The True Prophet

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Date: 12 August 2018

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[0:00] Before I jump into the sermon, I just want to expound a little more on what Taryn shared. My name is Steve. I'm one of the pastoral interns here at Trinity Cambridge. I'm trying to remember the name of our church.

And so what that means is we're part of a denomination called Sovereign Grace Churches, and Sovereign Grace Churches takes the ordaining of its pastors pretty seriously. And so they have a curriculum of books about this high or so that I have to work through that maybe I'm about here too. And then they have different tests and different things like that. And so part of the time of being an intern is both testing for knowledge but also testing for character too. And so I'm in the midst of that process. I'm in that with Taryn, who's also going through it, Matt, who's probably in Children's Church, and Ray, who I don't think is here today.
And we're all pastoral interns kind of going through that walk. The short way to describe this is that this is our side hustle, right? Like we are all full-time somewhere else. I think Ray, Matt, and I are all consultants of various kinds, and Taryn does like 15 different things, including teaching and working for the church and summer camp and stuff like that.
So that's kind of who we are. Sean's out for a couple weeks. A couple weeks ago, he said, I'm tired. And I said, well, and I thought that's probably because you haven't taken vacation in a year.
[1:13] So Sean takes two weeks of vacation around this time every year. This is the only time he takes off. He was texting me yesterday, like, can I help with anything? I was like, I think you're on vacation, if I remember that correctly. So he doesn't take a lot of time off, and we're hoping that he enjoys the time he takes.

So that said, I'm going to jump into the passage. And a traditional saying that this passage reminded me of when I was looking at it is that the opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference. And so there's a phrase that goes around like that. It's varied a couple different ways. It's attributed to a few different people. So it's a general idea of, like, I wouldn't overanalyze it, but in, like, a general relational sense, like, when you hate something or somebody, usually that's, like, the impression of, like, well, you have arguments or you have, like, flare-ups or disagreements.
Or maybe it's, like, really bad hatred, but at least, like, you're openly communicating and saying, I don't like this, and there's a potential for discussion and turnaround, and you're, like, trying to take activity. There's some semblance of care behind hate still.
Indifference is a little bit different. But often when somebody is indifferent, it becomes the end of things like communication or affection, right? So a friendship or relationship where there's indifference becomes quickly cold and possibly unbearable, and often it leads to just dropping out of somebody's life entirely.
[2:27] I imagine that at this point in most of our lives, we've all been cut out of somebody else's life in some way or another. It's usually a bit unceremonious. Either we make a mistake or they do, or we move and the relationship just doesn't, like, continue because you're in different spots.

I have a funnier example of this that's a little bit lighter. I was friends with somebody all through college, and then we stayed in touch after college for a little bit, and they were getting married, and I knew the person they were getting married to, and so we emailed back and forth occasionally.
And I said something a few months before their wedding, like, oh, really looking forward to the wedding. And they wrote back, and they were, like, actually, you're not invited. And I was like, oh, okay.
And so my perception of the friendship was a little bit different than their perception of the friendship, which was totally fine. And also wedding invite lists are pretty short. But after that, the communication kind of fizzled out, and I was like, okay, like, our friendship logically at this point is

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over, and that's totally, that's fine.
I don't think that there was any, like, true offense done in that situation. I think that there was just some miscommunication, and, like, friendships don't last forever. But in the moment, the feeling of, like, indifference was there a bit, of, like, oh, like, I thought our friendship was good enough that, like, I'd be at the wedding, but I'm not, basically.
[3:42] And so there's a bit of a shock of, like, being cut off, right? It's like, well, you're not going to be there. And so I think that that feeling of, like, abandonment on a small scale that I experienced in a moment is kind of what the Israelites are, or the, yeah, the Israelites are experiencing in this passage to a much larger extent.

That feeling of being cut off, that God feels indifferent, that the communication with him has stopped, that he's not listening to the appeals of the Israelites. And so that's a big question that hangs over this passage specifically. Why doesn't God help his people in their distress?
And why doesn't he answer their prayers in this scenario? And I think that the answer to that is that God will always fulfill his promises, right? God fulfills both his promises of judgment and his promises of grace.
And we're going to see both judgment and glimpses of grace throughout this passage, and all of them come from previous promises that God has made. It's a very, it's a logical progression from where they've ended, essentially.
The basic outline of the passage is kind of cyclical, so I'll explain it up front, and I'll kind of point out where we are as we go, too. So we're going to go through the same cycle three times, basically.
[4:50] There's going to be a lament over the state of Judah and where they're at and the suffering they're going through. And then there's going to be a petition for, oh, please relieve us from this pain.

And then there's going to be an answer by God. The first two times are all very, God rejects in the answer. And then the third time through, it's a little bit different. Jeremiah makes an appeal for himself, and then God answers him in a more offering grace to Jeremiah specifically.
So I'll try to keep tabs as we go through the cycle. So the first part of the cycle, or the first lament, is Jeremiah 14, 1 through 6. And this lament is all about famine, right?
And the completeness of the drought or the famine is stressed through contrast. So in verse 2, it says, her people lament on the ground, and the cry of Jerusalem goes up.
And the nobles send the servants out for water, and they come back with no water. And then there's kind of a spatial movement, right? It goes from the city where the nobles live, out to the country where the farmers are affected by the drought.
[5:54] And then it goes out further to where the wild animals live, essentially. And both deer, which are less hardy animals, and the wild donkeys, which are considered like some of the most hardy animals, essentially, in that area, all of them are suffering from this.

