We have now studied the first chapter over the last two Sunday mornings, and we come now to Jeremiah's very ***FIRST*** sermon. It begins in chapter two, verse one, and ends in chapter three, verse five. And as we read it, I want you to imagine a young man in his late teens preaching for the very first time---not inside a church or a temple to a sympathetic congregation, but in the streets, to a very unsympathetic crowd who didn't want to know. What a way to begin! And this is what he said:

*"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 became guilty---evil came upon them, says the Lord."'"*

*"Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob and all the families 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 out of the land of Egypt, who led us into in the wilderness in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that none passes through, where no man dwells.' And I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and good things; but when you came in, you defiled My land--- made My heritage an abomination. The priest did not say, 'Where is the Lord?' Those who handle the Lord did not know Me. The rulers transgressed against Me. The prophets prophesied by Ba'al and went after things that do not profit.*

*"Therefore, I still contend with you," says the Lord. "With your children's children will I contend; for cross to the coast of Cypress and see 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," says the Lord.'*

*"For my people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hued out cisterns for themselves--- broken cisterns that can hold no water. Is Israel a slave? Is he a home-born servant? Why then has he become a prey? The lions have roared against him---they have roared loudly. They have made his land a waste. His cities are in ruins without inhabitant. Moreover, the men of Memphis and Tahpanhes have broken the crown of your head. Have you not brought this upon yourself by forsaking the Lord your God when He led you in the way? And now what do you gain by going to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile? Or what do you gain by going to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates? Your wickedness will chasten you, and your apostacy will reprove you. Know and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord our God. The fear of Me is not in you," says the Lord God of hosts.'*

*"For long ago you broke your yoke and burst your bonds, and you said, 'I will not serve.' Yea, upon every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down as a harlot, yet I planted you a choice vine---holy of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine? Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me," says the Lord God.' "How can you say, 'I am not defiled? I have not gone after the Ba'als.' Look at your way in the valley, know what you've done. A restive young camel interlacing her tracks. A wild ass used to the wilderness in her heat sniffing the wind. Who can restrain her lust? None who seek her need weary themselves. In her month they will find her. Keep your feet from going unshod and your throat from thirst." But you said, 'It is hopeless, for I have loved strangers and after them I will go.'*

*"As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed. They, their kings, their princes, 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 their back to me and not their face. 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 as many as your cities are your gods, O Judah. Why do you complain against me? You have all rebelled against me," says the Lord. "In vain have I smitten your children---they took no correction. Your own sword devoured your prophets like a ravening lion; and you, O generation, heed the word of the Lord. Have I been a wilderness to Israel or a land of thick darkness? Why then do my people say, 'We are free, we will come no more to thee.' Can a maiden forget her ornaments or a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten me, days without number.*

*"How well you direct your course to seek lovers, so that even to wicked women you have taught your ways. Also, on your skirts is found the lifeblood of guiltless poor. You did not find them breaking in, yet in spite of all these things you say, 'I am innocent. Surely His anger has turned from me.' Behold, I will bring you to judgment for saying, 'I have not sinned.' How lightly you gad about changing your ways. You shall be put to shame by Egypt as you were put to shame by Assyria. From it, too, you will come away with your hands upon your head...for the Lord has rejected those in whom you trust, and you will not prosper by them.*

*"For 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 harlot with many lovers, and would you return to me?" says the Lord. "Lift up your eyes to the bare heights and see. Where have you not been lain with? By the waysides you have sat awaiting lovers like an Arab in the wilderness. You have polluted the land with your vile harlotry. Therefore, the showers have been withheld and the spring rain has not come. Yet you have a harlot's brow. You refuse to be ashamed. Have you not just now called to me, 'My Father, Thou 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."'"*

There's something of the power of ***GODS WORD*** as it must have come from that young man...comes through in the very reading of this passage; and as we study it more deeply God will speak to us, because this is His word---not just to ancient Israel, but to modern Britain (and the United States).

Just over 250 years ago in this country, an Anglican clergyman was forbidden by bishop after bishop to preach in his diocese. He finally arrived in the diocese of Bristol, and the Bishop of Bristol said to him, "***ENTHUSIASM*** is a very horrid thing, Sir, a very horrid thing." Enthusiasm was the 18th century word for ‘***EMOTIONALISM’***. And so, the bishop would have no emotion in his diocese, and the Anglican clergymen---by name the Reverend JOHN WESLEY---did not know what to do. So, he sought the Lord; and the Lord told him to go and preach in the streets of Bristol. He had never preached outside an ecclesiastical building. His soul was horrified with the thought...and he thought it was indecent, undignified, not worshipful to stand up in a dirty street with the dirty miners' faces looking at him and preach the pure word of God. But he said in his diary, "I consented to become more vile, and I began to preach in the Bristol streets." That was the beginning of the ***REVIVAL*** of the 18th century.

Just over 2,500 years ago, the young man ***JEREMIAH*** was called of God to preach. Unlike John Wesley, he had had no theological training, no experience of preaching to sympathetic congregations within church buildings. And God, in his late teens, said, "Jeremiah, I've called you. Now go and preach, and you'll have to do it in the streets. Just get out and preach. Whether you get a congregation or not, get out and preach."

