

At the Crossroads

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 November 2014

Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Let's turn this evening to the passage in Jeremiah that we read in chapter 6. I'd like us this evening to turn our minds to verse 16 of that chapter, where we finished our reading, Jeremiah 6, and at verse 16.

Thus says the Lord, stand by the roads, or stand at 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, we will not walk in it. Especially the first part of it, down to where it mentions rest for our souls.

This may seem a pretty depressing chapter to read at the close of a communion. And it's a very dark chapter. It's a chapter that's very much given to the Lord's emphasis on his judgment against the people of Judah.

In the days of Jeremiah. Jeremiah had an extremely difficult ministry. He was given ministry for God at a time when the people were not prepared to listen to the message that God had sent through him.

[1 : 12] And therefore, there was an impending judgment from God dangling over their heads. And Jeremiah had to include that in his message to the people.

They had been a people so long given to unfaithfulness, to idolatry, to what Jeremiah and also Isaiah before him had called spiritual adultery.

As the Lord gave them these graphic descriptions to describe how they had actually gone away from the Lord. And that's throughout the whole of Jeremiah, as you know. And even this chapter as well has a kind of summary of it there in verses 13 to 15.

Where he talks about those who are greedy for unjust gain. The spirit of greed and injustice. The falseness of those who are religious.

People in charge of their religious services. Prophets, priests. And also what you would call nowadays a false gospel. They have healed the wound of my people.

[2 : 13] Likely saying peace. Peace when there is no peace. And also they had come to the point where they weren't even ashamed of their sins against God. Even though they were being exposed by the prophet's ministry.

This is what he's saying. Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No. They were not at all ashamed. They did not know how to flush. Well, that's not too different, is it, from our own day.

Because that's what you find all around you. That's the kind of thinking. The kind of lifestyle. The kind of attitude. That you find with people who have no time for God.

And especially those who want to get rid of every thought of God from their lives. And from public life as well. But God hadn't actually finished with the people quite yet.

Because what he's doing here is really taking them to what he calls here a crossroads. It's a critical time for the people in Jeremiah's day. And God is using Jeremiah to bring them, as it were, to think about standing at a crossroads.

[3 : 23] There are two paths here that they are being asked to consider. Thus says the Lord, stand by the roads. Stand by these two roads. Stand at the crossroads.

The one is the path the Lord would have them follow. The other one is the one that they've been insisting on for themselves. And the Lord is saying to them, you have to choose.

You have to choose the right way. The way that leads to what is good. And walk in it and find rest for your souls. Now why is that something that we could look at at the close of our communion?

What way does that fit with our own experience, with our own position? Well, for one thing, we as Christians should be conscious of standing at the crossroads frequently.

It's something that God brings to us as we read the scriptures, as we consider where we are in life, as we consider what our Christian service is about, and what our own personal relationship with God is especially.

[4 : 30] God brings us to a crossroads in the sense of examining ourselves, in the sense of assessing where we are at. And God especially at a time of communion brings us to be committed to the way that leads to eternal life, to the way that involves serving Him in this world, being His people, being His witnesses.

But we have to come frequently to examine that, to examine ourselves in relation to that. And tonight, God is taking us really to reconsider and to reaffirm for ourselves what is it about this way that God is drawing our mind to?

Because really this is Jeremiah saying, you know, you're standing at a signpost. And the signpost is signed two ways. There's the way of the Lord and there's the way that you've already been taking, which God wants them to leave and to come back to the right way.

And for ourselves tonight, that's basically where we're at as well. Because those of us who are Christians, who are committed to the Lord, God is saying to us, well, if you look at the signpost, it's pointing straight ahead.

Just keep on that path, that direct way that keeps on following Christ, seeking to serve Christ, wanting to be clear for Christ, wanting to be like Christ more and more.

[5 : 50] There's the other way that goes in the opposite direction. And as you look at it, as the signpost points in that direction, you can see that that path then breaks up into different paths.

Some of them, you know, sit along fairly closely to the path that God has his people to walk, but it's not the same path. Whereas other branches of it diverge and go away much further from that path. Well, let's look at it in those terms. Let's look at it as to what is God saying to us tonight at the close of a communion? How do we come from a communion to assess our lives and to ask ourselves, what is now God requiring of me?

That's a question that applies to every single one of us, myself included, here tonight. And we can look at the passage, look at this verse, looking at what we can call five imperatives, five commands that God is giving.

