

Come Back, Backsliders

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Sean. If you're a guest here with us, I'm one of the pastors of Trinity Cambridge Church, and I have the privilege of bringing God's Word to you on most Sundays. And today, as Ruth read from, we're in Jeremiah 2, 1 to 4, 4, but because it's a long passage, I didn't read, we didn't read the whole thing. But that means as I'm preaching, because I'm preaching from the whole passage, I will be reading extended portions of it from God's Word.

And so I really encourage you to open your Bibles if you haven't already. Don't rely, because I'm not going to be putting the main passage of Scripture on the screen. And I know some of you guys might find that a little bit frustrating. Like, why doesn't he just preach?

Why does he have to keep going back to the Bible and read all this? Just tell us what it says. But that it's a strong conviction of mine that it's God's Word that is efficacious unto our salvation, not my words. And my words are just unpacking God's Word so that the effect of God's Word bears on us.

And that's why in 1 Timothy, in Paul's letter to Timothy, Paul says, devote yourselves to the public reading of Scripture and to exhortation and to teaching. Not just to exhortation and teaching, to the reading of Scripture, because it's God's Word that is effective in changing our lives. So please be patient with me. I'll refer you back to Scripture and go with me and read with me as I go. You've all heard the phrase, oh, it's nothing personal.

And ironically, sometimes people say that to you before they hurl their most personal criticisms at you. As if merely saying it's not personal now gives them the license to vent all of their frustrations and anger.

[1 : 38] And sometimes we think of our offenses against God, our sins, in the same exact way. We think of sin in this abstract, impersonal terms. And we say, oh, it's nothing personal, God. I love you and I think you're great, but I really can't resist this. I really need this right now. And we sin.

But today's passage talks about sin in concrete and intensely personal terms. Sin is not an abstract. It's always personal. It's an offense against. To sin is to choose something or someone instead of God and to take concrete steps away from God. And for that reason, all who sin must truly, genuinely, wholeheartedly return to God. That's the main point of this passage. That those who have turned away from the Lord must return to Him wholeheartedly. And we'll see that in two parts. First, we'll talk about how Israel turned away in chapter 2. And then we'll talk about how Israel should return to Him in chapters 3 and the beginning in 4. In chapter 1, we saw the word of the Lord come to Jeremiah to call him and consecrate him and then commission him as a prophet to the nations. And then here in chapter 2, we begin to see Jeremiah's obedience to God's commission. So read verses 1 to 3 with me.

The word of the Lord came to me saying, Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem, Thus says the Lord, I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.

Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of His harvest. All who ate of it incurred guilt. But disaster came upon them, declares the Lord. In their youth, this is a picture of Israel.

Israel was devoted to God. The word devoted is the same word that is used to describe God's covenant love toward His people, His steadfast love, His loving kindness. As they should be, Israel was once loyal to God and faithful to God.

[3 : 44] They once loved Him like a bride who loves her husband and follows him anywhere he's willing to go. Like a bride, Israel followed God out of Egypt into the wilderness to a land not sown, to a land that is not until before.

This is a beautiful image of a bride giving herself complete to her husband and leaving her household to start a new place, in a new place, a new life together. That's what Israel was like to God, a bride for Him.

And yet, and they were holy to the Lord, it says, consecrated to belong exclusively to Him. And they were the first fruits of His harvest. First fruits was a stipulation in the Old Testament where all the first fruits of your produce and livestock were supposed to be given to the Lord as an offering of thanksgiving.

And so by recognizing giving a portion, the first fruits of your produce to God, you recognize that all that you have ultimately came from God. And so that first fruit was considered sacred, devoted to the Lord, His special portion, symbolizing that everything belongs to Him.

And Israel was that first fruit for God, meaning that there would be in the future, the rest of the fruits would come, all the nations, people would come from all nations to be saved by Him. But Israel was the first fruits, and because of His special possession, all who tampered with the first fruits that belonged to God, all who messed with Israel, incurred guilt and invited the wrath of God.