And Jeremiah went out to preach his ***FIRST SERMON***---and we have just read it. Its theme was a pretty stark one. There are only one or two little rays of hope...of hope here. Jeremiah was a ***DOOM*** ***and*** ***GLOOM*** man, no question about that. And increasingly people are going to be unpopular who are doom and gloom men. There's now a wave of reaction against this. Lord Hailsham was interviewed this week by a journalist; and Lord Hailsham was asked what he thought of Britain now, and the journalist quoted to him something he said many, many years ago about Britain, "The glory of her future, and the strength of her character," et cetera. And the journalist said, would you stand by those words now? And he said, "No, I would not. We are now living in the city of destruction." And the journalist said to Lord Hailsham, "I regard that as hyperbole, exaggeration," and Lord Hailsham simply replied, "That is what they said to NOAH."

Now, Jeremiah was called to be a doom and gloom---not because this was a hopeless situation, but because the only way through it was to help people to realize the reality of what was going on. And that involved a ***PESSIMISTIC*** message. And this is almost a tirade. It's certainly an ***INDICTMENT***---but it's not an indictment by man, it's an indictment by God. God says, "I will contend with you," which is the legal term for, "I am the prosecution; and I put you in the dock, and I contend against you, and I will contend against your children and your children's children. I will contend with you until you realize the truth---until you can see what's happening to your nation clearly." And so that's what made Jeremiah go out and speak as the prosecution.

The whole sermon was full of ***QUESTIONS*** asked by God of the people that they might ***ANSWER*** these questions. Here are some of them: What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me? Has a nation anywhere changed its gods as you've done? Is Israel a slave or a born slave? Then, why have you become a prey to other nations? Have you not brought this upon yourself when you forsook God, who led you in the way? What do you gain by going to Egypt? What do you gain by getting into a common market with Assyria? What do you gain? How have you become degenerate and become a wild vine? How can you say, "I am not defiled?" Why do you complain against Me? Where are your gods that you made for yourself? Have I been a wilderness to Israel or a land of thick darkness? Why then do my people say, "We are free; we will come no more to Thee?" You have played the harlot with many lovers. Would you return to me?

Question, question, question. This is very direct preaching. It's asking fundamental questions of the people; and then also God (through Jeremiah) quotes the people's ***ANSWERS***, the sort of thing they are saying to Him. Here are some of them: You say, "I will not serve." You say, "I am not defiled." You say, "It is hopeless." You say, "We are free." You say, "I am innocent." You say, "I have not sinned." You say, you say, you say. And in the contrast between the questions which God gives demanding an answer and His quotations from their lips, you've got the feel of a tremendous dialogue of a frustrated, puzzled God who says, "Why have you done this to Me? Is the fault in Me? Can you point to anything in Me that has deserved this? Have I broken any promise I made to you? Have I done anything that should make you talk like this?"

Do you get the urgent feel? This is not just a polite sermon: "My text is, blah, blah, blah. Amen." This is a ***DIRECT ENCOUNTER*** between God and men through his servant. Now I've divided it up into ***SEVEN PARTS***---not so that we can get all analytical, but so that you can just remember seven things---seven notes that are struck in this first sermon of Jeremiah.

**Part 1: Holy Honeymoon (A Bride)**

***FIRST* OF ALL**, he talks of a ***HOLY HONEYMOON***...A holy honeymoon. That's where God starts, with nostalgia...With nostalgia. It was God who thought of marriage. Indeed, He thought of it because it would help us to understand Him. So, He said, *"Let us make man in our own image. So, He made man in His own image---male and female, made He them."* And there's something very profound in the relationship between a man and a woman. That should be a picture for us always of the relationship between God and His people. It is in the Old Testament---Israel is always regarded as the bride of God. And in the New Testament, the church is the same. "From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride." The sexual relationship is a perfect picture of the ***SPIRITUAL*** one. That's why this metaphor runs right through the Bible, and why the Song of Songs is in the middle of the Bible---a song which began as an erotic love song between a young boy and a young girl but has become a lovely expression of our love for the Lord. So, the two are very close.

And God not only thought of marriage, but He thought of ***HONEYMOONS***. And when He wanted to marry this nation---this people Israel---He made sure that they got a honeymoon with Him away from everywhere else...in a land not sown, where they would not be distracted with a lot of agriculture or industry. He took them out into a land where He could have her to Himself and she could have Him to herself, and they could be alone for their honeymoon. But then they got into the Promised Land, and they had to get down to digging the fields, and many distractions came. And here's God saying, "Can't you remember the honeymoon? Don't you remember how devoted you were to Me...how devoted I was to you? You had no one else. You loved Me so much in those days you were willing to go with me into a desert---a land not sown---where there was nothing for you but Me. You were willing to go anywhere with Me in those days. Now, you won't even cross the street. Now, you say, 'Where is the Lord?' But in those days, ah, you *really* loved Me?"

You get a glimpse of God's heart here, don't you? Do you get the feel of the frustration? God says, "You were *really* devoted," and the word he uses there which is translated 'devoted' is a Hebrew word I've used recently in the pulpit, 'chesed', which means 'utter loyalty', or 'true love', or ***'TROTH'***. And it's a word that's still used in marriage services when you give the ring or make the promise, "And thereto I pledge thee my troth." Troth, true love, chesed, which means not just, "I ***LOVE*** you," but, "I'm ***LOYAL*** to you." That was the kind of devotion. "You followed me wherever I led you. When the pillar of fire moved by night or the pillar of cloud by day. You followed me into a land not sown. You went anywhere. You'd have gone anywhere for Me. You didn't ask, 'What do I get out of this?' You didn't ask if it was going to be a pleasant land. You just went with Me into the wilderness. And because of that, you were very precious to Me, and I protected you and anybody who dared to touch you. I really let them have it---I was *jealous* for you. You were the first fruits of my harvest, and anybody who ate you, I dealt with them."

