His love, His mercy, His compassion, His patience, His strength, His promises, pick a card out of the ring of remembrance. Grab a promise.

I've never seen the righteous go hungry or his seed begging bread. Ask and it shall be given. Seeking you will find.

Knock and it will be opened. You shall run and not be weary. You shall walk and not faint, right? Because the Lord lives.

Those promises are only valid if the Lord lives. Start with the Lord lives. Next time something knocks you upside of the head you didn't see coming and you're spinning.

Next time you're depressed. Next time you're under it, you can't seem to get out. Next time you're getting ground and chafed and there's a heavy load.

You know, they talk about casting your burdens before the Lord. I've never figured out how to do that. I can't.

They stick. You know, I try to throw them and they just come right back in my hand. What does work, what does succeed, is to follow the biblical plan.

You notice, what I remember the Bible saying about casting things in front of the Lord isn't burdens, it's crowns. You cast crowns at His feet. I don't remember anything about casting burdens.

There might be something in there. I don't remember it. What is the mechanism for succeeding in this world of tribulation? In this world ye shall have tribulation.

What do you do? Start with the Lord. The Lord lives. He's expecting truth and judgment and righteousness from me.

When you get settled in your inner man first, that's why Jeremiah concentrates on the internal problems of Judah before it talks about their international relations and says, look, if you think you've got problems now, you persist in ignoring the Lord and getting off track and off topic and off message and forgetting who you are and why you're here. The judgment of the Lord is going to make your current circumstances look like fun times, look like an afternoon at Six Flags. God says, let's get this thing in perspective.

Do you really want to see trouble? Keep forgetting who you are. Keep forgetting that the Lord lives. Keep forgetting your obligation to truth and judgment and righteousness and you're going to see trouble that will put all of this into perspective.

If you cannot establish perspective in your soul, God is going to establish it for us. That's what Jeremiah says in a nutshell. So when you get over here to chapter 17, the sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron.

With the point of a diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart. There's an image for you. The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron.

With the point of a diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart. Now, I want you to think about the fleshy pink organ that is currently beating away inside your chest. What would happen if you took a pen of iron or the point of a diamond and started scratching that thing? It would be big trouble, right? So what kind of a heart do you have to have that a pen of iron and a point of a diamond has to be used on it? Soft heart? Hard heart? And into that hard heart is graven these sins.

Now, you remember that there's, we'll get to it, but there's another place where God says, I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. I will take out their heart of stone. I will give them a heart of flesh.

Guess what happens when you take out the heart of stone? The engraving goes with it. Sin goes with it. But you have to turn loose of the stone.

You've got to eliminate the stone. Get rid of the stony heart. This is a choice.

God isn't going to do this for us unless we choose it. The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron. The point of a diamond engraved on the tablet of their heart and on the horns of your altars.

The horns of your altars are made out of the same thing as your heart, flinty, adamantine granite. Look at verse 5. Thus says the Lord, cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. Does this sound familiar? For he shall be like a shrub in the desert and shall not see good when it comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness in a salt land which is not inhabited.

What's unique about a salt land? You can go to an uninhabited and unimproved place and say, this really has potential. What if it's salted? It won't grow. You don't have any future potential, right? Exactly.

So how did this happen? How did they get this adamantine heart that gets scratched with diamonds and points of iron and departs from the Lord, makes him like a shrub in the desert with salty ground all around and no future potential? How did that happen? It tells us right here. Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength. It's a funny thing.

You would think fleshy strength would give you a fleshy heart, but fleshy strength gives you a stony heart. God's strength gives us a malleable and compliant heart. So if we find ourselves having difficulty, if our sins will not leave, if we persist, if we repeat, if we have recidivism, one word a night folks, recidivism, if you keep being a reverse processed reversionist, what's the problem? Trusting the wrong things.

You can't fix the circumstance. You're not going to be able to pull the sin out by the roots. You've got to go back to attitude.

You have to go back to choices. Go back to that in which you trust. Go back to chapter four.