So it's kind of a wholesome dimension of like, this is a really bad drought. This is a really bad famine. And that's what he's capturing through that. This is specifically a sign of God fulfilling his promise of judgment to those who break his covenant.
We spent a lot of time the last few weeks digging into idolatry. What's that mean? What's it look like? What did it look like for the Israelites? What's it look like for us? And this passage talks a lot about the judgment that stems from that idolatry.
So I think it's important. I'm going to mention a few of the contexts, essentially, where the judgment comes from, because I think it's important for us to understand that God's not arbitrary. It's not like the Israelites were doing fine, and then they do some bad things, and God's like, oh, it's okay.
And then just one day God snaps. He's like, I can't believe this. I'm done with this, right? That's not how God is reacting in this scenario. And I think that that's kind of, we think that way, because like, that's kind of like the two aspects.
[7:00] There's two aspects of parenting. I was going to say two ways to parent, but I feel like every parent does these different aspects, right? So one is like, you just snap at your kid because they're being annoying. And the other is like, you lay out clear ground rules, and you're like, okay, we got to leave in 10 minutes.

Okay, we got to leave in five minutes. Okay, we're leaving now. And if they are like, why are we leaving now? It's like, well, I told you four times beforehand. And so God in the scenario is more like the, he's given preface.

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He's given warning. He's shown grace, and now he's bringing judgment. In this case specifically, one of the curses of not keeping God's covenant is drought. There's a long section in Deuteronomy in chapters 28 and 29 that talk through the curses that will come to Israel if they don't keep their side of the covenant, basically, if they don't obey God.
And this specific passage that I'm reading here is from Deuteronomy 28, 22 through 24. And it says, So this is something that was promised far in advance.
If you don't keep my covenant, this is what's coming. And so they're lamenting specifically, I think they know too, they're lamenting specifically, hey, like, we've messed up. We see this judgment on us. And so they turn to plead to God.
[8:28] What's interesting is actually Jeremiah is appealing on behalf of the people, right? So his appeal is in verses 7 through 9 of chapter 14. I'm going to read verse 7 again.

Though our iniquities testify against us, act, O Lord, for your name's sake. For our backslidings are many. We have sinned against you. And a small thing to note here, you'll see Jeremiah is saying, we have sinned against you, even though arguably Jeremiah is one of the more obedient people in Judah at this time.
And so he's not saying, like, all these people have sinned, please help them. I think that praying on behalf of other groups is pretty common in the Bible. It's something that we see frequently. And so there will often be, like, a corporate confession of we have sinned led by the more righteous members of the community, like, confessing on behalf of others.
I think that just as, like, a small side note, I think this is worth something worth us emulating and following. This can be on a bigger scale for when we advocate for people that are perhaps in a worse situation than we are or marginalized or oppressed.
I think that that reflects some of what God's looking at here of, like, standing up for other people. And it can happen on a really small scale of, like, if someone asks you for prayer for something they're struggling with, pray with them, not for them.
[9:42] You probably have had experience with whatever they're struggling with, too, unless it's, like, a really severe thing. And so it's often worth—I know it's been helpful for me when I've brought, like, I've said, hey, I'm really bitter about a certain situation or I'm bitter towards God for something in a scenario.

It's helped me when people have sat and prayed, like, oh, like, we ask for, you know, forgiveness and we ask for understanding of your love. Like, that small—I feel like that small thing helps people a lot. The passage in this case, backing up a little bit to this, is really a desperate appeal matching the famine and drought, right?
So not only is there severe sin, but there's also severe drought. I find it interesting. The Hebrew word for hope that's used here is in a few other places used for, like, pool of water. And I feel like that's kind of the reaction you have when you're thirsty.
It's just like a subliminal slip, right? It's like, when you're thirsty, all you can think about is that you need to drink water right now. And so it's like, it just slips out. It's like, hope. I mean, pool of water, of Israel.
Like, it's there. They're craving it. And the questions that they ask God in verses 8 through 9, particularly about being a stranger or a traveler in the land, basically it's like, God, we thought you were ruler of this land.
[10:53] Instead, you're acting like, I'm only living here for a little bit or I'm really just passing through for a night because you don't seem to care about the suffering that's going on in our land specifically. And so that's why they ask that question. And the main reason they give God for this appeal, like, God, why should you do this, is one that is commonly appealed throughout Israel.

It's for God's namesake. And so not for, because the people are awesome because they realize they're not, but because God is great and that he is the defender of his people.
And they're saying, you know, uphold your side of the covenant to us. Don't put us to shame in front of other nations, basically. An example of where this does happen, there's a number of them. One's from Isaiah 48, verses 9 through 11.
I'll just read verse 9. It just says, For my namesake, I defer my anger. For the sake of my praise, I restrain it from you, that I may not cut you off. And so the appeal is almost God save face, right? Like, we're your people. We're suffering. Doesn't look good for you for this to be happening. Which in some cases with genuine repentance is a good reason, right? Like, God does want to be, that God is the defender of his people and the protector of his people.

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[12:02] In this scenario, though, the problem is that Judah isn't really upholding their side of the situation. Like, they've already rejected God and they're not truly repentant. One commentary says that the sense of estrangement they experienced is sort of like misplaced, right?

They feel like they're estranged from God because God is neglecting them, when in reality it's from their own neglect and from their own guilty conscience. So they walked away from God, not the other way around.
So the real desire of like, honor your name is really just like, God, help us, right? We don't really want to change anything, but I just want you to get us out of this bad scenario. So God gives his answer to sort of that sideways appeal in verse 10 through 12 of chapter 14.
He says, So God explicitly says, like, I don't accept your petition.
Like, I'm not taking this request. And the reasons that he gives is because that they wander and that their feet are not restrained. And so what wandering in this scenario means, like, wandering after other gods, like we've talked about, or possibly to, like, alliances with other foreign military powers, which is kind of an affront to God too.
[13:32] It's like, well, God has explicitly said with Israel, like, you don't need other nations to help you. I will fight your battles for you. And that's supposed to be one of their distinguishing aspects. And so Israel's like, ah, I'm just kind of wandering from here to there, trying out different things.