Now, what does it mean, *"The* ***FIRST FRUITS*** *of my harvest?"* Oh, here we've touched the deepest point of all, because this was God's great purpose: When He made the world---when He put people in it---He simply wanted a big family of children who would love Him and love each other. That was His ***HARVEST***. That's why He planted the earth in space. That's why He planted people on the earth. That's why He took the dust of the earth and made Adam. That's why He did it. And so, the first fruits of His harvest---the first bit of the human race He really got to himself---was this little nation of slaves. It was the first fruits, the beginning of a family of every tribe and kindred and tongue. This was His first family and, "I brought you out and You loved me; and for the first time in history, I had a family---first fruits of My harvest on earth. And now you have forsaken Me."

Now all this just opens up God's heart and helps us to see things from His point of view. You see, so often we are so self-centered that we think primarily that if we get away from God, we're going to suffer; and we think of what might go wrong in our life. But you just think of it from God's point of view. What does HE lose when you're away from Him? That's the way to look at it. And so, God talks about this holy honeymoon that they had, and He is saying something profound about Israel which is true of the world, and that is we are not a ***RISING*** people. We are a ***FALLEN*** people. The title of Darwin's book, 'The Ascent of Man', is the exact opposite of the Bible. The Bible talks of man ***DESCENDING***. And if you claim to me that man is 'descended' from the apes, if you mean by that that he's morally lower than the apes, I agree with you. We are not a rising race---whether it's Charles Darwin or a professing Christian like Teilhard de Chardin. Whoever says we're on the up and up and up, and we're getting better and better is just totally contrary to the Bible. According to the Bible, we are ***FALLEN***---we've come down from something ideal, all of us. The whole human race has.

In the Garden of Eden, there was perfect fellowship with God, perfect conditions for man's happiness, perfect environment--- everything was very good. We've fallen from that. We've not risen from our origins; we've fallen from them. Israel, too, has not risen over the years. She has fallen from her origins---from the honeymoon with God in the wilderness. Well, now that's the first note that's been struck. ***REMEMBER THE HEIGHT FROM WHICH YOU"VE FALLEN***.

***Part 2: Bad Business (A Businessman)***

Now in the ***NEXT SECTION***, verses 4 to 13, God accuses them of ***BAD BUSINESS***. I think this would appeal to the Jewish hearers. The key phrase is 'no profit'...'no profit'...'you've done a bad deal'. And to tell a Jew he's bad at business and has done a bad deal and has traded in such a way that he's worse off than he was before---you try telling that to a Jewish businessman. And Jeremiah got up. He said, "You once were on a holy honeymoon. Now you're just in a bad business, and you're trading in something ***GOOD*** for something far ***POORER***. You're trading in a ***LIVING SPRING*** for ***BROKEN CISTERNS***." Have you ever heard of such a thing ever happening anywhere in the world---a nation trading in a God who helped them for gods who couldn't help them? Well, I'm afraid we have heard of it, because Britain is doing it at this very moment, and it's bad business. There is no profit in it. Far from it. There's a loss in your accounts.

But let's see how he works this out. He says, "First of all, you have become ***DISTRACTED***...distracted from Me." You see, when they were in the wilderness there were no other distractions. There were no amusements. There was no agriculture. There was no industry. They got their bread direct from the Lord. They went out each day with baskets and collected what came straight from heaven. They got their water from the rock in the same way. They got everything straight from God. There was nothing else. And so, they were not distracted. And God says, *"I brought you through a land where no man dwells,"* and it's true. In 1967, the Egyptian army perished in less than three days in that peninsula through lack of food and water. And when you consider that God brought two and a half million people through that area and kept them and gave them everything they needed. And in Him they found all their needs met.

And so, that was the profit to them from following God---all their needs were met, and God kept his word and brought them through. And so, they came into a new land...and they came into a land where there was cultivated countryside. And so, they were now distracted with agriculture. They came into a land of sophisticated society. There were now entertainments and things that could fill their time. They came into a land of perverted practices which appealed immediately to the lower side of their nature---things they'd not seen in the wilderness. And above all they came into a land of rotten religion (of which I'll say something in a moment). And they were distracted. Suddenly there were too many things to look at, too many things to do, too many other things; and so, they stopped saying, "Where is the Lord?" The people forgot to say, "Where is the Lord?" The priests, the princes, the prophets, the rulers, the politicians---they just forgot to say, "Where is the Lord?"

Do you know the only thing you need to do to get away from God is to ***FORGET***. You don't need to do anything terribly bad. You just need to be ***DISTRACTED***. You just need to have so many things to do that you never ask, "Where is the Lord in all this? Where is the Lord?" And therefore, their food came to them less directly from Him; and so, they thought more of the second resource from which it came---just as nowadays, there are many children who never even dream that milk comes from cows. It doesn't. It comes from the dairyman...it comes from the supermarket. And so, you never think of the cow. And indeed, a television interviewer interviewed some children in East London who did not know that milk came from cows. They'd never had to think that.

