

Ask for the Ancient Paths

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Date: 19 January 2020

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[0 : 00] The passage we read in Jeremiah chapter 6, which you find in page 634, Jeremiah 6, and we're going to focus particularly in verse 16, verse 16, where we read, thus says the Lord, stand by the roads or stand by the crossroads and look and ask for the ancient paths where the good way is and walk in it and find rest for your souls.

But they said, you will not walk in it. When we lived in Skye, there were crossroads near the school where I taught for many years, the Petrie High School, and my neighbour, my neighbour always called these particular crossroads Map Reader's Corner.

There were so many tourists, in fact, there were a lot more tourists now, but there were so many tourists even then that would drive to this particular point in the crossroads, stop their car, get out their maps, obviously days before Sat Nav, and just stop.

They just didn't know whether to take one way or the other way. If they were going up to Uig, they would obviously need to go to the left-hand road. They were going to Old Man of Stor to the right, but they didn't know which of the roads was correct.

And they spent ages, I remember even seeing it, you know, outside my window, staying, ages just waiting there, not knowing whether to turn to the left or to turn to the right.

[1 : 35] They were lost, these tourists, wherever they'd come from, they didn't know which direction to take. And my neighbour, who drove on that road every day, he would often have to stop and he'd have to tell the tourists which way exactly to drive.

They were lost, I might even say lost souls. And he would send, my neighbour would send these tourists in the direction that they wanted to go. And it happened again and again and again.

And in life, in life, there are crossroads where many stand today. Where many are hesitant, many perplexed, many just not sure which way to turn to find true satisfaction, true purpose, true joy in their life, true contentment.

And indeed, to find salvation. Not knowing which way to go, which way to follow. Trying this and trying that. Trying this guru and that guru.

This teacher and that teacher. Trying this false religion, that false religion. Following one way of life and another way of life.

[2 : 51] But never stopping one time, as we're thinking this morning, one time to hear the voice of the one who truly leads and guides and directs to fullness of life, to full satisfaction, to that place of eternal joy and happiness.

That voice that no other religion, that no other philosophical belief system can match, as we're hearing this morning, the voice of the Lord Jesus.

And in Jeremiah's day, in Jeremiah's, as we saw there in chapter 6, in fact, as we saw last week as well, the nation of Judah was in such spiritual turmoil.

It was in such spiritual decline. There were conflicting voices being heard in this time of turmoil. But the one voice that ought to have been listened to was being rejected.

The voice of God calling his people to turn from their evil ways and turn back to God. But the people prefer to listen to the voices that were crying out, peace, peace, when there was no peace.

[4 : 08] Later we'll be focusing on that a little more. But it's the voice that's still heard in our land today. The voice that cries out, peace, peace, when there's no peace. The voice that denies the one true God.

The voice that denies the way of salvation found in Christ alone. The voice that so many prefer to hear rather than the one word, the one voice, the Lord Jesus.

But let us hear that voice again. Let's turn, as we've done, to the word of God and as God speaks to us today through his word.

And as you see here, even in the voice that we hear, calling in verse 16, stand by the roads. Thus says the Lord. Stand by the roads, the crossroads. Look and ask for the ancient paths where the good way is.

This is Jeremiah speaking the word of God to the people. I mean, as we've seen, the people in the land of Judah, they're in such a spiritual crisis.

[5 : 11] And they're obviously, they've traveled far down that road of decline. And Jeremiah has watched all this happen. That's why we read at the earlier part of chapter 6, because we see him lamenting over that situation.

You know, he asks, rhetorically asks, who's going to listen to me? But he knows that he's got to speak to the people. He's got to speak the word of God to the people.

And, you know, he knows that to the people the word of God is seen as a thing of scorn, an object of contempt. And Jeremiah knows that the people aren't delighting in God's word.

And it actually makes Jeremiah more than just upset. It makes him angry. He says he's full of the wrath of God. And he's not going to keep the prophetic word of God to himself.

Especially when there are those in Judah who are saying, essentially, there's nothing wrong.

Nothing to worry about in Jerusalem. Things are fine. Peace, peace. And there's no peace.