What do we raise our hand and say in chapter four? Say it out loud. The Lord lives. That's where it starts.

That's where you get your truth. That's where you get your judgment. And that's where you get your righteousness.

The Lord lives. If you don't have the Lord lives, you're done. It's over.

You're stuck with your heart scratched with a pin of iron and a diamond point. And all you can do is trust in man and make flesh your strength. And you're going to be a shrub in the desert.

You will not see when good comes. You'll inhabit parched places in the wilderness in a salt land not inhabited. Not only will nothing grow, but there's, you've got no camaraderie.

I hear people say, well, I'd rather go to hell than go to heaven because the people in hell are a lot more fun. You know, all these stick in the mud, prudish, a holier than thou people. They're no fun.

I want to go to hell and party. Sorry, but of the many fallacies in that, the difficulty with pursuing the human viewpoint life is you always end up with no true friends, no genuine companionship. You remember the prodigal went and wasted his living, right? You know, had friends as long as he had money.

And when he ended up with the swine, he is alone. You will be alone in your heart. You will be alone in your soul.

You will be in a parched and desert place and there's no potential. You have put yourself in a position where people cannot get close to you and have any meaningful relationships because there is no basis. Your heart is too hard and so is theirs.

Now look at verse 7, blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose hope is the Lord, for he shall be like a tree planted by the waters. You've got a shrub in the desert. You've got a tree planted by the waters.

Now, how are we doing on mental images? What's the first one we saw tonight? Just saw it. Beginning of this chapter. You've got a piece of stone for a heart with an iron pin and a diamond point scratching in what? Sins.

Scratched in, can't get them out. That man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, all of the fleshly world's attainments, is a shrub in the desert, even when good comes, doesn't recognize it. It's a lot easier to see in other people, isn't it? Have you ever seen somebody and you say, look at the potential, look at the opportunity.

Let me just take control, leave your brain for one day and let me just make these decisions for you. Give me the levers and when you come back, your life is going to be so great because good has come. It's right in front of you.

Walk ye in it. Take a step. It's right there.

Come on. And most of us can't resist actually saying that and trying to push and shove and a person with a hard heart doesn't see it, doesn't make sense to them. They don't see it the way you see it.

You've got a good heart. They don't. You've got clarity.

They don't. You've got judgment. You've got truth.

You've got righteousness. They don't. It does not.

There is a veil across the heart. There is a veil over their eyes. And you say, but it's so obvious.

It's obvious to you because you're doing what you're supposed to. And it's as plain as the nose on your face. Planar.

Can't actually see my nose. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose hope is the Lord. Blessed.

This is a tree planted by the rivers of water, all kinds of opportunity and potential. There's no salt in this ground. Spreads out its roots by the river.

Will not fear when heat comes. Yeah, got some heat, got some stress. But I've got my roots deep in this rich soil.

I've got an unlimited source of living water. I shall not be moved. I'm a tree planted by the waters.

And those waters come from the Lord God in heaven flowing out from under His throne. Nothing's cutting off that water. Nothing's separating me from the God who lives.

From the God who is the source of my truth, the source of my judgment, the source of my righteousness. What shall separate us from the love of God, Paul says. See if you can ever answer that question.

There's only one thing that can ever separate us from the love of God. And that's us. Our bad choices.

It's leaf will be green. It will not be anxious in the year of drought, nor will it cease from yielding fruit. Productivity, permanence, redeeming the time, making a difference, inheritance in heaven, treasure in heaven, bright future, unlimited opportunity.

And by the way, you notice that there's no hint of an uninhabited land. There are other trees by this river. You're going to have fellowship.

You're going to have close contact with believers of like mind. Even when you're separated at a distance, there is that unity of the faith and the bond of peace. The heart, verse 9, is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.

Who can know it? If it is not disciplined, if it isn't submissive to the truth of God, to the presence of God, to the power of God, it will turn hard faster than fresh bread on a hot day. It has to be connected to God. It has to be submitted to God.