And then the feeling of their feet is not restrained. It's kind of like the bad habits that get ingrained from that. So it's like, they've wondered so persistently that the paths are, like, well-worn, that their feet are not restrained. They just keep going in them.
So it's like when you, if you've ever changed jobs in the same area and you had a commute that you had before, and then you accidentally keep driving the wrong way because, like, you took that way so many times, like, because your brain just, like, checks out and it's like, oh, shoot, I'm off the wrong exit now.
That's the kind of the feeling there of, like, this is really well ingrained into them. Their feet are not restrained. They just kind of go with instinct. So prayer, fastings, and offerings don't work either because these things are really designed to work alongside obedience and have their origin in obedience.
So without that foundation of obedience, prayer and fasting and offerings all kind of fall apart and they become meaningless to God. I think it's significant that God says, do not pray for the welfare of these people.
[14:36] It shows, like, the severity of the situation that they're in. There's only a few times that God, or the Bible suggests that God's not listening to prayer in some aspect. It's very, very limited, and this is one of them.

And I think that it's because God has decided on the judgment that he's going to give at this point. So he says specifically, don't pray for the welfare of these people. He doesn't say stop appealing for them. He doesn't say don't pray judgment on them because he does call Jeremiah to pray and prophesy judgment on them.
But he's basically saying, like, at this point, I'm not going to hear any more appeals for the welfare of these people. They've been disobedient for too long and too severely. Um, so instead of welfare, people get soared in famine and pestilence.
And these three words are brought up a lot in Jeremiah and also in this passage. So I'm going to dive into them a little bit. I talked a little bit about famine already, just like the severity of that and the pain of that. So I'm going to brush past that for now.
I'm going to talk a little bit about pestilence. I feel like pestilence is, if you were raised in a first world or Western country, like, we don't really know what pestilence is, right? We've seen people suffer from, like, severe disease that can even be mortal.
[15:41] Um, but usually it's, like, isolated instances. There's a lot of medical help and doctors that can bring you through things that would be otherwise lethal without medical assistance. And the big thing is, like, we don't see anything on, like, a zombie infection-like scale.

I'm just, like, spreading everywhere and being, like, deadly. Um, but if you take out, like, hospitals and modern medicine and you plop a bunch of people into a city like Jerusalem, uh, pestilence looks really bad all of a sudden because it's something that easily spreads and it's uncontrollable and no one understands it in the sense of, like, they don't understand how to really treat it.

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Um, and it can take simpler things to take lives. Uh, there's a good description from, uh, Thucydides, whose name I didn't try to pronounce before this, apparently. Uh, he was, he took part in the, or he wrote about the Peloponnesian War, uh, which was about 100 years after Jeremiah. Um, so that's over in Greece. And so he wrote about a city that was suffering from pestilence. And so I'll share a few just snippets from, from his writing. Uh, he said, people in good health were all of a sudden attacked by violent heats in the head and redness and inflammation in the eyes, the inward parts, such as the throat or tongue, becoming bloody and emitting an unnatural and fetid breath.
Their symptoms were followed by sneezing and hoarseness, after which the pain soon reached the chest and produced a hard cough. When it fixed in the stomach, it upset it and discharges a bile of every kind named by physicians ensued, accompanied by very great distress.
[16:59] In most cases, also an ineffectual retching followed, producing violent spasms in which some cases cease soon after and others much later. For the disorder first settled in the head, ran its course from thence through the whole of the body.

And even where it did not prove mortal, it still left its mark on the extremities for it settled in the privy parts, the fingers and the toes. And many escaped with the loss of these, some too with that of their eyes. Others, again, were seized with an entire loss of memory on their first recovery.
And so they did not know either themselves or their friends. Um, and so pestilence, the curse of pestilence in this case is like, that's the kind of severity of scale that we're talking about. A whole city of people that are sick, wondering whether they're going to die, lose their memory, lose body parts.
Um, it's not a pretty picture. And then pestilence and famine often come alongside war or the sword. Um, and I feel like war can also be difficult for us to understand. Um, the war that's coming for Judah specifically in this instance is the invasion of Babylon.
Um, likely what we read about here is Babylon invaded Judah twice, basically. Once they basically, they essentially came through and wrecked everything and left the city defenseless. And the second time they came back and, and established full dominance and captured everybody in the city, essentially.
[18:06] So this is the first time. Um, now we don't have a ton of people here that I know of, uh, that are either like have vivid memories of the most recent, like catastrophic war for America, which would be the Vietnam war.

Um, and we also didn't have a ton of like military or ex-military in the congregation here. So I feel like the thing that like is the closest analogy for us is probably actually 9-11. Um, it was a really tragic and shocking day where a lot of us were totally, totally blindsided by it because it was on American soil.
Uh, we felt entirely and totally safe. Um, if you were a U.S. citizen at that point or born in America, you probably like me remember exactly where you were and what was going on. Um, it was 3,000 people dying in a terror attack is no small thing.
And it's going to be something that's in my memory for the rest of my life that I'm not going to forget just from the shock and the terror of it. Um, and I don't use that analogy lightly, right? I'm not just like pulling that out of the air.
Like, I think that that's legitimately analogous to what Judah went through. Like, I think that that feeling is part of what they felt too. Um, and I think it makes sense, right? So in verse 13, it says that the preachers or the other prophets, pretty much everyone except Jeremiah was talking about peace and safety and things are going to be fine and don't worry about it.
[19:18] Like God's, God's got this. Um, and the people were buying into it, which makes the shock of actual war coming upon them and destruction coming upon them, just blindsiding them basically.