[6 : 16] So Jeremiah is no longer going to keep to himself the word that God has given him. He's going to announce God's word. Thus says the Lord.

And if thus says the Lord tells us that this is the word of God, then it means that to disregard that word will involve terrible consequences for the lives of all who hear that word but disobey it.

So what does the Lord say then that God the Lord says now? Look at verse 16. He asks the people, stop.

Stop where you are. Stop in the madness of your life and look at where you're at. Look at where you're at in your soul. Look at where you're at in your life.

Stop at these crossroads in your life. Stop. Just stand still. Because you don't know where to turn to by your own mind. You don't know where to find true peace, true satisfaction.

[7 : 23] And so ask a question. Where are the ancient paths? Where are the good ways to live your life on? Where are the good ways to walk in? What's the right way to go?

What's the right way to go from where you're standing now in all the messed up, broken life that you have, Jeremiah is saying, in your life sinning against God? What's the right way to live that honours God, that pleases God, and truly blesses your soul, indeed the souls of a people as a nation under God?

But then you might say, well, why does Jeremiah say, ask for the ancient paths? Why ancient? I mean, what was so good about these ancient paths that the people were to walk on to find true satisfaction?

And you certainly bring this to today. You know, the modern mindset, generally speaking anyway, when modern man thinks of ancient things, then immediately there's the thought that this thing must be old and therefore irrelevant.

Never really did much ancient history at school, but as soon as you said the word ancient, then there was a sort of turn off the young mind wouldn't readily take to looking at ancient history.

[8 : 41] But even in the church, even today, there's almost an aversion to anything ancient. Someone has once used the expression chronological snobbery.

In other words, moderns find that anything in the past, forget about it. Out of date, irrelevant, not relevant to the modern mind.

The ancient text of scripture, rubbish, somehow being alien to the modern way of thinking, when in fact the ancient texts of scripture, they come from the timeless, eternal God.

The ancient texts contain everything. Everything that you need. Everything that man needs in any age to know the one true God and to walk in His ways.

But in the scheme of things here, the ancient paths that Jeremiah is telling the people to ask for, they weren't irrelevant. They're not irrelevant now.

[9 : 48] They were far from out of date. What Jeremiah is asking the people then, as we're even being asked to look for now, they're the most relevant, up-to-date, necessary truths that you and I have to seek and to find.

See, the ancient paths that the people of Judah were to seek, are the same ancient paths that you and I are asked to walk on, to live by.

If you're to know that full blessing in your life, that a life lived to the glory of God and to enjoy Him forever. And so you might ask, well, what are these ancient paths?

Well, surely the truths that we find in God's Word, what does our shorter catechism tell us? The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, is the only rule, the only standard to direct us how we might glorify and enjoy God.

You know, it's often said by present-day opponents of the Bible that the church has to embrace present culture if it's seen to be relevant to today's society.

[11:00] Just a week or so ago, the new Bishop of York, for example, he said, the Bible has to fit into current culture. You know, the teaching that the church has proclaimed for centuries, well, you know, all these things have to somehow be turned around to fit in with the modern man's way of thinking.

You know, let's interpret the Bible according to the progressive culture that we live in. And of course, that implies, doesn't it, more than implies that the Bible that we live by somehow is counter-cultural and out of date in our progressive society.

Now, let's be clear, there are many ways that you can refute that argument. And of course, one way is to think about authority. Who's got the ultimate authority to say what's right and what's wrong? Because, if man has that ultimate authority, then surely the standards that man sets will differ according to the age that man's living in.

What's acceptable in one age will be different to another age. And if it's man that gives that authority as to what's right and what's wrong, who gives man that authority?

[12:17] Well, in the false argument, it's man himself. Fallen man, fallible man. Man who, as we said, will change through the ages. He can't give supreme authority to say what's right and what's wrong.

But if our authority comes from God, the living and true God, the eternal God, the one who created the heavens and the earth, the one who has no beginning and no end, if our authority is from God, the Lord, then it's His word that we follow.

He has the supreme authority. No one gives it to Him. His authority is by Himself. So if it's God's word that prevails, then what we find in Jeremiah's time has to be equally applicable to our own time.

