Jeremiah 23:9 to 24:10.

*"Concerning prophets, my heart is broken within me. All my bones shake. I'm like a drunken man---like a man overcome with wine--- because of the Lord and because of his holy words. For the land is full of adulterers. Because of the* ***CURSE****, the land mourns, and the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. Their course is evil and their might is not right. Both* ***PROPHET*** *and* ***PRIEST*** *are ungodly. Even in my house, I have found their wickedness," says the Lord. "Therefore, their way shall be to them like slippery paths in the darkness, into which they shall be driven and fall. For I will bring evil upon them in the year of their punishment," says the Lord.*

*"In the prophets of* ***SAMARIA****, I saw an* ***UNSAVORY*** *thing. They prophesied by Baal and led my people astray. But in the prophets of* ***JERUSALEM****, I have seen a* ***HORRIBLE*** *thing. They commit adultery and walk in lies. They strengthen the hands of evil doers, so that no one turns from his wickedness. All of them have become like Sodom to me, and its inhabitants like* ***GOMORAH****. Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts concerning the prophets, 'Behold I will feed them with wormwood. I will give them poisoned water to drink, for from the prophets of Jerusalem, ungodliness has gone forth into all the land.'*

*"Thus says the Lord of hosts. 'Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own mind--- not from the mouth of the Lord. They say continually to those who despise the word of the Lord, "It shall be well with you." And to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart they say, "No evil shall come upon you." For, who among them has stood in the council of the Lord to perceive and hear his word; or who has given heed to his word and listened? Behold the* ***STORM*** *of the Lord! Wrath has gone forth---a whirling tempest. It will burst upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intent of his mind. In the latter days, you will understand it clearly.*

*'I did not send the prophets...yet they ran. I did not speak to them... yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to the people. They would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings. Am I a God at hand,' says the Lord, 'and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him?' says the Lord. 'Do I not fill heaven and earth?' says the Lord.*

*'I have heard what the prophets have said, who prophesy lies in my name saying, "I have dreamed I have dreamed." How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets---who prophesy* ***LIES*** *and who prophesy the* ***DECEIT*** *of their own heart; who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams which they tell one another--- even as their fathers forgot my name for Baal.*

*'Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat?' says the Lord. 'Is not my word like fire,' says the Lord, 'and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces? Therefore behold, I'm against the prophets,' says the Lord, 'who steal my words from one another. Behold, I'm against the prophets,' says the Lord, 'who use their tongues and say, "Says the Lord." Behold I'm against those who prophesy lying dreams,' says the Lord, 'and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them. So they do not profit this people at all.' says the Lord.*

*"When one of this people or a prophet or a priest asks you, 'What is the burden of the Lord?' you shall say to them,* ***'YOU*** *are the burden, and I will cast you off, says the Lord.' And as for the prophet, priest, or one of the people who says, 'The burden of the Lord,' I will punish that man and his household.*

*"Thus shall you say everyone to his neighbor and everyone to his brother, 'What has the* ***LORD*** *answered,' or 'What has the* ***LORD*** *spoken?' But ‘****THE BURDEN OF THE LORD’*** *you shall mention no more; for the burden is every man's own word, and you pervert the words of the living God, the Lord of Hosts our God.'*

*"Thus you shall say to the prophet, 'What has the Lord answered you?' or, 'What has the Lord spoken?' But if you say, 'The burden of the Lord,' thus says the Lord, 'Because you have said these words, "The burden of the Lord," when I sent to you saying, "You shall not say, ‘The burden of the Lord.' Therefore behold, I will surely lift you up and cast you away from my presence---you and the city which I gave to you and your fathers. And I will bring upon you everlasting reproach and perpetual shame which shall not be forgotten.' "*

*"After Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, had taken into exile from Jerusalem, Jeconiah---the son of Jehoiakim---king of Judah, together with the princes of Judah, the craftsman, and the smiths, and had brought them to Babylon, the Lord showed me this* ***VISION****. Behold two baskets of figs placed before the Temple of the Lord. One basket had very* ***GOOD******FIGS****---like first ripe figs; but the other basket had very* ***BAD******FIGS****---so bad that they could not be eaten. And the Lord said to me, 'What do you see, Jeremiah?' I said, 'Figs: the good figs very good, and the bad figs very bad---so bad that they cannot be eaten.'*