[5 : 06] That's the picture of intimacy and trust we find here. But that is a thing of the past. The present state of things is quite different. Read verses 4 to 7 with me.

Follow with me as I read. Hear the word of the Lord. O house of Jacob and all the clans of the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord, What wrong did your fathers find in me, that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless?

They did not say, Where is the Lord, who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that none passes deep, where none dwells.

And I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination.

At this point of Jeremiah's ministry, the northern kingdom of Israel has already been conquered by Assyria, but some of them would have taken refuge in the southern kingdom of Judah, and that's where Jeremiah is based and is ministering.

[6 : 15] And so Jeremiah's here, he's addressing all the clans of the house of Israel, and asked them a rhetorical question, What wrong did your fathers find in me, that they went far from me?

This is God speaking. Of course, the answer is nothing. There was no wrong in God. God was always faithful to them. No one has found fault with God, because God has been faultless with them, yet still they found fault.

Yet still they went far from him. And because they went after worthlessness, they themselves became worthless. The spelling and pronunciation in Hebrew of the word worthless is very much the same as the word Baal, who is the main pagan god, the Canaanite deity.

And so every time in these passages and throughout Jeremiah, you hear phrases and words like worthless or unprofitable, good for nothing, useless, those are all kind of references to Baal.

Saying that you abandoned me, the true God who saved you, and you went after worthless things, and in worshiping worthless things, you became worthless yourself.

[7 : 23] And then look in verse 8 with me. All Israel forsook the Lord, it says. And not just the people, all the leaders of Israel. It says in verse 8, The priests did not say, Where is the Lord?

They didn't search for him. Those who handled the law did not know me. The shepherds transgressed against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit.

Again, Baal, right? The priests who are responsible for seeking the Lord did not ask, Where is the Lord? The scribes and Levites who are responsible for teaching about God themselves did not know God.

And the shepherds are metaphors for kings and rulers of Israel. And these rulers, these shepherds, did not lead people in God's way, but they themselves transgressed the ways of God, went across the boundaries that were forbidden to them.

And finally, even the prophets who are supposed to speak by the Lord and reveal His will, prophesied by Baal instead. For this reason, God must bring His charge against them.

[8 : 25] And this is what He says in verse 9 to 13. He contends with them. Therefore, I still contend with you, declares the Lord, and with your children's children I will contend. For cross to the coast of Cyprus and sea, or send to Kedar and examine with care.

See if there has been such a thing. 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. 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.

The main thrust of God's contention is this. Israel, what Israel has done, is so wicked, so treacherous, that it has not been done in the history of any nation around them.

Nations in the ancient Near East were polytheistic, so they might add deities to their pantheon of deities. They might reorder their deities in their prominence, but they never changed their gods.

[9 : 40] They never abandoned the gods that their ancestors worshipped completely. Yet Israel have abandoned the one true God.

They have changed their God and worshipped idols. And then God specifies their offense to two parts in verse 13. 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. Many people in this geographic area where Jeremiah is writing from did not have access to living waters.

So living water is referenced to a live water source. It could be a river or it could be a spring that spews forth water. And because most people didn't have access to such living water, they had to resort to rainwater.

And the way they saved rainwater is by digging a cistern into these rocky lime hills. They would dig a cistern out, hew it out, and then they would plaster the walls with lime plaster to make sure that the water doesn't leak.

[10 : 45] And then they would use irrigation to direct the water, the rainwater, into the cistern and store it for further use. But such cisterns frequently developed leaks and cracks, and it drained the very life source of their people who were depending on them.

So this is an image that's very familiar to God's people. And God says to them, I am the fountain of living waters. Yet you have abandoned me to hew out broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Let that image just be etched indelibly on your minds. God is the fountain of living waters. The God is the eternal life. And only He can satisfy you. We were created for eternity to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

And nothing less than that can ever satisfy us. whatever else you might turn to for joy, for purpose, for fulfillment, whether it's other gods or success, job, wealth, charitable work, beauty, fitness, or power, whatever it might be.