And so, they were thinking of the ***SECONDARY*** resources; and we think more of the supermarket than we do of the God who gave the food in it, because it comes in a secondhand way. It's like the South Sea Islanders who worship the moon; and when you ask them why they worship the moon, they say, "Well, you see, it's like this: The sun only shines during the daytime when it's light. The moon shines at night when it's dark," and they have no idea that the light of the moon comes from the sun. So, they've forgotten the sun. Is that a picture of what's happening? "You got into this land. You got distracted. No longer did your bread come from down above---it didn't drop from heaven---it grew up in the earth, and you got distracted."

And so, we've become ***DISTRACTED*** with our bank manager, when it's God who gives us the money. We've become ***DISTRACTED*** with our supermarket, when it's God who gives us the bread. And we are so far removed now from the direct source of our livelihood that we are so much more distracted by the intermediate sources. And we just never stop to say, "Where is God in all this? Where is the Lord?" Just sheer distraction. And the result is, therefore, that, when you are distracted, you are ***DEFRAUDED***...You are defrauded. That happens in business. If someone's going to con you, he has to distract you. Have you noticed? If he's selling you a secondhand car, he won't show you the rusty bits. "Get in. Feel the seat," and he distracts you so that he can defraud you. And in the same way God says, "You've been so ***DISTRACTED***, you've been ***DEFRAUDED***."

"Take your water supply," He says (and this is a marvelous example). Now water supply in Israel is all important to life. Water is the fundamental source of life. Because the hills are limestone, the water goes straight through them; and therefore, water is a key issue---irrigation, storing water. Now happy are you if on your land you've got a living spring---a spring that never runs dry. There is such a one on Mount Carmel. I saw it last September, a spring that has never in all the centuries ever run dry. It was the one that Elijah used and was able to use after three and a half years of drought. And think of a spring on your land, where you can just go and draw water all the time---and the more you take out, the more comes back; and it's still there...**A *living* SPRING.**

Now, the other alternative is to hollow out a ***CISTERN***---to dig a hole in the rock, line it with clay, and store water. And you'll see many such pits in Israel. Of course, you have to fill it. And when you take water out it doesn't fill up again itself...You've got to get more to put in. And there's one serious drawback with a cistern in Palestine, and it's this: It is an earthquake area, and there are tremors; and therefore, most cisterns very quickly crack, and hairline cracks appear. There's a slight movement on the earth and the cistern's leaking...and your water's just going out all the time. So, you've not only got to keep filling it, but it keeps emptying, and it's a race to keep it full.

And Jeremiah says, "Look what you've traded. You've traded-in God--- a ***LIVING SPRING*** constantly supplying your needs, always welling up so that the more you draw from Him, the more there is to draw. And you've traded Him in for ***BROKEN CISTERNS*** that you've made yourself...that you've got to fill up...that leak like anything and go stagnant. And that's what you've traded. That's just ***BAD BUSINESS***. And I contend with you and your children until you realize it. Have you made a profit on this deal?" God says it's not only a ***SINFUL*** thing to have done, it's a ***SILLY*** thing to have done. It's a SURPRISING thing to have done. You read the early history of the human race. There isn't a case of a nation that switches gods--- especially when it's from a real God to a god who's not real. And so, to sum it up," Jeremiah says, "You've left God and gone after worthless things and therefore become worthless. You've gone after 'bubbles', and you've become 'hollow'." That's the meaning of the Hebrew. And if you go for unreal things, you become an unreal person. If you pin your hopes on hollow things---broken cisterns, just bubbles, hollow things, vanity, emptiness---you become an empty, worthless, hollow, vain person yourself.

I don't think I need labor this point, because you can see it happening all around you---people turning away from God as a living spring who could supply all their need and go on supplying it and putting their hope in their bank balance. That's a bit of a broken cistern now, isn't it? Leaking like mad. Putting their hopes in their possessions; and they've got to keep renovating them and keep buying more. Putting their hopes in some worldly pleasure; and you've got to keep putting into it to get anything out of it...and putting more into it to get more out of it. And so, we go on. And it's a ***BROKEN CISTERN***, and it's not a reliable source of meeting a need. It's just a bad business. And says God, "My people, you see, have committed TWO EVILS. The other nations haven't committed two evils. They're guilty of having idols. They are not guilty of having turned from the truth to idols. And so, My people have done TWO bad things. They've turned ***FROM*** Me, and they've turned ***TO*** the other things that the other nations already had."

Do you know what the word ***'WORSHIP'*** means? The word 'worship' means 'worth-ship', worth- ship. The T-H have got dropped out. 'Worth ship'. We are ***'WORTH-SHIPPING'*** God this morning. We're saying, "God, you really are worth worshiping. You are worth coming to." This is good business---to turn from these broken cisterns to a living spring. And so, we are making a profit this morning, right? And we're really ***GAINING*** by coming, not losing.

***Part 3: Becoming a National Non-entity (A Slave)***

Now let's look at the ***THIRD*** ***NOTE***. Come even more home here, I'm afraid. "You have become," says Jeremiah, "a national non-entity." A ***NATIONAL NON-ENTITY***. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry when I watched the first five minutes of 'The Last Night of the Proms' last night (Note: British classical music festivals). Have you ever seen a greater farce, a greater spoof, a greater send-up of patriotism than those flags waving---singing, "Land of hope and glory. Britons, Britons, Britons never, never, never shall be slaves." It is such a ***FARCE*** because it belongs to an era when we were somebody. Those songs came out of a day when God gave us stewardship of a large part of the world. But now it's as hollow as a ***BROKEN CISTERN***.

