

The Ancient Paths

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- [0 : 00] Let's turn again to the chapter we read in the prophecy of Jeremiah. Jeremiah chapter 6.
- I'm reading again at verse 16. Jeremiah 6. I'm reading again at verse 16. Thus says the Lord, stand by the roads 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. Much of this prophecy, the prophecy of Jeremiah, deals with God's judgment.
- Judgment against the nations, but also judgment against the people who were termed God's people. In many ways, it's a difficult prophecy to read.
- And there are times, as you read through it, prophecy after prophecy of condemnation and judgment, we find these sometimes very hard things to understand and to comprehend.
- [1 : 12] But what we've got to remember, this is God's word. As we said, it's little wonder that Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet, because the message that he delivered was a message that was largely ignored, and he himself suffered because of delivering it.
- He delivered it faithfully, but he delivered it to a people who didn't want to hear. They weren't interested in what he had to say. And they were so convinced because they were God's people, that judgment wouldn't come upon them.
- They were persuaded that because of who they were, that God would never, ever bring the judgment that he brought upon other nations, upon them.
- But this chapter, as we saw here, it deals with what is termed the impending disaster for Jerusalem. And the prophet is highlighting the extreme danger that they are in.
- And he's showing to them that the only way of hope, the only way of refuge for them, is to return to the old paths, to turn from their idols to the living and through God.
- [2 : 29] And when you go through this prophecy, as in other prophecies, you will find that there are certain sins that rise up that are so offensive to God.
- God, violence, oppression, dishonest dealing. These things we may not think are, well, we do know that they are, that they're evil and they're bad.
- But you will find over and over and over again that the Lord is saying, because of the violence, because of the injustice, because of the oppression, because of deceitful ways of dealing, that God says, I must come and visit in judgment.
- You see, these are serious things. And you know, when we look at ourselves as a nation, so often we see dishonesty. We see oppression. We see exploitation.
- We see many of the things that are highlighted when you go through the prophets, the very things, what you would term national sins. And of course, the chief one of all was idolatry, where people worshipped other than the living and the true God.
- [3 : 46] Now, Jeremiah's life in many ways was unique because God used Jeremiah as a kind of a living parable or as a sort of an object lesson.

We know what an object lesson is. In a sense, Jeremiah himself became an object lesson to the Jews. Because if you go to the likes of chapter 16, you find that there were restrictions put upon Jeremiah's life.

For instance, he was not to marry, he was not to take a wife and raise a family in that place. And this was, in a sense, a disruption of what would be the normal, natural way which was so important to the Jews.

And he did, this was, he was, as we say, restricted from this because his life was to show. And the Lord was saying, I'm going to destroy this place.

I am going to disrupt family life. It is going to be destroyed. The family circle, the family unit, is going to be destroyed. And when you read in chapter 16, it shows that the families, men, women, children, were going to die of disease and die by the sword.

[5 : 06] And then he was restricted from going to the house of mourning where there was a death. Jeremiah was forbidden to go. He wasn't to go there to mourn and he wasn't to go there to comfort.

And again, that seemed such a strange thing because naturally, that's what we want to do. We want to go and we want to express sympathy and express comfort to people when there is ever bereavement.

But he was restricted from going. So he wasn't to display emotion or to display grief. And this was showing on two counts. One was in a sense that God had withdrawn his blessing, had withdrawn his mercy, and had withdrawn his pity from the land.

And the second thing it was going to show was that through the carnage that was to come, that there would be nobody mourning. There would be nobody to mourn for anybody.

It's an awful picture when you go through Jeremiah that the bodies were just going to lie on the land and be like, as it were, manure upon the land.

[6 : 19] And then the third restriction was that he wasn't to go to the house of feasting. He wasn't to join in any celebration because the order of celebration was going to go.

There were going to be no weddings. Family life, the time of feasting, the time of joy was to be removed. There would be only silence where there were previously weddings.

And you know, when you go through it, you say, this is a fearful picture. It's no wonder that the people didn't want to hear this message. Can you imagine what it would be like and it was a time of prosperity when things were going well.

And here's this man coming and he's telling them, this is what it's going to be. This place where we normally have joy and celebration and there's weddings and everything, normal, natural life, it's going to be chaos, carnage, all of you.