*"Then the word of the Lord came to me, 'Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "Like these good figs, so I will regard as* ***GOOD*** *the exiles from Judah whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans. I will set my eyes upon them for good, and I will bring them* ***BACK*** *to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down. I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord, and they shall be my people and I will be their God; for they shall return to me with their whole heart.' But thus says the Lord, 'Like the bad figs, which are so bad that they cannot be eaten, so will I treat* ***ZEDEKIAH****, the king of Judah, his princes, the remnant of Jerusalem who* ***REMAIN*** *in this land, and those who dwell in the land of* ***EGYPT****. I will make them a* ***HORROR*** *to all the kingdoms of the earth---to be a reproach, a byword, a taunt, and a curse in all the places where I drive them; and I will send* ***SWORD****,* ***FAMINE****, and* ***PESTILENCE*** *upon them until they shall be* ***UTTERLY DESTROYED*** *from the land which I gave to them and their fathers.' "*

Let us pray. "Father, we feel like taking off our shoes when we read passages like this. For this is holy ground and these are holy words and they come like ***FIRE*** and a ***HAMMER***; and we pray that your Holy Spirit of Truth will enable us so to be honest with your word, with yourself, and with ourselves. Lord, we find it much easier to be honest with each other than we do to be honest with ourselves. But we pray that each one of us, this morning, may be wide open to your word. We thank you that it is a healing word, even though it hurts; that your intention toward your people is good and for your glory; and therefore, we pray that you will grant us not that kind of easy comfort which comes from saying, *"Peace. Peace,"* when there is no peace; but grant us that deep healing that comes from the hurt first---which gets behind the symptoms to the disease and faces us with the truth that liberates. Lord, you know exactly the condition of every heart here this morning. You know each one of us. You are a God who's far and a God who's near---there is no secret hiding place from you. You know all things, for you fill heaven and earth. And therefore, we pray that you will have dealings with us this day. And, as later in the service we set aside two men (we believe, of your choice) for your work. May that too be a holy moment of rededication for every one of us. And we ask this in the name of the only true prophet---who was true through and through, even Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior." Amen.

***Jeremiah is Shocked By What He Sees in Jerusalem***

We are going to continue with the studies in Jeremiah. And as I said at the beginning of these studies way back in September or October when we began, I believe the devil just does not want us to complete these studies. So, will you ***PRAY*** as we go through. Will you ***PRAY*** that the word of God may go out with power and with grace. Now, Jerry (or Jeremiah, or whatever you like to call him) was a country lad, and he came from a country village called Anathoth. You can still find that village a few miles northeast of Jerusalem. It's now called Anata. It's an Arab village. But Jeremiah came from a country village to the heart of the big city. If I can put it in modern terms, it's as if John-Boy from Walton's Mountain was put in the middle of the red-light district in New York. And from a simple, straightforward life in which people knew each other with all their faults, but were really human people, this young boy was transported into a city in which there was a great deal of that which was ***FALSE*** and ***UNREAL*** and ***UNTRUE***. And he went through a series of ***TRAUMATIC SHOCKS***, but none so great as the shock of which we've just read.

***Societal Corruption: the People, the Political Leaders, the Priests***

His ***FIRST*** shock -- if you remember going back in your memory to earlier studies -- his first shock was the general level of ***DISHONESTY*** among the ***SHOPKEEPERS AND TRADERS*** and in commerce. He just couldn't get straight change for his money. He just couldn't find a shopkeeper who was straight in his dealings and who put the right figure in the till. That was a shock. He hadn't expected to find that in the city. His ***NEXT*** (**second**) shock was to find that the ***POLITICAL LEADERS*** were CORRUPT, and he said, *"Well, how can you blame the* ***PEOPLE*** *if the* ***POLITICIANS*** *are like this?"* If those in positions of national leadership are corrupt, then you can understand why the ordinary man is just out to get what he can and doesn't mind how he gets it. And that was shock number two. Shock number ***THREE*** came when he went into the temple and looked at the ***PRIESTS***---the religious leaders---and he said they've turned a house of prayer into a ***DEN OF THIEVES***!

