

Read Jeremiah 1

But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and all that I command you, you shall speak. Jer 1:7

I took our youth group on a weekend retreat and part of the team building exercises was a big obstacle course. One of the challenges was a large rock wall that stood about 50 feet in the air. I was looking at it, knowing that the youth wanted to see me get over it. But before I got on it, I had serious doubts whether I could even do it. We saw quite a few teenagers get halfway up and then they were done, some from exhaustion and some from fear. So as soon as I got on that wall, I wanted to get to the top, but I was pretty sure that I wouldn't.

We can often be quick in defeating ourselves. Just as I claimed defeat on that wall before even getting on it, Jeremiah claimed an inability to do what God wanted Him to do before he had even tried. God made it clear that He had a plan for Jeremiah before he was ever born, just like He has for all of us. And in this passage, God lets Jeremiah know that he will be successful under God's call. Jeremiah would be obedient in word and deed, which is the great measure of a believer. What God said for Jeremiah to say and do, he would do. It didn't come down to what Jeremiah couldn't do, but what he could. And what he could do, was whatever God called him to do. **What excuses are you giving for why you can't help in Children's Ministry, or teach a Sunday School class, or witness to your neighbor? If you feel that God is calling you to do it, then He probably is. He doesn't try to speak confusing things to us, but He speaks so that we know it is Him talking. Otherwise, how would we ever know to listen to Him? If you choose to obey, you will find yourself serving God in a way that He has already equipped you for.**

Read Jeremiah 2

Thus says the Lord, "What injustice did your fathers find in Me, that they went far from Me and walked after emptiness and became empty?" Jer 2:5

I was excited to have a date night with my wife some time back, and we decided to eat at a rib place that we had enjoyed in a previous city. We sat down, and didn't have the best table. Ok, I can overlook that for some good food. Then the waitress was taking forever just to get to our table. Ok, they're busy. Then it took forever to get our food. Now I'm getting a little hot under the collar. And while the food was good, it wasn't nearly the quality we had experienced during our previous outings there. So how many times do you think I've been back to this location? If you said zero, you're right.

There is usually a reason that we separate ourselves from something or someone. Maybe we're tired of bad service or a sarcastic personality, and we decide not to put ourselves through it anymore. But God tells Jeremiah that the previous generation walked away from God when they had no reason to. God asks what injustice could they have found in Him? And when they walked away from God they walked towards emptiness and became empty. The things we chase affect the person we become. When we chase after God, we become more like Him. When we chase after anything else, we become less like Him. And as you move from godliness, the only replacement is emptiness. You become

like the long list of lottery winners who thought they had found happiness in money, and instead have little money and a lot of heartache to show for their winnings. **Are you chasing after God? If you say yes, how are you doing it? The Christian life is specific. We don't just say prayer and bible study. We think about how prayer and Scripture are changing us to become more like Him. If you feel empty and unfulfilled, the reason is because you're chasing unfulfilling things. The world will probably tell you that what you chase is good, and maybe even necessary. But, if it causes you to leave the Lord behind, you're getting nowhere fast.**

Read Jeremiah 3

I thought , 'After she has done all these things she will return to Me'; but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. Jer 3:7

I was reading an article about a pastor in Minnesota a few years ago that caught my attention. He had a young couple in his church that he had counseled before their wedding and then he performed the marriage ceremony. This couple was always talking about missions beforehand and it seemed like they had been brought together for great things. After a few months of being married, this young husband became abusive towards his wife and they dropped their plans for missions. The young wife came back to her pastor and asked why God let her marry someone so two-faced. The pastor said, "You can't blame God. He didn't know this guy would end up acting this way." I'm pretty sure that even though I was reading this article silently, I said, "Are you kidding me?", out loud.

I really caught this verse as a reminder that we need to study the Bible and not just read it. God is talking about Israel and how they have been too willing to follow the empty things other than God. His statement here in Jeremiah 3 is basically God saying, "I thought they'd come back to me, but they didn't." This would imply God was unaware of a future piece of information, which would mean that He's not all-knowing, and ultimately, He's not God. So I took a look at this word "thought" and found that some other translations also say, "I thought". The Hebrew word that is being translated as thought is the word *amar* which literally means "to utter, say". So the verse should be translated, "I said come back to me, but they didn't." It appears that some translations of the Bible get this one extremely wrong. **One word makes a big difference. I recommend you finding a good Strong's Concordance of the Bible or a Vine's Dictionary of the Old and New Testament. Be willing to dig, so that when something doesn't seem quite right, you can study it for yourself and figure out what's going on. You don't have to be a scholar, but you should be willing to take the time to find answers to your questions. Those who read without thinking, aren't really reading.**

Read Jeremiah 4

Wash your heart from evil, O Jerusalem, that you may be saved. How long will your wicked thoughts lodge within you? Jer 4:14

While my wife was out of town for a while, it was my responsibility to make sure the kids were clean and bathed on a regular basis. One night I was brushing my daughter's

hair when I found a tick at the bottom of her hairline that had hidden itself pretty well in there. I was trying to pull it out, and that sucker was lodged in there tight. I worked on it for a while, and my daughter was just yelling in pain from me trying to pull that sucker out. I finally got it, but it was in so tight it took a little bit of skin with it. I remember being mad that this tick caused us so much trouble.

Just like that tick, sin seems uniquely designed to lodge itself within us. We have to be careful when we deal with sin, to make sure that we are taking the sin seriously enough. It is certainly easier just to claim the forgiveness of Jesus for our sin than to do something about it. But, God makes it clear here that removing sin takes effort. He instructs His people to wash themselves from evil and to dislodge wicked thoughts. **God can give us the power to remove sin: He gives us reminders when the sin shows up, He gives us a way of escape from the sin, and He tries to remind us of how we feel when this sin defeats us. But, the choice is always ours. We decide whether we will clean ourselves from evil. We decide to remove the evil thoughts. Are you doing all that is necessary to overcome evil in your life? We are to wash and dislodge when it comes to sin in our lives. The greatest effort to remove sin must come from us.**

Read Jeremiah 5

O LORD, do not Your eyes *look* for truth ? You have smitten them, *but* they did not weaken ; You have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent. Jer 5:3

Do you remember the day when your parent's spankings really didn't scare you anymore? I remember being around 12, and my mom would try to spank us, but she just didn't have the same strength she once had. I made sure to pretend that it hurt so that she didn't turn over the duty to dad and his paddle. Now I've seen my oldest daughter smiling sometimes when she knows she's going to be in trouble, and we realized we had to transition to a new form of discipline, because what we were using with her wasn't registering anymore.

God brought correction and difficulty into the lives of Judah with the intention that the people would recognize that God was working discipline into their lives and they would choose to stop rebelling. God knew that they wouldn't, but He wanted to make sure that they knew they had received a chance to change. Instead of accepting correction, they made their faces hard and refused to repent. This indicates that they recognized that they were doing something wrong, but they were unwilling to admit that God had authority to tell them such things. It's heartbreaking when I see a Christian, or at least someone who says they are a Christian, who chooses to reject God's discipline and hold onto sin. Usually it's because they reason in their hearts that what they're doing isn't really wrong. They come up with a reason that it's sin to someone else, but not to them. **We must be so careful, that if we find ourselves attempting to reason our sin with God, we've already lost. He doesn't want to hear excuses or reasons for your sin. He just wants you to admit you were wrong and then for you to move on. Don't miss God's authority in your life regarding your sin. You may find yourself unable to find His authority in areas that you do want it, like finding His will for your family or career. We can't pick and choose when to rely on God.**

Read Jeremiah 6

They have healed the brokenness of My people superficially, Saying, 'Peace, peace,' but there is no peace. Jer 6:14

Christianity has become the fast food of religions. I saw a video one time that showed a person pulling up to a drive-thru speaker in their car and ordering a worship service with "2 songs, no offering, and a 15 minute sermon." At the time I found it to be humorous, but now I find it to be prophetic. American Christianity is full of people who are church shopping. They're looking for a church that can provide them with a certain experience, over finding a place where they can be an active part of the body. And in order to bring numbers, pastors have preached messages of good feelings and the love of God and downplayed sin, the blood, and the relationships of faith to works.

Superficial faith relationships are nothing new. God's people were ignoring Him, but you had not only regular people, but even the priests in the temple being less than truthful with people. Church-goers were no longer hearing about the repentance that was needed in their lives. They were told to go in peace, live in peace, experience God's peace, but the peace of God was not resting on them. We cannot allow a minister to tell us what God thinks of us; the Holy Spirit is fully capable of doing that. People want to tell you that you're great in the hopes that you'll tell them the same thing. But, God is not impressed with flattery. He will not tell us lies in order to make us feel better. **Have you been looking for a message that makes you feel good, and ignoring the messages that don't? Those efforts brought down an entire nation. God is not a God who refuses to lift up His people, but He will tell us the truth about who we are. It's one of the most loving things about God. He doesn't allow us to live in the delusion that we are just fine. He shows us how we can become better than we are. Are you living a superficial prayer life, not praying too deeply for fear of what God might say? Are you superficial in your reading of the Word of God, being careful not to fall under conviction on a certain point? Are you serving in your church or are you looking to be served?**

Read Jeremiah 7

Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery and swear falsely, and offer sacrifices to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, then come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, 'We are delivered!'—that you may do all these abominations? Jer 7:9-10

I had a friend who used to do just about anything he wanted. That wouldn't have been a big deal except for the fact that he was married, and rarely seemed to keep his wife in the loop. One day he decided to take a trip to a town in another state, and didn't tell his wife until he had gotten there and decided to spend the night. I never heard how she took that, but my guess is not well. One day he told me, "It's easier to ask for forgiveness than permission." I thought he was just joking, but then I realized that's how he treated his wife. He didn't ask if she minded him doing something; he just did it and was willing to suffer the consequences later.

With God, it's easy to ask for forgiveness, but don't set yourself up in a position where you choose to go through with actions that you know will require forgiveness. The people of Judah were violating half of the ten commandments in verse 9 alone, and living their lives as if God played no active role. Then they would walk into His house and claim that they were delivered from evil things. But it wasn't deliverance of a group of people that suddenly saw the error of their ways. Instead it was people that wanted to live as if God didn't exist, but then to claim his deliverance when they were confronted with their sin. **Have you ever seen Christians who seem to think they can do anything they want because Christ has forgiven them? It's been a problem since the early church when Paul warned believers that the blood of Jesus was not a license to do whatever they want (Romans 6:15). Have you ever chosen sin because you knew that Christ provides forgiveness for sins? Jesus' blood absolutely absolves our sin, even those which we commit intentionally. However, He died so that we would be saved from our sins, and so that we would struggle against it. Are you using the forgiveness of Jesus as a license to do whatever you want spiritually? That is not why Jesus died for us. Our responsibility is to take every opportunity to resist sin and become more like the Savior who gave His life for us.**

Read Jeremiah 8

I have listened and heard, they have spoken what is not right; No man repented of his wickedness, saying, 'What have I done?' Everyone turned to his course, like a horse charging into the battle. Jer 8:6

I decided one morning to make breakfast in bed for my parents. I was probably about 9 years old and I thought that eggs and toast would be a good option. I hadn't really cooked eggs before, but I decided to give it a shot since I had seen my mom do them before. So I cooked the eggs and toasted the bread and then I knocked on their door. My mom was mad. I had apparently cooked the last of the eggs and I didn't cook them extremely well, so she made me eat the entire breakfast I had cooked for them. I remember eating it and wondering why I had even done it in the first place.