Your bodies are going to litter the streets. There's nobody going to be able to bury you. Nobody's going to mourn for your passing. All these things. And so it was a fearful message that he had to give.

[7 : 21] But if only Judah had thought upon their ways. And so the Lord is saying, stand by the roads and look and ask for the ancient paths where the good way is and walk in it that you may find rest for your souls.

Now, as we know, many people are careless and indifferent as they journey through life and don't give it any great thought, at least with regard to spiritual things.

But the Lord is saying to us here, stand by and look. Stand by and look. Examine where you are going.

And that's very important in this day that we're living in, which is a day that is so rushed. Everybody's in a hurry. Everybody's in a frenzy. Nobody has time. Always on the move.

Push, push, push. Push. I don't have time. Everybody says that. Everybody's saying, I would love to be able to go here, there. I would love to call. I would love to. The life that we lived even 20 years ago has gone.

[8 : 28] It's so changed. The speed of life is ferocious. Nobody has time. The Lord is saying, stop. Stop and look. Stop and think.

Stop and consider. Where are you going? Do you give it a thought? Where are you going? We're only here for a few short years.

And then what? Then what? It's a question that we have to ask ourselves. What happens?

Now, a lot of people think, well, that's it. I just said, that's it. I lie in the grave. End of story. But the Bible doesn't say that.

And this book, we either believe it or we don't. And if we believe it, then we have to pay attention and really live upon what it says. And the Bible makes it very clear that there are only two destinies.

[9 : 31] There's only heaven and hell. There's no alternatives. And that is why it is so challenging. And that is why the Lord keeps saying to us, listen, stop and think. Stop and reflect.

Stop and consider. Where are you going? What are you about? What's your life about? And so we have to take stock of these things.

You see, consideration is often the turning point in a person's life. It's turning point in the prodigal's life. It's when he stopped. It's when he came to himself, when he stopped and reflected upon who he was, on what he had, on what he had blown.

When he looked at his life, and yeah, his life had been brilliant. It was going places. He had loads of money, loads of friends. Everything was brilliant until everything ran out.

And he was destitute. He was empty. And he stopped and he began to reflect. And he says, right, who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going? What's it all about?

[10 : 32] He began to stop and to question and to think. And that is so important, so vital for us to do. Stop and consider and think.

And then it says, stand by the road and look. Now, as we know, life in many ways is full of different roads. And people are traveling down at different stages in life.

And, you know, sometimes as you look around and you look at people, and I suppose we all do that, we look at people, and particularly in this day that is obsessed with celebrity and all that kind of stuff, and so many people are looking at people's lifestyles, and they say, oh, I wish I had this, and I wish I had that, and I wish I was this person, and I wish I was that person.

Sometimes we need to stop and think, hold on, what is life all about? And it brings us back to the question, who am I? Where am I going? And sometimes when we really begin to assess where we are, who we are, and where we're going, we may not be so envious and so jealous of some of the people that maybe we look at.

As we said, the Bible tells us, ultimately, there are only two roads. There's a broad road, and there's lots of people. As it were, there's loads of other little roads, but there's only this one broad road and one narrow.

[11 : 53] And then it says, ask for the ancient paths where the good way is. Where the good way is. That is the pathway that the Christian is traveling on.

And maybe you're here tonight and you're saying to yourself, oh, well, you know, right now, the way things are, I don't fancy being a Christian. I don't fancy traveling down that path. I would rather be on the path I'm on.

But, you know, deep down, there's another part of you saying, well, I do look at the Christian, and I see what they have. There might be things right now that I don't want that life, but I'll tell you something.

I have seen the Christian grow old and die. And I know that they have something. You know, it's an amazing thing when you see God's people die and you see them approach death.

And you know the one thing you see? You see faith. Because they know where they're going. They know who they believe in. There's a calmness and there's a peace.

[13 : 06] And I often wish that our people could come and see the Christian often in the face of death, that great enemy, that enemy that we naturally recoil from.

It's human nature to recoil from it. But so often when you see that faith, and that's real faith, faith in practice, faith that is looking beyond death, looking to Jesus.