It has to come before God. I, the Lord, search the heart. I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.

I test the heart. Do you have a hard heart, scratched and engraved with sin, or do you have a submissive heart? That's the choice. Now, turn over to 1 of chapter 18.

Now, count your images. We're going to have a pop quiz next time. How many images has Jeremiah given us so far that we've looked at tonight? The first one is hard heart, and it takes really hard things, scratching in very permanent engravings.

What's the second one? You've got vegetation and its environment. It's either a shrub in the desert or it's a tree by the river. Here's the third.

Look at 18. The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord saying, Arise and go down to the potter's house. There I will cause you to hear my words.

Now, I want you to notice something that's overlooked often in chapter 18. There's places called the potter's house. It's like a ministry.

Potter and the clay, it's over in Romans. Potter and the clay, yeah, okay, I got that whole thing. Look at this verse.

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah saying, Arise and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house. Now, if God was already talking to Jeremiah and he said, Arise, why can't he just give him his word right there? He's already talking.

How did Jeremiah hear Arise and go? He's hearing the Lord, so why can't he just sit where he is and hear the word of the Lord? There is a condition. There's an initial invitation. Jeremiah, I've got something to say to you.

You need to do something, and then I'll say it. Do you see that? You see this? God comes to him and says, Arise and go, and you'll hear my word. Arise and go, and you'll hear my word.

So there's going to be two kinds of people. Somebody says, well, I'm right here. Why don't you just talk to me now? Talk to me on my terms.

Why do I have to go anywhere? Why are you inconveniencing me? Why can't you just bring it to me here? Jeremiah is of a different stripe. What does it say in verse 3? Then I went down to the potter's house. He arose and went.

This is the responsive heart. This is the malleable, compliant, humble heart. If God wants to speak, I want to be there to listen.

Jeremiah demonstrates the kind of heart he has by what he does. He goes up and goes. When God says, Get up and go, he got up and went.

Ever feel that way? Get up and go has got up and went. Jeremiah goes to the potter's house, and he sees the potter making something at the wheel. The vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter.

So he made it again into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to make. He starts

working with the clay, but the clay does not respond to his molding. The clay aberrates.

The clay doesn't hold the shape. So the potter says, Well, if you're that kind of clay, if you're not the kind of clay that I can form into a vertical vase, then I'm going to make you a flat dish. If you won't hold a thin wall, then I'm going to have to make a thick vessel.

If you can't be a thin shapely vessel for elegant use, I'm going to have to make a thick, clumsy vessel for common use. I can make you into a beautiful centerpiece, or I can make you into a chamber pot. Either way, you're going to be made into something because you are my clay, right? But it's in the potter's hand that is the image.

Image number one, hard heart. Image number two, shrubbery in its environment. Image number three, clay in the hand of the potter.

Now, how many different kinds of heart are there? Two, right? We decide which kind of heart we have. How many kinds of vegetation in an environment are there? Two. We decide which kind we are.

How many different kinds of clay are there in the hand of the potter? Two, there is that clay that conforms and when the master presses and pushes, it responds. It holds the shape. It's faithful.

It's consistent. It holds. It does what clay is supposed to do.

This clay marred in the potter's hand. It is a picture of Judah in Jeremiah's day. God is trying to mold it into something that will represent his craftsmanship, his artistry, his presence and power.

The clay won't do it. Clay won't hold the shape. It's marred in the potter's hand.

So he made it into another vessel. This is why Paul talks about in Romans, do I not have power over the clay to make vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor? Because you're my clay. The word of the Lord came to me saying, O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter says the Lord.

This is verse 6. Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. I am trying to make you into something. Now let me ask you, do you seriously think when Jeremiah walked in and saw this potter at work that the clay spoiled because he was kind of an amateur potter and he wasn't very good? He goofed.

The potter goofed and it wasn't the clay's fault. What is the clear understanding here? The reason the thing got marred is no fault of the potter. It's bad clay.

