

All things praise thee, Lord most high,

Heaven and earth and sea and sky.

All were for thy glory made,

That thy greatness, thus displayed,

Should all worship bring to thee.

All things praise thee; Lord, may we.

***Singing*** (3 minutes)

Shall we turn now to the word of God? The book of the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 8, verse four through to chapter 9. We've only got seven chapters studied so far; but already Jeremiah is speaking to us very profoundly. I had a bit of a personal crisis when I realized that God wanted this book to be taken, because I just guessed at some of the reactions there would be---and those have already started in quite a big way. For those who simply go to church to have a bit of a cheer-up are already saying, "Isn't it depressing to go to church on Sunday morning?"

The truth is **DEPRESSING**---because God has to ***HUMBLE*** before he can ***EXALT***. He has to show us ***OURSELVES*** before we can see ***HIMSELF***. And this book of Jeremiah, if we really **STUDY** it and really ***LIVE*** it and really ***SPEAK*** it out boldly, well, we shall be unpopular. I need no commentary on this book at the moment, but my daily paper. That's the only commentary I need. So, let's read together chapters eight and nine.

*When men fall, do they not rise again? If one turns away, does he not return? Why then has this people turned away in perpetual backsliding? They hold fast to deceit; they* ***REFUSE*** *to return. I have given heed and listened, but they have not spoken aright. No man repents of his wickedness saying, "What have I done?"*

*Everyone turns to his own course like a horse plunging headlong into battle. Even the stork in the heavens knows her times; and the turtledove, swallow, and crane keeps the time of their coming. But my people know not the ordinance of the Lord. How can you say, "We are wise, and the Law of the Lord is with us?" But behold, the false pen of the scribes has made it (the Law) into a lie. The wise men shall be put to shame. They shall be dismayed and taken; lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord, and what wisdom is in them? Therefore, I will give their wives to others, and their fields to conquerors; because from the least to the greatest,* ***EVERYONE*** *is* ***GREEDY*** *for unjust gain. From prophet to priest, everyone deals falsely.*

*They have healed the wound of my people lightly saying, "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." Were they ashamed when they committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed. They did not know how to blush. Therefore, they shall fall among the fallen. When I punish them, they shall be overthrown," says the Lord. "When I would gather them," says the Lord, "there are no grapes on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree. Even the leaves are withered; and what I gave them has passed away from them."*

*Why do we sit still? Gather together. Let us go into the fortified cities and perish there. For the Lord, our God has doomed us to perish and has given us poisoned water to drink because we have sinned against the Lord. We looked for peace, but no good came; for a time of healing but behold, terror. The snorting of their horses is heard from Dan---at the sound of the name of their stallions, the whole land quakes. They come and devour the land and all that fills it, the city and those who dwell in it. "For behold, I am sending among you serpents, adders which cannot be charmed, and they shall bite you," says the Lord.*

*My grief is beyond healing. My heart is sick within me. Hark! The cry of the daughter of my people from the length and breadth of the land: "Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her king not in her?"*

*"Why have they provoked Me to anger with their graven images and with their foreign idols?"*

***THE HARVEST IS PAST AND THE SUMMER HAS ENDED, AND WE ARE NOT SAVED!*** *For the wound of the daughter of my people, is my heart wounded. I mourn; and dismay has taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored? Oh, that my head were waters and my ears a fountain of tears, that I might* ***WEEP*** *day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people. Oh, that I had in the desert a wayfarers' lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them. For they are* ***ALL*** *adulterers, a company of treacherous men.*

*"They bend their tongue like a bow---falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land. For they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me," says the Lord. Let everyone beware of his neighbor and put no trust in any brother. For every brother is a supplanter, and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. Everyone deceives his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth. They have taught their tongue to speak lies. They commit iniquity and are too weary to repent. Heaping oppression upon oppression and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me," says the Lord.*

*Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts: "Behold, I will refine them and test them---for what else can I do, because of my people? Their tongue is a deadly arrow. It speaks deceitfully with his mouth. Each speaks peaceably to his neighbor, but in his heart, he plans an ambush for him. Shall I not punish them for these things?" says the Lord. "And shall I not* ***AVENGE MYSELF ON A NATION SUCH AS THIS?*** *Take up weeping and wailing for the mountains and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness, because they are laid waste so that no one passes through. And the lowing of cattle is not heard; both the birds of the air and the beasts have fled and are gone. I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a lair of jackals; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation without inhabitant."*

*Who is the man so wise that he can understand this? To whom has the mouth of the Lord spoken that he may declare it. Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness so that no one passes through? And the Lord says, "Because they have forsaken my Law, which I set before them and have not obeyed my voice, or walked in accord with it, but have stubbornly* ***FOLLOWED THEIR OWN HEART*** *and have gone after the Baals as their fathers taught them."*

*Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel. "Behold, I will* ***FEED*** *this people with wormwood and give them poisonous water to drink. I will* ***SCATTER*** *them among the nations whom neither they nor their fathers have known; and I will* ***SEND*** *the sword after them until I have consumed them." Thus, says the Lord of hosts, "Consider and call for the mourning women to come, send for the skillful women to come. Let them make haste and raise a WAILING over us that our eyes may run down with tears and our eyelids gush with water. For a sound of WAILING is heard from Zion: 'How we are ruined! We are utterly shamed because we have left the land, because they cast down our dwellings.'"*

