

Sinful Hearts, Sure Punishment

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Preacher: Ray Park

[0 : 0 0] So we've been studying Jeremiah for the past few weeks, and Jeremiah is a long book, and it's helpful to keep in mind the big picture and the key themes while we read this long book.

So Jeremiah was called to be a prophet when he was young. He was called to be a prophet to unfaithful people, people who turned away from God over many years, and so God is judging them for their unfaithfulness. Jeremiah is communicating two main themes. One is that God judges covenant infidelity and sin, and the other is that he is restoring an international people to himself.

And today we're studying chapters 16 and 17. While I walk through these passages, I want to call out three questions for us to ask ourselves, and we can have those as takeaways for today. So one of them is, first question is, who do you belong to? Second is, what is more important to you than God?

And third is, how can you change? Right? So who do you belong to? What is more important to you than God? And how can you change? So let's dive into verses one through nine. So we know that Jeremiah has already lived a really hard life. He's been chased out of town by the people we grew up with in his hometown, and it's about to get harder. God is commanding Jeremiah to deprive himself of three things. So in verses one through four, Jeremiah is commanded not to get married, nor to have children.

In verses five through six, God commands Jeremiah not to mourn for the dead. And in verses eight through nine, God commands Jeremiah not to feast or to celebrate, for example, at weddings. So no marriage and kids, no mourning, no celebrating, right? This sounds pretty awful. And so we have to ask, like, what's going on here? And again, Jeremiah is a prophet. What God is doing is he's using Jeremiah's life to communicate a message. There are multiple ways to deliver a message. You can do a direct, direct message like sermon like this. You could show a symbolic action. So you guys remember when Jeremiah was commanded to hide his linen cloth in the rock and it was ruined. And that symbolized the ruined pride of Judah, right? So Jeremiah has done that. And now God's commanding him to use his life events as a message. There are other examples of prophets doing this in the Bible. There's Hosea.

[2 : 4 0] So in the book of Hosea, we read that God commands him to marry and have children with a woman that is promiscuous. God tells him that she's going to cheat on him and he should marry her. And so she does, she's cheat on him. And then God commands Hosea to take her back to love her again. So that's what he does. He goes after her and he takes her back and he loves her again. And through these actions, Hosea was to communicate that God's people had been unfaithful to him like a cheating wife, but God still loved them. God still loved his people. There's also Ezekiel. So Ezekiel was told that his wife, the delight of his eyes would die. And when she died, Ezekiel was not allowed to cry for her or mourn for her. Not allowed to do anything. Sounds pretty harsh, right? And the reason is because Ezekiel was to prefigure what the Israelites would do. Soon the temple, which was the delight of the eyes of the Israelites, it would be desecrated. It'd be violated. And their sons and daughters would be killed. And the Israelites would not mourn, would not grieve, just like Ezekiel did not for his wife.

And so we have those examples. What was Jeremiah supposed to communicate through his actions, through his life? So a marriage, Jeremiah wasn't allowed to marry, right? And that's because the people of the land, the mothers and fathers, the sons and daughters, they would die. They would die by sword, by famine, and by disease. That's what Steve preached about last week, right? Those three things that happened for more. And in staying single, Jeremiah would prefigure the people who did marry, who were fathers and mothers, who had sons and daughters, but would later be single, be alone, because they would lose all of their family when they died, right? So Jeremiah was supposed to be alone. Second, Jeremiah wasn't supposed to mourn when people died. He wasn't supposed to express his pity.

Why? Because God had withdrawn his blessing and his love and his pity from the people. And so when people died, when disaster came upon them from war, they wouldn't be going about having funerals, wouldn't be mourning, wouldn't be grieving for the people. So Jeremiah was to show that that's what was going to happen. The birds of the air and the wild animals of the land would eat their bodies because people would not be buried, right? So that normal life event would stop. And third, Jeremiah wasn't allowed to feast. He wasn't allowed to celebrate because God was bringing an end to joy, to celebration. The normal life event of weddings would cease to take place. So Jeremiah was supposed to deprive himself of these celebrations, right? So this is God's message through his prophet.

