

At a 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: 09 January 2022

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] And on it you'll find all the details for the services coming through the week and also today. And so please just read through that for yourselves. And I don't really need to think to mention anything else.

You'll notice the two deaths that are mentioned there, Catherine McPhail and Olivia McLeod, at different ends of the age spectrum. Nevertheless, all those affected mourn the passing of loved ones.

And we commend them all to the grace of God. Let's begin our service this morning singing in Psalm 25. And that's the first version of Psalm 25.

As you find that on page 231 of the books, that's Psalm 25 in the Scottish Psalter. We're singing verses 4 to 9. Show me thy ways, O Lord, thy paths, O teach thou me.

And do thou lead me in thy truth, therein my teacher be. For thou art God that does to me salvation send. And I upon thee all the day expecting do attend.

[1 : 02] Thy tender mercies, Lord, I pray thee to remember. And lovingkindnesses, for they have been of old forever. Psalm 25, we'll sing these verses 4 to 9.

Show me thy ways, O Lord. And we stand to sing. Show me thy ways, O Lord.

Thy paths, O teach thou me. And do thou lead me in thy truth, therein my teacher be.

For thou art God that does to me salvation send.

And I am only all the day expecting to attend.

[2 : 19] Thy mercies, O Lord.

For thou art God that does to me salvation send. And I am only all the day expecting to attend. My sins and faults of youth, do thou art forget? Did thou art forget.

■ ■ ■ zn Atabby, O Lord, O Lord, Did thou art forget? After thy mercy, think on me, and for thy goodness gain.

God good and upright is the way he'll save us show.

And in judgment he will guide and make his path to know.

[4 : 03] Let's now join together in prayer. Let's call upon the Lord in prayer. O Lord, our gracious God, on this new day we give thanks that we are able to gather here to worship you, as we have done many times before.

We pray once again, O Lord, that you would make us thankful for this opportunity and privilege. We thank you for the assurance that you give us in these words that we have sung in your praise.

That you are the one who, as the God who is good in himself, will show your people that way that leads to everlasting life. God good and upright is, and the way he'll sinners know.

The meek in judgment he will guide and make his paths to know. We ask, Lord, today that you would show us your paths, and help us, Lord, to walk in them in such a way as would follow the direction that you give us and that you lead us in.

We pray for your Spirit once again to bless us. We acknowledge, O Lord, as we hand your word ourselves, that we are not ourselves able to apply it savingly to our hearts.

[5 : 17] That we are dependent upon your own blessed Spirit to show us that way of truth, and to guide us onwards, O Lord, in life, in such a way that would find continued strength and direction from you.

We thank you today that we can confidently confess our sin to you, and that we do so, Lord, in the acknowledgement that you are the God who forgives the sin of his people, who covers our transgressions from your sight, who has paid the great price of sin in the person of your Son, who came into this world to die the death of the cross.

And we bless you, O Lord, for the fountain of life that is in you, and for the way that that is commended to us in the Gospel. We pray today, Lord, that we may know of your presence with us. We need your presence at every passing hour. There is not a moment of our lives, Lord, that we can see. We do not need to depend upon you and know your direction in life.

And we ask today that as your presence is spoken of in your word, that we will know in our own experience, O Lord, that we meet with you here, that you are pleased to present yourself to us.

[6 : 33] We thank you for all that your presence means to your people, and especially in the difficult times of life, that they can indeed come to you as one who is ever present with them.

Even as David, in the psalm that we so often sing, in the psalm that speaks of the Lord as his shepherd, could say with confidence and in faith, even in the valley of the shadow of death, that you would be with him.

And we pray today, Lord, that that presence will be known and experienced by each of us here. We bring our concerns individually and collectively before you. Lord, we know that there are so many differences between us.

There are so many different experiences and backgrounds, so many experiences even in Providence at the moment, so many situations in our own personal and family backgrounds. Yet we thank you, O Lord, that all the variety is met in the one provision that you have made in the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray today that you would speak to us, Lord, from your word.

[7 : 40] Speak to us whatever condition we are in, and however much, Lord, we understand or otherwise of our own situation, we ask that you would speak from your word to us and show to us, Lord, that good way, that way that will give us rest and peace of mind and conscience.