*Here, O women, the word of the Lord and let your ear receive the word of his mouth. Teach to your daughters a lament, and each to her neighbor a dirge. For death has come up into our windows. It has entered our palaces, cutting off the children from the streets and the young men from the squares. Speak, thus says the Lord, "The dead bodies of men shall fall like dung upon the open field--- like sheaths after the reaper---and none shall gather them." Thus says the Lord. "Let not the wise man glory in his* ***WISDOM****. Let not the mighty man glory in his* ***MIGHT****. Let not the rich man glory in his* ***RICHES****. But let him who glories glory in this: that he* ***UNDERSTANDS*** *and* ***KNOWS ME****, that I am the Lord who practice steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in* ***THESE*** *things, I delight," says the Lord. "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "When I will punish all those who are circumcised but yet* ***UNCIRCUMCISED****---Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert that cut the corners of their hair; for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of ISRAEL is uncircumcised in HEART.'"*

***Crucial Question: What KIND of a God Do We Believe In???***

Well, I think you've got the ***KEY VERSE*** of this morning's study. *"Let not the wise men glory in his wisdom. Let not the mighty men glory in his might. Let not the rich men glory in his riches. But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me."* The great division in this country is not between those who believe in God and those who don't, but between those who believe in one kind of God and those who believe in another. That is a **FAR MORE** **IMPORTANT** **QUESTION** to us: not whether we believe in God, but what ***KIND*** of a God we do or do not believe in?

And if I can perhaps just oversimplify, I believe the great battle in religious circles in this country is between a ***SENTIMENTAL*** view of God and a ***SCRIPTURAL*** view of God. Most people in this country (according to a Gallup poll done by independent television) believe in God. But when you ask them what ***KIND*** of a God you believe in, it's so utterly ***DIFFERENT*** from the God of the Bible---even here in so-called Christian England. Let me tell you what I mean.

You'll never get to know a person until you listen to what he says and ***LET HIM SPEAK FOR HIMSELF.*** And nearly 4,000 times in this book there occurs a single phrase which occurs 15 times in the lesson I read for you. Did you notice it? ***"THUS SAYS THE LORD."*** And the only view of God that is the ***TRUE*** view is the God who has spoken here. Either we believe in the ***SCRIPTURAL*** God who has talked to us about himself and revealed his heart---how he thinks, how he feels, what his reaction is to situations. Only if we believe ***THAT*** God, are we in touch with reality. We may believe in a God who we have constructed in our ***OWN IMAGE*** (and I'm afraid there's such a gulf between us and God, that if you do that kind of thing, you'll get to a very false God) or you believe in the God who thought to make us in ***HIS* IMAGE**, an image in us which has been severely distorted.

***A Sentimental View of God, or a Scriptural One?***

Let me pinpoint one thing that came out in the reading I gave you, which you may not have noticed as I read. A ***SENTIMENTAL*** view of God is of a God who would never hurt a fly, it is of a God who would never punish someone, it is of a God who cares very deeply and loves very deeply but would never kill a man. Now that is a sentimental view of God. And it's the view of God which the ***MAJORITY*** of people who believe in God in this country hold. But as I read through these two chapters to you, five times God says, *"I will* ***poison*** *you."* And a ***SCRIPTURAL*** view of God is of a God who will poison people. Now that's where the sentimental view of God and the scriptural view of God just cannot meet. And you have to ask yourself, "What ***KIND*** of a God do I believe in? A God who would never kill anybody, and a God who would put poison in people's drink and kill them?"

Now, why would God poison someone? What sort of a God is it who would poison people? By the way, if you want the verses, you'll find them. Verse 14, verse 17 of chapter eight. You'll find it again verse 8, verse 15 of chapter nine. And on one or two other occasions, the very word is used, *"I will give them* ***POISON*** *to drink, and it will* ***KILL*** *them."* Why would somebody kill...poison? Why would God do it? Well, there's been a lot of discussion in the last three years about the situation in which someone is suffering so severely that somebody else who loves them so much will poison them to put them out of suffering. Parents have been doing this to children. Wives have been doing it to husbands. Indeed, there have been some critical legal cases recently about this, as you well know. And there is a discussion going on in medical circles (and wider than that, even at this day) as to whether you shouldn't put someone out of misery and give them a pill to stop them suffering. You see, already, we are within this area of killing to stop someone suffering. That's what some of the parents have said in court when they've strangled their baby. And they have been getting lighter and lighter sentences for doing this---and in some cases, suspended sentences or nothing at all.

They are doing it because they can't bear to see their children's suffering. That's why they're doing it. And I'm not going into the rights and wrongs of that now. It'll take too long. It's a very deep issue. But I want you to try and understand that God feels the same way about his children's sinning. That's how he feels. He would rather they were dead than doing what they're doing. And you can't understand a heavenly father's heart until you've got right into this--- until you see the kind of God who can't even bear to look at iniquity. And to him, the thought of his children going on sinning forever is so much that he made the law: *"In the day you sin, you die."* It is he who made that law because he'd rather see his children dead than sinning perpetually. And that is the truth. And so, while there are some people who would rather kill someone than see them go on suffering, God is the kind of God who would rather kill someone than see them going on ***SINNING*** indefinitely. And that's what comes out in this chapter. And here's the God who has got to the point where he feels it so keenly that he says, *"I have got to* ***poison*** *you. I just can't stand it anymore seeing you go on doing this."*