Right? And God is the potter. He says, you are clay in my hand. So back to chapter 4, what do we believe? What do we assent to? The Lord lives.

He is the source of truth, judgment and righteousness. If he's true, has good judgment and is

righteous, then it's not the potter that's causing the problem here. It's the clay.

The clay fails. The clay refuses. The clay will not conform.

Look, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand, O child of God. The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck it up, to pull down and to destroy it, this is a pronouncement of judgment. This is what God is doing in Jeremiah's day and Josiah's day to the kingdom of Judah, right? He's saying, I'm going to pluck you up and destroy you.

What's he saying? The instant I speak concerning this, to pluck up and pull down and destroy, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. Can it be any clearer? The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in my sight so that it does not obey my voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it. Now who is initiating and who is responding here? You Calvinists just go all woolly when you get to a passage like this because God's supposed to initiate everything.

He ordains it. He decrees it. He graves it with a pen of diamond and an iron point in eternity past and we're just all following the plan, not according to the word of God.

What does the word of God say? Look, you can get in trouble and I will pronounce judgment, but if you turn, I will relent. I can declare that you're doing a pretty good job and I'm going to bless, and if you turn and start choosing evil, I will relent from the good I was going to do. I'm watching you, God says, and I will respond and determine your fate based on you, what you choose, not what you feel, not what you imagine, not what you tell yourself in your deceitful above all things and desperately wicked adamant heart.

It's what you choose, what you decide to do. Now, therefore, verse 11, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, thus says the Lord, behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. Now what did God just get through saying when he says that? The instant he says that, what? As soon as he says it, turn and I will relent.

Isn't that the promise? It's a promise of God. It's the word of the Lord. Jeremiah went to the potter's house.

This is the word he got after looking at the potter and the clay, your clay spoiling in my hand. If you'll shape up, I'll try again. I will relent.

I won't turn you into a vessel for common use. Thus says the Lord, verse 11, behold, I am fashioning a disaster and devising a plan against you. So what should they do? If that nation turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster.

Return now everyone from his evil way and make your ways and your doings good. Now how do you do that? Chapter 4, right? Not hard. Alright, final image for the night.

Chapter 19, thus says the Lord, go and get a potter's earthen flask, take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests, go out to the valley of the sons of Hinnom, otherwise known as Gehenna. Go to Gehenna. Go to Gehenna.

Go to Gehenna. It's biblical. You can tell somebody, go to Gehenna.

Go to Gehenna, which is by the entry of the potsherd gate. Kind of appropriate. Take a pottery flask, go to the potsherd gate at Gehenna and proclaim there the words that I will tell you.

He is basically going to give them the same thing. You don't have time to read verses 3 through 9. It's the same thing. I'm pronouncing disaster.

This is the details of the disaster that we just saw in chapter 18, okay? It's just the details. You're going to be eating the flesh of your children. It's grotesque.

So he delivers this message of coming disaster. Now look at verse 10. Then after you've given them this pronouncement of impending disaster, if you've told them that they need to repent right away so that I can relent, then you shall break the flask in the sight of the men who go with you and say to them, verse 11, thus says the Lord of hosts, even so I will break this people and this city as one breaks a potter's vessel which cannot be made whole again and they shall bury them in Tophet until there is no place to bury.

Now, let's review our images. Image number 1 was a hard heart, not malleable. What was the second image? You got either a shrub in the desert or a tree by the rivers of water.

Third one, potter and the clay. What kind of clay was he working with there? Was he pulling it out of the kiln? This is fresh clay. This is clay at the beginning where there is a possibility.

The clay can decide if it's going to conform to the potter's hand or not. Now, what kind of clay have we got? This is still clay that came from the hand of the potter, but what's the difference? It's baked. You shall smash the flask before them and say, thus I am going to do.