***Jeremiah is Shattered: The PROPHETS Are Also Corrupt***

Now, there was ***ONE GROUP*** of men whom Jeremiah hoped to find ***INTACT***. A group among whom he hoped to find integrity, because he was going to join that group. And he was called to be one of it. He had been called as a teenage seventeen-year-old to be a prophet. And he knew perfectly well there were other ***PROPHETS*** already in the nation, and that when he went to the big city he'd meet lots of prophets. For by this time, it had become a profession, and there were professional prophets trained in the schools of the prophets. And so, they had plenty of ***PROPHETS*** as well as ***PRIESTS***, as well as ***POLITICIANS***, as well as ***PEOPLE***.

And then he met the prophets, and he was so shattered. He said, *"My bone shook. My heart broke. I felt like a man who's drunk."* I don't know if he'd been drunk or knew what it felt like, but he just felt---he just went to pieces, because he found that the prophets too were part of the total picture. Not all of them. Thank God, as we read through the book of Jeremiah, he found that ***SOME OF THEM*** were still men who were ***TRUE*** -- some. And we'll come across them later in the book of Jeremiah. But many of them, he found, were just the opposite. It was not so much what he ***HEARD*** at first, as to what he ***SAW***. In a word, he saw that the prophets were sleeping around with any woman they could get hold of. That's what he found. And it shattered him. And then, when he listened to what they said and claimed to be the word of God, he said, *"That's not the message of God. They're making it up. It's coming out of their own imagination. They're---they're dreaming it up. It's coming from their own subconscious. They're telling the people what the people want to hear, because that's the way to* ***POPULARITY****."*

In other words, he found out a most important ***TRUTH***. And that is: that when the ***AMATEUR*** becomes a ***PROFESSIONAL***, he's got to watch what that does to him. It's true, for example, of sport. When a sportsman is still an ***AMATEUR***, you can be much surer that he's playing the game because he loves the game than you are when he becomes a ***PROFESSIONAL*** and sets up a "*Georgie Best"* kind of home---and the kind of friends who inhabited that home. And you begin to wonder what's he in it for now: the ***FAME***, the **MONEY**? What's happening to the man? Is he giving the crowd what it wants now, or is he playing the game for the game's sake still?

And as soon as the prophets of Israel became ***PROFESSIONALS***, and went to their seminaries, and got churned out as professional people who could lay a message on from God to order, something happened to the men of God who were prophets. The amateurs had become professional. Success, status, prosperity -- all kinds of opportunities were now open to them that had not been open before. And when Jeremiah joined the group that he thought he was being called to join and minister with, he was ***SHATTERED***--- shattered.

We're not going to go into details. I want to draw out ***TWO THINGS*** that Jeremiah said to them. And if you forget everything else I say this morning, I want you to remember two equations---two equations, which Jeremiah applied to these men. He was shocked ***FIRST*** by their ***LOOSE LIVES***. He was shocked ***SECOND*** by their deceptive dreams -- sorry, their ***WISHFUL WORDS***. He was shocked ***THIRD*** by their ***DECEPTIVE DREAMS***. And ***FOURTHLY***, he was shocked by their ***BANISHED BURDENS***. These were the four items.

***Shock #1: The Prophets' Loose Lives---Applying Two Equations***

 But I'm dealing with the ***FIRST***, now, their ***LOOSE LIVES***. And he applied ***TWO HEAVENLY EQUATIONS*** to their lives, which we have to apply to ours this morning. Here's the ***FIRST (EQUATION): 'WICKEDNESS EQUALS UNGODLINESS***'. Now, that's not an equation the world will ever make, but it's an equation that God makes. It's a mathematical formula to apply to my life, to yours---wickedness equals ungodliness. Now, that's not how the ***WORLD*** interprets wickedness, but it's how ***JEREMIAH*** did.

The ***SECOND EQUATION***---that's a negative one (the first one) -- the positive equation, which Jeremiah applies is this: ***'RIGHT IS MIGHT'***. Right equals might. Now, those are the two equations he applied to these prophets. And they did not fit, and he found them wanting. He says there is ***ADULTERY*** right through the prophets. They were running off with other men's wives. Now, why does he condemn that? I'm going to ask the question very simply, because it is being asked today: "What's ***WRONG*** with adultery? What's ***WRONG*** with it? After all, if two people really love each other, why should they not be together? What's ***WRONG*** with it?" Now, have you ever stopped to ask what's ***WRONG*** with it? God doesn't make a lot of rules which are purely arbitrary. God isn't the kind of God who says*, "Now let's think of everything that people enjoy doing and then put a 'thou shall not' in front of it and really put them on the spot."* Do you think God's like that---the God, *"Who gave us freely all things to enjoy?"* That's a libel on God?