And it is perhaps a comment on our state of heart and mind, that we can understand somebody doing this to their child to stop the child going on suffering, we can't understand it of a father who would do it to stop his child sinning. Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, who will be speaking in this building in a few months time, he understands this; and I've told you of the occasion when he discovered this. He and a fellow Christian pastor were in a communist cell (in Romania) behind the iron curtain. And every day, his fellow pastor was taken to the torture chamber and subject to indescribable indignities and cruelties and pain to make him deny the faith. Day after day, he held out and remained true to Jesus. But one day, they flung him back into the cell half-dead. And he said to Richard Wurmbrand, "Richard, tomorrow I'm going to deny Christ. I can take no more. I can't take any more. And tomorrow, I'm going to deny Christ. I just can't face it again. They've broken me." And that night, Richard couldn't get to sleep, and he lay awake worried about his brother going to sin tomorrow morning. And he finally found that in his weakness, this thought came into his mind. He thought, "If I killed him tonight, he would get to heaven without this denial of Christ on his soul." And he stole over to the other bunk, and he put his hands around this man's throat as he slept and was going to squeeze the life out of him and kill him to stop him sinning. And at that moment, the man opened his eyes and said, "What are you doing?" And Richard said, "Well, I was going to kill you. Couldn't bear the thought of you sinning tomorrow in denying Christ." And you know, that fact that Richard was prepared to do this for his fellow pastor saved that pastor from denying Christ; and he went through the next day without denial---and the next and the next...until about 10 days later, he died in the torture. But he didn't deny Christ.

But Richard had got to the point where he would rather kill a man than have him go on sinning. Now, that was a little touch of the holiness of God getting into Richard Wurmbrand's soul. And we're nowhere near that holiness, so we don't feel this. We would feel it about somebody suffering appallingly. And I think most of us have had times when we would've wished to put someone out of their suffering. But you've got to be very near to God. And you've got to understand and know God terribly well, to understand that that's how God feels about sinning, and that he would kill a person to stop sin going on, spoiling his universe, and that he would give ***POISON*** to drink.

And ***five times*** in chapter 8 and 9, the scriptural God---not the ***sentimental*** one, the ***scriptural*** God, the Holy God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ---said, *"I must give you poison to drink. This has got to stop. Can't bear it in my world, in my holy land, in my holy city. It just can't go on anymore."* Now, does that tell you what I mean by the ***SENTIMENTAL*** and the ***SCRIPTURAL*** God? The things I've just said would horrify most people in this country who believe in God, and they would say, "I just can't believe...you must be sick, you must be mad to preach a God like that." But there it is in God's word. And either, ***'THUS, SAYS THE LORD,'*** is true or it's not. Either he said that about himself, or he didn't. There are no two ways about it. It fortunately, doesn't matter in the slightest whether you believe what David Pawson says or believes or not, it doesn't matter in the slightest; but it does matter what you say about, *'Thus, says the Lord,'* here. Is this God speaking? Is this the kind of God who really exists?

Well, now in the rest of this morning, I want to look at these two chapters and see that in fact, the situation is being viewed from ***THREE POINTS OF VIEW***; from ***JEHOVAH’S*** point of view, or God's point of view, then from ***JEREMIAH'S*** point of view (and he has very different feelings to God), and then from the ***PEOPLE'S*** point of view---Judah's point of view, the Jewish point of view (and they have different feelings again). And you can look at the same situation and ***GOD*** has one kind of feeling, the ***PROPHET*** has another, and the ***PEOPLE*** have a third. And you can tell where everybody is from the kind of reactions they have to the same situation. And I believe that God has a different attitude to the situation in Britain to most of us. I think he takes it 10 times more seriously than any of us do. Do you remember when I read that prophecy given on the 15th of July this year in London, in which God took the situation desperately seriously and promised that he would take the ***BRAKES*** off the evil powers in this country until London streets ran with the blood of innocent people. And since that prophecy, we've had bomb after bomb, after bomb, after bomb. And it was all predicted by God on the 15th of July, long before it happened. That's how seriously God takes the situation. That's why I think we can't play around appealing to people of goodwill. We've got to go very, very much deeper than that, till people realize that those bombs in London are the direct result of God saying it's got to ***STOP*** ...it's got to stop. Until we open our newspapers and see God's hand in the headlines, we haven't got deep enough or serious enough about the situation.

***The Situation From God's Point of View: No Profit to Him***

Now, let's look ***FIRST*** then from ***GOD'S*** point of view as he looks down. You do get a different viewpoint when you're a bit higher up. Do you ever climb a mountain? Sometimes, I've gone up the Hog's Back here. And one morning---I remember one Sunday morning before church---I walked up the Hog's Back, and the whole of Guildford was in a morning mist, and the cathedral was standing on top of the mist---you couldn't even see the grass around the cathedral. It was just there with the gleaming angel on top. One had a kind of vision of the church just rising above.

And somehow, I saw Guildford in a new light that morning...just saw things differently. You look down and you see the little street. So, when you get in an airplane, have you ever had the feeling (I have)... you come up out of London airport and you look down and you see tiny little people like ants, and then little cars like ants? And you see it's so small and you think, "Those people think their problems are big, but aren't they tiny?" Have you had that feeling?

Well, come up now with me to the highest heavens; come up now with me and sit with God looking down on the whole mess. How does he feel about it? What does he think about it? How does he react? I'm going to tell you how God reacts. He says, *"You know, the only part of nature that isn't natural is human nature."* That's how he reacts. He says, "*How human beings behave contrary to their natural instincts? In many ways people are sensible; but in religious realms, how utterly foolish and stupid they are."* That's how God sees it. Comes out at the beginning of our reading.