Um, and it's so brutal that in verse 16, it describes people are just left dead in the streets essentially, right? So war and famine and pestilence just, just absolutely wrecked Jerusalem.
Um, and so this leads us back to the second cycle of where Jeremiah launches into lament from this, uh, because it is so severe and in this, he literally weeps for the people.
Um, and it says in verse 17, uh, you shall say to them this word, let my eyes run down with tears night and day and let them not cease for the virgin daughter of my people is shattered with a great wound, with a very grievous blow.

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If I go out into the field, behold those pierced by the sword. And if I enter the city, behold the diseases of famine for both prophet and priest ply their trade through the land and have no knowledge.
[20:17] Um, a commentator put it this way. I thought it was just really concise that mass killings, whether from war or terrorism, shock the imagination and render numb the sensibilities of those who come upon such horrors.

Um, once again, though, even though this, these are atrocious things, um, these were things that God warned about long ago in Deuteronomy. Um, Deuteronomy 28, 16 says, cursed shall you be in the city and cursed shall you be in the field?
Um, that's in the context of like war and famine in Deuteronomy 28 as well. Um, which is exactly where Jeremiah finds his country, viewing it in tears. You can kind of picture him almost like stumbling around in a daze of looking through the city and everyone there is sick and dying and looking through the field and the armies are gone and dead and there are dead bodies piled up.
Um, you know, I remember we're in the second cycle of lament, petition judgment. So this is the first part of that lament. Um, I spent the first kind of explaining the cycle. So I'm going to try to like the, through the second cycle, I'll try to wrap around and apply it a little bit more.
And what's it mean? Um, so that's 17 through 19 is the, is the second lament. Uh, 20 through 22 is, is the second petition, uh, where Jeremiah prays again on behalf of the people.
[21:27] Um, I'm going to highlight from that verse 21, uh, where he says, do not spurn us for your name's sake. Do not dishonor your glorious throne. Remember and do not break your covenant with us.

Um, that again is pulling from that Deuteronomy passage. Deuteronomy 31, 20 discusses the people spurning and breaking their covenant with God. Um, where he says basically, uh, when I brought them into a land that's so good and when they're blessed, they're going to, uh, they'll turn to other gods and serve them and despise me and break my covenant.
Um, so they're kind of like appealing, like, oh, we're aware of what we did. Um, don't actually commit this thing that you promised a long time ago. Don't spurn us or break the covenant with us.
Um, what's interesting though, is that there's a strange inconsistency in this plea.
Uh, it lays stress on God's obligations and overlooks the strong obligations of Judah back to God, right? So it's like, oh, hold up your side of the covenant. Uh, but we're going to keep worshiping some gods over here on the side.
Um, but you said you do this. Um, I feel like it's a little bit like the, if there is an unbalanced, like friendship or relationship, those things tend to fall apart, right? Um, like if you, if, if someone isn't different towards you and you care a lot towards them, that's just, that's not going to last forever essentially.
[22:40] Um, and so there's that aspect of like, uh, you hold up your side of the deal, but I'm just going to, I'm going to mess around over here. Um, and so to that God gives his most dramatic answer yet.

And this is chapter five, verse one. Uh, the Lord said to Jeremiah, though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn towards these people, send them out of my sight and let them go.
Um, and standing before, standing before God in this case means interceding on behalf of the people. Uh, this kind of idea reminds me, interceding reminds me of kind of like a college, uh, advisor or like a business mentor, right?
Like you're connected to someone who's greater than you. Um, and you go to them for advice and they often appeal on your behalf. So if you have good connections in the business world, you might have a mentor that goes and appeals and gets you a job. Um, or if you are in college or in school, you have an advisor and this person makes the right connections for you to move to grad school or to, through your PhD program to get the right research.
Um, so that's kind of like interceding in the sense, like there's someone greater interceding on behalf of the people. Um, and Moses, Moses and Samuel were two, two of the greatest intercessors before God in the Bible.
[23:47] Um, Moses actually at one point averts God's judgment, uh, when all of Israel, they're out of Egypt, they make a golden calf, uh, cause Moses is gone for like three days and they're like, God's gone.

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So we got to make our own God now. Uh, and they all worship it and it's a, it's a total mess. Uh, and so God and Moses are talking basically on God, Moses has been away talking with God on the mountain, receiving the commandments he's going to pass to the people.
And God's like, yeah, so I see the people down there and they're all worshiping a golden calf now and this is over. And Moses appeals on behalf of the people and says, do not strike them down, show us grace.
Uh, and God actually relents. Um, and there's still judgment shown, but he doesn't totally wipe out the people like he was planning to. Um, similarly, Samuel, uh, appeals on behalf of the people. He was a, one of the first prophets in the times that, uh, Israel and Judah had kings.
Um, and there were multiple times that he basically, there's a battle going on. And Samuel comes in and prays or makes an offering. And then the battle turns in the way of Israel because Samuel, like God hears Samuel.
[24:47] Um, and so what's striking about this is like, God's like, look, if you had both Moses and Samuel standing in front of me, I wouldn't listen to both of them in this instance. Um, and so this argument's really like an argument from the greater to the lesser, right?