It doesn't matter how good these things are in and of themselves. If you turn to them for your ultimate fulfillment, if you turn to them as your ultimate goal in life, they will turn out to be broken cisterns that can hold no water.

[12 : 14] It might seem like it's working for you for a little while, but it's just a matter of time and you'll discover a crack here, a leak there, and find that your cistern is empty and that your life is running dry.

The same has happened to Israel at this point and we see the consequences of their idolatry in verses 14 to 19.

Follow with me as I read. 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 his land a waste. His cities are in ruins without inhabitant. Moreover, the men of Memphis and Tapanis have shaved the crown of your head. Have you not brought 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? Or what do you gain by going to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates? Your evil will chastise you and your apostasy will reprove you.

[13 : 21] Know and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord your God. The fear of me is not in you, declares the Lord God of hosts. God has bestowed great honor in Israel by calling them in Exodus 4.22 the firstborn son.

And he rescued them out of their slavery in Egypt. But by turning to these idolatrous pagan nations, to the broken cisterns that can hold no water, instead of turning to God the fountain of living waters, these people have enslaved themselves all over again.

And so God asks them, is Israel indeed a son? Is Israel indeed free? Why then are they wasted and enslaved to other nations? Even the Nile of the Egyptians, the famed Euphrates of the Assyrians, are just broken cisterns that can hold no water.

So don't turn to them, turn to me. And then using a series of hard-hitting images, and this is how personally God takes this, God describes the apostasy in verses 20 to 25.

First, he describes it in verse 20 this way, For long ago I broke your yoke and burst your bonds, but you said, I will not serve. God freed them from their slavery, but still they said, No, we will not serve the Lord.

[14 : 34] We will serve these idols instead. And then this analogy is used of prostitution. Yes, on every high hill and under every green tree, you bow down like a whore.

Baal, the Canaanite idol, was considered a god of rain and fertility. And so because of that, those who worshipped Baal performed sexual rituals at local shrines that were located on the high hills.

And even though they had been freed by the sovereign Lord, these Israelites sprawled themselves out under leafy trees like a common harlot. Then the second analogy is in verses 21 to 22.

God says, He planted them as a choice vine, holy of pure seed, to bear grapes of the highest quality, sweet grapes that can yield premium wine. Yet, they became like a wild vine that yields bitter fruit.

And they stain themselves with scents that not even soap can wash them clean. And then in verse 23, God compares Israel to a restless she-camel. He says, How can you say I am not unclean?

[15 : 41] I have not gone after the Baals. Look at your way in the valley. Know what you have done. A restless young camel running here and there. The word Baal here is important because even though Baal is one Canaanite God, there were many centers of Baal worship.

It's almost as if there are many Baals. And Israelites, as if worshipping Baal wasn't enough in one place, they worshipped him at every high hill, under every green tree. And in their idolatry, they were like a restless young camel running here and there.

It's a well-known fact among cultures that use camels that a young female camel is very skittish and jumpy. And so they are considered very unreliable for riding.

They kind of run around, jig-jag like this, like, and very fickle. And so God's comparing Israel to this she-camel that goes from one camel to another. And according to verse 24, Israel was also like a wild donkey used to the wilderness, in her heat, sniffing the wind, who can restrain lust.

A wild female donkey, when in heat, almost becomes violent. Sniff the wind, trying to pick up the scent of the male donkey from their urine.

[16 : 53] When she does catch the scent, she races down the wilderness in trying to find this male donkey. And so because of that, God says, none who seek her need weary themselves.

In her month, they will find her. There was no need for the adherents of Baal to plant altars because Israel was so eager to chase after Baals like a wild donkey whose lusts cannot be restrained.

And that God commands Israel in verse 25, keep your feet from going unshod and your throat from thirst. Don't let your sandals wear out and your throats parched from going after these idols.