Here are some normal things. What happens when a child falls down? Instinctively, they pick themselves up, right? And isn't that what you do when you fall down? Instinctively, you pick yourself up. Why do you not do it ***SPIRITUALLY***, when you do it physically? It's the ***NATURAL*** thing to do. "When a man falls, does he not pick himself up," says God. "Or when a man gets off his route when he strays, does he not try and find his way back?" You are going on holiday in your car and you're following the map and you've got onto a wrong road? What do you do? Instinctively, you say, "Well, let's find the ***RIGHT*** road, let's get back onto it." And immediately, you do something about it and get back on. Why do you not do it ***SPIRITUALLY***? It's the instinct of a natural thing to do.

And God even looks at nature, and he says, *"Look, nature does what I tell it. The birds---look at the way the birds migrate. The swallow knows when to head for Africa and when to head back."* The swallow knows it's got a homing instinct and it follows that homing instinct. I used to keep pigeons, and just fascinating to let them loose and see them circle three times, and see them get a bearing, and then head straight for home. They head straight for the place they came from. Why don't people do that? We came from God. Why don't we head for him? Why don't we let our instinct take over? There is a religious instinct. It is ***NATURAL*** for men to be godly. It's ***NATURAL*** for man when he is in a jam to say, "Oh God." It's ***NATURAL***. It's an instinct. It's there in us. It's as much part of us as the bird's homing instinct.

And so, God says, *"The stork knows how to go, and the swallow knows, and the turtledove knows. But look at those people. They FALL, they don't pick themselves up. They STRAY from the right path, they don't immediately say, ‘Let's get right back to the right path.’ They come from me, and they should be coming home to me, and their heart is filled with INSTINCT of me and to find me. And do they follow that instinct? They'll follow anything else, but. They'll listen to anything but the Bible. They'll study any religion but Christianity. They'll go anywhere but try and get back onto the right track.”*

And God looking down says, *"The* ***ONLY*** *part of nature that doesn't behave naturally is* ***HUMAN*** *nature. They have to bury their instincts. They have to go* ***AGAINST*** *their natural inclinations to be ungodly.”* Now, is that not true? How many people have you seen in a jam, and how religious they can become? Nothing makes a man religious like knowing he's going to be hung. It's amazing how a ***CRISIS*** puts us immediately in a ***RELIGIOUS*** frame of mind. "Oh God!" we cry instinctively. And it's deep down there. "You've made us for yourself," says St Augustine, "our hearts can find no rest until they find their rest in you." But is that what people are trying to do? Are people crowding into churches this day to say, "I must find God, I must get home to God. I must get back to God. I must have this instinct for God satisfied. I must find him at all costs." Do they say that? ***NO***!!

So, in ***PHYSICAL*** ways, we behave ***INSTINCTIVELY***. In ***SPIRITUAL*** ways, we do precisely the ***OPPOSITE***. And so, God looks down at this unnatural folly. The ***WORST*** part of it is, of course, that they think they ***DO*** know the laws of God when they ***DON'T***---because they've got the scriptures, because they've got their Bible. And in verse 8 onwards, the prophet says, *"You may have a Bible, but your preachers can make it say what they like."* And to me, the tragedy of our land is not so much that people don't have the Bible, as that the bits of it they do, they have such a ***DISTORTED*** understanding of it.

I could take this book and prove ***ANYTHING*** I like from it. You can mishandle the word of God, *"You can rest them to your own destruction,"* as Peter says. You can ***twist*** them until they mean the ***opposite*** of what they say. And this is the tragedy. And this is the ***TRAGEDY***: that men profess to read this book and to preach it; but they can twist it until it cuts-out that scriptural God...until there's no God left who would poison people rather than have them go on sinning, and until you're left with a mushy, sentimental, grandfather of a sort of God whom you don't ***FEAR***. There's a letter going into the Surrey advertiser this week which criticizes me for saying that the archbishop should teach us to fear God ***MORE*** than we fear unemployment, or violence, or inflation. And the letter said, "But Jesus came to deliver us from all our fears. There should be no fear in Christians." I don't read my New Testament like that. I read Peter's letter, *"Fear God, and honor the king." "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."* That's what God says in my Bible. And even Jesus himself, whom this lady quotes*, "Is coming to cast out all fear."* What did Jesus say? He said, *"Fear not those who can kill the body; but rather fear him who can destroy body and soul in hell. Fear him."*

There is a godly fear which belongs to a ***SCRIPTURAL*** God, and we can't get round this. If you get pally with the deity and lose your reverence and your awe, it's not the ***SCRIPTURAL*** God you've found, it's the ***SENTIMENTAL*** God. Oh yes, I know, *"Perfect love casts out fear."* Praise God. When perfect love fills this world and fills my whole being, then I won't need any more fear of God. But I know perfectly well that my love is not yet perfect; and I need to fear God for those things that need to be perfected.

And so, we have the ***LAW***, but you don't fear God. *"You heal the wound of my people lightly; you say it'll be all right if we all have just one big effort."* Did you see that letter in the advertiser this week that said, "What we need to do is to sit down and put on a record of Elgar's music," and that, "if we all listen to Elgar's music: *'Land of Hope and Glory',* we'll all suddenly become filled with national spirit, and the problem will be over." I ask you...I ask you, *"The turtledove knows where to go and the stork knows where to go,"* and we are advised to listen to Elgar's music. And that was a serious suggestion---sincerely put forward---to get our nation out of its troubles. Well, it is almost laughable from heaven. And God sits in heaven, and he looks down and he says, *"Aren't men foolish? Aren't they silly? I gave them an instinct for me. I put within them the same instinct that a pigeon has for its homing loft. Only I put in men an instinct for HEAVEN, and they don't follow it. How silly. They fall down, do they pick themselves up? They get on the wrong road; do they get back to the right road?* ***NO****!!! How silly."* And the tragedy of God's disappointment is in verse 13, *"When I would gather them (grapes and figs),"* says the Lord, *"there are no grapes on the vine and no figs on the fig tree. Even the leaves are withered, and what I gave them has passed away from them."* That is the ***TRAGEDY***.