We pray today for our families. We ask that you would bless them, all who are near and dear to us in the world, whatever their circumstances may be and wherever they may be in this world.

We commend them, Lord, to you and ask that you would graciously provide for them the grace that is necessary for us each day. We commend them to you and ask that your blessing will be with us, O Lord, as a people in these difficult times.

We pray that you'd bless us as a congregation. We thank you for all that you have been to us right through until this very day, that you have blessed us in the past, that you promised to bless your people in the future.

We ask that you would help us to wait upon you with that conviction. We ask, Lord, that you would continue to bless and own the gospel amongst us. We thank you for the gospel.

[8 : 51] We thank you for your word. We thank you for all who support your cause in belonging to the congregation. We pray that you would encourage us, O Lord, in these times that challenge us.

We pray that you would bring us onward with confidence in yourself. And we ask, O Lord, as we wait upon you further, in regard to the providence that has overtaken us in recent times in this pandemic, we ask that you would, Lord, continue to encourage us and continue to bless even though we find it so difficult in so many ways at this time.

We ask, Gracious One, that you'd bless those today whose hearts are heavy. We pray that you'd bless all those who mourn the passing of loved ones. Lord, it seems that every week that passes, we bring before you those who have lost loved ones in recent days.

And so it is this week and this Lord's Day also. Lord, we pray for them and ask that you'd bless them and pray that others who have lost loved ones in recent times or even in times gone by may continue to know your blessing and your comfort.

We remember especially the McLeod family in Melbost, O Lord, as they mourn little Olivia's passing. And, Gracious One, we thank you for the favorable conditions you gave us yesterday for her funeral.

[10 : 14] And we pray that her family will be blessed, Lord, in these days to come, that you would continue to strengthen them and to comfort them and to console them by your own spirit and in your own way as only you can with the consolation that you alone are able to give them.

We commend them, O Lord, to you today and graciously provide for them. We pray for all others, Lord, of whom we heard in recent days. We pray for Annie MacArthur, who has lost a sister.

We ask that you would bless Annie and pray that you would uphold her at this time, O Lord, as she finds herself the last of that large family. And continue to lay your good hand upon her, we pray, and to be with her during these days.

We ask, O Lord, too, that your blessing will be with us today in the thoughts that we have concerning recent events, especially little Olivia's passing.

And we think especially today, O Lord, of the children in Sunday school and in creche. And we ask that your blessing will be with the teachers, too, as they seek to deal with that matter with the children.

[11 : 24] We pray that you would help the teachers, O Lord, to go over these issues in a way that would know that you are leading them, that you are blessing them. And as they consider and contemplate all that's involved, O Lord, in the death of such a young one, we pray that your blessing will follow and that the teachers themselves will know of your guiding of them through this difficult event.

We ask, O Lord, that they today will know your presence with them, too, and we continue to remember them before you and give thanks for their contribution to your cause.

We pray for all our young people, for all our children. And alas, O Lord, that I ask that they would be today continually upheld by you and that your own truth may come to take hold upon their young lives so that they be formed under your truth into lives that will glorify your great name.

And so we pray beyond ourselves. We pray for our communities here. We pray for our nation. We pray for those who lead us. We pray, Lord, for those who look after our needs and our health issues, whether it be through pandemic or otherwise.

We ask that you bless all those who serve in the NHS, especially those on frontline services. We commit them to you again and ask that you would continue, Lord, to provide for us as a people in that rich way that you have continued to do so up to now.

[12 : 53] And we ask, O Lord, today for all others who are affected by COVID throughout our land and throughout the world. We pray that you would look upon us in mercy, Lord, that we may reach out in mercy to you and realize that through this you are speaking to us also as you have done in the past.

And we pray that as we reach out to you so we may know of your turning toward us in mercy and leading us out of this difficult time. Receive us, we pray now, and pardon our many sins and wash us freely for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Let's read God's Word now as we find this in the prophecy of Jeremiah. Prophecy of Jeremiah and chapter 6.

We're going to read verses 1 to 16. So Jeremiah chapter 6 and from the beginning.

Flee for safety, O people of Benjamin, from the midst of Jerusalem. Blow the trumpet in Tekoa and raise the signal on Beth-Herem. For disaster looms out of the north and great destruction.