It's like, okay, if I have the two greatest intercessors in the history of Israel standing in front of me, I'm not listening to you, Jeremiah. I'm sorry. Like it's not going to happen at this point. Um, and then after that, he immediately turns around and uses language.
It's sort of like when God brought his people out of Egypt, out of slavery. Um, when the appeal to Pharaoh is let my people go, like send them out of the land.
And this now God says, send them out of my sight and let them go. Um, and so in verse two, the people ask, where should we go? Uh, and this, this appeal has very much the same concern as like Cain and Abel.
Uh, Cain is the, uh, Cain and Abel are sons of Adam and Eve. Uh, and Cain's the one that murders his brother Abel. Um, and when God disciplines him, it, Cain says like, where will I go?
[25:45] Like you've, you've cast me out. Where will I go? Um, and they get a much less gracious answer than, than Cain does, right? So you've got some places you can go. There's pestilence, there's sword, there's famine, and there's captivity.

Um, and those are the places that I will send you out to. Um, he points out that there's four kinds of destroyers, uh, that are kind of shameful destroyers. It's like the sword, like your enemies are going to kill you.
And then there's just going to be animals that basically devour you like vultures and dogs in the street eating your meat essentially. Like this, um, and it Calvin, uh, John Calvin points out the, this like turns the natural order on its head.
It's like, this is really shameful. Like, first of all, you're gonna get beat by your enemies and then the animals that you're supposed to have dominion over and have control over, like they're just gonna, they're gonna be what curses you. Um, and then in verse four, he says, I will make them a whore to all the kingdoms of the earth because of what Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah did in Jerusalem.
Um, so outside of general idolatry that we've seen, uh, we now get to a specific reason for the judgments given so far. Uh, and I think this is where we'll particularly fuel God's judgments being justified. Uh, so God's not like arbitrarily punishing or just like going overboard.
[26:50] Uh, and I'm going to read from second Chronicles 33. Uh, and these are some verses about what Judah did under Manasseh essentially. Um, so Manasseh was 12 years old when he began to reign and he reigned 55 years in Jerusalem.

And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel. For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had broken down, uh, so like idols.
Um, and he erected new altars to the Baals and made Asheroth and worshiped all the host of heaven and serve them. And he built altars in the house of the Lord of which the Lord said in Jerusalem shall my name be forever.
And he built altars to all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. And he burned his sons as an offering in the valley of the son of Himon and used fortune telling and omens and sorcery and dealt with mediums and necromancers.
He did much evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking him to anger. Manasseh led Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem astray to do more evil than the nations whom the Lord destroyed before

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the people of Israel.
[27:53] Um, so not only does Manasseh show up and kind of endorse reestablishing idol worship, he puts up his own idols. Not only does he put up his own idols, he puts up idols inside of God's temple, which is where like God's, the place that God's presence was on earth.

Uh, not only does he put up idols in God's temple, he puts it like in the inner sanctuary. He says in like the, the two different courts. So it's talking about like the place that they specifically believed God abided. Uh, not only does he do that, he puts up idols to all the hosts of heaven inside of the temple.
Um, not only does he do that, he sacrifices his own kids to a God. Not only does he do that, he enlists basically. Every help of every kind of magic that you're not allowed to in Israel.
Um, so that's why in verse nine, it says he did more evil than he led Israel to do more evil than the nations that the Lord had punished before for other evils. Um, now you might be wondering, okay, Jeremiah, why didn't you lead with this?
This feels like a chapter one, verse one kind of thing. Like the word of the Lord to Jeremiah, you killed some kids. And so judgment is coming. Like that feels like the easy lead in, right? Like, why is that not the main reason?
[28:57] Cause I feel like it's easy for me to feel justified. Like, yeah, if there's literal child sacrifice going on, like this makes sense. Um, and I, I think that, um, there's a couple reasons.

Um, one is it's probably already implicitly known what's going on. Uh, Jeremiah started prophesying in the reign of the king, like immediately after Manasseh. And that king was more righteous and tried to like reverse some of what Manasseh had done.
Um, and so it's probably known like what's going on. Jeremiah probably doesn't have to say it explicitly in a lot of his prophecies. Um, and then the second point though, is that idol worship is offensive to God in and of itself.
Um, now I don't want to equivocate child sacrifice with idol worship. If you're debating today between sacrificing a kid to Molech or going home and watching too much TV, go watch TV. Like there's not even a question there.
The consequences of those two things are extremely different. And I do think that God values children in a higher aspect because he cares for the poor and the oppressed and the weaker. In Matthew 18, six says, whoever causes one of these little ones to believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.
[30:05] So like God cares for that. Um, but I do want to back up and clarify a little bit of what Christianity is all about, particularly if you're not religious or you're skeptical. Um, at this point, you're wondering why worshiping a specific God is so important.

Um, I think a common and acceptable viewpoint of religion generally today is that it's good for a few reasons, right? It's like self-improvement. You get, you show commitment. Uh, you get to be part of community.
Like, so religion is good in those aspects. Um, these are all benefits. Um, but I want to be clear that Christianity isn't mainly about being good people. It's about knowing Jesus. Um, there are lots of ways to try to be good people and to try for self-improvement, but there is only one true God.
Uh, character improvement stems from that. Uh, but I don't believe that we're here just to, just to be good people. The first commandment that Jesus gives, the most important thing is to love the Lord, your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, all your strength.
Um, and knowing Jesus is important because we believe God actually empowers us to become better people. Like that's where it stems from. Uh, there's a large self, like I said, there's a large self-improvement movement.
[31:08] Uh, a lot of that movement is like a billion books and like, none of them are like, you should be a better person or this is what it's like to be a better person. They're all like, how do I become a better person? Cause that's what everybody's really interested in.