Disaster is coming upon the people because of their unfaithfulness and their idolatry, and it's going to have devastating effects. I think it's pretty incredible what these prophets are doing, right? Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, in order to obey God, in order to serve God. For those of us here who are single, I think if God asked you to be single and not have a family in the future, just so he could tell a message, I think that would be really hard, right? Or if God commanded you to marry someone that you knew was going to cheat on you, also very hard. Or for those of us who have families, if we were told our beloved husband and wife or our children would die and we couldn't mourn for them, also very hard. So what I observe about these prophets is that they were willing to suffer in their service for God because they knew that they were not their own. They didn't belong to themselves, but they belonged to God. And because they belonged to God, God had the right to ask them of anything he wanted. So what does this mean for us? What's the application? I don't think the application is to be pessimistic and prepare ourselves for the worst case scenario, right?

To prepare yourself for celibacy. I think the application is that we should recognize that we belong to God and we should nurture the desire to have this posture before God. That God, if you ask me anything, I will say yes. And we know that this is true, that we do belong to God. In 1 Corinthians 6, which we studied a few months ago, Paul says, you are not your own. You are bought at a price, right? Christ bought us with his blood. So my first question is, who do you belong to? Who's the boss of your life? Do you belong to yourself? Maybe you let God inform your big life decisions, kind of like a financial advisor with investments. You know, he's, he has good stuff. He has good knowledge. You know, don't murder, don't steal. Don't lie, love other people. That's all fine. That's all good stuff. But when he commands you to do something that doesn't make sense or is too costly, maybe you think, I'm not doing that. You know, that, that doesn't make sense. That costs too much.

[8 : 12] I have the final call here and I'm not going to do that, right? Do you belong to other people? Maybe you only feel good about yourself when your coworkers or your boss or your friends have a high opinion of you. Does your world crumble when other people think you're incompetent or you're inconsiderate? And so you have to do whatever it takes to get back on their good side, right?

Or do you belong to God? Are you confident that he loves you and that he cares for you, that he has your best in mind? And so you trust him and obey him. Does he have the final word in your life? I don't think the right way to go about this is to say, ah, I feel so bad about myself. I've got to, I've got to do this better. Um, I think first we look at Christ who's the greatest example of someone who suffered for God. Um, he trusted God completely. He served him, suffered for him. He was the ultimate, ultimate picture of putting God first, of putting him before himself. Um, in obeying God, Jesus went from being the creator of the universe to being a baby born in a manger. Uh, he went from having an eternal relationship in the Trinity to being abandoned by his closest friends to being betrayed by them. So he was lonely and he went from a glory and majesty to being mocked and insulted by sinful men. And so I think we remember Jesus and how he loved us. And we let that stir up for our, in our hearts, um, love for him, right? Don't go halfway. Don't settle, but let's strive to say to God, anything you command me, I'll do because I know you love me and I know, um, you care for me. And I think, uh, we, we foster this daily in little decisions in our lives. All right, let's move on to verses 10 through 13. So in verse 10, um, God says, when you tell this people all these words and they say to you, why has the Lord pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity? What is the sin that we have committed against the Lord, our God? Then you shall say to them, because your fathers have forsaken me, declares the Lord, and I've gone after other gods and have served and worshiped them and have forsaken me and have not kept my law. And because you have done worse than your fathers for behold, every one of you follows his stubborn evil will, refusing to listen to me.

Therefore, I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods day and night for I will show you no favor.

I think it's pretty incredible what the people are asking. Uh, it's, they don't know why these disasters are happening to them. They're blind to what they've done over all these years. It's, it's like an eight year old, uh, on the playground, pushing someone else over. And, uh, they're, they, they get disciplined for it. And they're like, what did I do? Right. They have no idea.