He's built into this verse as he was addressing this through Jeremiah. So when you come to assess your own life and ask yourself where you stand, where your relationship to God is and where it's going and where he intends, that you proceed.

[7 : 08] That these five imperatives are actually there to help us to keep choosing the right way. Because when you come to know yourself in the way that God wants you to know yourself, you know your weakness, you know your proneness to yield to temptations.

Every single Christian faces temptations, and especially perhaps more so than other times. When you've enjoyed a time of blessing, when you've enjoyed being with God at a communion time, when you've enjoyed the fellowship of God's people, the preaching of the gospel, when your soul has really been touched and you know you've been blessed, there's a dark figure waiting just very close to you that wants to really make advantage of the way that you feel so comfortable, and rightly so. Enjoy your comfort. Enjoy the times of your peace with God. Enjoy the joys that he gives you to enjoy. But always remember that you are just as vulnerable, and if not more so, to the evil one's means and schemes by which he wants to draw you away from that, and to slacken in your commitment to Christ, and to just slow down in your spiritual life and vitality, and to withdraw a bit from that commitment that you know the Lord requires of you.

Well, what are these imperatives? First of all, he's saying, stand by. Stand by means just stand. The words he's telling them, stop.

Just stop for a minute from the life you're living and look at this signpost. Look at the way it's signposted in these two directions. Now, that word is so important.

[9 : 01] Stand by. Stop. Because that's what you and I need to do regularly. As Christians, we need to do it regularly. I'm not talking here to people who may not yet be committed to the Lord, although I'm not leaving them out in the message that comes from this text.

But it's for all of us to, as Christians, to consider this exercise daily. We have to actually look at the signpost that marks the way forward and that marks the alternative that Satan and our own hearts and sin and worldliness would call us to.

And as we do so, we have to stop. We have to take time to consider things. We have to take time out frequently, stopping at the signpost to read what it says, to take in what it says.

And you have to do that especially with your Bible. You and I have been given this most precious possession. There are millions of people in the world tonight who would desperately love to have a Bible in their possession, who would love to have a copy of the whole Word of God in their own language because God has touched their hearts and God has brought them to know their need and God has brought them a message from the Bible that has transformed their lives but they don't possess a copy of the Bible themselves.

How many do you have in your possession? How many do you and I have in our homes? How many have got your name on it? How many have been passed down from previous generations so that you would have them for your use?

[10:42] God is saying use that Bible well. Use it to consider your relationship to God. Use it daily in a way that as it were stops at the signposts of life and put to yourself.

Now which sign, which of these routes, which of these paths, which of these roads conforms to the Word of God and to the teaching of the Word of God and to the requirement of God and to the promises of God, which of these roads, roads or paths actually leads to what we'll see in a moment as the good, the final outcome of a journey, my journey, my journey through life, which of these paths that I must consider?

Is it the one that God commends or is it the one that seems so attractive compared to actually coming regularly to church and to prayer meetings and going on your knees and taking time to read the Bible?

The other one seems a lot more attractive because it doesn't seem to require as much discipline, as much commitment, but that's not the one that leads to the good and to life.

You have to stop. Stand at the crossroads. And secondly, look. Stand by the roads and look.

[12:11] Sometimes when you're in a town centre, maybe on holiday, a lot of town centres have these signposts that sign for you the different things that tourists who want to look at, museums or theatres, whatever it is, and all of these signs go in different directions.

But you don't really take note of every single thing that's written on those signs. You're looking perhaps for something in particular and you pick that out when you come to a sign and the rest of it you just don't remember what's on it.

But if you're stuck somewhere in the middle of the night, your car's broken down and you're walking and you're looking for some help and you're looking for safety and you come to a road sign with two directions on it, you're really going to study what's on that sign.

You're not going to walk past it and you're not going to treat it casually. You're going to take in what it says and God is saying to us that is how life must be. Stop and look.

Take it in. Consider it. Not only have we the privilege of possessing a Bible, we've got the privilege of so many things that help us to study the Bible.

[13:29] So many works whether they're commentaries or other books that help explain the Bible to us and its teaching. Well God is saying that is how you look at the signpost and how you take in what it says and how you consider it carefully, how you think it through.

And he has given us what he himself describes as the main means by which our minds are fed, by which our minds are increased in understanding and that is by the gospel being preached.