For the Christian, asking "What have I done?" is a great statement to ask yourself. We can ask what have we done for Jesus. Have I told anyone about Him or have I taken up some responsibility in my church that needed to be covered? Sometimes we need to ask ourselves what we have done in relation to our sin. It's so easy to try to justify our actions, but it's better to take stock of how we have failed and who we may have hurt in the process. You may feel like you're reading Jeremiah 6 all over again, and many of the statements are similar. But it's like the preacher who was asked why he kept preaching on repentance every Sunday. He said, "When people repent, I'll preach a different sermon." **So have you asked yourself "What have I done?" lately? Do you need to think about the spiritual progress you have made or failed to make? Do you need to admit to God a great mistake of sin in your life? There are so many areas that we need to make honest assessments of ourselves. Let's begin today. Don't take the word of those around you who say you're fine; they just want you to repeat the same words back to them.**

Read Jeremiah 9

but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD. Jer 9:24

When I started 4th grade, I had a history teacher who really started to make the past come alive for me. Suddenly I stopped thinking of George Washington as a name in a book, but I began thinking of him as a flesh and blood person who made incredible choices for the sake of our young nation. I eventually decided that I wanted to be the President of the United States when I grew up. Why would I want such an important job? It wasn't to fix our country or defend our nation. I thought that getting your name in the history books was the only way to guarantee that your life would be remembered as being worth anything.

Since becoming a Christian I've learned that the only person I really need to be known by is the Lord. He is able and willing to use me, maybe not in ways that the history books will write about one day, but definitely in ways that will make an impact on the eternity of others. God declares that there is nothing greater on this earth than knowing Him. When we know Him, the confusing seems less confusing. The mysterious seems less mysterious. We know that His ways are higher and more insightful than our own, yet He is a God who "delights" in showing us lovingkindness, justice and righteousness. This is a big statement since this comes in the middle of God's declaration that Jerusalem is going to fall hard for their sin. Even in the midst of discipline, God is always loving and reaching out for His people. **What do you boast in? If you were to take stock of your life and share the most important things you've done or can do, would they be things for your kingdom or God's? Let's remember that everything we can do comes from the Lord anyway. I don't boast when I preach a sermon or write a bible study. I simply remember, "The only reason I can do this is because God gave me a gift."**

Read Jeremiah 10

I know, O LORD, that a man's way is not in himself, nor is it in a man who walks to direct his steps. Jer 10:23

People trust people too much. Self-help books fly off the shelves, only to be replaced with new and updated self-help books. We ask our friends or our ministers for advice, and then we go with what they say when they make us feel good about a course of action. When someone comes to me asking what God's will is for their lives, I always give them the same answer: "I don't know." If you want know what God wants, you must ask Him. If I want to know what my wife thinks, I don't ask my children. I ask my wife.

We are always more willing to trust what we can see. God's words aren't always as clear to us as the words that one human says to another. And so Jeremiah is right when he tells us that you'll never get a good plan from man. God's plans aren't our plans. They include thoughts and knowledge that no one else is capable of. When He put together the plan for

how I would go to seminary, and suffer many hardships, it wouldn't have been the plan I would have chosen. But, it was the plan that has made me the man and servant of God that I am today. **Who are you listening to? Do you ask God-sized questions out of people? You may receive an answer that you like, but probably won't receive an answer that will help you. Stop looking for the answer you want, and start preparing yourself to receive the answer that God gives. His paths will lead you places you might not want to go, but that are absolutely essential to making you who He wants you to be.**

Read Jeremiah 11

And the LORD said to me, "Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, 'Hear the words of this covenant and do them. Jer 11:6

The day I accepted Christ, I was in a church. Christians were all around me, and I finally heard the full story of salvation and asked Jesus to forgive my sins and take over my life. But the journey to Christ didn't start in a church for me. It started in my house, where a church member came to ask me if I would like to go to church with him. That care that he showed me was the factor that drew me to church and eventually to Christ. I formed my opinions about what church was like from others and my few times going and I was just sure I didn't want any part of it. But when someone took the time to bring the message to me, I've been changed ever since.

As a minister, I feel that my job is to get Jesus out of the church. Don't get me wrong, I understand that He is everywhere. But some Christians give me the impression that they think the church is supposed to evangelize people. That's true, and Christians make up the church. I love that God doesn't tell Jeremiah to hang out down at the temple and tell people that they are sinners as they walk in. He's going out into the streets to reach those who aren't going to the temple. They don't care about God, and have given themselves to other gods. You don't reach people like that by sitting in church and waiting for them. You have to go out and find them. I've lead people to Jesus both inside and outside of the church building. But in both cases, the likely cause of them listening to me was because I sought them out. Some who need God will wander into a church looking for Him, but not a great majority. **Is there a street you need to beat to get the word out? Are you waiting for the church to win new believers to Christ, or do you recall that you are the church? Let's not let the message of salvation sit in our churches waiting for someone to look for it. Let's go and share it with people. Those conversations that you didn't expect to have while your car's oil was being changed, or with the parent at your kid's soccer practice are opportunities God has given you to get the message of Jesus out of the building.**

Read Jeremiah 12

You have planted them, they have also taken root; They grow, they have even produced fruit. You are near to their lips but far from their mind. Jer 12:2

Some Christians can be so naive. I've seen many of my teenagers from previous youth groups who tried to convince me that secular bands were ok because they thanked Jesus or God when they got their MTV music awards. All I could think about was the lyrics to their songs, and how that didn't really match up with thanking Jesus. A Christian band called the Supertones finally put what I was thinking into words with their song "Radio Plays". One verse says, "Perfect production without interruption, and everybody loves it because it sounds so sweet. They glorify sin, they sell sex and then they all say Jesus in their thank you speech."

Jeremiah talks about the wicked and how they seem to be doing just fine despite making choices for sin and selfishness. He nails exactly what's going on in the lives of many today. They may talk about God, or even Jesus in order to cause Christians to think they're not so bad. But in their minds, they are simply making a calculated move to get the good will of believers. We see this in politicians all the time. If I were to just take stock on an average day of how many Christians I run into on an average day outside our church, I'll bet it would be small. But, if I go to Congress, suddenly everyone there is a Christian. My guess is that there aren't as many Christians in Congress as there confess to be, but they are willing to talk about God in order to get the Christian votes. **Do you allow people to talk about Jesus and call that faith? Let's not ignore when actions and words don't match up. It's a perfect opportunity to share Christ with someone. If they claim to know Him, but they don't walk like they know Him, they have given you a perfect situation that you can start witnessing from. Talk doesn't motivate people; their hearts do.**

Read Jeremiah 13

'For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah cling to Me,' declares the LORD, 'that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise and for glory; but they did not listen.' Jer 13:11

I came across a story about Corporal Jeff Nashton who was severely injured in the bombing of a Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon in 1983. I was too young to remember this event, but 220 Marines lost their lives when terrorists used truck bombs to bring down the building. Corporal Nashton survived and was taken to the U.S. military hospital in Frankfurt, Germany. He was in bad condition, hooked up with all kinds of tubes and machines. A Marine Corps commander came to the hospital to check on the wounded. When Nashton saw him, and unable to speak, he motioned for a pen and paper. He slowly wrote a note and handed it to the commander. It said, "Semper Fi", the Marine motto meaning "forever faithful". Despite what he had gone through in the service of his country, he remained faithful to that service.

That certainly gives us a picture of God's heart for His people. Sometimes we go through difficult times, but the Christian life isn't like jumping on the bandwagon of a great sports team, and then jumping off when they stink. The Christian life is difficult. God has called

us to be spiritual people in a physical world, and that will always bring difficulty for those who attempt to live that life. But, I know that since living for eternity instead of just what this life has to offer, that I am a better person. The selfless sacrifice of Jesus on the cross for my sins and my life have shown me that selflessness is what gets things accomplished. God saved us not because He needs to be faithful to us. He saved us so we would be faithful to Him. **No one will ever give you a greater gift, deserving of your loyalty that Jesus has. Everytime we choose to be unfaithful by deliberately choosing sin, or refusing to repent over our sin, we are ignoring the faithful sacrifice of Christ, who had no reason to go to the cross except that He was compelled by the love of the Father for you and me. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to lead us towards faithfulness and that we would cling to Him instead of to worldly things that will lead us to sin.**

Read Jeremiah 14

When they fast, I am not going to listen to their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I am not going to accept them. Rather I am going to make an end of them by the sword, famine and pestilence." Jer 14:12

I get really down on myself when I make a bad play in sports. If I bobble a grounder or blow a layup or drop a catch, it just makes me mad. I used to make sure that my coach and teammates saw that I was upset over my mistake so they would know that I was taking the game seriously. After a few years of this I decided instead of dwelling on my mistake, that I should try to make up for it. So I would work harder to get the next grounder, or sink the next shot. It certainly felt better trying to fix my mistakes than feeling bad about them.

Sports metaphors are often used to describe our spiritual lives, but this shouldn't be one of them. I'm not saying that we should dwell on our mistakes, but we should certainly stop to consider why we made a choice to sin, and make a new choice to repent of that sin. Often we just try harder to do good things, without dealing with our sin. We cannot impress God with our spiritual stuff. That's the point here in Jeremiah 14. God doesn't want to see people fasting or giving offerings to Him. He wants to see them repentant. A spiritual service that is done as a result of repentance is great. Spiritual service done to avoid repentance is futile. **Do you know why I think some people believe there are scales in Heaven that weigh our good and bad actions? Because Christians sometimes portray things that way. We tell people to be good, but we fail to tell them about Jesus. We emphasize behavior over repentance. When you're confronted by your sin, do you repent over it, or just try to do better next time? Don't substitute doing stuff for repentance. God wants servants who obey out of love for Him, not out of obligation. Obligation builds church members; love builds Christians.**

Read Jeremiah 15

"You who have forsaken Me", declares the LORD, "You keep going backward. So I will stretch out My hand against you and destroy you; I am tired of relenting! Jer 15:6

I always loved Saturday's during the summer. I spent many of them with my grandma and great-grandma (Granny) and we would often go to the VFW hall for square dances on Saturday nights. I loved to go out there and show people my incredible dance moves. Looking back, I had no idea what I was doing and must have been making a complete fool out of myself. One night my Granny asked me to two-step with her. I didn't know what this meant, so she took my hands and showed me how to lead. You take two steps with your lead foot, and then a step back on every third step. I thought it was dumb to do a dance where two of the steps cancel each other out, but there was always that extra step forward that kept you going in the right direction.