[14 : 11] The lovely and delicately bred I will destroy the daughter of Zion. Shepherds with their flocks shall come against her. They shall pitch their tents round her. They shall pasture each in his place.

Prepare war against her. Arise and let us attack at noon. Woe to us for the day declines, for the shadows of evening lengthen. Arise and let us attack by night and destroy her palaces.

For thus says the Lord of hosts, cut down her trees, cast up a siege mound against Jerusalem. This is the city that must be punished. There is nothing but oppression within her.

As a well keeps its water fresh, so she keeps fresh her evil. Violence and destruction are heard within her. Sickness and wounds are ever before me.

Be warned, O Jerusalem, lest I turn from you in disgust, lest I make you a desolation, an uninhabited land. Thus says the Lord of hosts, they shall glean thoroughly as a vine, the remnant of Israel.

[15 : 14] Like a grape gatherer, pass your hand again over its branches. To whom shall I speak and give warning that they may hear? Behold, their ears are uncircumcised.

They cannot listen. Behold, the word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn. They take no pleasure in it. Therefore I am full of the wrath of the Lord.

I am weary of holding it in. Pour it out upon the children in the street and upon the gatherings of young men also. Both husband and wife shall be taken, the elderly and the very aged.

Their houses shall be turned over to others, their fields and wives together. For I will stretch out my hand against the inhabitants of the land, declares the Lord. For from the least to the greatest of them, everyone is greedy for unjust gain.

And from prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely. They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace.

[16:15] Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed. They did not know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall.

At the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the Lord. 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. Amen, and may God bless to us, that very solemn passage from His Word, to His own praise and glory.

I'm going to praise God further now in Psalm number 1a, in St. Psalms. Psalm number 1a, and that's on page one. Sing the whole of that psalm.

Blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk, who does not stand in sinners' paths or sit with those who mock. Instead, he finds God's holy law as joy and great delight.

[17:24] He makes the precepts of the Lord as study day and night. He prospers ever like a tree that's planted by a stream, and in due season yields its fruit. Its leaves are always green.

Not so the wicked. They are like the chaff that's blown away. They will not stand when judgment comes or with the righteous stay. It is the Lord who sees and knows the way the righteous go.

But those who live an evil life, the Lord will overthrow. So we'll sing these verses. Blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk. Blessed is the one who turns away from where the wicked walk, who does not stand in sinners' paths or sit with those who walk.

Instead, he finds God's holy law His joy and great delight.

He makes the precepts of the Lord His study day and night.

[19:04] He prospers ever like a tree that's planted by a stream, and in due season yields its fruit.

Its leaves are always green. Not so the wicked they are like the chaff that's blown away.

They will not stand when judgment comes or with the righteous stay.

It is the Lord who sees and knows the way the righteous go.

But those who live an evil life, the Lord will overthrow.

[20:41] Now we've got to turn, please, with me to Jeremiah chapter 6. And today we're looking at verse 16 of Jeremiah chapter 6. 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. Whoever might think they have a difficult ministry, Jeremiah certainly had a very difficult time in his ministry as a prophet.

This is a very critical moment for Judah, for the people that Jeremiah belonged to, for this nation of Judah. They are at a crossroads in their history. The Lord has been dealing with them in a way that through the prophets has warned them of disaster to come because of the ways that they have, the way that they have forsaken the ways of the Lord and turned against Him and imported so much of the idolatry of the pagan world around them into their practices.

And you can see really in verses 11 to 13, there's many places in Jeremiah you could find summaries of their situation, but in chapter 2, verses 11 to 13, you'll find the way that Jeremiah summarizes things.

There has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods. But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this.

[22:20] Be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the Lord. For my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

What a graphic description of what happens when we abandon the Lord and turn away from the Lord, the Lord who is the fountain of life, who holds in Himself securely the water of life.

Whatever it is we turn to then can be no better than broken cisterns, things which cannot possibly satisfy the way the Lord can and does. And this is the summary picture that He's giving there in chapter 2.

And then when you move on to verse 14 of chapter 2, verses 14 to 17, follows through with that teaching. Is Israel a slave? Is he a home-born servant?

Why then has he become a prey? The lions have roared against him. They have roared loudly.