Return to me. But Israel responds, it is hopeless, for I have loved foreigners, and after them I will go. Given Israel's stubborn refusal to repent of their idolatry, God denounces and derides, really mocks the futility of their idols in verses 26 to 28.

Read with me, verses 26 to 28, chapter 2. As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed. They, their kings, their officials, their priests, and their prophets who say to a tree, you are my father and to a stone you gave me birth, for they have turned back to me and looked at their face.

[18 : 18] But in the time of their trouble, they say, arise and save us. But where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise if they can save you in your time of trouble.

For where are your gods, O Judah? Is this something bothering you guys?

Should I just grab a mic, hand out a mic? I'll just keep going. So this is really ironic because in Canaanite worship, idolatry, on the high hills, they would usually have two symbols.

One would be a tree that is supposed to represent a male deity or a female deity. It would be a stone representing a male deity.

And so they're turning, so it's ironic that people made in God's image are turning to these creatures and saying, oh, this tree, you are my father. And then to a stone who gave me birth.

[19 : 21] And there's bitter irony here. Jeremiah is using satire because notice that even though the tree is supposed to represent the female deity, they turn to a tree and say, you are my father.

Even the stone is supposed to represent the female deity, they turn to the stone and say, you gave me birth. So God's painting this picture of Israelites' idolatry and pointing out the absurdity of it.

They are devoted to these idols and as devoted they have been, they're still utterly confused. They have no idea what they're doing. They're turning to sticks and stones, literally, and saying, you are my father, you are my mother.

And then even then, they say in verse 27, when times of trouble come, they say to God, arise and save us. Like an adulterous wife who returns to her husband only when she runs out of money.

Or like a rebel, a son who calls his father only when he is in trouble with the law and needs to be bailed out of jail. When they are in trouble, Israel still cries out to God, arise and save us.

[20 : 35] But God will not be mocked by such hypocrisy. And he says in verse 28, but where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise if they can save you in your time of trouble.

For as many as your cities are your gods, O Judah. There are as many idols in Judah as there are cities. Why don't you ask one of them to save you?

Statement is dripping with irony. Can the gods you have made with your own hands really save you? It's easy for us to dismiss these kinds of idolatry as something of the past, as superstitions of people, of gullible people in the ancient world.

And idolatry have not diminished over the years. We may not worship sticks and stones, but we too worship the work of our own hands. And instead of worshiping the God who created us, we may not worship the work of our own hands.

Hopefully that's better. Let's not let ourselves off the hook as we look at the idolatry of these Israelites because he's saying that as much as they have worshipped the works of their own hands, we too worship the work of our own hands because instead of worshipping the God who created us in his image, we often worship a God whom we have fashioned in our own image.

[22 : 17] We reduce God to amulets, pendants, and talismans as if we can put God in our pockets and carry him around with us and use him when we want. We reduce God to rituals, formulas, and legal requirements as if we can manipulate God by performing the right rituals, saying the right things, pressing the right buttons.

Instead of doing the things that God purposed and God prioritizes, we ask God to align himself to our purposes and priorities.

Instead of letting God's word challenge us and change our perspectives, we do elaborate interpretive acrobatics and water down God's word to avoid the clear teaching of scripture and make it suit our whims and wishes.

We pay lip service to God but give our hearts to the idols of this world to fame and acclaim to beauty to wealth to comfort to power.

God It's no different from worshiping sticks and stones. It's no wonder that such a domesticated God can't do us any good.

[23 : 37] And after we do this, we are surprised that our spiritual lives lack vitality. And after living as we have no need for God, when crises come, we turn to God for help and God asks us, where are your gods?

that you have made for yourself. Let them arise if they can save you. And then in verses 29 to 37, God continues his charge and expresses his grievance comparing Israel to a bride that forgets the attire that marks her as a bride, someone who is betrothed to someone.

Israel likewise has been unfaithful and Israel has become an expert in wickedness that they are now even teaching prostitutes. So that's how Israel has turned away.