And, uh, and God's like, are you serious? I'll tell you what you did. Uh, instead of following him, they forsaken him. Uh, they've been stubborn. They followed their evil hearts. And so my second question to you is what is more important to you than God, right? What are the idols in your life? We might not follow, um, little small statues and figurines, but we still have idols, things that are more important than God. What causes you to forsake God, um, turn away from him to say to him, you know what, when push comes to shove, I would rather have this than you. Uh, one way to figure this out is you could fill in the sentence, complete the sentence.

[11 : 54] My life would fall apart if I didn't have blank, right? My life would fall apart if I didn't have blank. So what is that to you? Maybe it's a spouse or a child, uh, maybe a promotion, a raise, maybe it's health and beauty, or again, the good opinion of others. Uh, for me, it was marriage.

Uh, I really wanted to meet my future wife in college and get married early, enjoy that companionship. And, uh, but that did not happen, right? Uh, college was lonely. Post-college was lonely for most of my twenties and I was frustrated. Uh, I knew that God loved me and I knew that God knew me, but that didn't help because I thought, God, if you know me, if you knew me, if you made me this way, and if you're in control of anything, of everything and, and you're good, why is this happening to me?

Right. Um, why am I alone? Why are you not giving me what I want? And so I turned away from God. I turned to other things. Um, I would turn to pornography for physical gratification. I would turn to alcohol to drown my sorrows. And sometimes I just turned to hopelessness because that would numb my feelings, right? I just wouldn't feel lonely anymore, or I wouldn't feel disappointed anymore. And, um, that's what I did. I turned away from God, but God didn't turn away from me.

God is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. During those hard years, he ordered my circumstances so that I would start developing a really close friendship, um, non-romantic with a really cool girl named Carolyn. And, uh, and we would hang out a lot. We would become friends. I didn't make a move because she was out of my league, right? Um, we actually did go to the same college. Um, but after years of being friends, I finally built up the courage to ask her on a date. Uh, she said, why?

Or she said, yes, I don't know why. Um, but she said, why? Yeah. Now we're married. We have a kid, right? So God is good. God is good. Uh, he blessed me even when I didn't deserve it. Even when I turned to other things that hurt me in the process. And so is there anything in your life that's a deal breaker with God? If you don't get it, you would turn away from him. So don't be tricked. Um, don't, don't lack in faith like I was right. God, as it says, is the spring of living water. God gives us the things that we need. Um, don't be tricked into turning away from him. Um, so let's move on to, uh, chapter 16, verse 14. So a few, few minor points that I'll, I'll go across quickly. Uh, in verses 14 and 15, God's speaking comfort to his people. Uh, he says he will restore them back to the land.

[14 : 45] And this is a really sweet word, right? Now is the time when God is judging the people for a sin, for their sins, but almost in the same breath, because God is compassionate and loving, he reassures them of his mercy and his faithfulness. He says that he will restore them back to the land.

And so there's hope, right? With God, there's always hope. But now is the time for judgment. Verse 16, God says he will judge the people. He will send fishermen and hunters after the people.

Uh, nothing's hidden from God. God sees all of their sin and his judgment is going to be severe and complete. Um, his, the hunters will, will be able to track all of the people in the crevices of the rocks and find them. And, um, and so that's going to happen. And in verse 19, we read of the nations coming to God to know his name. We know that the salvation of the nations is on God's heart and is one of the main themes of Jeremiah. God wants his salvation to reach the ends of the earth.

And though the Israelites have failed at being a faithful people to God, God's purposes will not fail. The nations will know God. And so if you love God, do you love God, right? If you love him, love what he loves. Think about what's on his heart. His aim is to make disciples of all the nations.

Make that your aim too. Looking at chapter 17 and my third question, how can you change, right? How can you change? Um, I, you know, I like Will Ferrell. I like his movies. I enjoy watching him, uh, act like a man child in his movies. I think that's really funny. Um, but that phenomenon isn't very funny in real life.