There was a cartoon in 'Punch Magazine'...a devastating cartoon which showed a mother sitting at a table crying with her head down on the table and a father looking very troubled with his arm around her. And through the window, you could see a policeman leading away their teenage son. And behind the couple, there was a television set standing on an occasional table. And between the TV and the table was the family Bible lifting the TV screen to the right height. The family Bible had cobwebs around the edge; and underneath (the cartoon) was this title, 'The real culprits'...The real culprits. That was pretty devastating. That was in 'Punch Magazine'. 'Punch Magazine' can have truth in it---God's truth. And it was there.

When our God says, *"Even the things I gave them have* ***GONE****."* And we can say this: that God gave so much to this land hoping to get a ***PROFIT*** from this land. He gave ***TALENTS*** to us, hoping to get ***INTEREST*** when he came again from the far country and said, *"What have you done with what I gave you?"* He gave so much to this country, and he hoped to get so much back; and he came and there were no ***GRAPES*** on the vine, no ***FIGS*** on the fig tree. Even the leaves had gone. And everything he'd given had passed away. Everything he'd showered had been dissipated and spent. And we've been living on spiritual capital for so long in this country that it's ***GONE***...It's gone. It's not there. We can't spend it anymore. It's gone.

And all the 2000 years of Christian history---we've fritted it away and it's ***GONE*** now. We've spent it; and God won't even get that back, because it's gone. And so, looking at it all from ***GOD'S*** point of view, how silly it all looks, and how profitless. How disappointed God is. And again, if you remember that prophecy I read, it was God saying, *"I hoped that your nation would be a demonstration to the world of my righteousness; but now it's going to be a demonstration to the world of the opposite."* And I believe that word is from God.

***The Situation From Jeremiah's Point of View: A Sick Feeling***

Now let's look at it from Jeremiah's point of view. Jeremiah was caught ***BETWEEN*** ***GOD AND THE PEOPLE***. Because he was one of the ***PEOPLE***, he had intense ***SYMPATHY*** with them. He felt for them deeply. But because he'd been ***CALLED OF GOD***, he was caught by God. He didn't want to preach what he preached. He didn't like preaching what he preached. But he was trapped between God and the people. And therefore, he became increasingly **UNHAPPY**. It became a greater and greater burden of agony to him. In fact, he begins to say, *"The wound of my people is* ***MY*** *wound---the wound of my heart. It's hurting me, this."* And it did. And it is of course a mark of a true prophet that it's hurting ***HIM*** as much as anybody else whom he speaks to. The frustration and helplessness came out in ***TEARS***.

Jeremiah says, *"I just feel* ***SICK****."* Now, I felt sick last week. I really did---just ***FELT*** physically sick, when I opened my newspaper and read that that bomb had killed the professor of research...it just made you sick. Didn't it make you sick, that a man devoted to saving children's lives should be blasted to bits by someone who hadn't even got any complaint against him? And it just made you sick! *"The wound of my people."* But brethren, it's going to go on. This isn't going to stop...you ask any policeman. This is going to go on until the streets of our cities are just going to be unsafe places for us.

And Jeremiah says, *"Oh, I could just weep."* For one thing, the people are so sure that God is all right and still with them. They say, *"Isn't the king in Zion? Isn't God on our side?"* And they just don't realize he's ***NOT***, not anymore. And he's so sick because to worship ***IDOLS*** doesn't make any sense. Why have they done it? It hasn't helped them. Why? It doesn't make sense? He's SICK because time is slipping away. He says, ***"THE HARVEST IS OVER, THE SUMMER'S ENDED, AND THEY'RE NOT SAVED."*** Now, he's meaning there: that bad harvest that God had sent---a very bad season.

And we've had a shocking season this year...a shocking season. And our crops have been failures. But are the people saved as a result? The harvest is over, the summer is ended, and are we saved? Well, we seem no nearer to God than we were before. Just the first little beginnings of people thinking seriously. He says, *"There seems to be no answer to it."* And this gets him, *"Is there no* ***BALM*** *in Gilead?"* Have you heard that phrase? What a quotable quote. **GILEAD** lay over the Jordan. It was a beautiful land, and it grew balsam; and the balsam was made into ointment and medicine. And balsam is a healer. And Jeremiah, from the highlands of Judea looks across the deep Jordan valley, and there's beautiful Gilead and he says, *"Is there no medicine over there for here? Is there no doctor over there who could come and do something for us?"* This is what people are saying today, "Is there nowhere in the world that can help us? Can the Shah of Persia bail us out? Is there no medicine anywhere? Is there no cure anywhere on earth? Can't we get some cure?" But the answer is, "There isn't any." And poor Jeremiah finishes up by saying, *"I'm just too sad for tears. I've wept too much. I've dried up. Oh, that there were a fountain of tears in my eyes, but I've just cried too much."*

That father of the boy who was kidnapped in Italy, who's paid 400,000 pounds to get him back (and one is glad that he's got him back, even though he's sold his house, mortgaged his future, got into debt to the thousands of pounds to get his boy back) ... he's got his boy back. But when they asked him how sad he was, he just said these words, *"I've wept too much. My eyes are dry."* That's how Jeremiah felt. I've wept too much. The thing that got him ***MOST*** was the loss of integrity of speech in his society; because ***INTEGRITY OF SPEECH AND WORD*** is crucial to a society that is based on credit. You see, the whole of our commercial world is based on credit; and we've got 10,000 bankruptcies a year now, and creditors are finding they don't get the money. People who said they would pay up, didn't.

