Kings and Prophets 16-07-21b

Let's pick up our study in Jeremiah chapter 15. I had you circle a word at the beginning of the first session during our review of the first half of this chapter. Do you remember what it was? Turn.

Shoo. That was in verse 7. I will destroy my people because they do not return from their ways. They do not turn around from their ways.

Well, Jeremiah has prayed this prayer that we just reviewed in verses 15 through 18. Oh Lord, you know, remember me and visit me. What is the first thing Jeremiah does here? And it is a right thing and a good thing.

He goes to the Lord. He goes to the Lord in prayer. He looks at his circumstance and he turns to God in heaven.

Lift my eyes to the hills from whence cometh my strength. Right? First course of action. He does the right thing and he acknowledges God's knowledge and God's wisdom and God's grace and compassion.

Remember me and visit me. Be merciful to me, oh God. Right? So that's really step one.

The topic tonight is what do the faithful and obedient do in such times? First thing we do, go to the Lord in prayer, in faith. This prayer is not a prayer of desperation. It's not a prayer of confusion.

It's not a prayer of chaotic thinking. It's not, oh God, help. This is someone who is faithful, who is obedient, and who looks to the Lord in confidence.

Lord, You know. In Your enduring patience, do not take me away. Take vengeance for me on my persecutors.

Notice he doesn't say, oh Lord, help me reload enough ammunition to blow these boogers away. Right? He puts his persecutors in God's hands. So number one, he looks in the vertical direction, in prayer and faith.

Number two, he commits the people who are his persecutors, his problem, to the Lord. Oh Lord, You take vengeance for me. By definition and by default here, he's not taking vengeance into his own hand.

He's not trying to countermeasure, counteract, fight against. We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, do we? Our warfare is spiritual. In Your enduring patience, do not take me away.

Don't let me be overcome by this opposition. Know that for Your sake I have suffered rebuke. He says, Lord, You know.

And You know that it is for Your sake that I am being persecuted. It is because of my identity. In Jeremiah's case, it is as a prophet.

We are all representing the Lord Jesus. He said, if they hate me, they're going to hate you. And they do.

And we suffer for our expression of faith. If we're not suffering as Christians, we're probably not identifiable as Christians in this culture and in this hostile environment. If we are so successfully blending that we're not marked out by the enemy, guess what? We're not worth making a target.

We are not making a difference. I am called by Your name, O Lord, God of hosts. I am identifiable.

I have the mark. I was looking this morning at a sermon that I was editing, and Dr. Criswell was pointing out, Paul, at the end of one of his letters, says, Let no man henceforth trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. And the word for marks there is stigmata.

It's the plural of stigma. Stigma. Is there a stigma today in being a Christian? That's your mark of the Lord Jesus.

For Paul, it's a double entendre, because not only is he marked, there is a slave mark. Slaves could be easily identified. You remember Onesimus running away from his master Philemon, and he goes all the way from Colossae to where Paul is in Rome, I think, and is sent all the way back.

It's quite a distance. How is he identifiable as a runaway slave? Well, slaves in the Roman Empire often had this visible mark, a brand of a slave. It's a stigma.

And Paul's wounds, you think about the times that he received the 40 stripes minus one from the Jews. You can imagine what his back looked like. You remember when he was stoned and left for dead at Lystra.

Can you imagine what his face looked like after being hit with jagged stones until people thought he was dead? That's a bloody process. So, I am called by your name. I am visibly identified with your name.

It's like those jugs that they find, the clay imprinted with holy to the Lord. That should be us. O Lord God of hosts, I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers, those who take God and His word lightly.

And this can range anywhere from believers who disregard it in their personal lives and don't think it counts, don't think it matters, don't think it applies. No problem shacking up with the person of my desire without benefit of marriage, without observing any proprieties, without noting God's word with respect to fornication and in some cases adultery or perversion. It's

whatever is socially acceptable is acceptable to me.

Mocking, taking lightly, disregarding, defining away, re-explaining God's word. Nor did I rejoice, nor did I celebrate with them. If you take away all of the negatives of God's word and just concentrate on the positives and everything is love and Jesus in a field of daisies, well, you have great celebration.

You can be happy because there's nothing to be remorseful about. There's nothing to regret. There's nothing to cause us to go to God's throne seeking forgiveness and cleansing.