***First Equation: Wickedness Equals Ungodliness***

Why then is adultery ***WRONG***? I'll tell you why many Christians think it it's ***WRONG***: because it's physical and sexual---and they couldn't be ***FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH***. Because when God made us, he made us physical and he made us sexual: male and female. And there's nothing ***WRONG*** with adultery because it's physical and sexual. Shall I tell you what's ***WRONG*** with it? IT'S ***UNGODLY***. It's ungodly. Why is it ungodly? Because God hasn't a body and therefore doesn't have sex? Nothing of the kind. When God said, "Let us make man in our own image," he created man---male and female. *"In the image of God created he them."* So, that that's not what's ***WRONG*** with it. And there is something in the physical relationships between man and woman that is like God---that is godly. Otherwise, every one of you listening to me this morning is the result of someone's sinning. And that is just an unthinkable position.

What is ***WRONG*** with adultery then? I'll tell you. When God loves someone, he is ***LOYAL*** to that person to the end. His love is ***LOYAL***. When he falls in love, he stays in love. That's what's godly, and godly love is like that. That's why in Jesus, *"Having loved his own, he loved them to the end."* That is why when that man was told to divorce his wife because she didn't care that much for him, and because she went around with other men, and because there was nothing in the marriage to hold onto, he said, "Stop!! Never speak to me like that about my wife. I love her; and I shall love her as long as there's breath in her body." And he did, and she died a few years later as the result of her sin, with his hands spread over her in love.

When God loves, there is in that love an element which in the Hebrew is called *'khesed'*, which means *'loyalty'* -- loyalty. And that is why in a Christian marriage service we do not say, "Do you love this person?" We say, "Will you be ***LOYAL*** to this person for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer." Is this a promise of ***LOYALTY***, or is it just that you're saying, "I've fallen IN love, which I may later fall OUT of"? That's what we're asking in the marriage service, and the response is, "I will." And if there's one phrase that comes out in the Bible on the lips of God, it's the phrase, "***I WILL***!"

Did you know, as I've just read this...did you notice verses five to seven of chapter 24? Listen! Thus says the God of Israel*, "Like these good figs, so* ***I WILL*** *regard, as good, the exiles from Judah.* ***I WILL*** *set my eyes upon them for good.* ***I WILL*** *bring them back to this land.* ***I WILL*** *build them up.* ***I WILL*** *plant them.* ***I WILL*** *give them a heart to know that I'm the Lord.* ***I WILL*** *be their God."* Do you see? *"****I WILL. “...”****I* ***WILL****"..."****I WILL****."* Therefore, how could prophets speak about God's love if they themselves were not ***LOYAL***? ...Were not loyal. Now do you understand that what the world calls ***'WICKEDNESS'***... It usually reserves that term for things that are dreadfully perverted or full of vice; things that society generally would say are ***DREADFUL***. But in fact, the word ***'WICKEDNESS'*** in the Bible, covers anything that is ***UNLIKE GOD***.

Do you understand what I'm saying? We were made in the image of God, to be like our Father, to be *'chips off the old block'*. Literally! We were made to be like him. And therefore, we can drop into the world's habit of pointing at particular things, and say "That's ***MORE*** dreadful than something else. That's really ***WICKED***!" But God says, *"Anything that's* ***NOT LIKE ME*** *is wicked."* That's why, when he calls to his people to turn from their wicked ways, he's calling them to turn from anything that is wicked. And gossip, within a church, can be as ***DISLOYAL*** as adultery. Do you understand that? It's a question of ***LOYALTY***! For God is so ***LOYAL***! That's love---to be ***LOYAL***! And loyalty ... And any breach of loyalty is wickedness, in God's sight. So, adultery through the land is here, said to be ***WICKED***. Not because it's sexual. Not because it's physical. That betrays a wrong attitude to God's creation. But because it's ***DISLOYAL***. It's ***UNGODLY***.