And if we're not regularly where the gospel is being preached then we're denying ourselves the kind of look, the kind of consideration, the kind of study that God requires of us for our lives to develop the way that they must.

Remember when the apostle Paul was writing to the Romans after all these chapters with these great doctrines in them right through to chapter 8 especially and then he comes chapter 9, 10, 11 to speak about the place of Israel, the place of the Jewish people and he comes more particularly in chapter 12 to apply in detail all that he's written up to that point and he begins this way that we are to offer our bodies a living sacrifice to God which is your reasonable selves and don't be conformed to this world but be transformed by what?

By the renewing of your mind. what he's given us is a renewed mind when we come to know him and to salvation and when he comes to place us in living relationship with himself in Christ that renewed mind he says is the means by which the faculty through which we are transformed through which our lives are transformed and if our lives are transformed and if they must go on being transformed through the mind through the renewing of the mind then that mind must be exercised

this is not talking about the people who have great intellect it's not talking about somebody that's really got such a brilliant mind that can just think about questions and answer them and take in all sorts of theology and be able to spout it forth again it's not talking about differences between levels of intellect he's talking simply about the mind that has come to be enlightened by God's truth whatever capacity your mind or my mind has intellectually it's not really the main consideration in looking at the mind being the means through which we're transformed in life and conformed not to this world but to something else to God himself in other words we have to think through the issues know how difficult it is for young people and I'm looking at some young people

[16:42] I'm not accusing them of this at all but I know from having been a young person a long time ago that this is the tendency when you're coming through school and you're coming to the higher end of your secondary school and you're told by your parents or you're told by your teacher you really must make time to study and you really must make time to think through what you're studying and to gather it up into your mind and to just go over it and over it not very attractive on a nice summer evening if you think of the alternative to play football or to go somewhere else but that's really the kind of thing that God is reminding us of here stop by the roads and look consider take it in think it through ponder it deeply because after all friends we're dealing with things that are attached to our eternity and to the quality of our

Christian life while we're in this world and just as a student or a pupil needs to prepare for an exam in a sense we're preparing daily to live for Christ and to live for eternity with Christ and he's saying here is what we have to do regularly to be different to the world and to insist on being different to the world to insist that your life and mine is not going to conform to this world well how are we going to make sure that your life is not conformed to this world by looking at a sign post every day and by saying this path that God has set for me that leads to eternal life that's the one that I must follow today like I followed it yesterday and everything that I need to do to make sure that I'm progressing in that path as I should that's what I need to attend to today and that's your daily exercise just like mine and we all fail in that

I fail in that but we have to pick up from where we failed and we have to recommit ourselves to the Lord maybe you have come to this communion at this time and your life was not as committed to the Lord as you would have liked or perhaps not as committed to the Lord as it once was and the Lord has shown you through this communion and laid on your heart the need to really get back seriously to the relationship you have with God and to serving him in this life the way that he himself requires of us well here he is tonight saying well this is it you're at the crossroads yet again and stand by the signpost and look consider take it in and move forward don't go backwards don't go sideways press on with your Christian life stand by look thirdly there's the imperative of ask for the ancient paths now we could spend a long time on that and we could actually make a wrong use of that as well not everything old is good in the sense of human behavior or things that we understand in our understanding or practices that we practice whether in church or elsewhere remember that error is almost as old as truth and we can be in error through things that people might see as a long-standing tradition a long-standing practice a long-standing historical practice on the part of a congregation or a church that's just as possible and you can't just say well just because it's got all written on it and because people have been doing it for hundreds of years it doesn't necessarily mean that it's good this past week was a celebration of Luther's commitment to the Lord and how he by God's grace was the means by changing the outlook throughout the whole of Europe as to how a person comes to be right with God he had faced hundreds of years of teaching that left people in darkness God blessed him in such a way that for him the ancient paths were not the paths that had been developed all these hundreds of years up to the 1500s the ancient paths were the paths of Paul the apostle and the path of justification according to scripture that's what's meant by the ancient paths the paths that God was laying before these people in Jeremiah's day the path that had been followed all the way down through the centuries by David by Abraham by all these people that had been faithful to God that these people of Jeremiah's day had simply gone away from the other path that they had chosen they had been doing for a long time and God is saying to them look at the signpost which is the path that leads to security to blessing to the good ask for that one commit your ways to that one that of course is not what they have been doing so what we're saying tonight is that things which so many people especially outside of the church but not necessarily all outside of the church people who would see things that we want to really say are foundational because that's what scripture makes them how we come to be right with God the