They have made his land a waste. His cities are in ruins without inhabitant. Moreover, the men of Memphis and Tappanes have shaved the crown of your head.

[23 : 29] Have you not brought this upon yourself? By forsaking the Lord your God when He led you in the way. And now what do you gain? By going to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile and so on down through the passage there.

And so many passages like that in Jeremiah, who historically has been known as the weeping prophet because he wept over the situation as he kept bringing it before the Lord in his own prayers.

So he was communicating to the people by God's direction the situation that they were in and what they faced in the future. And that's the situation that Jeremiah was called of by God to present God's truth to that particular generation.

And you can imagine how difficult, incredibly difficult that was. And in so many ways we find our modern world like this. We're not in the same situation as a nation as the nation of Judah where they were in covenant with the Lord, which of course as a nation we are not.

But in terms of the principles of the thing, you find that departure from the Lord always gives way or leads to forming other systems for ourselves that cannot possibly meet our human needs.

[24 : 50] Broken cisterns in the words of Jeremiah. And so in verse 16 here of chapter 6, the Lord is really erecting a signpost, as it were, for the people of Judah.

And we could say that it's a very fitting signpost for the days in which we live as well. And for ourselves as well, as we leave 2021 behind, as we still continue in a pandemic situation, as we seek to find direction from the Lord, here is the signpost that God is erecting at the beginning of a new year for us.

And the signpost actually has itself five imperatives written upon it so that we will actually come and find and choose the right way to go.

And for ourselves today, that's also very important because we're not out of the picture. Maybe that today, you yourself are at a crossroads.

There are many people in our country, I'm sure, who have been asking serious questions, even as a result of experiencing this pandemic and the restrictions that are associated with it.

[26 : 01] Some people have undoubtedly had a mind upon eternal things more seriously than before. And maybe in your own life today, you're at a crossroads in your life, whether it's a crossroads spiritually or morally or in some other way.

There may be somebody today here who will relate very closely to what Jeremiah is saying here in verse 16. Stand at the crossroads, 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.

So what are the five imperatives, the five notices, if you like, on this signpost? There's a signpost that's showing the one path that leads to rest, that leads to life, and there may be other directions shown on the signpost as well, and there will be in the opposite direction.

It's always the case in life. Where you have the way of life pointed out, there will always be some who will point out the way in the opposite direction. What are the five imperatives?

What are the five notices? Well, first of all, he is saying, stand, stand by, stand by the roads, the crossroads that you find in front of you.

[27 : 21] Stand by there. And then he says, look, take stock. And then thirdly, he says, ask. Stand by, look, ask.

What is to be asked? Ask for the ancient paths. Ask where the good way is and walk in it. And then fourthly, you've got, walk in it.

Walk in that way that's pointed out by God and find rest for your souls. Find a place of rest in the good way that God is pointing out to you.

And if we look at these in turn, they bring up much that is valuable for us to consider and apply to ourselves today. So first of all, he's saying, stand by the roads.

Stand, in other words, stop and take notice. In the busy paths of life, take time to read the signs. Take time to listen to what God is saying.

[28 : 20] Take time to read your Bible. Take time to come to hear the gospel as you're doing. Take time to take stock of your own situation. Read the signs. They're there to be actually read by you, not just passed by casually.

And especially as you come to this point in a new year, as you look back over the past year and the years of your life, as you look at the situation that we are in in the world with this pandemic that's come upon us.

This is the providence of God. This is God speaking to us in providence. This is providence into which we must seek to shine the light of God's truth. And God is really saying to us at this juncture, as a people, as a nation, as He is to many nations, stand, listen, take stock of the situation. Don't think that it's empty of my input, God is saying. Don't think it's detached from who I am or what I'm doing. And you know, it's so important that we do this daily, that we do this regularly as we go through this year, just to stand.

In other words, take your Bible, read your Bible, hear God speaking to you through your Bible, and make time for that.

[29 : 34] The world is a very busy place. Our lives are very busy lives. The temptation is to minimize your spiritual stoppings, your spiritual times as you draw aside and seek to spend time with God.

And you'll find many helps given you to read your Bible consistently or systematically. Many different Bible reading plans.