I didn't rejoice. I didn't celebrate. I didn't join in the praise and worship songs that were so uplifting because there's nothing of rebuke and correction and instruction in righteousness in these people who take the word of God lightly and take the name of God lightly.

You have filled me with indignation. I am righteously indignant. I feel the way the Lord Jesus felt when he looked at the temple and saw the money changers.

That's how I feel. Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, refuses to be healed? Will you be to me like a stream that seemed so promising in the spring when I built my house by it and established my homestead, but now that the heat is on, the water doesn't seem to be available? And you get the idea that Jeremiah knows that that's not going to be the case, but this is a provocative prayer. Jeremiah basically says, Lord, where is your refreshing water of life in this instance? I am in pain.

I know that you know this. You know that I am suffering because of your name and because of my identity in you. And he basically is a bit bold here.

He says, Lord, what are you going to do about this? Where's the constant reliable water? Well, God answers, doesn't he? What is God's answer in verse 19? What's the first word? Therefore, thus says the Lord, what? If. Now remember, this is a prayer. Jeremiah is praying on behalf of a group.

There is a remnant here. This is not Jeremiah by himself. He represents that faithful remnant, vastly outnumbered.

God says, if you return, then I will bring you back and you shall stand before me. If you take out the precious from the vial, you shall be as my mouth. Let them return to you, but you must not return to them.

This is definite. It is concise. It is solid.

It is clear. This is God's answer to Jeremiah's prayer, to the prayer of the faithful remnant, to our prayer today. This is what God says.

And he says, well, there's a condition here. You've got to return. What does he mean return? By the way, what do you think this word is? Shuv.

If you return, then I will bring you back. Guess what bring you back is? It's another form of shuv. If you return, I will return you, God says.

If you return, I will cause you to return. I will enable you to return. I will help you return.

If you return, I will return you. That's what it literally says. These are both forms of shuv.

Then in the middle, right after those two uses of shuv, you have, if you take out the precious from the vial, you shall be as my mouth. Let them return to you. Shuv.

But do not return to them. Shuv. This is a beautifully structured reply.

It's so typical of God. You can imagine that God can hardly speak without his divine glory and wisdom showing through. When God speaks, it just gives off structure and beauty and symmetry and elegance.

And this is a beautifully elegant reply to Jeremiah's heartfelt prayer. There's two shuvs at the beginning. There's two shuvs at the end.

So what is the theme here? What is the setting for the jewel in the center? It's all about what you choose. Now, when he says, if you return, I thought we said that Jeremiah is faithful and represents the faithful. So return from what? Jeremiah has prayed this prayer in verses 15 through 18, right? So what did he do? He has, for the moment, withdrawn from his difficult circumstance and gone to God's throne, right? He has come before God and he has made his appeal.

And he has stated his case. And he's based it on what he knows about God. God says, if you will go back into the situation that you have just described, if you will return, you go back and stick.

You go back and hold the fort. You go back and continue to endure this persecution and this hardship and this difficulty, which, yes, you are experiencing because you are called by my name. Because you love my word.

You've eaten it up and it defines you and it shines forth from you. And people that mock my word mock you. God understands all of that.

And Jeremiah knows God understands. But Jeremiah withdraws and comes to God with this. How many kings have we seen in our rehearsal in this study that took rash actions without going to God? Faithful kings.

Found the word of the Lord. Sponsored a big revival. And then ran off to launch an attack without consulting God.

Jeremiah doesn't make that mistake. Jeremiah has seen that happen in his lifetime. When he hits a difficulty, he goes to the Lord.

The Lord says, alright, I want you to go back. I want you to return to that situation. You're there for a reason.

You're shining like a light in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation. You go back and keep on keeping on. If you return.

I will give you the strength to return. If you return, it depends on your choice. I will enable you.

I will cause you. I will help you return. Get back into the fray with renewed energy, renewed strength.

If you wait upon the Lord, you'll renew your strength. Mount up with wings. Run and not be weary.

Walk and not faint. Right? If you return, I will return you. It's two forms of shew.

You don't get it in the English here. But God says, if you make up your mind to return, I will return you. In other words, I will be with you and I will strengthen you.

I will help you. I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness. If you choose to stick, if you choose to stay, you get back in the fray.

You fight that battle. I will return you. Now we have the jewel that's in the center of this fourfold shew setting.

If you take out the precious from the vial. The verb here, take out, is the Hebrew word yatsah. And it means to bring forth or to draw out from, to cause something to emerge.