need to be born again our dependence upon the Holy Spirit for our sanctified life all of the things the Bible itself makes absolutely basic and foundational without which you and I cannot be a [22 : 59] Christian or cannot be serving witnessing Christians they are the ancient ways these are the old paths they are not good just because they are old they are good because they are God's appointed ways because that's the way that God has always pointed out as the way to life the way to his acceptance the way that pleases him now this word good comes up there ask for the ancient paths where the good way is it's better translated I think there if we had ask for the ancient paths that lead to the good a path that leads to the good because this is dealing with really the terminus of the journey the end of the path that's what he's calling on these people to look to whatever he says your path is now to these disobedient people of

Judah think of where it's heading think of what's at the end think beyond the pleasure of the present he said to them and ask for the way that leads to the good good is a covenant word it's a word that is frequent in the Bible and it's also used in terms of God's covenant relationship with his people that's what he always has in mind for them good think of Paul's reference again in Romans 8 we know that all things work together for good towards good for those who love God those who are called according to his purpose that's not what the world would say but that's what God is saying and when God looked at the creation when he had created the world the universe as Genesis chapter 1 and 2 puts it what does it say God looked at all that he had made and behold it was very good what is good it's been a point of philosophy all down through the centuries and millennia how do you define the good the Greeks tried to define it people before that tried to define it philosophers today will try and define what is the good what really is the good there are ways of thinking about it even politically what is the good in a political sense well whatever you see about all of these things you can say that the good in God's terms is this it is what meets with God's favour and it is what gives your soul satisfaction that's the good and the good is especially provided in Jesus Christ this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased more or less the same thing as saying this is my beloved son who is himself very good and that goodness of Christ is what's offered in the gospel and it's that goodness of God and Christ that Jeremiah is calling the people back to in his own day he is saying really as you stand at the crossroads it's not just a matter of looking forwards where each of these paths are going but look backwards as well what's behind you what do you learn from history what do you learn from your own history as a people he's reminding them of you learn of where the good is situated where what will make you good and give you lasting benefit and delight and joy where is it situated is it in the ways people choose for themselves no it's in

God's way show me as we were saying show me your ways Lord your paths teach me lead me in that way and that's why we're saying that the ancient way the way that leads to good is really the way of the truth the way of God's own stipulations for human life as to what is and isn't acceptable pleasing to him and good for us that's why you just don't at all accept the conclusions of liberal theology or worldly philosophy that tells you that's all old fashioned stuff that was written hundreds of years ago how can you possibly think that book is relevant to human life today sadly many people just dismiss it altogether not that they don't look at the signpost some of them don't but even when you tell them look what the signpost is saying that's not relevant today at all that's just a book for old times human life has moved on since then well not as far as

[28 : 44] God is concerned because it's God's work it's God's signpost because that it never gets old we say this so often but the Bible says it so often that's why we say it so often and that's the path of the cross the path of justification by faith the path well if you think about Hebrews for a moment Hebrews chapter nine has two verses in it that are really crucial to what we're saying with regard to our personal experience of salvation Hebrews nine verse nine and verse fourteen where he talks there about how the old sacrifices in the old testament times that were offered were a type were a symbolical anticipatory of the sacrifice of Christ but it says they were offered but they cannot perfect the conscience of the worshipper and then verse fourteen is the same how much more shall the blood of

Christ who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish to God purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God it's got to get to your conscience this thing that must make you happy that must give you satisfaction that must give you a true and solid basis to life and to eternity what is it that gives you peace of conscience it's not the new ways of the liberal theologians it's not the way of politicians who actually dismiss the teaching of the Bible it's the way of Christ it's

the way of God it's the ancient way it's the way of salvation the way of truth there there was a magistrate in London at one time a fellow called Cairns and he quite often of course would have guests in his home and he had a habit of asking them one particular question just as he would answer he did it lots of times with people who came as guests to a meal with him he said which would you prefer to be guilty and then to be acquitted or to be innocent and then to be condemned which would you prefer let's put the question towards that which would you prefer to be guilty and then to be acquitted that's to be found not guilty to be set free or to be innocent and then to be condemned which would you prefer and he said most people chose the first one and he always said to them you're wrong because you've forgotten about conscience you see you could be guilty and then set free but you're not free from conscience but if you're innocent and you're condemned and perhaps even condemned to death you don't have a guilty conscience you know you're innocent that's by far the best one of the two to have that's what