But sadly, so many people, they push these things away from themselves and they say, well, I would rather not. I'm sure at the end of the day, that's what you want. You know, there's an awful lot of people like, they're like Balaam.

And Balaam was the kind of person who wanted to live like the enemies of the Lord, who wanted to live with the enemies of the Lord, but wanted to die like the righteous.

And you can't do that. He wanted that his life could be lived with the enemies of the Lord and lived like them, and he wanted to live his life to the fool away from God, forgetting God, joining with those who curse God, and yet at the end of the day, he wanted to die the death of the righteous.

[14 : 16] Well, it doesn't work that way. And the Lord is saying to us here, stop, consider, look. And so we find here it's termed the engine paths and the good way.

And it's an engine path because it goes all the way back. We can go all the way back through all the different churches and all the different denominations and go right back through all the religious seats of learning.

And we can go back in church history and reach the Reformation and to the early church fathers and go all the way back to Jesus Christ on the cross and go back into all the prophets and into all the law and go all the way back to Abel and to the Garden of Eden and we find ourselves here all the way back.

And my friend, there is only one way. There is only one way. It's a way of sacrifice.

It's a way of the mediator. It's a way of the substitute. And that is who Jesus Christ is. And right from the very dawn of human history, God set out for us this way.

[15 : 32] And all the whole Old Testament sacrificial system was pointing to Jesus and what Jesus was going to do. The Old Testament church were saved by Jesus.

You see, he was a lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world. And so they believed in the Messiah, the Son of God, who was to come, but whose sacrifice was typified and symbolized and set forth in the whole sacrificial system that was set out.

We are saved by believing in the Jesus who has come. The Old Testament church and the New Testament church are saved only in the one way.

We come to God in and through His Son. And this is the ancient way. These are the paths that were set out. There is no other way.

And we see here that it's termed a good way. It's termed a good way, obviously, because the gateway into this way is through Jesus Christ. And you cannot have a better way than that.

[16 : 40] You want to walk down a good road. What road do you want to go down? Let's go down the road that Jesus has opened the door of. He's opened the gate. Here is the way.

I am the door, Jesus says. Can you go down a better route than to go down the route of Jesus? The way that He has set.

Go down. And you don't go down on your own. You go down with Him. And it's a good way because it's the result of divine goodness.

It's God's goodness to us. All that. God's goodness is in them. And it's a way that produces good. Good people.

You know, God's people are good people. And I say that unashamedly. God's people are good people.

[17 : 36] We have to say that. Because God's goodness is in them, in and through Jesus Christ. Now, straight away, some people here may be saying tonight, ah, you know, God's people, they are full of faults and failings and inconsistencies.

You know what? I could sit here with a sheet of paper and I could go around this congregation and I could put the different names down and I could list all their faults. Loads of them.

You know, you could. But you know, that sheet of paper with all the faults of all the Christians, you would have got it wrong. It should be far. But you know this, I don't think you could get enough sheets of paper to fill this church.

Or I don't think this, I shouldn't, I don't think this church could take all the sheets of paper if you were to list all the faults of God's people. You would need thousands and thousands and thousands of sheets of paper if you're going to start listing all the faults of God's people.

But you know something? Despite all the faults and the failings, God's people are better people now since God came into their lives than they were before.

[18 : 53] And that's something we've got to remember because people straight away, there is always this accusation, it's one of the things that people do straight away and say, ah, the Christian, ah, look at their faults, look at their failings.

you see, God is at work in his people, turning them, changing them, transforming them, working at them, just in the way that a sculptor is at work with a sculpture.

when you go and you see somebody who's making a statue and he's working at it and he's only halfway through, you don't go and rubbish it and say, ah, that's full of, that's full of mistakes.

There's lumps and bumps there there shouldn't be. and he would say to you, look, I'm only halfway through. Come back when I'm finished. And God is only halfway through working with us.

One day, all his people will be the finished article. One day, they will all resemble Jesus. But right now, the work is going on, conforming them to the image of Christ.

[20 : 01] So remember this, God's people, are better now than they were when God first began with them. And you know, whatever faults and failings, and there are many that the Lord's people have, they are more useful to the Lord today than they were when God began a work in their heart.