You don't need to follow them all slavishly. They're only there for guides. They're only there just to give you some sort of structure by way of trying to keep you in the path of reading your Bible, of drawing near to God in prayer.

But whatever you do, stop, take stock. Make time for this. Make time for God. Most of you are doing that. I'm sure maybe all of you are doing that to some extent. But this is really saying to us, to myself as well as to yourselves, stand by the roads.

Look at the situation. Think about it. Take stock. And do so using the information God has given us.

[30 : 44] Secondly, he's saying, look. Stand by the roads and look. In other words, you're not stopping just to casually take in the sight. Jeremiah is saying to these people or the Lord is saying to the people through Jeremiah, take stock of the situation.

Stand by the roads and look. You're not there for a picnic. You're not there for a day out. You're not there as if life is not really all that serious. He's saying, look at the situation.

Look carefully. Examine how it is. Give your mind to it. Remember how Paul wrote to the Romans in Romans chapter 12, where he began by speaking about giving of our bodies or ourselves to God as a living sacrifice.

And then he says, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds. And you'll find all the way through the Bible and especially in the writings of the Apostle Paul, how the mind is singled out for special importance.

The mind in many ways is the control room of your life. It's where your life is directed from, where your mind contains not just your intellect and your ability to read and to think.

[31 : 58] It's also the way by which you steer your life as the information that God gives you comes and reaches your conscience, your understanding. So you process that information.

And as you process that information, what you're basically doing is looking at these roads, looking at the ways in which life presents you with alternatives and with choices that have to be made.

And what God is saying through Jeremiah to the people there is, give mind to this. Think it through. Come to proper decisions. Think through the alternatives.

Think through what the outcomes are of following these particular paths, these roads. God is quite clear in His Word as to where they lead to, where the way of faith in Jesus Christ leads to and where the opposite leads to.

These are pointed out by Jesus Himself, the broad way and the narrow way. And in the simplest terms, that's really a summary of what Jeremiah is actually saying to the people or God is saying through him.

[33 : 04] And that means making choices. You know, sometimes you'll find people who will say to you that coming to follow the Lord Jesus Christ is not a decision as such.

It's the Lord that comes to give you the mind. It's the Lord that comes to renew your heart inwardly. Of course it is. The Lord does that. That's what it means to be born again when you're born from above, born by the Spirit.

But don't imagine for a moment that God is saying to you, you don't have to take decisions. You don't have to take choices. Because under the direction of God's Word, there are many times when you find not just the likes of Jeremiah but others calling upon the people that they're ministering to to make a proper choice.

Think, for example, of Joshua saying to the people in his day, choose this day who you will serve. Will it be God? Will it be the gods of the nations, of the pagans around you? But that's what he's saying to you.

You have a choice to make and today is the day of choice. You have a decision to make. It's an important decision. Your eternity depends on it is what Jeremiah is saying. So for ourselves, friends, the beginning of this new year that's just been entered not so long ago, here's the signpost that God is setting out for us.

[34 : 17] We're at a crossroads not just of a year but in our lives there's some way or other in which today we have to make choices. We have to choose for ourselves whether it's to be Jesus or not, whether it's to be the way of righteousness or not, whether it's to be the life we've always lived or a new life by following Christ, whether we are going to follow the life that we've begun to follow as a Christian or not.

Many people have come to crossroads over the years and I'm sure over this pandemic as well that have said, well, I think I'll just take a step aside from following Jesus, from following Christ, from being a Christian.

And God is saying, you mark in your own life where you're at. Think through the issues. Think through how it's important as Romans 12 says, Romans 12 says, to be different to the world around you.

You know what the world thinks. You don't have to go far to actually see the kind of thinking and the kind of attitude and the kind of behavior you find in the world. The alternatives to God.

There are many, many alternatives to God as we'll see in a minute. But for you and for me today, he's saying, look, you have the opportunity. You have this choice to make. You have all the information you need in your Bible.

[35 : 33] You have it preached to you. You have all that experience of life itself under the gospel. And so, stand by the roads and look.

That world out there does not take this seriously. Neither did the people of Judah. Although they thought they were safe and that no disaster would ever befall them, they had the history.

You see, they had that in their background. They could say, well, God dealt with us in the past. And that's exactly what Jeremiah is now doing in the third imperative where he's saying, ask for the ancient paths where the good way is.