[16 : 32] I, I think it's a real and scary possibility that I could turn 50 and I'm not one day wiser or more mature or more loving than I was at 20, right? I don't think change happens automatically. It doesn't happen by doing nothing or with wishful thinking. I think it takes work and discipline to grow.

It takes prayer and reading God's word and putting my sins to death. But on the other hand, hard work and willpower, uh, they alone don't bring change. I could spend years learning about God, studying his word, looking really polished on the inside, but inwardly I could be rotting, rotting away with bitterness and resentment, uh, with lust and envy, with pride, right? So the problem is our hearts. Verse nine says the heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure.

Who can understand it? You know, it's not that we're ultimately good and every now and then we make bad choices, but the Bible says our hearts referring to our inward thoughts and emotions, our loves and our desires, our values. Our hearts are sick and beyond cure. It's like sin covers our bodies like a thick mud that just caked on and we're trying to get rid of it with our hands, but we're just rubbing it around. We're just moving it around with our muddy hands, right? What we need is God's cleansing water to wash us, to wash us clean, to make us new. We need God to give us new hearts.

And this is what God promises later in Jeremiah chapter 31. God says, this is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord.

I will put my law in their, in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. What a reason to be filled with, with hope and joy. I mean, just think about the times when you've tried to change your heart, tried to change something. Maybe you remember trying to be a more forgiving person, but you just can't. You couldn't because you couldn't get past the need for vengeance, right? Sometimes you think, I can't forgive that person because he needs to pay for what he did. Who's going to make him pay if I don't make him pay? Or you're trying to be a less prideful person, more humble, but you can't get past the thought that you really are better than somebody else.

[19 : 00] You're better because, you know, I'm, I'm smarter. I work harder. I'm more competent and more responsible. Why wouldn't I look down on her? I mean, she's lazy. She's stupid. That's just true.

Right. And so we have these battles of the heart that we can't win by ourselves. You know, it's impossible without God, but with God, all things are possible. We need God to make our hearts new.

And so I think we are diligent about these disciplines, about praying to God, reading God's word, but it's not by our might and by our power, but it's by God's spirit. We need to rely on him.

All right. Looking at the last section in chapter 17. So let's look at verses 19 through 27 in chapter 17. This is about keeping the Sabbath. So it's a very practical application of trusting in God and having idols in our hearts. One of the ways that the people were disobeying God was that they were not keeping the Sabbath. Starting in verse 21, God says, be careful not to carry a load on the Sabbath day or bring it through the gates of Jerusalem. Do not bring a load out of your houses or do any work on the Sabbath, but keep the Sabbath day holy as I commanded your ancestors. Yet they did not listen or pay attention. They were stiff necked and would not listen or respond to discipline. This command goes back to the 10 commandments in Exodus chapter 20, where God says, remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord, your God. So how does this apply to us? Are we supposed to keep the Sabbath? If yes, what does it look like practically? Should we not carry anything heavy today, right? Nothing more than like 10 pounds?

So to answer those questions, first, yes, I think we should keep the Sabbath. The Sabbath isn't just in the Old Testament. In Mark chapter 2 verse 27, God tells us, or Jesus tells us, Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So it's a part of God's creation order. It's for our good that we work six days and we rest one day and we keep it holy. What does this mean practically, right? What are some helpful guidelines for keeping the Sabbath? Well, I think that there are guidelines, but ultimately the specifics are down to a matter of personal conviction, right? I don't think it looks the same for different people. Here's what I mean. I think one guideline is that we should keep the Sabbath holy. Holy means set apart, right? It's, I'm using all these things for one purpose, but this, I'm using it for something else. So the Sabbath should be a special day. It should look different from your

[21 : 53] Saturday, from your Monday through Friday. And special doesn't mean just different. Like on Sundays, you watch NFL football at one o'clock and then at 4 30 and then Sunday night football at 8 30, which I used to do, by the way, I used to watch nine hours of football on Sundays, right? Not good.