Like, how do I get from point A to point B? Um, and we believe that that's, as Christians, we believe Jesus works that change in us. Um, and if you're focused on a God or different gods than Jesus, then he won't be affecting that in your heart because you're focused on other things.
Um, I think a good example of like what Jesus can do past typical self-improvement is the concept of forgiveness. Um, so if you read self-help books or listen to, um, like people who are more

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agnostic talk about forgiveness, often the focus of that is kind of like an internal freedom.
Like if you're offended by somebody or hurt by somebody and you go and you forgive them, um, then you're sort of released and at peace because you're not holding something against anybody anymore. And so you don't have to feel the pain that they've put on you.
Basically, that's a lot of like the forgiveness, self-improvement, uh, language. Um, Christianity provides deeper forgiveness, right? Uh, Jesus doesn't say, forgive your, forgive your enemy so that you feel better.
[32:11] He says, love your enemy and pray for those that persecute you. And so when I forgive as a Christian, my goal is not just my good. My goal is literally my enemy's good because I once stood as an enemy to God and he forgave me.

Um, so it opens up a whole new aspect of, of self-improvement. That's not just about me. It's about God in that aspect. Um, and I think more importantly than just like, I should be a Christian for self-improvement, uh, the importance of knowing Jesus and the centrality of that is because this is a relationship with God, right?
God's not some like habit building miracle bystander that's like, oh good, you prayed to me three times. Now I'm going to make you a little bit more disciplined and you're good to go. Like we're actually in a relationship with a being who loves us and wants us to love him back.
Um, and it's, it's, it's sort of analogous to marriage where there's like the, the single commitment to a single person. Um, but instead of like the marital love being the focus, it's, it's worship is being the focus.
Cause he is God and he alone is worthy of worship. Um, and so when we give ourselves to other things besides God spiritually, we're cheating on God and ourselves essentially.
[33:15] That's why God is so upset over worshiping other gods because it hurts our committed and exclusive worship with him. Um, and so all of that is why I say the idolatry and the, and the actual like mortal sins against other people are both significant in God's eyes.

Um, they compile to bring God to this point of, yes, I am bringing judgment upon you. I'm going to fulfill my promises of judgment. Um, so given that Judah has been worse than the other nations, God has judged before the third time Jeremiah comes back to lament, um, he doesn't follow that up with a petition.
Um, so verses, uh, five through nine or like the third lament, uh, in verse five says, who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem, or who will grieve for you?
Who will turn aside to ask about your welfare? You have rejected me, declares the Lord. You keep going backwards. So I have stretched out my hand against you and destroyed you. I am weary of relenting.
And so he asked like, who's going to pity you? Sort of rhetorically, nobody. Um, one commentator kind of explains it in the sense that mourners experience a loss of wellbeing, uh, but like comfort and neighborly concern is, can really help with that.
[34:19] So when you ask somebody that's going through something rough, like, how are you doing? Um, can I pray for you when you offer specific ways to help? Like those are things that are part of the restoration through mourning. Um, and when nobody's doing that, then you're truly lost, right?

You're truly on your own. Um, what's happened is finally after enough rejection and after enough severity of sin, God is weary of relenting. So he's, he's tired of giving more and more grace and letting these things slip.
Um, he's shown a lot of mercy up to this point. Many kings before Manasseh have done sinful things as well. Israel has strayed away many times. Um, but this persistent and escalating evil has finally brought him to the point of judgment.
Um, and I think the logical question for us is like, how do we make sure that God doesn't grow weary of relenting with us, right? That should be kind of like the next question that pops into your head. Like, uh, this is concerning.
Like, can I get to this point? What's going on here? Um, and I think that this is what makes the work of Jesus on the cross so significant, right? His promise is through Jesus, God is infinitely patient with us.
[35:16] Um, and so in Galatians three, uh, Paul actually talks about the curses that we've been reading about from Deuteronomy, right? So he actually talks about how Jesus takes those curses that we've been reading about in these past, past few passages on himself.

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So Galatians 3 10 says, all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse for it is written, cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them. And so the curses that we've seen Israel take today, Jesus takes those curses for us, right? He was famished. He was beaten. He died for us on the cross. And so in verse 13 of Galatians three, Paul can say, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.
For it is written, cursed is everyone who was hanged on a tree so that in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promised spirit through faith. Um, now Galatians three is far more complex than the couple of thoughts I've shared here.
Uh, but what's significant is really that the curses described here are taken in Jesus's death, right? And instead of those curses, we now receive blessings through the spirit. Um, and for most of us who aren't like ethnic Jews, um, this is the ability to even be part of the family of God comes through Jesus.
[36:27] That's part of that redemption he's offering there. Um, if you believe in Jesus, the fact is God's already relented in many things against you. Um, and as Christians, I think the best way for us to check and say, like, how do we know we're on this path of like, uh, how do we avoid idolatry?

Um, so that we avoid God's discipline, which I think still is in play because God will discipline those he loves his sons. Um, and really like the check for idolatry is like, what do our time and money reflect for priorities?
Because those are like our two most expendable things, probably first time and then second money. Because you can, there are ways to generate more money, but there's not really ways to generate more time. Um, so do you say you follow Jesus, but work 80 hours a week in a scenario where you're not really forced to work that much?
Uh, do you say you follow Jesus, but give away like the remainder of your paycheck to people, uh, rather than like slicing out a chunk to say specifically, like I'm giving this towards charity or towards the poor or towards the church.
Um, you shouldn't ask me for financial advice. I told one of you recently who said, I want to like manage my money better that you should give more money away. So if that's probably going to be my advice for you, unless you are literally living day to day, then come talk to us.
[37:33] Cause we'll help you with that. Like I'm, I'm serious about that. If you're financially struggling, let the church know we can help. Um, and so I want to share, I, we've shared a lot of examples of like what idolatry is. And I want to share an example that I've seen recently of what I like idolatry pivoted towards God looks like.