God is saying to us whatever people think of the way of life the Christian lives whatever ways we may have as alternatives ask yourself at the crossroads which of these ways will give me peace of conscience that's the way to follow and that's the way of Christ and the way of the cross that's what we come when we come to the end of a commune that is what he's been saying to us we have remembered the Lord's death in the sacrament of the Lord's supper and as we've remembered the sacrament of in the sacrament of the Lord's supper as we've remembered the cross as we've remembered the shedding of his blood the death of Christ it's crying out to us as we come to the end of the communion this is the way walk in it don't leave it don't go aside from it don't slacken in it and that's really what he's saying fourthly there walk in it he's not just pointing to the signpost and saying consider it really take in what it's saying he's actually saying walk in it tread it out for yourselves he was saying to them

God was saying to them it's not enough admiring the signs and even to come to acknowledge well yes it does look as if God is true you've got to walk this path and walking the path means being more than religious these people were religious these people were religious because as you find there in verse 20 God is saying to them what use to me is frankincense that comes from Sheba this was an expensive commodity they were taking it in so they would use it as incense in their offerings or sweet cane from a distant land your bird offerings are not acceptable nor your sacrifice is pleasing to me my friends tonight there are hundreds of people in the church in the world that see themselves as religious and their heart is not right with God they are not walking the path of obedience to

Christ what he's saying is consider the sign post consider the ways take stock of it take it in study it ask where is the way that leads to the good make sure he's saying that's the one that you're focused on but then walk it set out on it keep walking on it don't deviate from it and we can expect many temptations to deviate from it because for one thing the son of God himself met with the very same temptation when he was tempted in the wilderness by the devil that was the main aim the devil had in the three temptations that are recorded for us in the scriptures that was the main aim underneath all the ways in which the devil arranged the words hid the real purpose this was the real purpose that if it were possible he would take

[35 : 23] Christ away from the path of obedience to the will of the father if you are the son of God command these stones that they may be made bread why are you hungry you're the son of God why are you in this deprived position surely you as the son of God shouldn't be in this state of dependence man man man man man he said man man who cast yourself down from the temple from the pinnacle of the temple isn't it written he will give his angels charge and they will protect you and the third one too All the kingdoms of the world That were under the sway Of the devil By God's allowance Till the gospel went out to free people He showed Christ the glory of them Though he knew it already All this will I give you

If you fall down and worship me If you leave the path you're on And come to my side You don't have to actually Get to this glory By going through the cross I'll show you another way And I'll make sure you get it all If you fall down and worship me You'll meet with that temptation You've maybe met with it already When you're shown an alternative To following Christ You know where it's from Walk in it Keep walking in it Look for grace every day To walk in it further To proceed in it To take step after step To take the next step Walk in it And find rest for your souls Is the final one Stand by it Look Ask

Walk Find rest This is really by way Of a promise As much As it is A command Or an imperative
Find rest For your souls There are many people In the world Pretty few Most people In the world
Are looking for Peace For rest For satisfaction And these people Of Jeremiah's day They were
looking for it In the wrong place They were looking for it In a way of their own devising What
seemed right to themselves What they thought best And God was calling them back to The way of
God The way of following God The way of obedience to God Because that's really What that way
leads to You'll find peace of course While you're in this life Yes God gives you peace In your heart
Peace with God Peace of conscience All your sins are covered But what's at the end of it?
Rest There is no more beautiful word In the Bible In all of human vocabulary For troubled souls Like
you and I As sinners Than the word Rest Rest It's just Full of life And there's nothing in it To spoil it
And that's why Jesus said Come to me All you who labor And are heavy laden And I will give you
rest Take my teaching upon you And learn of me And you will find rest For your souls That great
Christian Augustine And many of his sayings Are with us today But one of them Is frequently quoted
We've quoted it ourselves And it's as follows
Thou hast made us for thyself And our soul can find no rest Until we find our rest With thee Stop
Consider Look Look Examine Ask for the ancient paths And walk in them And you will find rest At
the end of it And peace during it For your souls Let's pray Gracious God We give thanks For the
rest And peace That you have provided And created for us Through our Lord Jesus Christ We
thank you for The way in which Through the disturbances Of his life And of his death We have
come To the possession Of peace Bless to us Your word We pray And continue with us In the days
ahead For Jesus' sake Amen Amen