Now that's what happened to Israel. They'd been a nation to be reckoned with. They'd been a power in the Middle East. They'd been a key power under David. They had reached the heights of peace and prosperity and power that they were ever to know. But ***NOW*** look at them. They are a national nonentity. They're still saying, "We never, never, never shall be slaves," but they were slaves. They were being pushed around by other nations. And God says through Jeremiah, He says, "Were you ***BOUGHT*** as a slave?" Or the other way to become a slave, "Were you ***BORN*** to a slave?" And that's the two ways you got into slavery. You were either bought, or you were born into it. And God says through Jeremiah, "Why is it you're being pushed around? Why have you become prey to the nations? Why do they despise you now?"

Some years ago, the Africans coined the phrase about Britain, ‘a toothless lion’…A toothless lion. You don't respect a toothless lion. No longer to be reckoned with...second rate...other people's property to be pushed around. Now here, there are two vivid pictures, one of Jeremiah's, one of my own, just to make it more vivid. *First*, he says, "You've been in the lion's mouth." You've been in the lion's mouth. And if you go to the British Museum in London and go to the Assyrian room, you will see the stone monuments of bas-reliefs of lions, which show the lion of Assyria. This was the mighty symbol of this mighty nation. And Assyria had already been and devastated ten tribes of Israel, and 90% of their land was now lying waste and empty. And interestingly enough, it was now being inhabited by real lions, because now that there were no people to keep them down, they were over-breeding in the Jordan jungle, coming up into the former country of Israel, and literally, if you went through that country now, you came face to face with lions, not just Assyrians pretending to be lions, but ***REAL*** ones.

And so, Jeremiah says, "Look, 90% of our country has been in the lion's mouth." Or to put it in modern terms, how much of our empire has gone. And he says, "Now that you're out of the lion's mouth, you're just climbing on the tiger's back." Just climbing on the tiger's back. Now that's not his phrase, that's mine. That's what he's meaning. He's saying, "You're now trying to make friends with the powers that devastated you, and you think that's where your security lies." It's an extraordinary situation. But what strange things happen in alliances between the nations. Russia and America allies---25 years ago against the German eagle. 25 years later, Britain and Germany getting together hoping that that way lies security. It is incredible. We honestly think ***THIS*** will save us.

And I ask, as Jeremiah asked, "What do you gain by playing ***POWER POLITICS***, when the need is much, much deeper than that? Why do you never ask, "***WHY*** has all this happened?" Why do you never stop to think ***WHY*** has Britain become second rate and is on the way out? Why? Why don't you ever ask this basic question? All you ask is, "***HOW*** can we possibly stay up?" We can (we think) only do it by climbing on the tiger's back. We can only do it by getting into another big power bloc, recognizing a nation that has more money than we have and getting into league with them. That's all you can think of doing because you've never asked ***WHY*** there isn't a prime minister in the last 25 years who's asked ***WHY*** all this has happened. All they ask is ***HOW*** can we get out of it? Or ***HOW*** can we stay up reasonably? ***HOW*** can we keep up our own standard of living, even if we lose the empire? That's all we ask. And so, Jeremiah says, "You've never asked ***WHY***. Have you not brought this upon yourself?"

That's the answer. And he says, "It's no use going to Assyria and Egypt. They won't help you out. They won't help you out." In the Daily Telegraph this week, an astute writer said that the last British politician to apply Christian principles to his work was Sir Stafford Crips. Well, you may disagree with the statement, but there's an element of truth in that. It's not enough for a prime minister or anyone else to be ***SEEN*** in church and read the lesson. What we need are people who will ***APPLY*** the word of God to their politics, to the questions they ask of a situation, and the solutions they seek. And that's what Jeremiah is accusing these people of. He is accusing them of ignoring PRINCIPLE and simply living by EXPEDIENCY, of never asking the deeper question WHY, and only asking the shallow question HOW. And that is how we are conducting our affairs as a nation---as Israel did. You have become a national NON\_ENTITY. If you don't let GOD lead you as a nation, then OTHER nations will sooner or later lead you.

***Part 4: A Lover***

The ***FOURTH PICTURE*** changes from a bride, from a businessman, from a slave, to a ***LOVER***; and the picture changes and has strong sexual overtones. The reason for this is not just what I said earlier. The reason is that the ***ROTTEN RELIGION OF ISRAEL*** was ***DEIFIED SEX***. It was a fertility cult. Nature is beautiful. Nudity is natural. This was the kind of thinking in the rotten religion of ***CANAAN***. And when they came in, they were not only distracted by these things, they became ***PART OF THEM***. And so, these overtones are due to the fact they had committed a double prostitution---with ***GOD*** and with ***PEOPLE***. So, the two things went together, and *worship* became an *orgy*.

And so, here are some very blunt things. I hope they won't over- offend some sensitive spirits, but Jeremiah doesn't mind using very earthy pictures to try and show them what's happening. He first of all takes a picture from the ***PLANT WORLD***, and he said, "I sowed you as a choice vine." The word he uses is the ‘sorek’ vine, which is a beautiful quality red grape used for the best wine. And he said, "I sowed you a ***SOREK*** vine, quality red grapes. And what came up? Wild vines, ***WEEDS***." What do you do when weeds come up? You pull them out of the land, don't you? You dig them up. No point in leaving them there. They will pollute the land further by seeding the land with themselves. "What's gone wrong?" says God, "You've become ***DEGENERATED***. It's not just how you behave. There's something inside you gone wrong. You've degenerated in nature. A choice vine has become a wild one. How did that happen? And you've not only become degenerate, you've become ***DEFILED***."