Ask for the ancient paths. By that, Jeremiah actually meant those that have been long in existence. What he's doing is taking them back to the days of the Exodus and back before that to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob.

The ancient paths, the paths in which God revealed his ways, in which he brought them to be a people for himself. They've left that path. They've turned away from God.

[36 : 38] They've forgotten their history. Or at least, if they haven't forgotten it, they've forgotten it to the extent they no longer have an interest in following that path for themselves. Of course, that doesn't mean that today, as sometimes we may say ourselves or hear said, it wasn't anything like as good today as it was in the old days.

The old days were best. If only we were back in the old days. If only we had the things we had in our older days, in our younger days when we had better conditions.

Well, that's not what Jeremiah is saying because not everything about the old days was good and not everything about the present day is bad. We have so many advantages compared to those who lived in what we call the old days in the past.

We have so many technological advantages. We have so many advantages in terms of the freedom we enjoy. We have relative peace. All of these things that have come into our experience are there by God's good disposition.

And that's why here Jeremiah goes on and defines the ancient paths as the good way, where the good way is. And when you find this word good used in the Bible in this way, it always means good in a moral sense.

[38 : 04] It always means good in a way in which God himself defines it as good. You remember when God had created the heavens and the earth, he rested on the seventh day and God looked upon all his work and behold, it was very good.

It gave him satisfaction. It met with his approval fully. He had created this and it met with every single thing that he had intended was there and the environment for man was there and it was all

very good.

He was giving it his full approval. And this word here, this word good is so often as it is here in verse 16. It's used in a covenant way where God is saying this is the path that I would have you to follow, the path where I am in covenant with you, the path where you live on my promises, where you believe my promises, where you benefit from my promises, where the relationship that I have set up with you in grace is maximized by you, is enjoyed by you, where you get the benefits of that in the life that I give to you, in the direction I give to you, in the future that I've laid up for you.

To enjoy the covenant blessings of God. In other words, what God is pleased with is what we are to enjoy. That's where Judah and Israel had so badly gone astray because they were looking at the path to follow as a path where they themselves were pleased with it.

A path that satisfied themselves and their own cravings and very often their sinful cravings as well. And as Jeremiah puts it to them here, that's not the meaning of the good way at all.

[39 : 50] The good way is the way God approves of. Where do you find the good way that God approves of? Where do we find it for ourselves? Well, you look back over history. You look back over your own life.

But you look back over history and you find as you look back over history, you look back into your Bible especially. You look back into this revealed will of God. And as you do so, you go back in history to the great events of redemption.

Right through the Old Testament, from the Exodus, right through to the New Testament, the incarnation of the Son of God becoming man, his death on the cross, his resurrection, his ascension to glory, formation of the New Testament church, the time of the apostles, right through the history of the church from then on, times of the great church leaders in the centuries after the apostles who themselves faced so many deviations from the truth, who worked out the doctrines, the great doctrines of the faith that we now have, the person of Christ, justification by faith, and they had to do it on the anvil of controversy as it was often put.

And we're the beneficiaries of that. That's the good way that's come to us, that God is pointing out to us. And then you follow that through into the time of the Reformation and then further on into times of great revival, times when God brought further blessing upon us as a people, times in our own experience, even as congregations, when we know of times in the past when God was active in our midst.

And it's not that God is not active in our midst yet, but what he's saying is look back over the path, look back over the road that you followed, look back over the path that God defines as good. Ask for it.

[41 : 41] Set your feet in it. Ask to be led in it. Ask once again for this path to be made clear to you. And as you go along that path, unless you examine it, so you'll find that that's the good way.

And then he says walk in it. It's not just to stand beside it and look at it. It's not just to take stock of it as you look at it. It's not just to ask for the ancient paths, pray over it and ask about it and inquire and investigate and look at it and examine it.

He's saying walk in it. You know, it's something like the alternative would be something like somebody looking for a path to a certain place and comes to the signpost and there's the signpost and it describes the place to you and describes the way to it and it points it out and you just stand there looking.

You don't walk in that path. You actually stay there or you go back the way and Jeremiah is saying to the people that's effectively what you must not do because there's a disaster coming as this chapter itself has said.