And commerce collapses when credit goes. I was talking to a businessman in the last few weeks, and he was telling me that now in Europe, if a German wants something from Britain, no longer will he take a British word that it will be delivered on a certain date. A German businessman---if he knows his onions---he will now ask that the British firm will sign a document with penalties for delay and delivery; then he might get it on time. And there was a day when a British businessman gave his word, "You will have it by then," you could trust that word. But you cannot trust that word now. You can trust it with a German firm.

And throughout the Common Market, most business is still done on trust of word...but no longer with Britain. They will not ask for trust of word with Britain; they want it written-in, and penalties written-in if it's not kept to word. In the last fortnight, British Leyland changes its name from 'British Leyland' to 'Leyland' so they can sell cars without the word 'British' attached to them. And some of you are old enough to remember slogans like 'British is Best', when 'British made' meant you could really trust that product, and 'Japanese made' meant you couldn't. And the whole situation has reversed.

Integrity makes commerce collapse. And when you can't trust the man who says, "I'll deliver it by next Thursday,"--- when you can't trust him, then you are in difficulties. And I don't need to tell you businessmen just what the situation is in regard to 'word'. And we are long-past the day when an Englishman's ***WORD*** is his ***BOND***---as binding to him as any written legal document. And one can only advise businessmen to be careful, even Christian businessmen. In fact, Jeremiah says, *"Every brother is a supplanter."* Now, you won't get the pun in that. There's a very clever pun in the Hebrew. Do you know what he's saying? He's saying, *"Every Israeli is a Jacob."* For the word *'supplanter'* in Hebrew is *'Yaʿaqov'*, *'Jacob'*. And if you know the story of Jacob, you know that Jacob was a ***DECEIVER***--- that he pretended he was his brother Esau, and he got the birthright, and he deceived and he really got on. And people would say, "My, he's clever."

We were watching a film on Tuesday afternoon at the staff meeting here. We don't always have films at the staff meeting. But it's a missionary film...it's a missionary film. And we'd booked it for the last Sunday in December in the evening to have in the service. Shortish film, brought to us from Guinea; and shows how a Canadian missionary went to a tribe for whom the highest virtue was ***TREACHERY***, and for whom the highest virtue is to play a ***DIRTY TRICK*** on someone else to betray them. And how a tribe would befriend someone and bring them home and make friends with them, give them meals and be nice and kind and smiling to them. And then one day, just slice their head off and eat their brains. And this is considered ***CLEVER*** out there. And when the missionary first told the story of the ***CROSS***, they were thrilled. They said what a hero ***JUDAS*** is. He got away with it and he got money for it. Marvelous. What a fool Jesus was. But Judas. And Judas became a folk hero in the tribe. Now, this may seem incredible. But I tell you that in commercial life, you can have the same kind of jungle in which it's ***CLEVER*** to do the dirty on someone else. It's ***CLEVER*** to strike a hard bargain. It's ***CLEVER*** to have got away with something. And that's all it is, ***TREACHERY***. This is Jeremiah's viewpoint then.

And he gets to the point where he says, *"I just wish I could get right away...just buy a little cottage in the country and just get right away from all the people."* Have you had that desire? It's not necessarily God's way for you. Listen. *"O that I had in the desert a wayfarers' lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them."* Just ***LEAVE IT ALL***. Get out of it all. And more and more people are trying to do that. You can't buy a cottage in the country now, because more and more people want a little hidey-hole to get away from it all---to get out. And Jeremiah just wished he had a little country cottage. But God said, "*You stay right where you are."*

Here's a ***poem*** by William Cowper, the hymn writer. "*Oh, for a lodge in some vast wilderness, some boundless contiguity of shade, where rumor of oppression and deceit, of unsuccessful or successful war, might never reach me more! My ear is pained, my soul is sick with every day's report of wrong and outrage with which earth is filled."* Does that strike an answering chord in your heart? It does mine.

***The Situation From Judah's Viewpoint: Sober Down!***

So, we come to the ***FINAL VIEWPOINT***...of Judah. Disaster is certain to come; it's not ***IF***, but ***WHEN***. The cattle will go, the birds will go, the beasts will go, the jackals will come---all that will be left will be a bitter taste...a bitter taste: the wormwood and the gall. Now, if you believe that disaster is coming, how do you best behave in the meanwhile? If you believe that things are ***REALLY*** going to come to the brink of destruction, how do you ***PREPARE*** for it? There are ***TWO*** things you can do. ***ONE*** is to live it up while you can. The ***OTHER*** is to sober down. And Jeremiah speaks to the women of Jerusalem (and the men), and he says, *"Don't live it up; sober down. Because when the crisis comes, the people who will* ***COPE*** *with it are those who have* ***SOBERED DOWN BEFORE IT COMES****. Those who live it up will have nothing."*