When God says we're going backwards, that means we are choosing sin. Moving forward as a Christian is to become more like Jesus. We'll never reach that mark, but we try for it all the same. And every time we sin, we step back because we're becoming less like Jesus. God knows we are going to have sin and failures in our lives. But God is not going to be patient when all we do is walk backwards. Jesus died to forgive us of our sins and to motivate us to live for Him and seek to do Kingdom work. God's patience with His people runs out when they just assume forgiveness means God doesn't care when we sin. That is not who God is, and while He offers forgiveness, that doesn't mean the sin wasn't grievous to His heart. **Are you walking forwards or backwards in your walk with Christ? What have you committed to do for Him in the last year or several months? Did you commit to share your faith, pray or read the Bible more? Have you been faithful to that commitment or not? Commitments we make as Christians are generally motivated by the Holy Spirit. So when we ignore them we are not just letting ourselves down, but God as well. He has specific plans to bring us towards holiness, but we have to be a part of those plans.**

Read Jeremiah 16

Then you are to say to them, 'It is because your forefathers have forsaken Me,' declares the LORD, 'and have followed other gods and served them and bowed down to them; but Me they have forsaken and have not kept My law. Jer 16:11

My parents used to have the most riveting nights at home. They would take a large table down in our family room and cover it with a jigsaw puzzle. Not the large 50 piece puzzles either, but the 3,000 piece puzzles of flowers or some picture where all the pieces looked the same. And because my parents used to do them, do you know how often I put together jigsaw puzzles? Never. About the only time I see anything in that many pieces around my house is when the kids have broken something.

I hear people often try to blame their childhood, and specifically their parents, on why they make the dumb choices they make. The fathers of Judah forsook God. But they weren't just lazy in their faith. They followed, served, and bowed down to other gods. They went all out. And God mentions this as a reason for the coming destruction, but He makes something else clear in verse 12. The children of these fathers have done as much,

and more evil than was done in the generation before them. It's not blamed on bad parenting, but on bad living. Just because your parents did something, doesn't mean you will as well. **Do you allow a poor childhood to account for the sin, habits and addictions in your life? Then stop it. God doesn't allow for those excuses and neither should you. He built every one of us with the ability to make our own choices. If our parents messed up much of their own lives, shouldn't that motivate us to be the opposite of what they were? You are not your parents. Whether they were faithful to the Lord or not, their choices are not yours. Stop blaming your past for your problems. We make our choices, and just like we want credit when we do the right things, let's take credit and responsibility when sin wins in our lives.**

Read Jeremiah 17

You shall not bring a load out of your houses on the sabbath day nor do any work, but keep the sabbath day holy, as I commanded your forefathers. Jer 17:22

Animals have to be fed everyday. We had horses, chickens, dogs, and various other animals during my years of growing up. And I'll just tell you right now, our horses didn't care if it was Christmas day. Our dogs didn't care if I had been to a New Year's Eve party the night before. All they knew was that it was morning, just like it had been morning the day before, and they were hungry. I learned that I couldn't use a holiday as an excuse to be lazy in feeding the animals. They depended on me, and it was my responsibility to care for them. Even on Sunday mornings. I could have explained the idea of the Sabbath to them, but I'm sure they probably wouldn't have listened very closely to my speech.

There are many people who claim to be Christians, but you'd never know by their church attendance. I wouldn't say that everyday I've been to church has been a day that I've drawn closer to God. But, I definitely credit the church with providing me with Christian friends that I could lean on and who have taught me a great deal in my life. Here is Jeremiah, God tells the people not to bring any loads out of their houses in order to just go to work. His desire for the Sabbath is that they would carry their offerings into the temple, instead of their work down to the office (v.26). God is aware that there are some jobs that need to be done on Sunday, however the day belongs to Him and not to you. **If you didn't get all your work done for the week, is that God's fault? Should you push aside His priorities for your own? Everyday is supposed to be lived for God, but we know that doesn't always happen. He set aside one specific day during the week to remind us to leave behind our selfish plans and to seek Him. It's our opportunity to refocus for the week. If you find Monday to be more of a drag than normal, I'd ask what you did on your Sunday. Did you spend all day waiting to watch your team, and then you just had to watch them lose? There are lots of things you can do on Sunday. None will be more fulfilling or more able to draw you close to God than being in His house with others who believe the same as you.**

Read Jeremiah 18

But the vessel that he was making of clay was spoiled in the hand of the potter; so he remade it into another vessel, as it pleased the potter to make. Jer 18:4

My kids love Play-doh. Sometimes we get other kinds, but the original still seems to be the best stuff. Our kids will get it all out over the table while they cut it and work it and just have a ton of fun. The problem happens when they don't put their stuff away. Soon after, the clay begins to dry out and then it's just no good. Sometimes our kids will realize their mistake, but once the clay is dry, it's dry. They can work with it a little bit, but it's not as much fun and you can't do as much with it.

God doesn't just talk about clay, but he sends Jeremiah to the workshop of a potter. And when he gets there he sees the potter making some sort of vessel on the wheel. While the potter is working on it, the vessel suddenly starts losing shape and the progress that had been made is lost. When it says the clay was spoiled, it means there was some impurity in it. Maybe it was a small rock, or bit of dirt, but the integrity of the clay was lost as a result of that impurity. The correlation is pretty easy to see. God desires to fashion us into something great, but the impurities He has to deal with in our lives, our sin, causes us to be made into something less than desirable. Notice that the impurity came up when the potter was working. **Have you ever had the sense that you were being used by God in a real way, but then sin still came in and interrupted what you were doing for Him? Sin can come in a number of distractions when we are diligently serving Him. The awesome thing about our God is that He didn't throw the clay away. He began working it into something else, still usable, but not to the same extent the first one would have been. And that's what sin does in our lives. It's one of the few things that can limit God as He works in our lives as they are.**

Read Jeremiah 19

Because they have forsaken Me and have made this an alien place and have burned sacrifices in it to other gods, that neither they nor their forefathers nor the kings of Judah had ever known, and *because* they have filled this place with the blood of the innocent Jer 19:4

Several of my friends are huge Baltimore Ravens football fans. One wife was recently telling me that her husband had a chance to see a Ravens game at the stadium of the Pittsburgh Steelers, who are a fierce rival. Her husband was given a ticket by a friend who told him that he could not wear any of his Ravens gear. He thought they were joking, but soon realized it was no joke. So he wore just a plain shirt to the game and said he was glad he did. There were many local fans that were making life unpleasant for the out of town visitors to their stadium.

After Israel and Judah split into two nations, Judah was essentially known for having Jerusalem as its center. Israel collapsed before Judah, with worship being a big part of their problem. The kings of Israel built new worship centers so that the people would not travel to Jerusalem to worship. However, these newly built altars were used not to worship the Lord, but to worship idols. Eventually there is a need for Jeremiah 19 because now the people who live in the city of the temple are doing the same things. They are following false gods, even going as far as to offer their children as human

sacrifices. The temple was not being used as a place to worship God. **What happens in your church? Is there a real sense of coming there to worship, or are there a lot of things that go on in your church that have little to do with God? Are outsiders welcome in your church? There are lots of great programs that have found their way into churches, and while some of them bring new people in, those people are adding numbers instead of disciples. The purpose of the church is that God would be worshipped and that people would grow closer to Him, not to each other. Are you coming into the Lord's house to worship Him or for some other purpose? Any reason other than to worship God is alien to the purposes of the church.**

Read Jeremiah 20

O LORD, You have deceived me and I was deceived; You have overcome me and prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all day long; everyone mocks me. Jer 20:7 I once pastored a church for a grand total of 9 months. I was there for a short time when an extremely divisive person surfaced. I did everything I could privately, and eventually before the church to lead this man to repentance and to lessen his influence on the church. Unfortunately, my attempts failed and I felt that if the church was unwilling to deal with sin, then I needed to go elsewhere. I wondered for many months if I had failed to listen to God in going to that church. Recently I was talking to a former member of that church who was hearing about the wonderful things going on in our family and our current ministry. He said, "Heath, do you know that if you hadn't come here for those nine months, you wouldn't be where you're at now and doing the ministry that God has given you now." That was great confirmation for me from a true man of God.

Sometimes when things aren't easy, we wonder if we missed a memo from God. Jeremiah certainly felt that way. This is the second time we see him accuse God of deceiving him. He was under the impression that serving God would lead to open roads and repentant hearts. Instead, he found himself thrown in jail by a priest! Just because the task is hard, doesn't mean that God is not working. Jeremiah was doing exactly what he was supposed to. Jesus had to die on a cross to bring salvation to us. I had to be willing to uproot my family and go to a church for nine months in order to learn some lessons, and ultimately end up in a wonderful place of ministry. **The hard things are usually what we look back on with fondness. Maybe you once lost a job, and now you can look back and see how God was working. Perhaps some illness for you or a family member had you in tears, but a short time later you realize the lessons God wanted you to learn. The Christian life isn't easy. Being molded into something that is the complete opposite of what you are never is. Just like the clay that Jeremiah saw being formed by the potter, it didn't look like much, but that potter had big plans for it. But those plans required the clay to be spun around and smacked around until it took the shape of the potter's plans. Are you avoiding any hard things in your marriage, job or personal walk with Jesus?**

Read Jeremiah 21

Please inquire of the LORD on our behalf, for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon is warring against us; perhaps the LORD will deal with us according to all His wonderful acts, so that *the enemy will withdraw from us.*" Jer 21:2

I love Presidential history and their stories are so interesting to me. One of my favorite is about Franklin Roosevelt who hated the long White House receiving lines. He had often complained that no one listened to what he said, as they focused more on what they would say. So during the line of a particular reception, he decided to murmur to each person "I murdered my grandmother this morning", as he shook their hands. People responded with phrases such as, "Keep up the good work" and "God bless you sir!" As the ambassador to Bolivia came to FDR, the President once again said, "I murdered my grandmother this morning." The ambassador leaned close and replied, "I'm sure she had it coming."