Um, and so like worshiping God with time and money and really pouring those things into him. Um, so I met someone, uh, I describe as an entrepreneur recently who is kind of, uh, like I am. He's an intern in a sovereign grace church.
Um, and so he's got classic traits of a strong businessman. Uh, he knows how to invest money and where to put it. He knows what people to invest time into and when to invest that time. Um, what's interesting though, is that he's not an entrepreneur.
I don't think he started a single company, uh, sort of, um, he's actually a chemical engineer and is nine to five. And so he manages a lot of plants. Uh, but when he comes home, he's exercised a lot of that entrepreneurship through the church and through the community.
Um, so he talked very freely with me, uh, about the amount of time he spent working with college kids. He lives in urban Philadelphia. Uh, and he spent years and years and years just funneling college kids through basically who came and said, I want to help, uh, this community.
[38:35] Like I want to help the poor. I have a heart for this or that. And he's facilitated and made connections for them and, and help start up whole ministries for them. He told me that he literally, he saw a need for what he had the college kids coming in.

And so he's like, oh, well I'll just buy housing for them. And so he invested in that. Um, and then he saw the need for these college kids who are here for the summer to have a job, to sustain themselves. And also for people coming out of rehab to have a job.
And so he's got all these different connections and he's like, oh, I'll, you know, I'll spin up a coffee shop. Um, and we'll employ people there and we'll sell coffee in this main spot on the street. Um, there's a lot of background to this of like God giving these things to him in many ways too.
Um, but it was just amazing to me. It's just like, I talk with, I work at a tech medium sized tech company. I talk with pretty impressive entrepreneurs pretty frequently who use these efforts to like spin up worldly things that aren't necessarily bad, right?

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You're still employing people. Um, and when I asked him, I was like, why and even how did you start doing? Um, he told me that when he was around my age, uh, he read a short book by John Piper, uh, with his pastor called Don't Waste Your Life.
[39:32] Um, which I obviously didn't read closely enough based on how intensive he is that I've read it too. Um, and he realized like, he's like, I don't want to squander another moment on these things.

Like I'm going to make every moment count. And so we even talked about like how he analyzes his individual days and how he's invested in people and how he's weighed time. Um, and just how it can be used best for Jesus.
And I'm not saying like, we all have to do what he does, nor am I saying this guy's perfect. I think we all have like different paths to follow Jesus on in that sense. But I just wanted to share like an example of like the positive side of like, we've been talking about the negative of idolatry and what this can bring on you.
What does it look like when you follow Jesus with the same passion that the Israelites followed idols? Um, and if you're interested in talking to people like this, like that really strikes your heart. Uh, there are a few people like that in this church too, and I'd be happy to like connect you to talking with them.
Um, and so that's, uh, if you don't believe in Jesus, uh, and instead find yourself in the spot where it's like, yeah, I guess I kind of do like place my ultimate trust in like the money I make, or like I really find benefit from work or you're, you know, you are in another religion.
[40:35] Um, I'm, I want to be playing with what this passage says and what the Bible is saying, right? You sit under the potential of the same judgment, um, that Jeremiah has listed here. Uh, I, God still takes seriously whether people worship him or not.

Um, I'm not going to park too long on that. That's a quick intro to Jesus. I'd be happy to talk with anybody after the service about that too, and what that looks like to follow him. Um, I want to hit up the last part of the passage here, uh, which is really of Jeremiah.
And so he pleads to the Lord and then the Lord, uh, talks back to him. Um, and so Jeremiah's plea in verses 10 and then 15 through 18, uh, is basically like, Jeremiah says like, woe is me in verse 10, my, my mother that you bore me a man of strife and contention to the whole land.
Uh, I have not lent nor have I borrowed yet all of them curse me. Um, and Jeremiah's saying like, what's going on here? Jeremiah's whole ministry has been strife and contention essentially, because he's saying things that nobody else is saying or that very few people are saying.
And so I'm not going to park along on that either because there's stories later in the book that we'll look at of like where this happens, but there's like formal charges. Like he's, they tried to throw him in jail. There's informal, like yelling at other prophets.
[41:39] There's disagreements. Uh, there's like prophecy show-offs. Um, this is not like Jeremiah's life is not fun basically is what he's saying. Uh, and so God reassures him in 11 through 14 and says like, you know, I care for you.

I'll make you strong. And the prophecies you're saying are true, right? This judgment's going to come on Israel. Uh, but Jeremiah comes back in 15 and says, you know, Lord, you know, remember me and visit me and take vengeance for me on my persecutors.
Um, in your forbearance, take me not away. Know that for your sake, I bear reproach. Um, and then he talks about basically verse 16.
He says, your words were found and I ate them. And so he's talking about when he was originally called to be a prophet back in, um, like chapter one that we looked at. Um, and God says, I'll put my words in your mouth.
Uh, and Jeremiah is saying, you know, this was a joy and a delight. Uh, when I started out in prophecy and verse 17, I didn't sit in the company of revelers. I sat alone because your hand was on me. Uh, there's often with prophets, like they had to sit, uh, they had to like distance themselves from the people after they were called.
[42:42] Um, I think specifically in this case too, like Jeremiah was called at almost the exact same time that Josiah was doing some restorations. And like, they found part of the, part of the word of the Lord.