***Word to the Women***

Now, he deals **FIRST** with the ***WOMEN***. He tells the ***WOMEN*** to ***OPEN*** their mouths and the ***MEN*** to ***SHUT*** them, which is intriguing. Now, let's see what he tells the women to do. The extraordinary thing is that just before a society collapses, ***WOMEN'S FASHIONS GO CRAZY***. I'm absolutely serious about this. Society, in trying to have their last fling before disaster comes, goes crazy. In Jerusalem, Jeremiah says what they began to wear--- ***SCARLET*** was the favorite color that spring...for the spring fashion...bright, vivid scarlet. Golden ornaments were extremely popular. And the cosmetic fashion in the last days of Jerusalem was eyeshadow---painting the eyes to make them look Twiggy-like. And this is described---you read it, didn't you, in an earlier chapter. *"Listen, what do you mean that you dress in* ***SCARLET****, that you deck yourself with ornaments of* ***GOLD****, that you enlarge your eyes with* ***PAINT****? In* ***VAIN****, you beautify yourself."* Now, can you see that happening here? Well, I'm afraid, it has happened. And it happened this week. The spring fashions are out. The spring fashions are out for next year. And Britain has sold double the number of these fashions than she's ever sold before. Now listen, here is Barbara Griggs on fashion. "Spring 1976 is going to be the ***BRIGHTEST*** and best news in what girls are wearing since they invented the mini. At show after show, Europe's top designers have turned their backs on doom and gloom to give us a riot of ***COLOR*** and ***FUN***. They could have been forgiven for turning out staid, sober, understated clothes in keeping with these glum times. But they've paraded instead an infectious optimism and cheerfulness. And some of the shows had the whole audience on their feet cheering their heads off at the sheer fun of it all." And so on.

You see, Jeremiah isn't quite so out of date, is he? And he's saying, *"You women, instead of preparing for more* ***SOBER*** *times, you are living it up. You're going* ***CRAZY****. All these cosmetics, all the gold ornaments, you're just going* ***CRAZY****. You're having a LAST FLING."* He said, *"Why don't you start trying to be* ***SOBER****? Why don't you live more* ***QUIETLY****? Why don't you teach your children---your daughters--- how to sing* ***DIRGES****, because they're going to need to sing them?"* In other words, *"Why don't you* ***SOBER DOWN*** *and prepare for what's coming instead of trying to* ***LIVE IT UP****. You will then not have such a big shock as the other people."* Now, that's exceedingly ***PRACTICAL***.

***Word to the Men***

Let's turn from them to the ***MEN***. What about the men? And here is the ***MOST IMPORTANT VERSE*** for this morning. Even though Judah was going downhill so rapidly, the men were still boasting that they were ***CLEVER***, or ***POWERFUL***, or ***RICH***. And speaking as a man, I know that those are the three basic ambitions of men. Very few achieve all three in a lifetime. Most people manage to get a bit of ONE. We love to say, "I'm a successful man." And when you say of someone that he's been successful, you always mean one of those three things in ordinary conversation. You ask, when somebody says to you that they've been successful, "What do you mean by that?" It's either that they've become very ***CLEVER*** and got a string of degrees after their name and become very knowledgeable, or that they've got a ***POSITION*** ***OF POWER*** in which they give authoritative orders to others, or that they've become very ***RICH***, they've made their money.

The thing that will stand you instead then, is not that you're wealthy or powerful or clever, but that you ***KNOW GOD***---that you ***KNOW*** him and ***UNDERSTAND*** him. So, *"Let not the rich man boast that he's made a packet. Let not the clever man tell us what degrees he has. Let not the powerful man say, 'I can say, "Do this,"' and he and she and a thousand others do it. Let not those men brag about that---even in their own heart to themselves. But let them say, 'I'm prepared for the crunch, because* ***I KNOW GOD*** *and* ***I UNDERSTAND HIM****. And therefore, I understand that my ambition should be: justice, righteousness, to be fair, to be upright, to be a man of integrity. Then I'll be able to cope with the crunch.'"*

And so, you've got a picture of a whole ***SOCIETY*** going downhill. And you've got the ***WOMEN*** living it up in fashions; you've got the ***MEN*** trying to make money, trying to get power, trying to be in a position where they can weather the storm. And God comes in and says, *"****SOBER UP****, the lot of you. Sober down and prepare to be much more* ***SERIOUS****; and get to* ***KNOW ME****."* You see, the Jew was proud of just two things. ***ONE***, that he was ***CIRCUMSIZED***; and ***TWO***, that he was ***SUCCESFUL*** in one of the three areas I've mentioned. That's why you find so many ***CLEVER*** Jews, so many ***POWERFUL*** Jews, and so many ***RICH*** Jews. And to be circumcised in body and successful in business...these are two big ambitions. And God says, *"Jews, you may be circumcised in* ***BODY****---so are the Egyptians, so are the other Semitic peoples around you; but are you circumcised in* ***HEART****?"* What does that mean? Well, you're circumcised in heart when you've had ambition for power and wealth cut-out of your heart---cut off---and **when your heart wants to know God.**

***A Positive Note to End: How to Know the Lord***

So, let me finish in a very positive note. I believe the most urgent thing I can say from this pulpit this morning (depressing though all this is) is this, you can get ***READY*** for the ***CRUNCH***. And the way you'll get ready is ***TO GET TO KNOW GOD***. Until you know him and share his outlook and share his serious outlook, and understand how he feels and how he thinks and how he reacts to the whole mess, and then you'll be ***READY*** for it when it comes. And you'll be able to ***SEE*** others through, and you'll be able to ***CARRY*** them through. You will not be among those **RUNNING** ***AWAY*** to some little place in the wilderness to ***ESCAPE*** it all. You'll be right here, where God needs you, firm and strong and saying, **"I KNOW GOD!"** And when the people really are in a position to say, "And we want to know him too," you'll be ready to tell them.

Christians of all people should ***NOT*** be running away and creating little holes for themselves where they can be safe. Christians should be getting to ***KNOW*** God. There is a ***PROGRESSION*** of thought in this. In chapter 8, verse 7, you don't know the maker's instructions, you don't know the ordinance of the Lord. In chapter 9, verse 3, you don't know the Lord. In chapter 9 verse 6, you refuse to know the Lord even though he's talking to you. But in chapter 9, verse 24, you ***UNDERSTAND*** and ***KNOW*** the Lord.