And ***EQUALLY***, you find that the prophets here are denounced for telling ***LIES***. And that's put alongside because, that also is a ***DISLOYALTY***. It's unlike God. When God speaks, he tells the truth. Therefore, to tell a ***LIE*** is to be ***UNGODLY***. And it's ***WICKED***, whether you call it a white lie, or a black lie, or a half-truth, or whatever! It's ***WICKED***! And when you look at things from God's point of view, and see this equation: *'Wickedness equals Ungodliness'*; you can look at yourself and you can look at a church congregation, and you can realize ... that God could put the word ***'WICKED'*** on even church-going people, whereas we tend not to. We tend to say, "It's those dreadful, perverted people ***OUT THERE***. They're the wicked people." But God says*, "In anything in which you're not like me, that is* ***WICKED****, because it's* ***UNGODLY****."* And that's the ***FIRST EQUATION***. And I mention that because, quite simply, it would be too easy for us to read this passage, and not apply it to ourselves, and pray about all those wicked people who are bringing Britain down. If in anything I am unlike God, then God calls me to leave ***MY*** wicked ways.

***Second Equation: Right Means Might***

The ***SECOND EQUATION*** which he applies is this: ***'RIGHT MEANS MIGHT'***. Now once again, this is totally the ***REVERSE*** of the world's attitude. To the ***WORLD***: 'Might equals Right'. That's the world we live in. If you are bigger, you are better. That's the equation that is applied. And if you can get power, that will put you in the right. That's how Hitler used to think. But many, many more people think this way. If you have got the power of money, that puts you in the right. If you have got military power, that puts you in the right. And God's word comes sharply into that picture, and says, *"The man who really has* ***MIGHT****, is the man who is* ***RIGHT****."* And the prophets are told, *"Your might is* ***NOT*** *right."*

There is no man so ***POWERFUL*** in this world as the man who is ***RIGHT***. Who is right. Unfortunately, modern English has squeezed that phrase right down until it doesn't mean what it meant originally. When we say, ***"He is RIGHT,"*** we mean he is right, ***MENTALLY***. That in an argument, he, in fact, proved to have the ***RIGHT*** answer to the question. And we say, "He is ***RIGHT***," meaning he has the right ***MENTAL*** answer. But you know what it means in the ***BIBLE***? When the Bible says, *"This man is* ***RIGHT****,"* it means, he is right ***MORALLY*** as well as ***MENTALLY***. He is *'in the* ***RIGHT*** *',* or he is ***'UPRIGHT***,' or he is "***RIGHT-YES***." Righteous. And to ***GOD***, might is right, or rather, ***'RIGHT IS MIGHT'***. To the ***WORLD***, ‘***MIGHT IS RIGHT’***.

Now, just think of the ***IMPLICATIONS*** of that. We live in a world, in which people grasp for other kinds of might, other kinds of power. And then, when they've got that power, they think that that gives them the right to do certain things. What we desperately need in ourselves...in our nation...in our world, is men who will say, ***"RIGHT IS MIGHT."*** And in the long run, the man who is in the ***RIGHT***, will be the man who will bring it to pass. It's the difference between men of ***PRINCIPLE*** and men of ***EXPEDIENCY***.

So, all this is just saying that to be ***UNLIKE*** God, is to be ***WICKED***. To be ***LIKE*** God, is to have the ***MIGHT*** that rests on being ***RIGHT***. And that's the might of God. *"I believe in God, the Father Almighty."* But wherein lies God's ***POWER***? Does it lie in the fact that he's bigger than I am? Is he like the kind of earthly father who tells his children not to do a thing---not because of the ***MORAL*** implications, but because he doesn't like them doing it, and because he's bigger than they are, and he can only say, "Because daddy says so." Is that the kind of power that God wields? ***NO***! The kind of power that God wields is the power that is based on ***RIGHT***, and says, *"You cannot do that because it is* ***WRONG****."* Because it is wrong.

Now, go away with those two equations. Apply them to yourself. Apply them to our society. ***WICKEDNESS IS UNGODLINESS***. And if for no other reason than that equation, we live in a ***WICKED*** society. It is not an exaggeration to say, "Society is ***WICKED,*** *because it's* ***NOT LIKE GOD****.”* The world will not accept that. They'll say, "You're exaggerating!" But in fact, it's the simple ***TRUTH***. And then we say to society (after we've said it to ourselves), "The only ***MIGHT***, that God ultimately allows to have final say, is the ***'MIGHT WHICH IS RIGHT'."*** ...***'RIGHT IS MIGHT'***. Now, I've spent a lot of time on that first point, so I must move on. But God's ***CURSE*** is on those who put ***MIGHT*** first, rather than ***RIGHT***.