It's going to bring people against them. The Babylonians are coming and they're not going to spare Israel. They're not going to spare Jerusalem. They're not going to spare Judah. They're not there just to have a nice day out.

[43 : 03] They're there to make war. They're there to destroy. They're there to bring down what has already been built up. And even if that isn't exactly what we face nevertheless unless we turn to God as a people in principle we are facing disaster.

Unless we turn to God as a people where are we going to find our rest? Where are we going to find a secure future? Where are we going to find a future for our children? Look at the situation that we've got in our land.

Look at what children are being taught in schools. Look at what's being further recommended for them. Look at all the immorality that you see in society around you and look at the way it's

commended.

Look at the way relationships are no longer seen in terms of the light of the Bible or the teaching of the Bible in terms of biblical morality. These are the ways in which we these are the ways where we find ourselves as a people in these critical times and the pandemic does not seem to have turned people to sensible conclusions to wisdom to actually seeking God to crying out to Him.

Maybe I hope there will be some I'm sure there are some who have done that but by and large as a people that's not what you find in the evidence around you. And indeed I have to look into my own heart and ask myself today what difference has the pandemic made to you?

[44 : 35] How has it affected your thinking? How has it affected your relationship to God I say to myself? And so God is saying to you as well what have you made of it?

Has it made any difference to your relationship with God? Or how you view the world and how you see eternity or how you see death? Because all of these things are built into the signpost and all that's around it and all that's written on it for us.

And he's saying walk in it. You see the people it's not that they lacked religion and there's always a difference of course between religion and faith in Christ because these people had religion they had religion in abundance.

All the way through the times of the prophets you'll find the prophets saying it's not that you're not religious you're going through certain ceremonies and rituals and rites and you've really you're steeped in that.

But he actually says here in verse 20 what used to me is frankincense that comes from Sheba or sweet cane from a distant land your burnt offerings are not acceptable nor your sacrifices pleasing to me therefore thus says the Lord behold I will lay before this people stumbling blocks and so on and he's picking up the same solemn theme again of the disaster that will come on them unless they turn from their evil ways.

[46 : 10] Now friends these things are difficult to deal with. They're not easy to preach from they're not easy to listen to I appreciate that and I'm not saying this any of this today simply so that we ourselves will just take it to ourselves and leave it at that or alternatively that we will say well it's for people elsewhere it's for others it's for the people in our land who don't know and don't want God at all.

We're all bound up in this we're all bound up in this providence we're all bound up in what's happening around us from day to day we can't isolate ourselves from it and every time God comes in his providence to bring such things to us and to our notice he is speaking to us as well he's asking us what is your house like in terms of your spiritual house what is your congregation like what is your church like what is your own private life like see what he's saying in verse 20 there is very relevant to ourselves and to our day walk in it he's saying walk the path of faith walk the path of trusting God walk the path of putting him first walk the path of those who have gone before you and shown you that way and the way they walked it themselves walk the good way the ancient paths the way of life the way that's pleasing to God don't bypass it don't just stand looking at the signs ask for it but walk in it he's saying and so you'll find he says fifthly you'll find rest for your souls very like the words of Jesus in Matthew 11 isn't it come to me all you who labor and I will give you rest well he says this is God saying through Jeremiah in this good way ask where the good way is walk in it and what will happen you'll find rest for your souls because you see this rest this peace that Jeremiah is speaking of the peace that God brings about in his salvation look at verse 14 and what he's saying there in verse 14 they have healed the wound of my people who is they well they are the prophets the false prophets and the priests in verse 13 there everyone deals falsely Jeremiah had many opponents who passed themselves off as priests just as in the days of Ahab and Elijah while he's saying they have healed the wound of my people lightly saying peace peace when there is no peace you see they're giving false assurances to the people just like you find in the New Testament just like you find right down to the present day where people have a version of the gospel so called that will not bring peace where the things that God has emphasized that are central and foundational to the rest that he wants us to have for our souls where these things are thought to be no longer relevant where Christ's death on the cross as a propitiation for example or justification by faith in Christ or Christ himself as the exclusive way to God where all of these things are seen to be actually in need of revision or in need of upgrading and indeed as we'll see tonight from Philippians