It sounds pretty bad. I'm sorry it's so heavy for the first part of the sermon. But there's hope because God calls us to return. And that's the second part of the sermon. Chapter 3, verses 1, and all the way to chapter 4, verse 4, it tells us how Israel should return to the Lord.

And King Josiah did begin a nationwide reformation during his reign and that's a time when Jeremiah is ministering. But much of Israel's repentance, it turns out, was short-lived and it wasn't really genuine.

[25 : 00] And so God addresses that situation here in verses 1-5 of chapter 3. Follow along with me. If a man divorces his wife and she goes from him and becomes another man's wife, will he return to her?

Would not that land be greatly polluted? You have played the whore with many lovers and would you return to me? Declares the Lord. Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and see.

Where have you not been ravished? By the wayside you have sat awaiting lovers like an Arab in the wilderness. You have polluted the land with your vile whoredom. Therefore, the showers have been withheld and the spring rain has not come.

Yet you have the forehead of a whore. You refuse to be ashamed. Have you not just now called to me? My father, you are the friend of my youth. Will he be angry forever?

Will he be indignant to the end? Behold, you have spoken but you have done all the evil that you could. Chapter 3, verse 1 is referring to Deuteronomy 24, 1-4 which forbids a man who divorced his wife from remarrying her if she had in the intervening period been married and divorced or widowed from a second husband.

[26 : 15] If the woman had not remarried in the intervening period it would be a happy reconciliation for her to return to her husband. But because the woman had remarried and then subsequently been divorced or widowed for her to get back with her husband was tantamount to adultery.

And so that command in Deuteronomy 24 outlawed basically prevented serial divorce and remarriage that could be used as a form of legal adultery. right? Well I've divorced and you can take back your own wife you can pass along wives among yourselves among immoral men and so that's what the law prevented and so if that's the case even with this human marriage God asks Israel you who have whored with many idols can you just return to me in this glib casual way?

This is a serious matter that requires true repentance and transformation. Israel has been like an Arab in the wilderness so this is a proverbial expression from this time an Arab waits in the wilderness a marauder waits for the caravans to come to raid them in the same way Israel has waited for lovers to come by to pounce on them and yet will they return this casually to the Lord?

Then in verse 4 Jeremiah shifts metaphors and compares Israel's relationship to God with the relationship between a son and a father after being afflicted with droughts and recognizing that their devotion to Baal the so-called God of rain has been futile Israel says to God glibly my father you are the friend of my youth will he be angry forever?

Will he be indignant to the end? But God knows that Israel's insincere because what they have said and what they are doing does not line up so he says behold you have spoken but you have done all the evil that you could and their evil deeds have belied the smooth words that they speak and not only Israel Judah has fallen into the same trap and Israel at least you know didn't have anyone to go before them to show them that this will be the consequence of their evil doing but Judah had Israel going before them they should have known better yet Judah has one-upped really Israel in their wickedness and they have not returned to God but they have instead returned to him as it says in verses 8 to 10 in pretense they have not returned with their whole heart and so God says in verses 12 to 14 return faithless Israel declares the Lord I will not look on you in anger for I am merciful declares the Lord

[28 : 48] I will not be angry forever only acknowledge your guilt that you rebelled against the Lord your God and scattered your favors among foreigners under every green tree and that you have not obeyed my voice declares the Lord return oh faithless children declares the Lord for I am your master I will take you one from a city and two from a family and I will bring you to Zion notwithstanding the earlier teaching that a man may not remarry his ex-wife who was remarried in the intervening period Jeremiah declares that God is still willing to take Israel back as his spiritual bride and this passage really beautifully captures God's mercy and grace towards sinners because God says over and over again return he used the language return oh faithless Israel return oh faithless children for I am your master the word master is Baal in Hebrew he's saying no