***The Connection Between Human Nature and Nature***

And here, I'm going to say something... I don't know what you're going to think... But Jeremiah says, *"I see a direct* ***CONNECTION*** *between human nature and nature."* And he says, *"I can see now why there's a* ***SHORTAGE OF WATER*** *in the land."* Now I think already you're sensing what I'm going to say. You see, to the ***UNBELIEVER*** there is no connection between human behavior and what nature does. No connection at all. And so, they can never connect up the ***WEATHER*** with ***WICKEDNESS***. But there is a connection, and the connection is ***GOD***. And God controls the ***WEATHER***, and God takes notice of ***WICKEDNESS***. And therefore, there is a connection. And therefore, I believe that nature and human nature are so ***INTERLOCKED***. It's funny, but people will believe that when anybody but God says it! If someone in a newspaper says, "You can talk to your geraniums and they'll respond," it's ***BELIEVED*** that nature and human nature are interlocked! It's believed, and it's spread all over the papers! Look, the Bible has been saying this for years---that the geraniums can suffer from your wickedness. That is the ***BIBLE*** outlook on ***NATURE***. And there's nothing new in that. The Bible has said it. And so, Jeremiah says, *"I know now why the RAIN is short. I know now why the pastures are* ***DRYING UP****. I can see the* ***CONNECTION****."*

Let me take this a little further. I had a very interesting conversation on Thursday lunchtime with Mrs. Agnes Sanford, following her service in the cathedral on Wednesday evening. We talked about many things. And, I realized that we have a lot to learn from that dear woman of faith and prayer. I also felt that she has quite a bit to learn about God's word. And do you know what the main subject of our conversation was? ***EARTHQUAKES***. Now this was Thursday, remember (Thursday midday), we talked about earthquakes. And she felt that we, as Christians, could and should be ***REDUCING*** the number of earthquakes that are happening in the world; and she has moved her house. And she now lives on top of the San Andreas fault in California, quite deliberately, to pray that the earthquake, which all the seismologists are predicting, may not happen.

There, I'm afraid, we found ***COMMON*** ground and ***DIFFERING*** ground. I agreed with her entirely, that ***PRAYER*** can stop an earthquake. I believe entirely that the earth is bound up with the condition of man living on the earth. I believe that. But I said, "I believe also that Jesus said, *'In the last days there will be more earthquakes, as nature herself protests against what man is doing and against the sheer ungodliness of men.'* " And so, we agreed to differ on this one. And do you know what happened on Friday? Half of Europe was in an ***EARTHQUAKE***! Now do you see no connection at all between the fact, that ***ITALY*** is veering to an ***ATHEIST POSITION*** (philosophy, what have you...), and the ***EARTHQUAKE*** on Friday? Do you see no connection? Alright, dismiss it as coincidence! I tell you we're going to see more and more of this kind of coincidence...Because there is a ***CONNECTION*** between nature and human nature, and the connection is ***GOD***. And God controls ***NATURE*** and God responds to ***HUMAN NATURE***; and Jeremiah says, *"I can see it so clearly. I can see why you're short of* ***RAIN*** *and why your crops are dying out. I can see why God is not blessing. Why should he send rain?"* Mind you, I can see in this nation, by July we will have the government calling for a national day of prayer for rain. But to my mind there's something that's needed ***BEFORE*** we pray for rain nationally, isn't there...***MUCH MORE?*** Why should we have rain in our condition? Why should we not have ***DROUGHT***? Do we deserve rain? As a nation, you ask yourself that question, “Is there no ***CONNECTION***?"