They're more useful to this world than they were before God began a work within them. God's people.

You know, there are many, I know that there are many people in here tonight. And if God had not come in mercy into your soul and dealt graciously and savingly with you, I know what you'd be saying.

I wouldn't like to know me today. I don't know what would have happened to me. I doubt I would be even here.

I doubt I would be even living. Some of you had pressed the self-destruct button. Some of you were on a road to nowhere. And you know the transforming power of God's life.

[21 : 13] And you don't need anybody to come and tell you about your faults and failings. So that's what I'm saying. That it's a good way because God's people, whatever they are today, and they're still sinners, they're sinners saved by grace, they are better than they were before God dealt with them.

And may I say to any person who's taking refuge as to where they are tonight with regard to rejecting Jesus by pointing the finger at Christians and saying, ah well, I can see all the faults and failings.

Let me say this. That is not going to do you one whit of good the day you appear before Jesus. Jesus is not going to ask any person on the day of judgment about somebody else as he confronts you and me.

When we stand there on our own before him, he's not going to ask us about somebody else. So there's no point in using somebody else as an argument.

The Lord is only going to ask you one question. What did you do with me? What did you do about me? Did you take me or did you reject me?

[22 : 32] Not what somebody else was or somebody else did. That's not going to come into the equation with regard to you and with regard to me. And so you see how important it is that we look to what we have here.

And so the Christian's life is fitted and filled with good, good things, with love, joy, peace, with gentleness, goodness, all these things, the fruit of the Spirit, these things should become more and more manifest in the believer's life as they travel the way, the way of obedience, the way of confession, the way of profession, all these things.

And so we have to follow the Lord. Follow the Lord wherever, whenever. It wasn't easy for Jeremiah at times. Jeremiah had a unique work.

We won't all be called to make sacrifices the way that Jeremiah was called. But whatever sacrifice Jeremiah had to make, you know if you were to ask Jeremiah tonight in glory, Jeremiah, was it worth it?

He would say a hundred thousand times yes. Because the glory that Jeremiah enjoys tonight transcends any glory that the world has ever displayed or ever even thought up.

[23 : 53] The weight of glory. That's what the Bible talks of. The weight of glory. And so we're told to follow this way, walk in this way, and we're told you will find rest for your souls.

Isn't that wonderful? Rest. freedom from a sense of guilt, freedom from a sense of weariness, freedom from the uncertainty that this world brings.

Rest to our souls. We love the word rest. And this is what has been promised. And Christ brings this persuasion, this assurance into the life of the believer.

Rest for your souls. But you know this, it says here, but they said we will not walk in it. But let me say one thing here where it says, and you will find rest for your souls.

Can I speak to any person in here tonight who was brought up in a Christian home and at an early age showed a real interest in the gospel, at an early age was impressed by the gospel, was affected by it and touched by it.

[25 : 10] And yet, although you may still come to church, you have pushed these impressions and these influences aside. It's time you came back and found rest for your souls.

As the psalm says, the psalm we're going to finish with, O thou my soul, do thou return, unto thy quiet rest.

And if any of you are on the run tonight, it's time you returned. It's time you came back. Came back to that place of rest. Because, sadly, for the Jews, they didn't.

They wouldn't listen. And they said, we will not walk in it. They made the wrong choice and the destruction and the judgment came.

Please, tonight, when you're on mercy's ground, remember. Remember what you have seen. Remember the faith that you have seen, living faith, lived out in lives.

[26 : 24] Remember what you have heard about Jesus. Look to him. Believe in him. accept him. Follow him. And know the joy and the peace that is found in him.

Let us pray. O Lord, may we indeed come unto this word in such a way that it will affect us.

May we turn from the restless ways that so often we are in. And may we walk on that quiet path where there is peace. May we know the refuge that is found in Jesus.

And we pray, Lord, for any who are running away from God. May they run no longer, but may they, like Adam, come back. The call is going out.

Where are you? And we pray, Lord, to draw to your shelf tonight those who are on the run. Lord, bless and pity us. Shine on us with thy face.

[27 : 24] Do us good, we pray. Guide us and keep us and cleanse us from all our sin. In Jesus' name we ask it. Amen. Amen.