They hadn't, that the people hadn't seen a long time and everyone's celebrating and they're doing a Passover for a first time and doing a lot of things again. So there's a lot of celebrations that are

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positive going on. Um, and Jeremiah is sitting over in the corner, like receiving, beginning to receive words from the Lord of like, there's punishment coming.
Um, and so like, I think that's part of what kept him sitting alone too. Um, so Jeremiah has got one of the like worst prophetic gig gigs, I think in the Bible looking at this, like he gets to sit there and he wrote lamentations too.
Um, so he gets to sit there and like talk about all the bad stuff that's coming basically. So like, I get that, right? Like this looks really cool. God's going to speak through me. He gave me his word. This is great. Oh great. All of his words are judgment upon people and everyone disagrees with me. Um, I think that we can sympathize with that in like smaller levels. Um, I think of like people who joined the church plant early here.
[43:42] Uh, I feel like joining a church plant, like right when it starts, uh, is always pretty cool. It's like we're on the ground level. This is all new things going on. And then you unload boxes for a straight year every Sunday morning and every Sunday afternoon.

And all of a sudden you're like, this isn't so fun anymore. Like what's going on here? Um, so there's like, I think there's like shadows of this kind of effort and this kind of calling in our lives too, uh, that God calls us to.
Um, and so God's response, uh, hear his response. It's not exactly what Jeremiah wanted to hear or exactly what he asked for. Um, but I think it's good because it's from the Lord.
Um, and so he says, if you return, I will restore you and you shall stand before me in verse 19. Uh, and he also says in verse 21, I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.
Um, another thing I want to highlight too is at the end of verse 19, he says, they shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. Um, and I think what's probably going on here, God's like, okay, cool. We're going to keep doing this prophecy thing, but you got to come back to me.
[44:41] You got to meet me where the prophecy is. And so I think the temptation Jeremiah is going through is like, this sucks. Like I don't want to prophesy anymore. Um, or I kind of want to like acquiesce to the people.

I want to give them something that's like, sounds a little bit better. Um, so I don't know whether we don't know whether he actually did that or not. There seems to be some callback of God. Like you got to turn back to me here. You got to return to me.
Um, and then I'll give you words and then you'll see like you are strong again. Like the people will turn to you, but you won't even care what they think. You'll turn away from them. Um, and this is good advice generally, right?
I do consulting with customers who pay my business a lot of money. Um, my experience telling good news early is actually good thing to do. Even though people don't like you in the moment when a serious crisis is averted that costs a lot of money down the road, they appreciate it then. Right? So spreading bad news is not necessarily a bad thing. It's just not a fun thing. Um, and so the disappointing part for Jeremiah too, is probably like, even if he says the hard truths, like he's like, yeah, you will notice Jeremiah is like squash my enemy.
[45:42] And God's like, I'm going to deliver you from your enemies. And Jeremiah is probably like, come on, man. Like, can you give me something a little more here? Um, and so I think that, uh, what we, what Jeremiah hears is something that we often hear or often need to hear and is reflective of like things that Christians wrestle with today.

Um, so there are difficult things that God calls us to, um, including like specifically what we believe. Uh, and then there are difficult people that we have in our lives too. And I think that carries over well to us.
Uh, and I, Jeremiah likely has more of these than any of us ever will, but that makes him a good person to learn from in this instance. Um, as far as difficult things, God calls us to and calls us to believe, uh, as a Christian, there's a lot of things like there's some things that fit well within our culture.
And then there's some things that don't fit so well within our culture. Uh, and I feel like in conversation with each other, uh, it's easy to like, if someone's like, I'm struggling with something, it's easy to be like, oh, that's fine.
Rather than kind of pushing back and encouraging. Uh, I feel like in conversations with other people about, oh, you're go to church. What's that about? It's easy to kind of like smooth that over and just talk about the parts that are like acceptable rather than Jesus.

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[46:48] Um, and so I think it's easy to like cheapen what we believe in that sense and like kind of take the edge off. Um, and so we have the same temptation Jeremiah does in that aspect. Um, and so I think that the irony of softening any message that we have to say is that it cheapens it.

Right. So the real value, like the real reason I'm a Christian is because of all the complexities of God. Um, and the beauty of the church and like the history and tradition. And like, there's so much that goes on behind that.

And how do I expect somebody else to be a Christian if I'm like hiding part of that from them that I think is going to hurt them or offend them or something like that. Um, and so I think that that call to be, to be robust in how we talk about Jesus and what we believe is really important.

Um, and then the other pieces is difficult people we have in our lives. Um, God doesn't promise to get rid of them. Um, sorry about that. And I think that specifically we don't, we don't really have like, uh, what I'd call institutionalized persecution in the United States.

So like there, our church doesn't have to meet underground. Uh, there's no state sanctioned church. Uh, there's no like talk track that we're supposed to go through. Um, but there are instances, and I know I've talked with some of you of like people that you work with or live with or know are like pushing back on you or give you a hard time about being a Christian, um, or give you a difficult time at your work and moving up or in school.

[48:00] There's a lot of like individual things that can happen. Um, if you feel like you're in that spot, like trust God that he will deliver you out of that hand, the hand of that person. I really encourage you that.

Um, and I, I think probably the, the best way to wrap this up of like the difficulty of this is like, what we're really struggling with is like, is God good some of the time or is he good all the time?

Um, and when he doesn't look good, how do we react to that essentially? Um, so I'll close with a quote from C.S. Lewis from the Screwtape Letters. Um, Screwtape Letters just for context is a discussion of a fictional discussion between demons basically of like how to tempt people and how to draw people away from God and like, what's dangerous?

What would draw people back to God? Um, and so one demon says to another, don't be deceived. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human no longer desiring, but still intending to do our enemy's will looks round upon a universe from which every trace of him seems to have vanished and asks why he has been forsaken.

And yet he still obeys. Um, so at this time, uh, we'll move into prayer in just a minute. Um, we take a time of silent reflection. Um, so I'm going to ask everyone to silently reflect on the message, uh, and consider what God might have for you, for you from this.

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