Why are they going to be smashed? Why did God say they're absolutely going out under discipline because of the sins of Manasseh? Because they are a baked flask. Now, doesn't this seem contradictory? Isn't he saying turn and relent and repent and I will remove the judgment? And here he's saying judgment is coming no matter what. He says be soft clay and mold my hands.

Over here he says you're baked clay and you're going to shatter. What's the difference? Who's the audience when he goes to the potter's house? Who's in the potter's house when Jeremiah gets the word of the Lord? There's the potter and there's Jeremiah, right? This is the word of the Lord. Oh, house of Israel, look at the beginning of verse six.

Oh, house of Israel, can I do with you? Who is the image of the clay and the potter directed to? The house. Who lives in the house? The people, the children, everybody. Everybody's in the

house, right? Who is the audience in chapter 19? Who does he take to the valley of Hinnom and talk to about this flask? Who's the audience? Take the elders of the people and the elders of the priests, the leadership.

So where's the real problem? There are people who are still salvageable. There are people who will turn, right? And so listen now, here's the point for the night. There's two audiences here.

Some of them are intransigent. They have spoiled in the hand of the potter. He turned them into a flask and it's baked.

That flask is going to be shattered. That's the elders of the people. He takes those people out.

He says, this is what God's going to do with you. And at the gate of the pot sherds, which is the gate of the broken stuff, he breaks another one. And he says, this is you.

This is absolutely happening. Yet there is this message to others. At the same time, some people have, as John says, they have sinned.

John says, there is a sin unto death. I do not say that you should pray for that. The door of the ark is shut for those folks.

As many as are getting in the ark have gotten on and the door has shut. They're done. Sins of Manasseh.

Notice sins of Manasseh leadership. You have led them to sin. The leadership is absolutely going to get wiped out no matter what.

But people in and underneath. Look at our country today. Forget the leadership.

It's over. But we're the people in the house. We can claim the promises of God.

We will be delivered. We will be under God's watch care. Never seen the righteous go hungry.

Never seen a seed begging bread. Be righteous. Raise your hand.

Swear that the Lord lives. Do what you're supposed to do. Eliminate the abominations.

Get rid of the evil things. Do what you're supposed to do. You will be fine.

By the way, I want you to notice one other thing. In this whole great long book of Jeremiah, he tells them the captivity is coming. He tells them who's going to be the captors.

He tells them how long it's going to last, 70 years. He tells them why it's coming, how it's coming. There's infinite detail.

You will know what you need to know when the judgment of God falls. If you're doing what you're supposed to do, if you are asking and seeking and knocking, if you are a tree planted by

the rivers of water, that water is going to come into your deep roots and you will know in that hour what you should do. You will know in that hour what you should say.

Relax. Make sure the inside is squared away. Make sure your leadership is not a baked clay flask.

Be malleable. Be teachable. Be humble.

Be willing to change your mind. Be willing to let some things go that you earlier chose and say, wait a minute, cursed is the man that trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord. I don't want to be a shrub in the desert.

I don't want to have my ground be salted. I don't want to be in an uninhabited place. I want to be that tree planted by the rivers of water.

Square that away. Don't worry about the circumstance. Just put a little punctuation mark there.

Leave the circumstances where they are. Get the inside straight. It's the presence of God, the existence of God.

It is the promise of God. God calls us by his promises. It doesn't get any more practical than this, folks.

This is what you do. This is how you thrive. This is how you become an overcomer.

This is how you reign with him on his throne. This is how you walk with him in white. This is how you receive the new name.

This is how you receive the white stone. This is how you partake of the hidden manna. This is how you grow in grace and knowledge.

This is how the father prunes us so that we bear more fruit. This is how you abide in the vine. This is the how to, and it is not hard.

It is a decision. It is establishing and following priorities. This is what I'm going to do.

Today is Thursday. Pretty well shot, ending with a Bible class. Great way to finish a day.

Tomorrow, Friday, I'm going to examine myself and see if I'm in the faith. I am going to look for any of this abomination stuff that has crept in, and I'm going to find it, and I'm going to purge it. I'm going to do like King Josiah, but it's not going to be a superficial purge.