And here the crudest picture he uses comes in. He says, "You're like a young she-camel in season or a wild ass in heat." Now let me bring that home. We have a lovely little dog, 'Trixie', as you know. And Trixie is normally very well behaved, normally very obedient, very cooperative, very friendly. She's our dog. She behaves that way. Indeed, for most of the year, she prefers us to other dogs and comes when we call, tells them to go away and snaps at them. But at certain times of the year, there's a total change in that picture--- ***TOTAL CHANGE***. She behaves as if she's not our dog. She's at the door wanting to get out. She goes into the garden just as soon as she thinks we're not watching. How she gets out, we don't know. She's off. And we find her with a lot of dogs up on the Dorth Down--- She's in season. And God says, "You seem to have got into a sinful season. You're like a young she-camel. You just seem driven away from me; and suddenly you're not my children anymore. You're running after anyone. You're like a she-ass sniffing the wind for the scent of a male. He doesn't have to come looking for you, ***you* go running looking for *him***."

It's a vivid picture, and a very telling one. And that's why, at the end of this little section, Israel says, "It's hopeless...we can't help it... we've loved too many people. It's an urge. We've just got to go." ***HOPELESS***. And it's a vivid picture of those who've got away from God and who get so caught up in other things. It may seem incredible to you that they should take a ***PURE*** religion of God and MIX it with others. That's what they were doing. They still kept up a formal acknowledgement of God---they still used His name for official occasions, they still had their 'Westminster Abbey' ceremonies in the Temple---but they had mixed all this other in with it. Now how can you possibly mix Christianity with other religions? ***WE*** do it. So how can we blame ***THEM***?

Every time a Christmas tree appears in a church at Christmas, we've incorporated the symbolism of a pagan festival right into something that's Christian, for the Christmas tree with lights goes back to the fertility cults of early Europe, and the nature rites that worshiped nature and the returning of spring and the ending of the shortest day with the returning light---the lights and the evergreen trees as the symbol of spring. It's pure ***NATURE WORSHIP***, but it comes in. The Bible never tells us in the New Testament to have a ‘harvest festival’ (a festival in England), but how we love harvest festivals.

Now, these are comparatively innocent mixtures; but you see, we soon bring a mixture in---and that's what they did, only THEIR nature worship was a little MORE DEGRADED than the kind of nature worship WE tend to bring in. So that we can understand HOW it happened. It doesn't excuse it, doesn't explain it; but God says, "WHY? What's gone wrong with you that you just must go for these things?"

***Part 5: A Resulting ‘Great Trouble’***

Now ***NUMBER FIVE***, note number five. There is only one end to such things: ***TROUBLE***, big trouble, a time of trouble. We think we can get away with it. I find a lot of British people at this time honestly believe that we'll pull through this the same way we pulled through other things. Why should we? A time of great trouble is coming for Jeremiah. Why? Because this is a moral universe. It is not based on ***CHANCE*** but on ***JUSTICE***. And therefore, trouble comes to this kind of thing. No one ever gets away with anything. There is a day of ***RECKONING***. Now the word 'crisis' in the Greek language is the word 'judgment'. K-R-I-S-I-S. 'Krisis' means 'judgment' in the Greek language. And therefore, whenever we say there's a crisis, we mean there is a judgment, and it is. ***CRISES ARE JUDGMENTS***!

And now God says, "When that crisis comes, you are going to be **disgraced** and **deserted**,"---disgraced in the same embarrassed way as a professional thief when he's caught by the police just leaving the house with a bag of loot over his shoulder. Have you seen that happen? You'll know how embarrassed the thief looks. There's really no way out of that situation. There's no way to retain your dignity when you're caught in that situation. No way. If they say, "What are you doing with that?" And you say, "Well, I'm just putting it back." There's just no answer. You have nothing to say for yourself. Nothing. And that's why most of them just go silent. There's nothing you can say if you're caught red-handed. And as a thief is shamed, so the ***PRINCES***, the ***PRIESTS***, the ***PROPHETS***, the ***POLITICIANS*** of Israel will all be ashamed. They'll have nothing to say in the time of trouble. And more than that they'll be deserted, because then they will say, "Save us, save us, save us," and God almost laughs in irony and says, "Okay, you've got as many gods as you have cities. Where are they? Where are they?"

And here comes a profound principle---which applies not only to nations but to individuals. The ***TEST*** of the reality of your religion is this: Will it help you when the time of trouble comes? It's all right when you're affluent, when you're comfortable. You can afford to play around and dabble in all kinds of faiths. But the real test of faith is, when the time of trouble comes, ***WILL THAT RELIGION HELP YOU***? Let me apply it individually. When tragedy invades your family, will your faith help you at that time? Faith in your own gods will not help you. They will not come to save you. But faith in the ***REAL GOD*** will save you.

What about the trouble of death? For it is a time of trouble---a time of real trouble which none of us look forward to (in itself, I'm meaning now...not what lies beyond). None of us look forward to this time of trouble. We hope it will be an easy time for us. Will your religion help you at that time? Will your God see you through? Oh, when things are going well you can dabble with a Ouija board. You can play around with any religion you like. But when you come to ***DIE***, will *your* God ***SAVE*** you? And the biggest time of trouble that will come to every man is the day when he stands naked before God in the day of judgment, "For it is appointed to every man to die, and after that the judgment." Will his gods help him at that time? And the answer is, he will be deserted unless he has the ***ONE TRUE GOD***, for there is no other.