God willing it's exactly the same situation or similar that Paul faced in his day as well when alternative messages were going out in the name of Jesus that could never give peace false gospel and false prophets I don't need to tell you that that's part of the world that we live in as well and in many ways the pagan alternatives apply in the context of our world as well alternatives to Christ alternatives to faith in Christ alternative to Jesus being himself alone the way the truth and the life and all of that is already there in the context of Jeremiah you remember Augustine saying that great saying of Augustine which itself of course brings out in summary form the purpose for our creation by God and what that leads to or should lead to thou hast made us for thyself and our soul can find no rest until we find our rest in thee there was

Augustine picking up the same thing as the prophets and apostles were saying where is the place of our rest where can I find rest for my soul where can I find a place even amongst everything that everything that's going on where I'm secure where I'm safe where I know that this for me is safety and security well it's here in these paths in Christ in following the way of the Lord you'll find rest for your souls come to me said Jesus and I will give you rest because we live in a weary world we live in a world that's still blighted by sin our own lives are lives that are thrown around so often and find it so difficult to get rest and we need rest we need to be assured that we have rest we need to be assured that there is a resting place despite all that you see of turmoil around you that there's a resting place in the middle of a pandemic and it's there in Jesus Christ for us doesn't mean we won't have thoughts that ask serious questions about what's going on and why but it does mean that even if we don't get an answer to any of these questions we can still say

[52 : 18] I find my rest and my foundation in my Savior I find my safety there I find that whatever goes on in the world around me I still come back to this consideration and this conclusion that Christ is all I need that Jesus is everything I need that following Jesus is the way to rest is the way in which I find satisfaction and in which I know God is pleased to direct me so I say to myself and I say in God's name to yourselves 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 there's no one here who needs not have that rest there's no one here who doesn't know what God is saying here there's no one here who needs to have anything other than the rest that is in Christ so here it is

God's great gift to you here's God's signpost to the beginning of this new year it doesn't matter our age it doesn't matter how long we've been in this world it doesn't matter how many years have passed before and whether or not we've still come to Christ the point is here and now that's our opportunity and it doesn't matter how long we've been following Christ it doesn't mean that one of those days we will not be tempted to walk away from him and we need to be strengthened against that so he says look at the signpost see where your security is ask for the ancient paths pray that God will keep you and give you continued direction and then there's one other thing and it makes its own point so tellingly that I'm going to say nothing about it just let the words speak for themselves here are all these imperatives here is God's appeal through Jeremiah here is the response but they said we will not walk in it we will not walk in it stubborn refusal of God's great offer and direction may it never be said of you may it never be said of me that this is how we responded to the gospel to say in the face of God

I will not walk in it let's pray Lord our gracious God your word is so solemn and so much of what it says to us and our lives need to take stock of that solemnity and Lord our God we confess before you today that however much we have known you in the past and know you now and however much we've had of the benefits of the gospel you still require us to take stock of where we are today we thank you for the opportunity for the signposts that you erect along the ways of life and for especially at the beginning of a new year as one year closes another gives way and another begins and so we give thanks Lord for the likes of this signpost in your truth that calls us to look for and ask for the ancient paths the ways of life that which you approve of that which will give us rest for our souls if we walk in it oh direct our steps we pray and in the words of the psalm that we have sung show me thy ways oh Lord thy paths oh teach thou me be our teacher in thy truth we pray continue with us now and pardon our sin for Christ's sake amen we're going to conclude now by singing in psalm 119 that's on page 159 psalm 119 the verses mark 33 to 40 teach me to follow your decrees then I will keep them to the end give insight and I'll keep your law with all my heart to it attend lead me in your commandments path for there oh Lord delight

I find incline my heart towards your laws from selfish gain preserve my mind verses 33 to 40 of psalm 119 teach me to follow your decrees then I will give them to the end give give insight and I

give your love with all my heart to it attend lead me in your commandment's path for them o lord
delight

I find incline my heart to lord your laws from selfish pain reserve my mind o turn my eyes from
worthless things give life according to your word to me yourself your servant keep your pledge so
that you may be feared o lord remove from me the shame

[59 : 30] I tread your laws accept your love your laws excel in my brightness o how I long for your
decrees reserve me in your righteousness your righteous death now may the grace of the Lord
Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and
evermore amen