I am your true master not Baal and so God is and he exhorts them to return repeatedly in chapter 322 he says it again return oh faithless sons I will heal your faithlessness and then again in chapter 4 verse 1 if you return oh Israel declares the Lord to me you should return the words return and faithless actually come from the same Hebrew root word so the two words form a poetic wordplay that reveals God's gracious character it's as if he's saying to us saying to Israel come back to me backsliders return return to me you who have turned away from me God gives us a second chance God calls us to himself not when we are faithful to him but when we are still unfaithful while we're in the middle of our adultery he calls us to himself not when we are remorseful repenting of our sins but while we are still rebellious he calls out to us when we are still in our sins and backsliding headlong away from

God he calls to us come back to me return to me and not only does it reveal God's heart for us that word return which is used 16 times just in chapter 3 alone perfectly captures what our response to God should be in order to return to God we must trace our path and renounce all of our sinful ways we can't simply continue in sin and say to God God I return to you I'm here because every sin is a step away from God you can't take a step forward and backwards at the same time but when it comes to sin and repentance going backward is sometimes the best way forward C.S. Lewis illustrates this in his book Mere Christianity he says we all want progress but progress means getting nearer to the place where you want to be and if you have taken a wrong turning then to go forward does not get you any nearer if you're on the wrong road progress means doing an about turn and walking back to the right road and in that case the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive man there's nothing progressive about being pigheaded and refusing to admit a mistake and I think if you look at the present state of the world it's pretty plain that humanity has been making some big mistake we're on the wrong road and if that is so we must go back going back is the quickest way on that's what it means to repent of our sins and to believe in Jesus

Christ you turn from your sins away from your sins and you turn toward God in faith and you cling to him and for those of you who are not yet a follower of Jesus this is how you become a follower of Jesus Christ how you become a Christian you might be an honest person that's trying to live a good life but that's not good enough you might be imagine this think about this imagine a very dutiful wife right she fulfills all the things that society might expect her to do as a good wife she raises her children well she's an amazing chef who prepares a meal for all her household so that they are well fed and in the midst of all of that she still has time to get some extra income to help supplement the income that her husband brings in she does everything well except she doesn't love her husband in fact she doesn't even acknowledge him if you were to observe her life you would not even know that her husband exists when you ask her why she does all of these things she simply says it's just the right thing to do she is not doing any of this for her husband she is doing it for herself she is doing it for her children she is doing it for others do you think she is a good wife absolutely not she is derelict in her primary duty to love and to belong to and to support her husband god created us his people are supposed to be a bride for him he created us to have a relationship with him and that's our ultimate eternal divinely ordained purpose he designed us to know him and to trust him and to love him and he pledged his people as a bride for himself yet we have refused to acknowledge him in our ways and we have lived not for him but for ourselves and in doing so we have effectively turned to other lovers have committed adultery against

God that prideful unbelief that refusal to acknowledge God is at the root of all sin and that's why every sin is a personal affront to God and if you are not yet a follower of Christ that describes you now and you must repent of your sins and believe in Jesus for salvation and that means a fresh start a new beginning look at chapter 4 verses 3 to 4 with me God says break up your fallow ground and sow not among thorns circumcise yourselves to the Lord remove the foreskin of your hearts O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem lest my wrath go forth like fire and burn with none to quench it because of your evil deeds a fallow ground soil a ground that has never been tilled before and a land that is tilled of course is easier to farm but a land that is tilled also more readily grows thorns and thistles and so often

[36 : 05] Israelite farmers were sowing on thorns and so here by saying break up your fallow ground and sow not among thorns he's saying the same thing he's saying you can't just change what you have you need a complete new start it means if we want to turn to the Lord it's not enough to get a little modification here and there in our lives a little alteration here and there we need not a mere reformation of some aspects of our life we need a complete transformation God says circumcise yourselves to the Lord but lest you think that he's merely referring to the physical circumcision that marked the Jewish people as God's own he adds remove the foreskin of your hearts external conformity to God is not enough going to church is not enough doing good deeds is not enough you need to become a new person in order to be saved you need a changed heart and that's why it's impossible for us to return to