"And so, Israel," says Jeremiah, "you're heading for a time of trouble. Will ***YOUR GODS*** see you through that trouble? The answer is, 'No!!' They leave you alone. You'll be embarrassed like a thief caught red-handed, and you will look so silly. You've said to a ***TREE***, 'You're my father.' You've said to a lump of ***ROCK***, 'You gave me birth.' What will ***THEY*** do for you when you're in the time of trouble? Will the ***tree*** bend down and pick you up? Will the ***stone*** bend over and sustain you? Never." Clever preaching. It's irony. And it hurts.

***Part 6: Placing Blame on God***

Note ***NUMBER SIX***. Here we're reminded of the incredible inconsistency of human thinking. And that is that---when we're in trouble---we can always see that God is to blame. We can never see that ***WE*** are. Isn't it extraordinary? When we get into a real jam, we complain against God. "Why did God allow the Second World War?" So many people said that during the war. "Why does God do it? Why isn't He doing something? Why? Why? Why?" Complaining against God. And the implication is that, if you blame God for the troubles that come, then you've got to say honestly, "That's because I believe I am innocent. I have not sinned. I've done nothing to deserve this."

A television interviewer this week went to Lichey. Do you remember that place? Can you think back that far? Eight days ago, they had an earthquake. Such is the speed of modern mass media that we forget things within a week. But Lichey had an earthquake eight days ago...No, a little more, 10 days ago now. And an interviewer said to a man sitting in the ruins, "Why did this happen? Why do you think this happened?" And the man said, "It was the will of Allah," which is the proper answer for a Muslim, for the word 'Muslim' means 'surrendered one'. 'Islam' means 'submission', and they are fatalists in their religion. So, he said, "It is the will of God." And the interviewer said then, "Why do you think God then decided to do this to your village?" And the man said, "Because of the sinners here."

Now, what is ***YOUR*** reaction to that conversation? Do you have a ***WORLDLY*** reaction or the reaction that ***JESUS CHRIST*** had to a conversation like that? And do you know what they were? The worldly reaction is, "I can't accept that, because those people were innocent. They were as innocent as we were; and therefore, they didn't deserve it." Now that's a worldly reaction. That's how fallen intellect thinks. "We are basically innocent people. None of us deserve such tragedy. Therefore, they were as innocent as we are. And therefore, it's wrong to say that God did it."

That was not the reaction of our Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus was asked about a disaster---a collapsed skyscraper that killed a number of people---and they asked Him, *"Were these greater sinners than anybody else because they had this tragedy?"* Do you know what His reaction was? *"You are* ***ALL*** *guilty, and you* ***ALL*** *deserve it; and unless you repent, you will* ***ALL*** *likewise perish."* Now, isn't that a different reaction? The unbelievers' reaction is, "We are all innocent, so the people of Lichey didn't deserve it." Christ's reaction is, "The people of Lichey were guilty and did deserve it; and so, do ***YOU***. And that disaster should be a reminder to ***YOU*** that ***YOU*** need to get right with God in case disaster struck ***YOU***." What a difference of reaction.

But, you see inherently we're so big-headed that we think we're innocent---that we've never done anything to deserve tragedy. The most extraordinary case of that I came across was a man of 96 in the hospital. I went to visit him, and he said, "I don't know what I've done to deserve this." He said, "I've always lived a good, clean, upright life." I said, "Have you've never been ill in your life?" He said, "Never!" "You've never been in hospital?" "Never." He said, "I don't know what I've done to deserve this," all innocence. At 96! First trip to hospital; and he was out again in 10 days, fit and well. But he thought that 10 days in hospital was most unjust of God.

Now that's an extreme case, but he was simply saying what comes naturally to fallen nature. We complain against God and say, "God, why have you done this?" And God says, "I've told you why I've done it, and all you do is kill My prophets. You don't want to know." "Why have you done this, Lord? I'm innocent. I have not sinned." He said, "Look at you. The blood of innocent people is on your skirts. You gad-about as lightly as this. You trot off to Egypt and Assyria. You pay no attention to ***ME***---I'm your husband. And you say, 'I have not sinned. I'm innocent.'" It's an incredible thing that we can think like this. Can a bride forget her wedding dresses, God? "Can a bride forget her wedding dress? Yet you've forgotten ***ME*** days without number. You complain against ***ME***. You dare to blame ***ME*** for disasters. You're not innocent. If you run to Egypt you'll come back with your head in your hands, nursing your bruises and hiding your shame."

It's an important reminder to us that sin affects, unfortunately, our ***INTELLECT*** as well as our ***MORAL*** life. It affects our thinking so that we can't think straight, and we think everybody's innocent and doesn't deserve any disaster. And when disaster comes, we blame God for it. We just can't think straight. And so, we come to the final note in this sermon.