So the ancient paths of God's word, they are the right path, the right way to walk and to live your life by. It's the good way that the ancient paths direct you to live.

I hope some of you are receiving Billy Graham's daily devotionals online, walk with me. And yesterday, it was amazing, yesterday, the devotional was centred on Matthew 24, 35, heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

[13:38] And to summarize what Billy wrote there in that passage, he noticed all the different changes in society, the technological changes, the scientific changes, the medical advances, you know, happening at such a frightening pace, much of course for our good, because what God has given under His common grace for our good.

But as Billy said, Jesus' word is eternal. His word is final. His word, the word of God is absolute authority. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life.

And I want to quote directly from what Billy said in that message. He said this, We know then that if Jesus says something is right, it's always right.

If He says something is wrong, it's always wrong. Yes, simple, but yet profound, because the word of God has absolute authority in your life.

And if that's the case, then that word, the word of God, the word of the Lord, is the good way. The ancient path that you're to look for, the way to live that you're asking for is found in the word of God.

[14:56] It's that good way. It's the way of the good, literally, the way of the good. The way that you who love the Lord are to walk on and to follow. And so, we're commanded to walk in that way, walk in that path.

What is that path? It's the way, the way of life. The path that leads to true blessing from God and the true enjoyment of blessings from God.

And again, whether it's in Jeremiah's day, whether it's in our own day, it's the same word of God, the same command of God that we're given to walk in that way, walk in that good way because it's for your eternal good, it's for you to enjoy God in this life and to know that you have the promise of that eternal enjoyment and the life to come there in glory.

And certainly, you know, here in Jeremiah's day, Jeremiah's calling on the people, he's calling on them to mend their ways. There is this work, that hope has been given to them.

Mend your way, return to the Lord your God, return to the covenant Lord of Israel, return to the one who's been faithful to you when you've not been faithful to him.

[16:11] But don't we all, all of us, fail so many times to heed that call that God gives to stand at the crossroads and to ask where the good way is.

If you're a Christian, you'll know there are times when you're at a crossroads. Maybe in terms of the ways of the world, you know, whether to follow one path, one way, or another way to live.

Maybe you've been at a situation where you're at a crossroads and you've been pressurized, as it were, to conform to the mindset of the world and so many of the contemporary issues of the day. You've been, as it were, put in a position whether you're going to follow the crowd, whether you're going to take that line of least resistance, whether you're going to go with the flow, or whether you're going to remain faithful to the Word of God.

I'm sure you've all been there at some point in your life. You've had to make a decision whether to follow one way, the way of the world, or the other way, the way of God.

[17:19] Whether you, to keep in with the vast majority around you and the so many moral compromises of the day, or whether you're going to take that stand for truth. Where do you go?

Where do you go for help? Where do you go for that direction in your life? You go to the ancient paths. You go to the Word of God. You go to the old paths. You go to God's Word.

You go to where the good way is. You go to where the narrow road is that leads to life. That life that's true fulfillment, in the Lord Jesus.

And yes, you go where others might not go. But you follow the good way, the way of life that God blesses in all abundance.

But what if you're at that crossroad? What if you're at the crossroads concerning your soul? You've been confronted with a great choice.

[18:17] Whom will you serve? Are you going to turn the way of the broad road? Remember the road that Jesus spoke of in the Sermon on the Mount? That road that leads to destruction?

Are you going to turn? Or are you going to turn to the narrow road? That road that leads to life everlasting? Are you at that point? Are you at that crossroads?

You've stopped there at the crossroads. Maybe you've turned back. Turned back from going on the good way. Turned back from going on the way of life. Maybe like Orpah in the story of Ruth.

In the Old Testament the story of Ruth. Ruth, her sister Orpah remember when they were at a particular crossroads in their life with Naomi, with her mother-in-law.

And Ruth went on the way of life with her mother-in-law, with Naomi. Orpah turned back. Orpah turned back to her comfort zone of her previous place where she'd grown up.

[19:22] That life, that comfort zone that was outside of God instead of her going forward in faith in the one true God as Ruth did.

But the command's here for you. Stand at the road, stand at the crossroads and look. See, see your soul, where your soul's at. See where your soul is outside of Christ.