And it's got lots of different nuances and translations in the word of God. But it basically says, you've got to distinguish. You've got to separate.

You've got to cause one thing to come out from the other thing. Come out. You've got to make it come out.

So he says, if you will take out, cause to come forth, the precious from the vial. Now, precious is the Hebrew word yakar, Y-A-Q-A-R. And this means what is valuable.

It's translated precious. It is translated costly. In 1 Samuel 3, it says, chapter 3, verse 1, 1 Samuel, it says, the word of the Lord was rare in those days.

Communication from the Lord was rare. It was yakar. It was not a common thing.

It was a precious thing. Few and far between, and therefore valuable when you found it. Right? 2 Samuel 12, 30, talking about things that are precious stones that are set in gold, and it's translated precious stones, rare stones, valuable stones, highly esteemed stones because of their rarity.

Same thing in 1 Kings 5, 17, costly stones to lay in the house of the Lord. So, God says, if you will distinguish and separate out and make a distinction for that which is rare and costly and precious. What's he talking about here? What did Jeremiah mention in his prayer? This is the context.

What is it that Jeremiah values? And it's the joy and rejoicing of his heart. What's precious to him? God's word. God says, if you will return, I will be with you and return you.

If you will separate out and distinguish and cause to emerge as separate and distinct that which is rare and precious, that which is valuable, which is the word of God, the worship of God, the appreciation for God, those rare things, separate that from the vile. Now, what is the vile? This is a really interesting word because it doesn't mean that which is corrupt or rotting or something like that. This is from the verb zalal, Z-A-L-A-L, but it's a participle.

And so it's zalal. Remember that O-E infix I've mentioned many times over the years? When you have O-E instead of two A's in a Hebrew verb, it turns the verb into a noun. Well, zalal means to shake.

That's what the verb means, to shake. So zalal, if you take a noun from that verb, what's it going to mean? Something shaky, right? Something unstable, instability, that which cannot be counted on. It's not something good to build on, to shake or to quake.

And oddly and weirdly, in your King James and New King James, and even in the Jewish Publications Society translation, it is often translated glutton. Now, how do you get from shaking to gluttony? Well, it's by association because it is often found right next to the word for drink or drinking. And so they say, well, eating and drinking.

So you're overeating and overdrinking. And so it'll be associated with wine bibbers in Proverbs 23, 20. Be not among wine bibbers or with the gluttonous eaters of flesh, gluttonous eaters of meat.

But it comes to mean to be worthless because it's light and unstable. What can you use it for? It's not solid, it's not reliable, it's shaky. And so what is God saying here? He says, if you will return into this situation that you have described, that is the theme of the book of Jeremiah, the faithful remnant isn't even appreciated by its own people.

If you will separate out that which is precious, that which is valuable, that which is highly esteemed, that has genuine merit, the truth, the truth of God, from that which is variable, unstable, unreliable, shaky. And this is often associated with drunkards. Why? You can't count on them.

They're unstable. They can't walk a straight line. They can't speak a coherent sentence.

They can't be counted upon to show up on time with the right stuff, doing the right thing. Because their pattern, and notice this is a participle, when you've got the O-E-Z-O-L, this isn't,

well, I was unreliable one time. This is a pattern of shakiness.

This is an ongoing condition of instability, lack of security, lack of confidence, lack of reliability. Cannot be counted on. You can't build on it.

You can't trust it. God says, in this situation that you're in, in these times in which you live, you have got to make an issue of that which is firm and secure and valuable for that reason, from that which is a fad, a splash, unreliable, turns with the shifting winds of opinion. It's legitimate today.

It's illegitimate tomorrow. It has no foundation. It has no basis.

It's the shifting sands. God says, if you will do this, you go back into this situation and you continue to point out, here's what's valuable, here's what's real, and here's what's true, and speak out against, make a distinction of that which is ephemeral and transient. Reminds you of Kohelet and the Hevel, the effervescent, evanescent, vaporous nature of all things human, versus the divine eternality and solidity and incredible value above gold or silver or rubies, more precious than gold.

So make that distinction. And you will be speaking for me. You will basically be my voice on this earth.

You will be my mouth, God says. I'm not speaking from heaven with thunderous tones. You are my voice.

You are my mouth. You make this distinction. You speak up and speak out.

You stick and you stay. And you continue to suffer abuse and ridicule and disregard and ad hominem attack, belittling, deriding. You go back.