God on our own that's not something that we can do in our own strength despite God's offer of forgiveness and his restoration Israel and Judah never fully return to God they become repeat offenders over and over again committing this adultery and we likewise are incapable of being faithful to God because of our hearts which are fickle and incorrigible so then how can we be saved Paul picks up this idea of the circumcision of the heart in Romans chapter 2 29 and he says but a Jew is one inwardly and circumcision is a matter of the heart by the spirit not by the ladder and later in chapter 3 of Romans he says that there is no distinction between the circumcised Jew and the uncircumcised Gentile because circumcision is a matter of the heart and then he says this all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in

Christ Jesus whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith Jesus is the one who can circumcise your heart Jesus is the one who can redeem us from slavery Jesus is the one who can atone for our sins and Jesus accomplished this because he became the good shepherd that lays down his life for his sheep as he said in John he was the shepherd after God's own heart that God promised he will return to that final promise in chapter 3 verses 15 to 18 go back with me to chapter 3 verses 15 to 18 this is how we know how God saves how God intends to save us through Jesus he says and I will give you shepherds after my own heart who will feed you with knowledge and understanding and when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land in not be made again at that time

Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord and all nations shall gather to it to the presence of the Lord in Jerusalem and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart in those days the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers for a heritage these shepherds that God promised these rulers after God's own heart that's a phrase that's derived from how God described David as a man after his own heart this is a prophecy of a true king in the line of David that will come and that was Jesus who was the new David the ultimate Davidic king he was the one who was fully after God's own heart and he came as a shepherd he said he is the good shepherd that lays down his life for sheep in John 10 and he died on the cross for our sins because he knew that we could not earn and attain this righteousness that we need on our own Jesus died for our sins and gave his perfect righteousness to us on the cross and he rose again and sent his

Holy the covenant of the Lord will be no more at that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the Lord the ark which represented the presence of God Israelites envisioned the ark as the footstool of God they believed that the throne of God was in heaven and the footstool of God was on earth and by God's what is God saying now he is saying the footstool will be no more because the very throne of God will be in our midst that's in Jesus Christ and he reigns from the cross he ascends his throne on the cross dies for our sins and he rises victoriously now he's seated at the father's right hand in heaven and he is beckoning us to come if you are not yet a follower of Christ I want to invite you to this remind you again that he's the fountain of living waters that rather than hewing out broken cisterns that can hold no water that you should come to him in

[41 : 38] John 4 14 Jesus says this to Samaritan woman whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again the water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life I don't know what you're turning to if you're not a follower of Christ what broken cisterns that you have in your life but you must come to Christ he's the only one that can give you this wellspring that's eternal it doesn't matter how much you have sinned it doesn't matter how much you have fallen back and turned away from him and this this passage teaches it clearly that God's not asking you to come halfway and meet him if you're an unbeliever God's not asking you to come halfway and meet him he's come all the way every gift in your life everything that is beautiful and good and glorious in your life is a gift from

God that's intended to point you to the Lord and every sin that you have committed against him God has offered forgiveness and paved the way for you to come to him through Jesus Christ he's come all the way for you and you are still turning your back to him and not your face turn return to him and drink deeply from the living water and for brothers and sisters in Christ I urge you also to come to the waters stop seeking to save yourselves with your own good works come to Jesus for strength and stop trying to serve and live and obey in your own strength return again and again to this fountain of living water when you feel discouraged when you feel that you failed God again when you feel like you disappointed him when you feel like giving up return again and again to this fountain because there is grace enough for you there is mercy enough for you and only by drinking deeply of this living water can we have the spiritual life the vigor and vitality to love and obey him in this life please close your eyes with me and reflect for a try to picture

God beckoning you to come and try to reflect on what it is that is holding you back the broken systems that you keep returning to and after you have reflected for some moment we'll pray spend our time praying together as the body of Christ