***1. Spend Time With the Lord***

How do you know the Lord? Let me be very ***PRACTICAL***. You cannot get to know a person unless you give ***TIME*** to that person. There is no shortcut. And the only men and women I've met who know the Lord are those who've spent ***TIME*** with him. I would never get to know you unless I spent time with you. You would never get to know me unless you spent time with me. That's the first thing. And spending ***TIME*** to know the Lord is the ***FIRST*** requirement.

***2. Listen to the Lord: Read and Think Upon His Word***

The ***SECOND*** thing is this. If, in the time you spend with him, you do all the talking, you will not get to know him. He will get to know you, but you will not get to know him. You only get to know a person by ***LISTENING***, right? And there are people who just don't know how to listen to God. So let me be practical about that too. I believe that the most urgent thing today is that people should spend more time in this book. 10 verses a day may (you think) keep the devil away, but it won't help you to know the Lord. And I suggest as an immediate practical step that every one of you resolves to ***READ*** three chapters a day and five on Sunday, and you'll be through the Bible once a year then, and you'll have listened to everything God says just ***ONCE IN A YEAR***. And that you don't just read it through, but you think about it and go on thinking.

Now I realize I'm at an advantage here. I realize that you've given me time to do this. And people say, "How do you prepare your sermons?" And I had to go to a college of students a week ago and answer this very question, "How do you prepare sermons?" And I just had to say, "Well, I ***READ*** the passage and I ***THINK***. And I read the passage and I think. And I read the passage and I think. And I read the passage and I think. And each time I think a thought, it goes down on paper. Then I go back and read it again. Think again. Write it down again. Until I feel, 'God, I ***UNDERSTAND*** what you're saying. I know how you're feeling about this. I know your reaction. I understand you; and I can see how you can feel about Britain today. I feel I'm just beginning to know you.'"

And that's an immediate ***PRACTICAL*** outcome of this service. At the end of another 12 months, I want you to be able to boast---not that you've made enough money to see you through the inflation, not that you've got a position that will keep you and your family secure, not that you've passed your degree (though all of these things may be part of God's will); I want you to be able to say, "I really ***KNOW*** the ***SCRIPTURAL*** God. I really ***FEEL*** as he feels. I really ***UNDERSTAND*** why he's so upset about what's going on. I'm beginning to ***SHARE*** a horror of sin that would make me rather ***POISON*** someone than let them go on doing it. I begin to understand." Let me hasten to add that ***ONLY*** God himself can take that decision. Only God could do it fairly and justly and righteously. But if God is acting, then we need to ***UNDERSTAND*** and we need to ***LISTEN***---not to all the letters in the papers, not even to all the preachers, for they say so many different things---we need to get to the point where we ***KNOW*** what God is ***DOING*** and what God is ***FEELING*** about Britain. And then we're with him. It's not a case of (as Israel thought), "God is on OUR side." It is a case of, "We shall then be on ***HIS*** side...even though we're lonely, misunderstood, isolated, criticized, persecuted; but we'll ***STAND*** with God; and we'll ***KNOW*** him."

The ***CRUNCH*** will come. And I tell you that when all the spring fashions have gone; and when the ***CRISIS*** really does hit and we can't afford to buy spring fashions, people in Britain will ***THEN LOOK AROUND*** for those who ***KNOW*** God. They'll look around for those who are still living alongside them and have ***NOT*** run away. And they look around for ***JEREMIAH***, and they'll say, "Jeremiah, you were right. Will you tell us about God?"

So, we lead into baptism. Now, what has ***BAPTISM*** got to do with all this? Very simply, baptism is part of getting to ***KNOW*** the Lord. It's getting ***RIGHT*** with him. It's being baptized as he was baptized. It's being ***BURIED*** as he was buried, ***RAISED*** as he was raised. It's getting right into the Lord. It's ***KNOWING HIM*** so that after this baptism, the people who are baptized will be able to say, "Lord, I ***UNDERSTAND*** just a little now of what you felt when you went to the Jordan River, and you submitted in obedience to God in front of all those people. I ***UNDERSTAND*** a little more. I ***UNDERSTAND*** what it is to be buried and finished with an old life. And I ***UNDERSTAND*** a little more of what it is to be raised. And my ambition now is not to make money or to be powerful, my ***AMBITION*** is, *“To* ***KNOW*** *him and to* ***KNOW*** *his sufferings; to* ***KNOW*** *the power of his resurrection; whom to know his life eternal."* And so, we pray that these candidates, as they're baptized, will be prepared by God's Holy Spirit for the ***CRUNCH*** that's coming and will find in their baptism one of those experiences in which they, "Knew the Lord."

Let's pray.

"Oh God, in a world that seems to be going ***CRAZY***, we came to church this morning to be ***SOBERED-UP***. Thank you for your constant word to us in the New Testament, "Be ***SOBER***; watch and pray." And Lord, we ask that you will ***SOBER-UP*** your people. Help us to prepare for all lies ahead, that we may mean business with you. And Lord...for these candidates in baptism...Lord may they follow-on to ***KNOW*** the Lord, to ***KNOW*** you---not secondhand, but firsthand---and to ***UNDERSTAND*** how you feel. We ask it in the name of the Lord Jesus, who made it so much easier for us to know you because he came and lived among us and is still alive. And in ***KNOWING*** him, we ***KNOW*** the Father. So, in his name, we ask it. Amen."