And so that, that's not special in that way. Special means it's set apart for God, right? A time to focus on him, to worship him for something that's spiritually beneficial to you as well. And I think that's, that's what we're doing right now. That's something that we can practically do, getting together with other Christians, praising God with music, listening to his word preached. So that's one way to make it special, make Sunday special for God. How else can you keep the Sabbath day holy? How can you make it special so you're growing in your love to God? Maybe it's singing praise songs at home or reading a book that will help you grow in, in, um, in devotion to God. So that's one guideline. Another guideline is that the Sabbath should be a restful and restorative day. This is where it can look different for different people. For example, if you're looking at a computer screen all day, every day while you're working, it might be restorative for you to get outside, uh, do some physical activity, go for a run, ride a bike, right? Um, maybe play some basketball, uh, that might be good for you. But if you're a contractor and you're punishing your body every day, um, constructing, constructing buildings all week, it might be restorative for you to take a nap, right? Or to watch NFL football, right? And so, um,

I'm, I think it's different in that way. I'm guessing in terms of what we should not do, it's not the most restorative thing probably to run all of our errands on Sunday or to save all of our homework, uh, for Sunday. Um, so what's, what's most restorative for you? What if, um, what would be restful for you today so that if you did it, you'd be energized for tomorrow? Um, you'd be energized for the week to come. Um, so on, on hand, one hand, we should keep the Sabbath, right? What are some reasons, on the other hand, that we're tempted not to keep the Sabbath? Uh, what, what do we tell ourselves or what do we hear? One thing might be that, uh, we don't know that we're supposed to take a Sabbath, right? We never heard of that, but you can't use that excuse after this sermon. Uh, sorry about that. Another reason is that, uh, it's what we talked about earlier, idolatry. Maybe there's an idol in your life. Maybe we don't ultimately trust God to provide for us, and so we need to provide for ourselves. We need to put in those extra hours. Uh, maybe we don't value God supremely. Maybe other things are more important to us, right? Um, and so, yeah, we get into the office, we work more, we get ahead, or it's not a particularly special day, so again, we pack it full of errands. That's when we get stuff done, but then we go into Monday still tired and not restored. Um, but idolatry promises you one thing and it gives you another, right? That's what sin does. Verse five says, cursed is the man who trusts in man. Of course, cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord. But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord. They will be like a tree planted by water and never fails to bear fruit. So again, we should dig out that idolatry in our hearts. Another big reason we fail to keep the Sabbath is that we fail to get our work done earlier in the week, and we're stuck with a long to-do list. Remember, we're supposed to work for six days and keep one as the Sabbath. So it's hard to do that when you're procrastinating. Um, you haven't done any homework till Sunday, and so you have to do it, right? Um, or you haven't done any shopping for food. You haven't done your laundry, and so there's literally no food left in your fridge, or you have no clean clothes left, and you have to get your errands done, right? So practically speaking, if you want to rest for one day, you got to work for the other six, right? I mean, the world has a five-day work week with two days. I mean, the Bible has six work days and one. So work hard those six days and make sure you rest on that one day. Uh, so brothers and sisters, we, we need heart change. It's something that's beyond any of us to achieve. Uh, but Paul says in, in Romans 7, what a wretched man I am who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death. Thanks be to God who delivers me through

Jesus Christ our Lord. So be encouraged because the Lord died to save sinners, to save me, and to save you. Uh, let's say with Jeremiah, as he says in chapter 17, heal me, Lord, and I will be healed. Save me, and I will be saved, for you are the one I praise. Let's pray. Uh, Heavenly Father, thank you for your word of truth. Thank you for your word of grace and instruction. Our hearts are desperately sick, but in Christ you give us new hearts, and so we have hope. Please help us to be wholly devoted to you.

Please help us to cast down the idols in our lives, and please help us to trust you for deep, lasting heart change. And we pray in Christ's name. Amen.