It's amazing how often we fail to really listen. Sometime we can be told something directly to our faces, but it doesn't really even register with us. This passage is a great example of that as Pashur, who is the same priest who locked up Jeremiah, comes from the King asking if Babylon is going to destroy them. My guess is that Pashur is looking for a new answer, because the last thing Jeremiah said before being imprisoned was that Babylon was going to destroy them. Pashur is hoping that Jeremiah will give a more favorable answer since he's now behind bars. The problem for Pashur, and ultimately Judah, is that the message didn't come from Jeremiah...it came from God. **Sometimes God shows us what we should and shouldn't do in a very clear manner. Other times, he may use a person who comes and shows us our sin or a particular area of service that we should consider. We need to be willing to accept God's answers to us. We cannot wait God out when He gives us a job to do. I've known men who felt the call to ministry and ignored it for decades. Guess what they felt God wanted them to do 20 years later? The same thing He had called them to 20 years before. Don't ignore the call of God. Don't say "no" when God says "yes". Let's consider what God has been asking of us lately that we have not responded to.**

Read Jeremiah 22

But if you will not obey these words, I swear by Myself," declares the LORD, "that this house will become a desolation. Jer 22:5

One day, some good friends of our offered to ride in the van with our family and show us around the new area we lived in. They had said that before we went, we should go out and eat lunch and they said we could go anywhere we wanted. I'm always a bit hesitant when people tell me to pick where we're going to go eat, because I don't want to pick Olive Garden when they're thinking Burger King. So my friend Barry asked again, "Where would you all like to go eat? We can go anywhere you like." My son said, "Chinese", to which Barry quickly replied, "Anywhere but that."

While I don't consider my friend Barry's word to be untrustworthy, there's one person who's word you can always trust. Sometimes I have to hear someone make an offer twice before I believe that I can count on it. Or some people give an opinion on a matter, but I wonder if they're opinion is sincere or simply influenced by the crowd they're around at

the time. The wonderful thing is that God's words are always true. In this passage the Lord swears by Himself, to verify that His words are absolutely true. If God said something one time, that should be enough, but it was very important that the people understand the consequences of ignoring God's words. If they thought He might relent on His punishment, they were wrong. In fact, if God were to only mention something once, that should be enough for us to believe it. **What if John 3:16 were the only mention of the saving power of Jesus? If so, that one verse would still be enough to move missionaries and motivate the church to share and spread the gospel throughout the entire world. God's promises are solid. His promises of salvation are sure. His promises of discipline when we choose unrepentance are sure. Are you trusting in the promises of God or the efforts of man? His words are sure, and His promises can be trusted. People will always let you down, so read the Bible and see true words that have stood the test of time and that will remain after you're gone.**

Read Jeremiah 23

"Am I a God who is near," declares the LORD, "And not a God far off?" Jer 23:23
I played little league baseball as a kid mainly because my mom made me. She was good at softball and so she really wanted me to play. I was terribly uncoordinated for the sport and didn't see a lot of playing time, but I liked hanging out with my friends. I remember a particular game where I got in to bat, and the coach "encouraged" me not to swing. So I stood up there and eventually the pitcher walked me. So as I got to first base and I was all excited, until I looked over at the third base coach. He was giving me the sign to steal second base. I was thinking, "You know I'm slow, right?" So I took my lead and as the pitcher started the wind up, I sprinted for second. I could quickly see the second baseman preparing to field the ball from the catcher, and when it looked like he was about to catch it, I slid. When the dust cleared, the second baseman had tagged me out, and I was a good 2 feet from second base. I had severely misjudged how far my body would slide, and that was the last out of the game.

It's easy to misjudge distances (or so I would like to believe), but what is the distance between you and God? The Lord asks a really great question in verse 23, asking if He is a God who resides near or far. I've heard many people that are certain that God is near, and many that are certain that He is far and aloof from us. It's always good to let Scripture answer Scripture, because God says in verse 24 that He fills the heavens and the earth. God is everywhere at all times. To say that God is far from you, is technically incorrect. We may feel a distancing from God as a result of our sin, but our feelings are not reality. **Do you feel there are times that you are separated from God? Your sin certainly can give that feeling, but God is physically as close to you when you sin as He is when you choose righteousness. The wonderful truth is that we never have to go find God to tell Him we're sorry. If I say something that was rude or disrespectful to my wife, and later I decide that I need to apologize, I have to go find her. But the moment we realize we need to repent before God, that is the moment we should pray. God's presence is there and He is completely able to hear. You don't need to run down to church, or have the pastor pray. Remind yourself today**

that you are in the presence of an inescapable God as you make your daily choices for selfishness or selflessness.

Read Jeremiah 24

Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the captives of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place *into* the land of the Chaldeans. Jer 24:5

My father-in-law told my wife one day that we're too quick to get our kids past punishments. I guess Nikki had to spank one of the children one day for a particular violation while her father was around. After about five minutes, Nikki hugged the child and said she loved them. Her father felt that we were watering down the punishment by hugging them too quickly. Our point on discipline is that it's supposed to let the child know they made a choice and that there are consequences for that choice. But one of our intended consequences is not for our children to be afraid of us, but simply to change the choice.

We have seen such strong language from God regarding the downfall of His people as a result of their sin. But now that the punishment has come, look at how God regards his people. He calls them good and not bad. It's not that they already have made different choices, but at this point they can't get much lower and God's plans for them now will be to lift them back up. He lowered them to conquer their pride and to refocus their attention on the Lord. But, He still loves them immensely. **Just like when I discipline my kids, God does not enjoy seeing His children suffer. He always has a plan, and that plan is for restoration. Has God had to discipline you recently for your sin? Do you feel ashamed or unable to speak to Him? God already has plans to bring you back and remake you, just as that potter that Jeremiah came across. Let's trust the forgiveness of God today. It doesn't come and go, but it is the nature of who God is when we ask for it.**

Read Jeremiah 25

"Yet you have not listened to Me," declares the LORD, "in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. Jer 25:7

My kids have had an interest in the law because their uncle is a police officer. Over time, they began to realize that people go to jail as a punishment and they began asking what would happen if Mommy or I went to jail. I assured them that won't happen, but of course they persisted with "what if". I finally said to them, "I will not be going to jail because I will not do anything that would put me in jail." They needed to understand that people don't accidentally go to jail, but they go there as a result of choices they made. It's not the fault of the police or the judge, but of the inmate who made his choices.

God gives a pretty clear indictment on the people. They haven't just ignored Him, but they have intentionally lived opposite of God's commands for their lives. There have been times that out of laziness or apathy, I haven't done those things that God desires for my life. But the choices of the people were intentionally against God's desires, and as a

result He had to bring discipline in order to bring change. **Have you ever sinned and known that you were working against God's will for your life? The sin we feel guilt over usually isn't when we have a quick outburst of anger without thinking, but it comes when we struggle against a sin, perhaps even for hours and days. We look back and we can see all the ways of escape that God provided, but we make a direct choice to sin. When we do this, we are saying that the consequences are worth whatever steps back we might take as we attempt to justify our sin. God isn't asking that we use our hands for church work, but for God work.**

Read Jeremiah 26

Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and to the prophets, "No death sentence for this man! For he has spoken to us in the name of the LORD our God." Jer 26:16

When I was reading about Lewis and Clark's expedition up the Mississippi river, I found out that they used very interesting currency. They didn't carry money, but a letter that had been signed by President Thomas Jefferson. In the letter it was made plain that these men were on an expedition of the United States, and that any transactions would be covered by the treasury of the United States. As a result, businessmen were quick to work with the expedition because they knew that the government would pay. I wondered why people took that letter at face value. How did they know the letter hadn't been made to look like it came from Jefferson? Mail took months to get from the frontier to D.C., so if it had been a scam, the perpetrators would have been long gone before anyone knew it.

Sometimes we have the same questions about God? How do we know when He is speaking to us? How do we know that we're not just coming up with our own ideas, or worse, how do we know we're not being misled by Satan? Jeremiah 26 gives proof that Jeremiah's message was true. As the people contemplated killing Jeremiah for his words against the people, some began to remember that this exact same message had been preached before. And not just one time, but multiple times. The confirmation of God's messages is that they often aren't new. God speaks the same messages to me, often times because I didn't listen well enough before. If we are seeking to hear from Him, we will, and if we don't, we won't. **God's will for us is not something mysterious. God doesn't desire to hide from you the things that He wants you to do in your life. The people of Jerusalem finally realized that their problem was with the message and not the messenger, and they spare Jeremiah. Have you been wondering if a certain leading in your life is from God? Have you asked Him? Most of the things I don't know enough about, are the same things I've simply not taken the time to investigate. God's will only becomes murky when we put our own will first.**

Read Jeremiah 27

But if they are prophets, and if the word of the LORD is with them, let them now entreat the LORD of hosts that the vessels which are left in the house of the LORD, in the house of the king of Judah and in Jerusalem may not go to Babylon. Jer 27:18

My granny loved to can vegetables. During the summers that I would be with her and my grandmother, they always had a huge garden. The fresh corn off the cob, green beans, and tons of other fresh foods make me long for them even early in the morning! About halfway through the summer, we started canning for the winter. She always grew enough so that she could have her garden vegetables long after the garden was gone. It was such a tedious process and I often wondered why she didn't just buy the cans of vegetables at the supermarket in the winter. During thanksgiving I remember her sending me down into the basement to go get some vegetables, and she cooked them up for our meal. They tasted just like they had in the summertime, and I never complained about helping with canning again in the future.

Judah gets terrible news that the king of Babylon is now in charge. This may seem difficult to understand why God would put an idolatrous king in charge of His people, but quite honestly it wasn't a big leap from the kings they had been serving under anyway. God knew there would be some "patriotic" prophets who would encourage the people to resist Babylon and fight, but that wasn't His will. He challenges these prophets that if they are so concerned with the welfare of the people, they should go preserve the items in the temple. Many of these were made of gold, and God had given specific instructions on how the tools of the temple should be made. God asks that these prophets go and collect those items so that they will not go missing. The other reason, is that God will bring His people back one day, and wants to bring them to a functional temple where the people can repent and serve. **Things may not be as you want them in your nation or even in your church. So what are you going to do about it? Are you going to talk or will you move to action? We need people serving so that when the revival that people have been praying for happens, our churches are ready to receive them. That was God's intention of the revival that would happen over a century later when the Jews returned. I fear that in America if revival would break out, the churches would stop it due to their lack of preparedness for a move of God amongst the masses. Let us pray for and prepare for revival.**

Read Jeremiah 28

Then Jeremiah the prophet said to Hananiah the prophet, "Listen now, Hananiah, the LORD has not sent you, and you have made this people trust in a lie. Jer 28:15

Bob Harris was a New York weatherman for many years, and became known as the trusted "Dr. Bob" due to his work with several news agencies around the city for nearly 10 years. But, Dr. Bob had a secret. An anonymous letter came into the office of WPIX television, stating that Bob Harris didn't have anything more than a high school degree. In fact, he had attended college and studied math, physics and geology, but he never finished. He originally called his first employer, a local CBS station, and told them he had a Ph.D. in geophysics from Columbia University. He was subsequently fired from his television job, nearly lost his home, and his wife divorced him. Harris was interviewed in 1979 by People magazine, just after all these facts came to light. He said, "I took a shortcut that turned out to be the long way around, and one day the bill came due. I will be sorry as long as I am alive."