And ask for the ancient paths that lead to the good way that's life in Christ. When you go in that way, when you give your life to the Saviour, you'll never regret that decision.

You'll never regret the time when you gave your life to the Lord Jesus, when you followed Him on the way of life. It's that way that we're told there in verse 16 that involves a response, a response of action.

Walk and find rest for your souls. Walk, walk in it and find rest for your souls. There's walking and resting in the Lord. You see, it's not just enough to know which way is the good way.

[20:31] It's not enough just to know where the right direction is in the road of life. You've got to walk in it. You've got to live that life. the tourists there at Map Reader's Corner in Portree, they might have been told by my neighbour or told by others which way to go, whether they were going to the ferry in Uig or going to climb up the old man's store, but they'd have to actually drive on that particular road that they were told would lead them to the place they wanted to go to.

And likewise, it's not enough just to have that head knowledge of where the ancient paths are that lead to the life that is good in the Lord.

You've got to get on that way. Get on that good way and walk in it. In other words, live. Live the life that God calls you to live. It's what we see there in verse 16 that tells of a walking that speaks of

living, living in a way that glorifies God, living in a way that delights to do His will, to do it in full obedience to His Word.

You see, in Jeremiah's day, there was still worship in the temple. People were still going to the temple. Priests were still performing all the rituals that were involved in temple worship.

But the hearts of the priests and the hearts of the people were far from God because they were walking in ways that actually dishonoured God. If you were to go to the next chapter in chapter 7, that chapter gives a very much a fuller picture of all the wrongs, the wrong way that the priests and the people were indulging in.

[22 : 13] They were going to the temple. They were performing all the outward forms of worship. But in fact, their hearts were far from God. Yes, they were worshipping God in a particular form, but they were denying God in their lives because their hearts were falling after false gods.

They were falling after the baes. They were oppressing the poor. They somehow thought that as long as the temple was there in their midst, then everything was fine.

The people might have known the ancient past, but they weren't walking in them. They were, what we might say, giving lip service in the temple, lip service in worship, but their lives weren't being changed because they weren't walking in the good way of life.

Jeremiah was giving people here the word of God to point them in that right direction to turn from their evil ways, telling them walk in that good way, find true rest, find that true peace that they'd actually been forfeiting when they were turning away from God and falling after false gods.

And, you know, that call that Jeremiah gave to the people to walk in the good way to find rest for their souls. That really tells us how miserable the people were in their spiritual darkness because the word that Jeremiah gives tells us just how the people had no peace.

[23 : 51] They were spiritually depressed. They were in spiritual decline. I mean, how could there be anything else but within the peace of God, knowing the peace of God, when they were following after other gods?

Don't we know that in our lives? When we wander from God, when we follow after the idols of our own making and of our own choosing?

You know in your life, as I know in my life, when we wander from the narrow road, we're not at peace. We're restless. We're restless in our souls until we come back to God and in true repentance of heart.

And you who don't know God as Lord, you can't know that true peace that fully satisfies until you come to him by faith. And St.

Augustine was absolutely correct when he said of God that you have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.

[24 : 54] That's what Jesus said of himself. Remember when he called out to those who were around him, come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls.

Look at that last little section of Jesus' words, you will find rest for your souls. See the echo, see the echo from the words that Jeremiah gave to the people in verse 16, walk in the good way and find rest for your souls.

What's that rest? Is that peace? Is that being reconciled to God? It's the only way that anyone can find true joy and true peace and true contentment in your life.

It's that rest, it's that peace that God gives to the person who's been plagued by a guilty conscience because of sin in his or her life. And we're told, come to God, come to him, walk in the good way and you'll find rest for your souls.

And you have got a heart that's troubled by some particular sin, walk in that good way and you'll find rest for your souls. If you're anxious about tomorrow or something happening later this week, walk in that good way and find rest for your soul.

[26 : 18] It's that rest that prepares you even now for your eternal rest and glory. life. It's where somebody wrote where the storms of life will be ended and you'll enter into an inheritance that's reserved for those who did walk in the good way.