***Part 7: Hypocritically Running Back to God***

From a loving ***BRIDE***, Israel has become a hardened ***HARLOT***, living a dissolute life. And the extraordinary thing is that her feelings are so unsensitized that unashamedly, when trouble comes, she comes trotting back to God expecting Him to receive her. That is the incredible thing. And so, God says, "Listen, even at the human level, if a wife runs off and plays the harlot and has many lovers, does she think she can just walk back into a partnership? Does she think the husband can just have her back?" This is what Hosea said to the ten tribes in the north; and now Jeremiah has to say it to the two tribes in the south. "Do you honestly think you can just walk back in, as if nothing had happened?" And here now comes a very extraordinary thing.

He says, "You've come to me because I've stopped the rain. You now realize that all this fertility cult doesn't control the rain. All this nature worship doesn't control the rain. And I stopped the rain. Now, you come crawling back to me. You realize that your real ***SECURITY*** lies with ***ME***, that your real ***HOPE*** lies with ***ME***...and you come crawling back to ***ME***." And he says, "You call me ***father*** and ***friend*** when you are my ***divorced wife***." Now, I find that so incredibly real a picture, but get the feel of it. Here's a wife who has run off and played around with so many people that she is divorced. And then she comes back with a sort of smarmy approach, grinning on her face and saying, "You're not really angry with me, are you? You see, I just look on you as a kind of fatherly friend. Let's keep it platonic. Can't I come back and just have you as a ***FATHER*** and a ***FRIEND***? I'm not really happy to have you as a ***HUSBAND***, you see, because that's a bit of an exclusive relationship, isn't it? And I've really got rather fond of a lot of other people. But can't we just be friends? Can't you be a father to me?" Can you imagine that happening in real life? Well, it does! It does.

And so, you get him and her having sampled otherwise, saying to the press, "We're just good friends again, just good friends." No? Mickey Rooney was married for the eighth time this week...or last week. And his eighth wife said, "None of his other wives understood him, but I'm going to be different." The incredible ***DELUSION***, incredible delusion. And so, says Jeremiah, "You come crawling back to God because the rain has stopped." You come crawling back for National Day of Prayer, and you say, "*Father*, *Friend*." But God says, "I am your ***HUSBAND***---your holy husband in holy matrimony. Do you think you can come back and just have me as a ***FRIEND***?" You see, this is true to our human nature. Wouldn't we much rather have God as a *father* and a *friend* than have him in holy matrimony? And then we can play around with *other* things. But God says, "The only relationship I will have with you is an exclusive one and, *'Keep thee only unto her, so long as you both should live.'"* That's what it's got to be. You can't have God as ***FATHER***, you can't have God as ***FRIEND***, unless you have him as ***HUSBAND*** in holy matrimony---***together*** ***forever***, and ***exclusively together***.

What a message. And so, beginning the sermon with the honeymoon, he now says, "You come back as ***HOLY WIFE*** or not at all." Not at all. There's no in-between. No in between. Why? Because God says, in the last sentence of this sermon, "I'm sick of hearing what you ***SAY*** and having to watch what you ***DO***. Your words and deeds don't match. I hear what you speak. I hear your prayers, but I know you just go out and do the opposite. **“This people worship me with their LIPS," said Isaiah, "but their HEART is far from me."** It's a bit depressing, isn't it? It's a depressing sermon. And the big question that may be left in your minds by Jeremiah's first sermon is this: Did he hope that they would come back? Or did he think it was too far gone, the situation? Was he a ***PESSIMIST*** or an ***OPTIMIST***?

Well, there are just one or two gleams of ***HOPE***. But Jeremiah knew---he knew---that they could not come back as they were and that they could not change. The leopard couldn't change its spots, the Ethiopian his skin. And so, he, in a sense, had no hope. He knew that God ***WANTED*** them back. He knew that God ***LOVED*** them still. But ***NO REAL HOPE*** comes through this sermon---that they will respond to his sermon. Now, I'll tell you why: Because God knew that it would need ***MORE*** than a Jeremiah to do the trick. God knew that He'd have to send His only Son Jesus to bring a ***NEW COVENANT***, not an old one, but a new one. And this Jeremiah realized later; and in chapter 31 (we'll talk about it) ---a new covenant that would be sealed in His blood. "This is My blood of the new covenant." Jeremiah later realized that God would have to do something totally ***NEW*** and would have to change the leopard and give a ***NEW*** ***nature*** and make a ***NEW*** ***covenant***. And hallelujah! What Jeremiah would never be able to have done, Jesus has come and done; and there's a ***NEW BRIDE*** for the Lord. There's a ***NEW HARVEST***. There's a ***NEW FAMILY***. There are ***NEW CHILDREN*** who love him. There's a holy matrimony again. And God loves his people.

What a sermon. What a sermon. And that was Jeremiah's FIRST sermon as a young man in the streets of Jerusalem. Did they listen? Did he get more than two or three curious people listening? I just do not know. The important thing is that the word of God has to be preached. And when it is preached, the Holy Spirit of God can move. ***BUT IF GOD HAS SPOKEN, WHO CAN BE SILENT???*** Let us pray.

“Father, it hasn't been an enjoyable experience of preaching this passage or listening to it this morning, but it's Your word. And Lord, we realize that You have a heart of such love that You want a family on earth who love You exclusively, and who are not distracted by many other things. Oh God, search our hearts, we pray, as we study this word. Save us from ever making it an intellectual exercise. We read these scriptures to make us wise, not to make us clever or knowledgeable. And so, Lord, go on speaking to us; and as we take bread and wine to celebrate that new covenant---that new marriage of which the symbols are bread and wine---Lord, make us your holy bride, for Christ's sake. Amen.”