Dr. Bob's was living a lie. He didn't just want to be a meteorologist, but he wanted to be on TV and radio. He wanted to be someone. We have too many people who claim to be bible teachers and pastors who simply want to be "someone". Jeremiah never shared messages so people would look at him. He shared them so people would look to God. But, Hananiah wanted attention. He clearly must have known that the Lord hadn't spoken to him, but in order to get attention he proclaimed that Babylon would not rule Judah, but would be broken by them. Jeremiah did as Deuteronomy 18:22 suggests; he said that they should wait to see who's prophecy comes true. Hananiah follows with more theatrics as he breaks a yoke that Jeremiah was carrying on his neck as a sign. Hananiah had been caught in a lie, but he was willing to compound that lie to try to save face. It eventually led to his death. **Are you trusting in a lie or perhaps a liar? Too many people accept anyone who claims to be a bible teacher as someone they can trust. Many people in my church listen to bible teachers who are not sound in their doctrine and who seem to say things simply for their own attention. If a teacher seems to be more focused on people seeing him than the Lord, then you need to find a new teacher. Part of the blame for false teachers rests on those who teach, but the other part rests on those who listen without really thinking through the teaching. Are you allowing false teachers into your life?**

Read Jeremiah 29

'For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope. Jer 29:11

I've learned that my GPS is not all-knowing. There's no doubt that it can get me from point A to point B, and it may even do so in the fastest time possible. The problem is, it's not too concerned with my welfare! I was using it in inner-city Philadelphia last year, and some friends were in the car with me. We had just visited a mission project and we needed to get back to where we were staying. So I plugged in our destination and after a few hundred yards, the GPS said to turn left. I got to the turn and we all looked to our left. It looked scary. I thought that if there was ever a place that gangs ambush the cars of out-of-towners, this was probably that street. So I said "No way" and kept driving straight until the GPS found me a different way home.

I knew that that GPS didn't have my best interests at heart, but God always does. After his people have left for Babylon, He has this letter written to let the people know that He will keep His promise. Leaving Jerusalem was not easy for many, but God's assurance is that even though their circumstances are difficult, that does not mean that God is not actively working. His plans give us a hope and future. Sometimes His plans involving fixing the results of us pushing our own plans, but He's big enough to do that. **You may have a terribly difficult circumstance in your life right now, but have you prayed about it? There have been difficult times that the Lord gave me a peace to get through because He was working. There have been other difficult times that were messes of my own making. In both situations, He brought me out for good on the other side, but I had to communicate with Him to understand what he wanted me to do. All of God's plans for you are good. Even when He has to discipline us over sin, the end result of His plans is that we'd become more like the person He desires for**

us to be. Trust God today. Pray about your circumstances, and ask for wisdom to help you see what He's trying to accomplish in your life.

Read Jeremiah 30

You shall be My people, and I will be your God. Jer 30:22

I like professional football, but I don't have a favorite team. The St. Louis Rams were my team, but they've been horrible for too long, and they have no prospects of getting better anytime soon. So I've been hopping back and forth between a couple of teams that are local to us here in Pennsylvania. But I just can't seem to get fully devoted to any one of them. Partly I don't want to pick the wrong one. This is my first chance to not just root for a local Missouri team, and I don't want to mess it up by picking a team that is just a season or two from being the Rams.

God doesn't have a bandwagon for us to jump on. Obviously I wasn't too committed to the Rams and the Rams aren't committed to me as a fan. With God, these dynamics are totally different. God doesn't just tell Israel that He will be their God, but that they shall be His people. When we enter into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, we are not just accepting God, salvation, and religion. We are giving ourselves to Him forever. We don't just try Jesus out, but we become God's possession at salvation and as a result our decisions are no longer our own. Too many people want to claim God as theirs, but they are not willing to be claimed in the same way. The American church is absolutely failing in explaining what it means to accept Jesus as Lord. We have explained accepting Him as Savior and covering our sins, but clearly people have not fully understood what it means to give their lives to Him. That's why many "Christians" live like non-believers. **Is Jesus the Lord of your life? Do you go to Him on a daily basis with the decisions you must make? Do you seek to resist sin for the sake of your Lord, or do you just accept sin as a part of life and ask Jesus the Savior to keep you clean? If Jesus is not the Lord of my life, then He is not the Savior of my life. It's not just about receiving forgiveness, but it's about giving ourselves to Him.**

Read Jeremiah 31

The LORD appeared to him from afar, *saying*, "I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness. Jer 31:3

Shoes are a big thing to me. I never had good shoes growing up, so now that I am finally able to buy my own shoes, so I usually buy nicer ones now. So you can imagine my frustration at buying a new pair of basketball shoes, only to see them begin to tear along a seam after a few days. So I took them back for a replacement pair and had the same problem again. My third pair eventually also started to show their flaws, but I decided I liked the shoes so much that I finally just kept them.

We are significantly more important than shoes, but God has the same attitude towards us as I did those shoes. The defects in the shoe never made me want to give up on them. Their value didn't decrease in my eyes, but I simply wanted the defect to be fixed. This passage gets into the question of whether we can lose our salvation in my mind. There is

no doubt that Judah and Israel sinned, and God showed His displeasure and judgment by removing His people by the defeat to Babylon. But God's love is an everlasting love. His kindness is not fickle. Now God never accepted His people back until they were repentant, but He always took them back. **I often wonder why God keeps His promise to save me? I am so unworthy of being covered by the sacrifice of His sinless Son, and yet here I stand in His grace. We need to remember two things when it comes to sin: 1) We will never out-sin the grace of God. His forgiveness is not that shallow. 2) God will not allow us to continue in the wonderful plans He has for us until we repent. Judah lost 70 years according to Jeremiah 30 before anyone would come back. That's an entire generation, and lots of time lost. Today are you willing to believe that Jesus has saved you from ALL of your sin? And are you repentant and broken over your sin? Do you confess it to Him specifically, or just say in your mind that the blood has covered it and you have no need to confess? Confession and repentant move us in our lives as believers. Attempting to ignore or bury sin will cause God to take drastic, yet loving actions, to get our attention.**

Read Jeremiah 32

Indeed the sons of Israel and the sons of Judah have been doing only evil in My sight from their youth; for the sons of Israel have been only provoking Me to anger by the work of their hands," declares the LORD. Jer 32:30

I've been reading some quotes by a pastor named Tim Keller. He spends a great deal of time talking about religion v. relationship and trying to help people understand the nature of what salvation is. One of his quotes I've been thinking about directly applies to this passage today. "Christians come to see that both their sins and their best deeds have all really been ways of avoiding Jesus as Savior." Keller talks a lot about the efforts of people to follow the law and be good people and that even in trying to be good apart from Christ is really being evil.

Some people might read this verse and say that the sons of Judah couldn't have been doing ONLY evil. But, when they were living for themselves, that was evil. And when they paid lip service to God in the temple and concerning themselves with the law temporarily, that was evil as well. Judah was an idolatrous, selfish and prideful nation. Even after the reign of the godly king Josiah, Judah fell right back into their same old ways. Judgment didn't come from the work of God's hands, but of their own. **What are you doing? When you sin you bring separation between you and God, even as a believer. The relationship just isn't as tight as when you are living for Jesus. But living for Him doesn't mean you keep the rules of the Bible. Jesus didn't say that their greatest commandment was rule keeping. The greatest commandment is to love God completely. A list will never compel us like love will. If you find that you need to be prodded towards kingdom work, perhaps you need to refocus your love on the Lord. You will usually prioritize what you love. If you find your priorities going elsewhere, then the 30% of your life that you give to the Lord will really be of no value to Him or to you.**

Read Jeremiah 33

'Call to Me and I will answer you, and I will tell you great and mighty things, which you do not know.' Jer 33:3

James Gilmour was a missionary to Mongolia in the 1870's. While there, he was once asked to help treat some wounded soldiers. While he had some training in first aid, when Gilmour came to a soldier with a badly broken thigh bone, he didn't know how to treat it. So Gilmour prayed that God would help him. He searched the hospital, but couldn't find any books on physiology or anatomy. And a few minutes later, some beggars came into the room and were asking the foreigner for money. He gave what he could, but then noticed that one of the beggars was very skinny to the point that Gilmour could see his skeleton. Gilmour says that God brought him a walking lesson on anatomy. He asked the beggar if he could examine him, and by tracing the man's thigh, he was able to see the layout of the bone. He quickly returned to the wounded soldier and was able to set the fracture correctly. Years later, James Gilmour still commented on a prayer that was clearly answered.

People give many reasons for the purpose of prayer. Some say it's more for us than God. Others say it's an encouragement to those who hear our prayers. I think prayer is more direct than that. It is the communication between God and man. And often the things we pray about are the things that we are just completely clueless on. And God says in verse 3 that He makes us aware of those things we do not know WHEN WE CALL TO HIM. Prayer is not a Sunday School answer. It's talking to God! Christians are looking for answers on subjects from their pastors, or books at the Christian bookstore and putting in more effort than is required. **If you want to know God's will for you life, talk to God. If you want to know which fork in the road to take, talk to God. If you want to know the purpose of your circumstances, talk to God. He will make known what you need to know, but you have to call on Him. Are you hoping for God to show up in your life, or are you asking Him to? Until believers live like God is a real person, their lives will never change. God is not waiting around to handle our disasters. He wants to handle our entire lives. He wants the successes. He wants the boring days. He wants you to call to Him. Don't live days apart from God.**

Read Jeremiah 34

But afterward they turned around and took back the male servants and the female servants whom they had set free, and brought them into subjection for male servants and for female servants. Jer 34:11

I remember a church member who had a terrible habit of making terrible choices. He gave the excuse that his emotional problems caused him to act without thinking of the consequences. I bought this for a while, until I noticed that he would come to me and just repeat the same old stuff. He didn't sound like he was under conviction. He sounded like he just felt guilty, or possibly just wanted sympathy, but he again referenced his inability to control his behavior. I asked him to stand up, which he did, and then I asked him to sit down, which he did. I asked him why he stood up and sat down, and he said it was because I told him to. "No", I said, "You did it because you chose to." He didn't really

make huge inroads after that, but he started to at least agree that the choices he was making were a result of his desire to make them, and not some psychological problem.