You who followed the Lord Jesus in your life, you will know that eternal rest and the glory of heaven. And you see here, Jeremiah has given the people that hope. He's given them hope even at this crucial hour.

He's given them hope of rest, eternal rest if they would but ask for the ancient paths and walk in the good way. And it's the same message that's given today through God's word.

Did the people, did the people in Jeremiah's day walk in that good way? Did they find rest for their souls? Well, we've got the verdict at the end of verse 16.

but they said we will not walk in it. They've been given the word of God. We know it, thus says the Lord. They've heard the remedy to all their spiritual turmoil, the remedy to ask for the ancient paths and the old ways and walk in the good way.

[27 : 38] They've been given that assurance that if they were walking in that good way, they'd find rest for their souls. What do we find? We find that they rejected the word of God.

We will not walk in it. They were rejecting the way of the Lord. We forward some 500 years plus when Jesus offered his hearer's new life in him and much of what we're going to say is an echo from this morning, of course.

When Jesus called to the people to come to him and find rest, when he called people to believe in him. But many would not.

Jesus taught this, spoke of this in many circumstances. One of the ways was by parables, of course, the parable of the ten pounds, the parable of the ten miners.

We're told that the citizens of the kingdom that a nobleman had acquired, the citizens said, we will not have this man to rule over us. Just move forward through the ages, go through the pages of history, go right up to our present day.

[28 : 55] And what do we hear? We hear the same response in our streets, in our media, in our governments, our schools, places of work. We will not have this man to rule over us.

In other words, we won't walk in that good way. it's that mindset that says that evil is good and good is evil. It's that rejection of the way of the Lord that if you know the Lord Jesus as your Saviour is going to break your heart.

Particularly when loved ones will say, we will not walk in that way. When there's that rejection of the way of the Lord that, yes, caused Jesus to lament.

Remember when he lamented over Jerusalem? Oh, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it. How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings?

And you would not. And you would not. You weren't willing to accept the prophets that God sent you. You weren't willing to receive the last prophet, the great prophet, the Lord Jesus.

[30 : 12] And the people in Jeremiah's day, they wouldn't accept the word of God that Jeremiah gave them. The people in the time of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, they would not accept that they received the Saviour.

And even when Jesus was being tried there before Pilate, the people crying out, away with this man. They preferred the criminal Barabbas. They preferred that criminal to Jesus.

And they cried out, away with this man, crucify him. But what about you? What's your response to the call that God gives you to walk in that good way and find rest for your soul?

Where is that good way? Found in the way, the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life, the one who alone gives you that true rest in him.

Don't walk away from that way. Don't reject the Saviour who came in love to give himself for sinners, but rather turn to him, receive him by faith.

[31 : 22] Trust him for your life, and when you trust him for your life, you'll go in your way rejoicing. And yes, heaven will rejoice, they'll be rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents.

I pray they'll be rejoicing in heaven this evening, over even here one sinner who asks for the ancient paths, who finds that good way, who walks in that good way, and finds rest for his soul.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, you have shown us where the ancient paths are, you have shown us where that good way is, and you have called us to walk in that way.

Lord, forgive us when we have preferred to walk in other ways, when we have preferred to live our lives along the broad road that leads to destruction. Forgive us, Lord, when we have rejected in our heart the way, the way of God, the way we know that your way is the right way, the only way, the only way that leads to salvation.

And so, Lord, we pray your forgiveness for each one of us when we have turned to our own way, rather than following your way.

[32 : 42] Lord, you have given us much to consider this evening, much to reflect on. May it be, Lord, that we apply your truth in our lives this week. May it be, Lord, that we don't turn our eyes from you and prefer to view iniquity, but rather, Lord, keep us on that right way.

Keep us standing sure on the truth, on the word that is your word. Give us, Lord, that enabling to follow you, to go on your way and to rejoice in it.

So, Lord, hear us as we continue in worship before you now as we sing from your word. Help us, Lord, in that singing to glorify your name. Hear us as we continue before you now.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's sing then in Psalm 32 on page 244.

Psalm 32, we're going to sing from verse 7 to 11, the tune is Martyrs. 7 to 11, Psalm 32, to God's praise.

[34 : 19] Salzen happy.

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