You return. I'll return you and you'll be my mouth speaking truth. What should the faithful and obedient do? This is what you do.

You stick. You stay. You keep on keeping on.

God says, I'm returning you. I've heard your prayer and I want you to keep on the mission. Keep doing what you're doing.

I know you're taking fire. I know it's difficult. You keep doing it.

You'll be as my mouth. Let them return to you, but you must not return to them. Remember, Jeremiah says, I used to be in that crowd.

But when I took your word in and it was precious and it was the joy and rejoicing of my heart, I had to go sit alone. I could no longer tolerate their company. And he says, when you go back, you speak up and you speak out, but you don't.

I'm not telling you go reassociate and go back and sit down with the mockers and the deriders. And these are in line for judgment. You speak up.

And if there are those who hear and come to you, that's great. Accept them. Welcome them.

You speak in such a way that you leave a path where they can come to you. If they return to you. Great.

But you do not return to their fellowship. Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly. You don't stand in the way of sinners.

You don't sit in the seat of the scornful. You speak up and identify what is ungodly. You identify what is sin.

You identify what is scorned and yet is so valuable. You delight in the law of the Lord. You meditate in a day and night and your life is a witness.

It is the voice of God speaking in your generation. That's what you do. Look at verse 20.

I will make you to this people a fortified bronze wall. What they throw at you will not stick. They will not break you.

They will not destroy you. They will not tear you down. They will not wound you.

You're not a stone wall. You're a bronze wall. Against which nothing will prevail.

They will fight against you but they shall not prevail against you. For I am with you to deliver you and save you says the Lord. It's a promise.

You return. You do what you're supposed to. You make an issue of what counts.

And you identify that which is shaky and transient and unreliable. I will be with you. I will make you a bronze wall.

I will be with you. I will deliver you, verse 21, from the hand of the wicked and I will redeem you from the grip of the terrible. You know what redeem means, right? It means get you out of.

Now what does that tell you about the grip of the terrible? If you were never in it, you wouldn't have to be redeemed out of it, right? If we weren't lost in sin, we wouldn't have to be redeemed. We are going to find ourselves in the grip of the terrible. And God says you go right back in there.

I will redeem you out of it. You're there, but you're not going to stay there. How long is it going to last? It's up to the Lord.

You stick and you stay. That's the message to the faithful. Very quickly now, turn a page and look at chapter 17.

We're not going to have time to do this in detail. We talked about the beginning, the sin of Judah written with a pen of iron, with a point of a diamond. But the structure of this chapter is almost identical to chapter 15.

Look at verse 14 of chapter 17. Jeremiah in verses 14 through 18 prays just like in chapter 15. What does he pray? Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed.

Save me, and I shall be saved. You are my praise. They say to me, Where is the word of the Lord? Let it come now.

As for me, I have not hurried away from being a shepherd who follows you, nor have I desired the woeful day. You know what came out of my lips. It was right there before you.

Do not be a terror to me. You are my hope in the day of doom. Let them be ashamed to persecute me.

Do not let me be put to shame. Let them be dismayed, but do not let me be dismayed. Bring on them the day of doom and destroy them with double destruction.

Now, what do you expect after seeing chapter 15? What do you think is going to happen in chapter 17? Look at verse 19. Thus the Lord said to me, Go and stand in the gate. Return, and I will return you.

Go stand in the gate of the children of the people, by which the kings of Judah come in, and by which they go out, and all the gates of Jerusalem, and say to them, Hear the word of the Lord, you kings of Judah, and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem who enter by these gates. Thus says the Lord, Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it by the gates of Jerusalem, nor carry a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, nor do any work, but hallow the Sabbath day as I commanded your fathers. Your fathers did not obey or incline their ear, but made their neck stiff, that they might not hear nor receive instruction.

It shall be, if you heed me carefully, says the Lord, to bring no burden through the gate of this city on the Sabbath day, but hallow the Sabbath day, to do no work in it. Then shall enter the gates of this city kings and princes, sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they and their princes, accompanied by the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and this city shall remain forever. They shall come from the cities of Judah, from the places around Jerusalem, land of Benjamin, the low land, from the mountains and from the south, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, grain offerings and incense, bringing sacrifices of praise to the house of the Lord.