I find this passage both heartbreaking and timely. The people felt guilty about having fellow Jews as slaves, so they released them. But, after a short time these masters went back out and took their slaves back. When the passage says these servants were brought into subjection, it indicates they weren't asked nicely to come back. Many slaves were in their position because they were paying a debt they had no other way of settling. So when these men and women heard they were free, I'm sure they praised God for the act of mercy that had come into their lives. But the masters hadn't experienced conviction...they experienced guilt. They were sorry because they had been caught and God was displeased. So they stopped their sin for a time, hoping that the guilt would pass. And apparently it did. **Have you taken sin back up that you had previously laid down? What or whom are you blaming for your sin? I'm sure these slave owners came up with some justification for why they recaptured their sin (slaves), but there was no justification. There was no excuse. Christians must leave behind excuses in the same spot we leave behind our sin. I've never left any sin that I later thought would do me any good. Be brave and devoted enough today to ask God to reveal your sin to you, and be prepared to repent and lay it down.**

Read Jeremiah 35

The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are observed. So they do not drink *wine* to this day, for they have obeyed their father's command. But I have spoken to you again and again; yet you have not listened to Me. Jer 35:14

How many times do I have to say something to my children before it becomes a given in our house? I often seem to get into discussions with my children about keeping their rooms clean. "But you didn't tell us to clean them." I have communicated that I am never pleased when their floor is no longer visible as a result of the toys and clothes that have covered it. But, they insist that they need to be reminded everyday. On the other hand, my kids know that on payday we're going out to eat. They don't question it and they don't forget about it. It makes me think that they probably have heard me just fine on the room cleaning issue, but if it's not something they want to do, they try to forget about it from day to day.

When I read this passage I literally said "Wow" out loud. I was wondering why God sent Jeremiah to a bunch of guys that normally live in the desert and follow a bunch of difficult rules. The point is they were still following the command of a long passed descendant who at one point in the past told them how to live. Generations later, that command was still being lived as if it had just been spoken. Conversely, God had told Israel and Judah many times about what He expected from them and they never seemed to listen or remember. God is giving a very clear declaration that the judgment that is coming is not something sudden or unexpected. **How many times has the Holy Spirit talked to you about your sin? Do you find yourself becoming forgetful in keeping the difficult things of the faith? God communicates through His word and through**

the Holy Spirit. We have ample sources of God's will communicated to us, and yet we often live as if we have forgotten what God wants from us? What is the last thing you clearly remember being communicated to you by God? Perhaps through a sermon, your personal bible study time, or through prayer? Have you obeyed that word? Sometimes we start looking for something new from God when we still haven't obeyed Him on the old things.

Read Jeremiah 36

Take again another scroll and write on it all the former words that were on the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah burned. Jer 36:28

Snow days didn't happen as often in college as they did in high school. Since so many students lived on campus, the roads had to be really bad for them to care about commuters like me trying to make it in. The best snow days were always the days I had a test. Suddenly I had a reprieve! I could study like I should have instead of like I did. Did the extra time help me? Not much. I usually didn't do much studying, but found some other way to waste my free day, and then I still had a test to take the following day that I hadn't studied for very well.

As believers we don't get reprieves on the lessons that God has for us. If there is a lesson He wants us to learn, we will continue to have it in front of us until we get it. Jehoiakim thought that he could burn the words of God and escape conviction. Instead, God not only wrote it again, but added to it as a result of Jehoiakim's disobedience. God knew that the king's response would be, but just because God knows what we'll do, doesn't mean He won't give us the chance to do it. As the Lord brings new spiritual lessons into my life, He knows how long they will take, but that doesn't stop Him from teaching them. As I've grown in my walk with Jesus Christ, I do recognize these spiritual lessons more easily than I used to. **When you get a sense that God is trying to teach you something, you need to prepare yourself to learn it. If you don't learn it now, God will continue to work on you until you do. He doesn't attempt to build our integrity and then give up when we fail a couple of times. God is telling you to do/change/or be something. How do I know? Because God always has a plan for our advancement and for sanctification (making us more like Jesus). There is probably a Jeremiah in your life who is reminding you of what you should be doing, either through their words or example to you. Don't ignore it. God won't skip lessons for our convenience. How are you listening to the words of God for your life?**

Read Jeremiah 37

Meanwhile, Pharaoh's army had set out from Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who had been besieging Jerusalem heard the report about them, they lifted the *siege* from Jerusalem. Jer 37:5

My prayer life has changed significantly over the last several years, but this certainly reminds me of my prayer life as I was looking for a job in seminary. I was out prayer walking for hours every night, just really asking God to work something out in my life, as well as the lives of many other people I knew. And after He gave me a job, I still prayed,

but not with that kind of fervency and frequency. I got what I wanted, and so I couldn't really think of other things in my life that had a real need for prayer. I moved on when the problem went away.

Jerusalem has been under siege from the Babylonians (Chaldeans) for a while. So as the army of Egypt approaches, the Babylonians leave to go meet the challenge. And suddenly everything goes back to normal in Jerusalem. People are coming and going from the city and people just seem to relax. I'm betting there were fewer prayers lifted up, and the prophet Jeremiah finds himself imprisoned as a possible traitor to the Babylonians. It just seems that once the dilemma was lessened, the city got back about its business rather quickly. **When the circumstances that caused you concern and moved you to prayer are over, does your devotion seem to dwindle? What the inhabitants of Jerusalem didn't realize was that Babylon's army was going to come back. They had not continued in their preparedness during the lull, and as a result Babylon will return and put them back in the same position. What is causing you to pray a lot right now? Think about this: as you pray about the situation, are you thanking Him for previous times that He answered your prayers? Are your prayers selfish or are you remembering to lift up the situations of others in your life? Is prayer a discipline that is being built into your life, or a crutch that you lean on if you have to?**

Read Jeremiah 38

Then the officials said to the king, "Now let this man be put to death, inasmuch as he is discouraging the men of war who are left in this city and all the people, by speaking such words to them; for this man is not seeking the well-being of this people but rather their harm." Jer 38:4

Most coaches know what to do in a blowout. You play hard as long as you can, even if there is just a faint glimmer of hope. Usually in college football, blowouts happen more often than with the pros. So a coach might keep his best players in until the 4th quarter, but if he's down by 40 points, he usually brings in his backup players. This gives them a chance to play and keeps his best players from getting injured in a game that's already been lost. But I was watching a game recently where the home team was down by 40 and the coach kept in his best players. None of them got hurt, but there was no chance to win and it wasn't worth the risk. He didn't want to admit the game was lost, but apparently he was the only one who didn't know.

I'm sure Jeremiah was called "unpatriotic" because he was such a doomsayer against his own people. But his call to the city was a call from God, and we can see that with King Zedekiah, Jeremiah is trying to preserve the king's life. Ultimately they just don't truly believe that Jeremiah knows what he's talking about. Even though the bread in the city has run out, they are still putting their trust in their fighting men. The city leaders worried that Jeremiah was demoralizing the men, but Jeremiah preferred they be demoralized by the truth, than killed for a lie. I wish the right thing and the easy thing were often the same. But, they're generally not. **We keep our mouth shut in a lot of situations where we should open it. And other times we talk when nothing really needed to be said. When talking to others who are going through serious issues, we should think about**

whether the words we are sharing are our best guess, or if we are sharing biblical truth. People can get shaky advice anywhere, but when we have the opportunity to counsel someone, we need to do so from the Word of God. Only God can share words that will specifically and assuredly impact the lives of people. We can only guess.

Read Jeremiah 39

For I will certainly rescue you, and you will not fall by the sword; but you will have your *own* life as booty, because you have trusted in Me," declares the LORD. Jer 39:18

I read about Pastor James telling his congregation of his early lessons in flight school. He had wanted to learn to fly for years, and was becoming very good at it. Fairly early in his training, his flight instructor told James to put the plane into a steep dive. After a short time, the engine stalled and the plane was out of control. James realized the instructor was not going to help him, so he began going through the checklist, and was able get the plane righted. As James took out his frustration on the instructor, the teacher said, "There is no position you can get this airplane into that I can't get you out of." It was a lesson to help James know that He could trust the instructor no matter how bad the situation might appear.

Jeremiah had a continued ministry as God's mouthpiece even after Babylon came within the city walls of Jerusalem. One of the men who lived there, Ebed-melech, was told by Jeremiah that his life would be spared because He trusted in God. God says that his booty, or his treasure, will be his life. This man wouldn't escape with all of his possessions, but he did escape with his life. If he had failed to trust in the Lord, he would have lost his life along with his stuff. The faith of Ebed-melech is notable. This man clearly hadn't just trusted before Babylon came into town, but he still trusted God. People of this mindset in Jerusalem were few during these days. How was he able to trust? I would like to think that this wasn't the first time the man had trusted in God. Faith isn't built up by words, but it's built up as we rely on God for everything. We don't just rely on Him during difficult moments, but during every moment. **Think about how you are or are not trusting God? Which situations do you quickly give to Him, and which ones do you hold for yourself? There aren't big situations and small ones in life. Even the smallest decision can lead to the biggest consequences. We need to be aware that moments we fail to trust and seek the Lord, are moments that Satan will work in our lives. He will lead us to self-sufficiency as we look around and think, "I'm handling things pretty well today." Just remind yourself of the times that your life has taken a bad turn due to your self-reliance.**

Read Jeremiah 40

Now the captain of the bodyguard had taken Jeremiah and said to him, "The LORD your God promised this calamity against this place; Jer 40:2

My co-workers in college knew that I was a Christian. In the early years, it was mainly because of the things I talked about and the items I had around my desk. I was talking

about Jesus and God, but I wasn't always actively living my faith out. They didn't seem to be impressed by my words, but they were impressed when I would do unselfish acts. There was lots of extra paperwork responsibilities that people in the office didn't like to do, so I started doing them. I didn't tell people what I was doing to help, but eventually people would see me from time to time. That made a bigger impact on people listening to me about my faith than anything else.

I love it when God's work becomes clear to non-believers. In this passage you have a Babylonian general who holds Jeremiah in great respect. I'm sure he never read the Hebrew bible and knew little about the God of the Jews, but he knew when a prophecy came true. Everything Jeremiah had spoken for God came true, and Nebuzaradan holds Jeremiah in higher respect than Jeremiah's own people did. I wish more people would be vocal about their faith, but I think there is something to the idea that living our lives as Christians will influence others as well. Here an unbeliever was influenced by a believer who did everything God wanted him to, even when it was tough. That's authentic. Jeremiah didn't know about God...He knew God. **Do people around you consider you religious? Perhaps they make comments about your office decorations or your church attendance, but it doesn't necessarily affect their lives. I don't think that non-believers are impressed by our religious stuff. They are impressed when we act as selfless people and show that we consider others around us more important than ourselves. We can draw the lost simply by being authentic in our relationship with God. The world doesn't need more religious people carrying around their churchy checklist. They need sincere followers of Christ who live their entire day considering the desires of God and the needs of people.**

Read Jeremiah 41

And they went and stayed in Geruth Chimham, which is beside Bethlehem, in order to proceed into Egypt because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, since Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had struck down Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon had appointed over the land. Jer 41:17-18

There are a lot of names in this account, but here is gist of what's going on. Babylon conquered Jerusalem, and in order to help maintain order on their new territory, the king of Babylon appointed a Jewish person, Gedaliah, as governor over the region. It was a way to help ease the transition of power, and really a very generous move on the part of the Babylonian king. Ishmael was also a Jew and considered Gedaliah to be a traitor agreeing to serve in this way, so Ishmael gets some men together to assassinate him and they even carry away some prisoners just to show how serious they are. Johanan was a captain in Judah's army and he hears of this and goes to free the prisoners, which goes fine. As a result of the action of Ishmael, all of these people are now on the run though. Even though they had nothing to do with the assassination of Gedaliah, they feared there would be repercussions on them, so they planned an escape to Egypt.