Jeremiah tells us, this people essentially honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. They went along with the Josiah reforms, but their heart wasn't in it, and that's why they got destroyed. Our heart has to be in it.

Do you care? Do you want to live a life that pleases God? Do you want to live a life that honors

our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ? If you do, you've got to get off your spiritual duff and do something. The Lord Jesus didn't sit on the mountain and wait for people to come to Him for three and a half years, did He? I'm here to do my Father's will, He said, and He went, and He did, and He worked. My Father is at work, and I must be working.

I am sent. I have a mission. I want to get with it.

So let's be aggressive. Let's ensure that we are in the right place, believing the right things, setting the right course. God will absolutely bless.

Look at verse 15, in closing here of chapter 18. Go back a page. Jeremiah 18, 15.

Because my people have forgotten me, they have burned incense to worthless idols. They have caused themselves to stumble in their ways from the ancient past. Now, do you think that this made no sense to people when they did it? Did they say, I'm just going to do something crazy today? I'm going to do something nonsense.

I think I'll just go burn incense to an idol. They actually believed in this. They had been fed the big lie by the inhabitants of the land.

Oh, listen, when I worship Baal, my crops get, look, my field is so much more prosperous than yours. Well, I worship Baal. Come down to me.

Look, this works. It's practical. It made sense to them.

It's as old as the first lie. How did Eve get tripped up? Well, I just think I'll do something crazy and eat this fruit. It was logical.

It was reasonable. She looked at it and saw that it was desirable to make her wise. She was fed a line of bull and she swallowed it and ended up swallowing the fruit.

But she swallowed the lie first. The lie precedes the bad decision. These people burn incense to worthless idols.

Why can't they see that they're worthless? Hard heart scratched with a pen of iron and a diamond point just won't penetrate. There is a refusal. It's a choice.

They have caused themselves to stumble. Notice they've caused themselves to stumble from the old path. It's a well worn path.

You know, paths get established for a reason. You ever been up in the woods and you see a deer path or you see a cattle path through the woods? You know why that path is there? It works. Dumb animals figure out this is the way to go to get from here to there.

It's a good path. Somebody says, well, I think the straight line would be better. I'm going to strike out through the brambles and I'm going to go straight up over the... There's a reason

why the path is where it is.

In culture, there's a reason why conservative cultural values have lasted so long and have served so well. They work. People will say, well, I've got a better way.

I'm just going to blur the lines and erase the signs on the bathroom doors and so on. You're departing from the ancient path. The ancient path is an ancient path because a lot of ancient people figured out that works.

I mean, does not evolution itself teach you that what works persists and your clowny ideas about doing something better are not going to persist and everybody that's tried it is in the dustbin of history? Ancient paths are ancient paths because they work, even in secular world. They cause themselves to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths to walk in pathways and not on a highway. There's a highway.

There's a highway. You know what's great about highways? Everything. Everything is great about a highway.

They've leveled the hills. They've filled in the valleys. They've put in bridges.

They've smoothed the curves. They've banked it. They've drained it.

It's got great stops along the way with clean restrooms and plenty of great snacks. It's a highway. Oh, no.

I want to take a path. I'm going to walk to Milwaukee to walk on pathways and not on a highway to make their land desolate and a perpetual hissing. There's an image for you.

It's an auditory image. You know, when they want to scare you in a movie, you hear this snake rattles and kind of a hissing noise in the background. Everyone who passes will be astonished and shake his head.

What were they thinking? I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy. I will show them the back and not the face in the day of their calamity. Start turning around trying to appeal to God at that late date.

All you're going to see is God departing, not God coming. See the back and not the front. Well, this is the choice.

I had one more great image for you. Real quickly, our images. You've got the hard heart or the soft heart.

You've got the shrub in the desert or the tree by the living water, right? You've got the soft clay or the baked flask. The last one is the basket of figs. Turn to, oh man, I hope I didn't lose my basket of figs.