But if you will not heed me, verse 27, to hallow the Sabbath day, not carrying a burden when entering the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day, I will kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and that fire will not be quenched. Now here's my question to you. We've reviewed all of the heinous things going on in Jerusalem and Judea, and God says, if you'll hallow the Sabbath day and not bear a burden, everything will be great again.

Why does He pick the Sabbath day as the representative command? Why is that? Remember Hebrews chapter 4? They would not enter into my rest. There remains a rest to the people of God. If you read Hebrews 4, He justifies that rest argument on the basis of God creating the earth in six days.

He goes back to Psalm 95 and quotes it. Take it down. I don't have time to read it to you.

Look up Hebrews chapter 4. Look up Psalm 95. That Sabbath resting in the Lord is important. Jeremiah and the remnant are resting in the Lord, aren't they? They're relying on His strength.

They're going to Him. God says, if you enter into my rest, I will do the work. If you're going to do your own work, and by the way, of all of the commands on the tables of the law, which one is hardest to justify from a practical point of view? People can make all kinds of arguments about, well, adultery really is bad, and theft is bad, and murder is bad, and harming one another is a bad thing, and cursing with the Lord's name.

People can make sort of almost secular arguments in favor of those commands. What's the rationale for the Sabbath day? It doesn't make any sense. It's arbitrary.

God says, look, I worked for six days and rested on the seventh. You do the same. It has no practical value except that God said it.

It's not like thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not murder, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not covet, honor your father and mother. All of these you can say, well, that has social benefit and value. The most people can say is, well, you need to rest every once in a while, but we do that every night.

Why not work on the Sabbath? Turn quickly for our closing passage here to Exodus 31, verses 12 through 17. I will remind you that shortly after the giving of those tables, what was the first command that got broken and required a death penalty in Israel? Make a note of it. It's Numbers 15, 32 and following.

The man picking up sticks on the Sabbath. The first command. It wasn't a murder.

It wasn't a theft. It wasn't a case of adultery. It wasn't somebody dishonoring their father and mother.

The first command that got broken and the first guy to get executed under the new law that came down from Sinai was a guy who violated the Sabbath. Why does God take it so seriously? Closing verse now, Exodus 31. Exodus 31, beginning at verse 12.

It is right and it is important because God says it. Isn't that the theme in Jeremiah chapter 15? Isn't that the theme in Jeremiah 17? Your words were found and I did eat them and they were the joy and rejoicing of my heart. God says, you distinguish that which is valuable from that which is shaky and ephemeral and transient.

The Lord spoke to Moses saying, speak to the children of Israel saying, surely my Sabbaths you shall keep for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you, who separates you. Sanctification is separation. You remember that, right? Sanctifying, being holy, kadosh, it means to separate.

You shall keep the Sabbath. Therefore it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death.

Whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. Work shall be done for six days, but the seventh is the Sabbath of rest. Holy to the Lord.

Not because it makes any kind of secular sense. Not avoiding pork because it's more easily infected with germs and a lot of the arguments people make for other parts of the law. The Sabbath is holy because God says it's holy.

And it doesn't have to make any sense. You do it because God says it. It is precious because it's the word of God.

Whoever does any work on the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death. Verse 16, the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. Now as if he hasn't said this enough and repeated it enough, he continues.

It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth. And on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.

It's a sign. Now why are we out from under that particular law even though we tend to respect the Ten Commandments down to this day? It's a sign between God and Israel. It's a covenant sign like circumcision was.

And he says it explicitly here. But that's the reminder. Why does God make this point in Jeremiah and through Jeremiah in chapter 17? Are you going to remember the covenant and are you going to do what I say because I am the Lord your God? Or are you going to rationalize and justify? Well, that just doesn't make any sense.

I can make 13% more money if I go ahead and work that seventh day, right? I can make 13.5%, 14% more money if I work an additional day a week. Why wouldn't I? I'm getting enough rest. It's okay.

I don't need to stop. It makes no sense. It's irrational.

It's true because God says it's true. It's right because God says it's right. And that's what God's people need to stand for.

Be God's voice. Be God's witness. Shine like a light in this generation.

What do the faithful and obedient do? Look at Jeremiah 15. Look at Jeremiah 17. Go to the Lord.

Stand in his strength. Stand up for what he says. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for the clear and persuasive direction that you give to us. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will remind us.

And as we choose to return to our circumstances and to stick and to stay, be with us according to your promise. Strengthen us and help us so that we can accurately and effectively reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus. In whose name we pray, amen.