One person can really gum up the works. I'm sure Ishmael felt that he was doing a great service for God's people by assassinating the Jewish governor. However, God had been communicating through Jeremiah that Babylon would be in charge for a while, and they

needed to submit to that rule for a time. And so the actions of one man put a large group of people in danger. It's very frustrating to see people make choices without thinking about the consequences or effects on other people. As a father, I recognize that the choices I make will have a direct impact on my wife and on my children. My son sees the choices I make, and perhaps they won't float to the surface for many years, but it's very likely that his choices as a husband and father will be influenced by what he saw me do. **Who are you influencing around you? Before you answer that too quickly, really take an inventory of the people that you interact with on a daily basis. Some of the people we are with most often (family and co-workers) are the people who start to lose importance because of familiarity with them. You are making an impact. You need to consider your words and actions from yesterday. Our most important evaluation is what God thought of our day yesterday, but second is what did people think of us yesterday? Did they see us as someone living out a genuine faith? Or were they put off by our attitudes and actions?**

Read Jeremiah 42

Whether *it* is pleasant or unpleasant , we will listen to the voice of the LORD our God to whom we are sending you, so that it may go well with us when we listen to the voice of theLORD our God. Jer 42:6

There are really only two kinds of visits you can have to the dentist: pleasant or unpleasant. As a kid, I had a lot of problems with my teeth because I ate sugar and rarely brushed. So I hated going in for checkups because I knew the only thing they would check is how many fillings I would need this time. But, as unpleasant as it is to go to the dentist, the pain of a dental problem is much worse. I've had two root canals and the pain of a broken tooth is rough. In those cases I couldn't wait to get into the dentist, because I knew an unpleasant visit would bring a pleasant result.

So here you have this group of people who are left over from the last chapter. They didn't kill Babylon's newly appointed governor, but they were in the vicinity and so they're afraid of being guilty by association. The people are preparing to escape to Egypt, until the commanders of the people asked Jeremiah to seek if God wanted them to go to Egypt or stay put. And they assured Jeremiah that as long as he told them truth, they would do whatever God said whether they liked it or not. So Jeremiah comes back to tell them that going to Egypt is bad, and if they stay, God will protect them. Suddenly the people call Jeremiah a liar and refuse to listen. Why such a change of heart on following God? I would say it's because they never intended to follow God. They had made up their minds to go to Egypt and they were hoping that Jeremiah would give them the ok from God. When this didn't happen, it becomes clear that they didn't want God to give them instruction. They wanted God to go with their plan. **Often we make our plans and then pray and ask God to bring them about. Our first step in an issue should not be to come up with a plan, but to seek God's plans. If we ask for wisdom, He will grant it, and planning without the wisdom of God is likely to get you a plan that God is not for. His ways are higher and greater than ours and as a result, His plans are not often going to be the ones we would have picked. Are you willing to follow God in any circumstance? Or are you simply looking for Him to verify your own thoughts?**

God's plan may not always be as pleasant as the one you picked, but the final result will ultimately be what's best for you and bring you closer to becoming the person God wants you to be.

Read Jeremiah 43

He will also come and strike the land of Egypt; those who are *meant* for death *will be given over* to death, and those for captivity to captivity, and those for the sword to the sword. Jer 43:11

When I got ready to leave for Army Basic Training, I called my uncle who is an officer in the Army. I asked him what I should expect, and all he would tell me is "don't volunteer for anything." So when we were all snapped to attention in week three, I tried to look as inconspicuous as possible. They started calling names, and I did my best to be invisible. The drill sergeants were just berating these guys as they pulled them out of formation. Finally my name was called and I went through an hour of being put in stress positions before being told I was now placed in charge of the platoon. I couldn't have avoided being called on, because they had already chosen me and five squad leaders to lead the platoon. It seemed random, but had been completely thought through and set up.

It seems that the original reason these Jews in Jeremiah 43 were leaving was because they were afraid they would be blamed for a murder they didn't commit. After God makes it clear that they will not, the people accuse Jeremiah of lying about what God said and they head off to Egypt anyway. Their intention no longer seems to be avoiding punishment for the murder, but to avoid living under Babylonian rule. But the Babylonians came because all of Judah, including these people, had lived in rebellion against God. They would not be permitted to just escape correction, so now they have carried their sins amongst the Egyptians who will also suffer because of the disobedience of the Jews. These Jews thought that they had just hit some bad luck and they were trying to escape. Just like my experience in basic training, the Jews were receiving the judgment that was specifically laid out for them. Some would die, some would fight, and some would simply be imprisoned. They couldn't even escape to Egypt to avoid it. God would have made things easier if they had obeyed, but they chose their own way. **Do you want to avoid judgment over your sin? Do you know how to do it? Repent. It doesn't mean we'll always miss the correction that God brings, but there are plenty of examples in the Bible where people were able to lessen the judgment by recognizing their sin (Zeph 2:1-3, 1 Corinthians 11:29-31). So what sin have you been trying to ignore, in the hopes that God will too? Perhaps He has withheld correction to give you a chance to recognize the problem as you choose to make different choices. Stop trying to avoid the truth of your sin, and confront it in the grace and forgiveness of Jesus Christ.**

Read Jeremiah 44

But since we stopped burning sacrifices to the queen of heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have lacked everything and have met our end by the sword and by famine. Jer 44:18

Athletes are a very superstitious bunch. I read of a pitcher that always wore the same pair of underwear every time it was his turn to start a game. On a particular outing, he got blasted early and lost the game. He later said that he hadn't worn his lucky underwear that day. I don't know if he really believed that or not, but I did wonder if he went on the mound thinking that he had already messed up and that it got into his head a little bit. His ability came from his arm, not his underwear, but he was having a little trouble giving the proper credit to the proper things in his life.

The people of Judah were giving credit to the wrong person. They had been sacrificing to false gods, and everything seemed to be going just fine. Then when Babylon came, the people's lives were thrown into turmoil and their daily routines were interrupted. Many of the people credited that interruption of devotion to a false god as the reason for their upheaval. They didn't realize that the reason they had been able to remain in their nation during days of disobedience to God was as result of His patience and continued efforts to make all the Jews aware of the judgment to come. There were so many prophets all giving the same declaration of impending doom, but the people ignored it. **Who's getting the credit in your life? Are you telling others of the great work God is doing in your life, or do fully accept the praise that people give you? Don't give yourself too much credit for the good things you have, because pride is always the downfall of the Christian. We begin to think that we deserve certain things, and we rely more on ourselves and less on our God. Who is your trust really in? If you're unsure, think about how many times this week you've listened to God's instruction and how many times you've simply went with your own plans. The ability to do anything comes from God, and He may take away those abilities if they are causing us more harm than good.**

Read Jeremiah 45

Thus you are to say to him, 'Thus says the LORD, "Behold, what I have built I am about to tear down, and what I have planted I am about to uproot, that is, the whole land. Jer 45:4

Have you ever had someone try to comfort you in a situation, simply by telling you how much worse the situation could be? I remember watching a show one time where two guys are out on the ocean in a boat on a beautiful day. Suddenly the boat begins to take on water, and these two guys get their life jackets and prepare to go into the water. Eventually the boat sinks and these guys are left treading water. The owner of the boat is devastated, but his friend tries to cheer him up by saying, "We'll it could have been worse." "How could it have been worse?" The friend says, "There could have been sharks in the water here." And of course, then a fin begins to circle them. Don't worry...this was a comedy so they didn't get eaten.

Baruch had simply done what God wanted him to do. He had written and delivered the words of Jeremiah and as a result had received much of the same grief and trouble that Jeremiah endured. I'm sure Baruch found this difficult to take, and probably slightly unfair. However the assurance that God gave was that Baruch's nation was going to crumble around him, and that God was going to allow it to happen. But Baruch was told

that his life will be spared. He's not promised that it will be easy, but he's promised that he will live. I'm sure Baruch may have felt much like the man who jumped from a sinking ship into shark-infested waters. What did he have to live for? God wanted to continue using him. The Lord tells Baruch that his life will be preserved for all the places he will go. So there would be a lot of change in this man's life. **You may feel that you're moving from one bad situation to another, or that your string of misfortune is more than most people around you are going through. Never forget that God is completely aware of who and where you are. There is never a time that He is taken by surprise by an event in your life, and just because your plans are thrown off kilter, doesn't mean that His are. Don't allow yourself to dwell on circumstances. Instead, pray diligently for wisdom and understanding on how you should handle situations you find yourself in. People who fail to pray, find themselves praying even harder later in an attempt to undo the work they attempted on their own.**

Read Jeremiah 46

O Jacob My servant, do not fear," declares the LORD, "For I am with you. For I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven you, yet I will not make a full end of you; but I will correct you properly and by no means leave you unpunished." Jer 46:28

I recently finished watching the PBS series "Carrier". It followed a six month tour of duty for the U.S.S. Nimitz aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf. It appeared to some on the ship that they weren't doing much. In six months there, the planes flying missions over Iraq never dropped a single bomb. So those on the boat felt that their mission was unimportant, but the pilots had a different perspective. They were often 20,000 feet up watching the movements of troops on the ground, prepared at a moment to swoop from the sky and give support to ground troops or to take out approaching enemies. These pilots commented on how many times they were told by ground commanders that even though they didn't engage the enemy, it gave their troops confidence to know someone was nearby, though unseen, that could help out at a moment's notice.

We read these words here against Egypt and find that there is a great destruction coming. Part of it is due to the disobedient Jews who fled there, but Egypt had plenty of reasons for God to bring judgement upon them. As God finishes talking about more destruction, He gives some final words of comfort to His people. He promises that He is near, even when they can't clearly see or hear Him. While they see the nations fall around them, those nations are being brought down without plans to restore them. God tells Judah that even though He needs to punish them to bring correction, He is still there. He hears their cries as they feel crushed under the weight of His judgment. God isn't hands off. He doesn't send angels to do His bidding while He remains aloof and uninvolved. Whether good moments or bad, God is constantly near to us as children of God. God's presence never leaves us. **Have you ever prayed and felt that God wasn't available to hear? It's not because He's too far away...it may be because you are. Judah had much sin in their lives, and as a result they felt a disconnect from God, but He was still there and waiting for their ultimate repentance. If you have sin in your life, you are likely exaggerating the distance that exists between you and God. He's still around, but**

He's waiting for you to make the big decisions for change instead of ignoring your sin. Even as I write this, I do so recognizing that God is in the room with me right now. There is nowhere I can go that He cannot.