24? Thanks. My page is stuck together. Yeah, the two baskets of figs.

The Lord showed me and there were two baskets of figs set before the temple of the Lord after Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had carried away captive Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah and the princes of Judah with the craftsmen and smiths from Jerusalem and had brought them to Babylon. Broken flask, leadership, elders, chief guys dragged off. One basket had good figs like the figs that are first ripe and the other basket had very bad figs which could not be eaten, they were so bad.

The Lord said to me, what do you see Jeremiah? I said, figs, good figs, very good and bad, very bad which cannot be eaten, they are so bad. Again the word of the Lord came to me saying, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, like these good figs, so I will acknowledge those who are carried away captive from Judah. What seems bad is actually good.

Didn't see that coming. How could being uprooted and taken out of the land be a good thing? But God sent Jeremiah to tell them, you need to comply. Babylon is my scourge and when they say we are taking you, you go.

That's the message from God to Judah. It's counterintuitive isn't it? Why should I comply? This is the land of promise, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Ancestors have shed blood on this land.

We fought Philistines, we fought Amorites, we fought all of the other ites, we fought the incursions from hither and yon. I've been here for umpteen generations. God says, when the Babylonians come, put down your weapons, put on the chains, march to Babylon.

This is my preservation for you. It's the word of the Lord. Those are the good figs, very good figs.

I will acknowledge those who are carried away, captured from Judah whom I have sent out of this place for their good. Doesn't look good, but it is good. Think back over your life.

How many things did not look good that actually were good? There's just, that's a long list isn't it? Into the land of the Chaldeans, for I will set my eyes on them for good. Notice God is facing them, not walking away from them. Circumstances bad, divine attitude good.

I will bring them back to this land. I will build them and not pull them down. I will plant them and not pluck them up.

I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. Notice, these who are obedient, I will give a heart to know me. If you go to the potter's house, I will give you my word.

If you comply and go into captivity voluntarily, don't resist, don't throw yourself against the brick wall of my judgment. I will keep my eyes on you. I will bring you back.

I will plant you. You have to trust me on this. And I will give you a heart to know me.

Saves the best for last. Better than returning to the land, better than being planted and not plucked. I will give you a heart to know me, but you've got to obey first.

You have to choose to comply first. Then I will give you a heart to know me. He doesn't say, well, those to whom I've given a heart to know me, they will voluntarily go into captivity.

God is not a Calvinist. Sorry. I will be their God.

They shall return to me with their whole heart. As the bad figs which cannot be eaten, they are so bad. Thus says the Lord, so will I give up Zedekiah, the king of Judah, his princes, the residue of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt.

I will deliver them to trouble into all the kingdoms of the earth for their harm, to be a reproach and a byword, a taunt and a curse in all places where I shall drive them. Pretty clear, yes? All right, final review. What are our images from the first half of Jeremiah here? Hard heart or a soft heart, which is it going to be? Shrub in the desert, tree by the rivers of water, which is it going to be? Soft clay, malleable clay, clay that holds its shape, or spoiled clay that's going to get baked and shattered.

Are you going to be a hard flask, too far gone, won't change, won't listen? Final image, which basket are you in? Oh fig. Now give us a figgy pudding. Which basket are you in? Are you a good fig that hears the word of the Lord, counterintuitive though it may be, and obeys? Or do you stick to the traditional wisdom, wisdom of men? You make flesh your strength.

Our army can turn them back. Our diplomats will arrive at a solution. Cursed is the man who trusts in man, makes flesh his strength, has a heart that departs from the Lord.

Each of these images, see if we can remember these five now for next time, because that's half the book of Jeremiah right there. And isn't the message just implicit in those very clear memorable images? That's why God gave them to us. And that's our choice.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the powerful and effective ways that you have communicated your truth to us.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will impress them on our hearts, that we will be malleable enough to retain them, to be changed by them, to respond to them, to live our lives in a way that pleases you and glorifies our Savior the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in His name. Amen.