Read Jeremiah 47

Because of the noise of the galloping hoofs of his stallions, the tumult of his chariots, and the rumbling of his wheels, the fathers have not turned back for their children, because of the limpness of their hands, Jer 47:3

When I was young, I used to see movies and television shows where a parent would sacrifice their life in order to save the life of their child. As a kid, I never understood that. I often thought, "If it was them or me, I pick me." Fast forward a couple of decades and now I have three young children of my own. If I could give up my life to save theirs, would I? Without blinking. I would willingly take the pain and death intended for one of my children for two reasons: as their daddy, it's my job to protect and watch out for my kiddos. And secondly, I love them. I could never abandon them.

Now as we look at Jeremiah 47, remember these aren't God's people. The Philistines are also falling under the judgment of the Babylonians and look at the fear in them. They have decided it's every man for himself. They left their children behind them without even an attempt to turn back and rescue them. The world is leaving so many kids behind. Kids identify with the music of singers who haven't even written the songs they sing. Kids follow the crowd like a leaf on a river, just going wherever the current takes them. But what about Christians? Many Christian parents think they're doing a good job with their kids because they are "raising them in church". But raising them in church doesn't make our children Christians anymore than raising dogs in an aquarium makes them fish. If you have children, are you simply letting them live their lives or are you loving them as a parent? A parent's love keeps children from the things they may want to do, but that will bring them harm. A parent's love causes a mom or dad to never allow their child to be somewhere that they don't know about. It's about effort. **If you are a parent, are you really putting in the effort to raise your children? If you are a child still at home, your parents may not always do the best job they could, but if you allowed them to be a part of your life instead of living separate from them, your relationship would be a lot better. Many children and parents that being to drift never really intended it, but just allowed it to happen. Take the time to reconnect with your parent/child because the love the world promises will only break your hearts.**

Read Jeremiah 48

For because of your trust in your own achievements and treasures, even you yourself will be captured; and Chemosh will go off into exile together with his priests and his princes. Jer 48:7

I never quite figured out why, but my mom built a shrine to me in my own room. While I was in high school, I won lots of awards for public speaking and various other reasons. So she took all these plaques and hung them on a wall in my bedroom. I thought it was a bit weird, but sometimes you just let moms do their thing. As I moved from high school

to college, many of those awards were listed on my application to help the university see my overall involvement and I'm sure it helped my entrance. But when I went for my first "adult" job with an insurance company in college, I didn't list those awards because they didn't matter any more. You realize the awards of high school are great, but they don't translate into real-world success. They just prove you rose above your fellow students, which isn't saying much in our current public school system.

I saw resumes of people trying to work at my company who had many high school achievements listed, and nothing else. And as a result, we didn't see those people get hired or stick around very long. They were trying to live off of expired achievements. We see the same thing here in Jeremiah 48. These last few chapters really correspond with Zephaniah chapter 2 which lays out the same destruction of these nations we've been reading about, including Moab (goes to prove the trustworthiness of the Bible...it's in constant agreement with itself over many years and authors). The crazy confidence of Moab wasn't in what they could do, but what they had done according to this passage. They were living in the past, with nothing to show in their present. Many Christians are living off a past accomplishment. They asked Jesus to come into their lives as Savior-Lord, and that's really all they ever did. They expect Heaven based on this event, and they have failed to accomplish anything for their Lord. **What are your kingdom accomplishments? Have you shared the gospel with anyone or led someone to the Lord? Do you have a trail of sins that have been left behind you as you've chosen selflessness over selfishness? Or are you pretty much the same person you were when you prayed the Jesus prayer? If so, then you're living on a pretty flimsy achievement from your past. Jesus' is absolutely enough to save you, but He didn't just save you from your sins, but from a purposeless life. So if your life still lacks purpose and effort towards the things of God, then your well short of the achievements God would like to see in your life.**

Read Jeremiah 49

Thus says the LORD of hosts, behold, I am going to break the bow of Elam, the finest of their might. Jer 49:35

I often listen to other preachers just to get another look at how other churches worship the Lord through their Sunday morning ministries. I was watching one preacher who was walking around with two pieces of paper and no Bible. I assumed that he probably had his scripture typed on the paper, so I continued to listen and watch. Then he started to "quote" scripture, and by quote I mean horribly paraphrase. I can't recall the chapter and verse, but he said that the Bible tells us that we need to show our strength and that God doesn't want weakness, but strength. Actually the Bible says that when we are weak is when we are strong. When we choose to trust in His strength over our own, that is when we can be used most effectively. Otherwise our own abilities, and our trust in them, gets in the way.

We all have strengths, but the issue becomes when we forget who gave them to us. The nation of Elam had a particular strength when it came to warfare, which was their archers. So how could God let Elam know right away in their battle with Babylon (really

a battle with God), that they were not going to win? He takes away their strength. He removes their archers in some way during the battle, and once that occurred, all that was left was the losing. **Have you identified your spiritual gifts as a believer? We all have them, and they have been given specifically by God to be used in our lives. The problem becomes when we accept the praise of people, and we fail to redirect the praise back to God. He is the reason we can do everything and anything. And when the pattern continues where we accept all the credit and distribute none to Him, God may take that strength away. And what will you do? Will you struggle to accomplish more by your own efforts, or will you swallow your pride and come in humility before God. I know that I can preach, but only because of the Lord. And times that I have walked off thinking too highly of myself have been followed by times of praising the Lord and repenting over my sin. I appreciate this gift, and I want to be a good steward of it in order to retain it.**

Read Jeremiah 50

"In those days and at that time," declares the LORD, "the sons of Israel will come, *both* they and the sons of Judah as well; they will go along weeping as they go, and it will be the LORD their God they will seek. Jer 50:4

I know it's a happy moment, but watching families reunite is always tough for me to watch. I saw a video sometime back of military dads coming home and surprising their children at school after being away in Iraq. If a dad ever wanted to know what his kid thought of him, that's the moment that you see no contemplation of what to do or what to say. The tears, hugs and words come freely. While I'm sure being away from your family for such a long time is so heartbreaking, being loved and received in such a genuine way has to restore all the loneliness that the soldier felt away from his family. Those fathers were always ready to receive their children.

People often claim that the God of the Old Testament is an unfeeling, uncaring God. But in the midst of all the tragedy that the Jews will face at the hands of the Babylonians, He still loves them and plans to restore them. And we see here that He doesn't just restore Judah, but all the people of Israel. There will no longer be a divided kingdom, but one nation of God's people. What will make the change that allows this? It's not the willingness of the Lord, because He was always willing. The people are weeping and seeking the Lord. They have finally been broken, and as a result they will be restored. When we sin, it's just like we have been separated from our Father, who is always ready and waiting to receive us again. **How do you come to the Lord when you have been disobedient? Do you come saying "I'm sorry"? Or do you come embarrassed over your sin, knowing that it has delayed your continuing development as a Christian? We try to rank big sins and little sins, but any sin is a moment that we choose to halt our walk to be more like Jesus and continue to be more like ourselves. Let's ask God to keep us humble, and that He would break us over our sin. Let us come to Him with our disappointments and failures, knowing that He is lovingly ready to restore us!**

Read Jeremiah 51

Then Jeremiah said to Seraiah, "As soon as you come to Babylon, then see that you read all these words aloud Jer 51:61

Barry Bonds' final year with the San Francisco Giants had to be a nightmare for him. The evidence that he had been using steroids was piling up for the home run hitter, and many fans felt he had disgraced the game and should quit. So from stadium to stadium there were masses of fans yelling "cheater" and holding up signs to the same affect. However, I never saw any stories of fans coming up to him in public and saying the same things. In fact, all his interactions with fans were by individuals asking him for his autograph. The boldness these fans had in a crowd was lost when the words would be completely their own.

There is a lot in this chapter, but I found myself praying on this issue last night so verse 61 was an easy one to settle on. Jeremiah writes this incredibly long prophecy against Babylon and he sends it with Seraiah to Babylon. Seraiah was on his way there with King Zedekiah, so I presume Jeremiah decided not to make the trip and to allow this man that he trusted to share the prophecy. No words can be said against Jeremiah on this issue, because he had certainly proven that he was willing to take the punishment for saying true things that were not well received. But think about the task given to Seraiah. He is supposed to walk into a bustling and thriving Babylon, and tell them they're all going down at the hands of God. That had to be a frightening proposition as he may have worried about what would happen to him for saying such things. He was in a large crowd coming from Judah, but when he started to say these words there would be no one on his right or his left. His only comfort was that he was speaking truth that had been given by God himself. **Have you ever withheld words that you promised to say to somebody? Maybe you were going to address how they hurt you, or how they let you down, but when you were face to face with them you didn't say a word. Then you need to evaluate where your words are coming from. If you have doubts about sharing something to someone's face, you need to ask for wisdom. Perhaps the Holy Spirit was holding you back from saying something that you shouldn't, or perhaps you just became too worried about saying difficult, but truthful things to someone. Before you have difficult conversations you should pray, just as I'm sure Seraiah did before he shared those words with the Babylonians. Pray that the wisdom of God will lead you to say what you should, and hold back what is unnecessary.**

Read Jeremiah 52

They also took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the basins, the pans and all the bronze vessels which were used in *temple* service. Jer 52:18

There are plenty of real estate companies throughout our country, but did you know there are companies that only deal in church real estate? They sell old buildings to smaller congregations and help growing congregations find new locations. The more disturbing trend is when a church building is sold because the church is dying, not growing. To see businesses that are operating out of buildings that were once houses of worship for God is

disturbing. We live in a country where the gospel witness is already dwindling and losing the presence of an entire church in a community certainly doesn't help.

The priests were actually warned that this event of verse 18 would happen when Babylon came into Jerusalem. These pagans would have no respect for the worship implements in the temple and only saw the material value in these items. So the priests were warned to hide the items so they would be preserved for use when the people returned to Jerusalem. Instead, these items lost their significance and were probably just melted down. I fear that the church as a whole is losing its significance. Churches that were once growing and vibrant have in some cases died off altogether. **When I lived near Memphis there were once-beautiful, large churches sitting mostly vacant on a Sunday morning because the area of town had gone bad. But which went bad first? Did the church lose it's first love and forget about the people? Or did the community go downhill and the Christians left? In either case the story is sad. It's certainly sad to see non-believers come into the temple and remove the significance from these items of worship, but I consider it much sadder to see Christians today remove the significance from entire churches! Does your church reach the people around it? Do non-believers see value in the existence of your church because of the care and love that your church shows for people in your community? If the church loses significance in our nation, let it not be because we helped it along.**