And then Jeremiah says, *"I see not only God's* ***GENERAL*** *judgments on the earth in what is happening in nature."* And Jesus said that ***EARTHQUAKES*** will be the protest of ***NATURE*** against what man is doing living on those floating plates of earth. He said*, "I see that the men* ***RESPONSIBLE*** *for this condition are in a very DANGEROUS position."* He (Jeremiah) says that*, "I can see God doing* ***TWO THINGS*** *to them: putting them on a* ***SLIPPERY PATH*** *and giving them* ***POIISONED WATER*** *to drink."* Now, those are strong words--- very strong words---and a nice little god who simply wants everybody to be happy, healthy and comfortable. Yes, you can pack a cathedral with hundreds of people who want physical health. Wherever people have more of this world goods, they are more interested in ***PHYSICAL HEALTH***, because that's the one threat to their losing their enjoyment and comfort. That's why Christian Science is so popular in wealthy areas. Yes, we're interested in health, and we're interested in comfort and we want to be whole and we want all this but, but God is dealing with things at a much deeper level and he says, *"I will put them in a* ***SLIPPERY PLACE****. My wrath will come like a* ***WHIRLWIND****, like a tempest."* It's not all light and love. There is the ***WRATH OF GOD*** in the darkness as well. And if we're going to preach the ***WHOLE*** word of God, it's got to include both ***LOVE*** and ***WRATH***. It's got to include both ***LIGHT*** and ***DARKNESS***. It's got to include both ***RAIN*** and ***DROUGHT***. It's got to include both the ***TRUTH*** that he set the bounds of the ocean and the ***TRUTH*** that there will be more and more earthquakes. As Jeremiah says, *"In the last days, you'll understand this more clearly... you'll get the message more clearly."*

***Shock #2: The KIND of Message of the Prophets---Wishful Words***

Now, I must hurry on. The ***SECOND*** thing that disturbed him about the false prophets was the kind of message they brought. First thing was the kind of lives they live. The second thing was the KIND of message---***WISHFUL WORDS***. There are ***TWO SOURCES*** of prophet's words. ***ONE*** is the ***IMAGINATION*** of the ***HUMAN*** mind; and the ***OTHER*** is the ***INTENTION*** of the ***DIVINE*** mind

***Prophetic Source #1: Imagination of the HUMAN Mind***

And Jeremiah said, *"You are getting your messages from the* ***IMAGINATION OF YOUR OWN MINDS****. The source of your message is basically your own human nature.”* And human nature is basically ***OPTIMISTIC***: "Everything will turn out all right in the end. This is just a cycle. There'll be an upswing. Hope springs eternal in the human breast. Look on the bright side and put on your rose-colored spectacles. It's all right; we're just going through a temporary setback." And our politicians are already telling us, "It's all right, we're on the upswing. Inflation's going to come right down to 4.5%... it is only a matter of just hanging on."--optimism. Human nature can only live by optimism---can only survive. You can either live by ***HUMAN OPTIMISM*** or ***FAITH IN GOD***. You have no other choice except utter despair. And I can understand unbelievers trying to kid themselves that things are not as bad as they seem. I can understand them desperately clutching at ***WISHFUL THINKING***. I can understand them. Glad to have someone tell them it's gonna be all right. I can understand them clutching at straws of hope by whoever gives them.

***Prophetic Source #2: Intention of the DIVINE Mind***

But I also understand that this is the imagination of the human mind. It's not the ***INTENTION OF THE DIVINE MIND***. As Jeremiah says, *"This is* ***VAIN HOPE****."* You see the problem with being a ***PROFESSIONAL*** preacher is that your bread and butter depends on people supporting you; and you are, therefore, tempted to tell them what is ***POPULAR*** and what ***THEY*** want to hear. It's the most subtle pressure, and it had come on these prophets, *"And these are* ***VAIN HOPES****,"* said Jeremiah. They were saying to people who would not let ***GOD*** speak to them, *"Everything will be all right."* They were saying to those who stubbornly followed their own hearts---in other words, lived exactly as they wanted to---and saying to them, *"No evil will come upon you."*

I was talking to one of the small groups that advised the Archbishop of Canterbury on his publicity program about calling the nation to *'think again'*. And I'm not going to discuss now the ins and outs of all that. I will just say this one thing. The question that I believe ought to have been asked is, "What sort of society do you think ***GOD*** wants? Because if you ask people, "What kind of a society do ***YOU*** want?" I told this man on Friday morning: "I'll tell you the answer: precisely the society we have got. We've got it because we ***WANTED*** it. We just don't like the ***BILL*** when it comes in. We don't like the ***PRICE*** we have to pay for being in a society where everything's up for grab---for being in a society where everybody has as much ***MONEY*** as they want and as many ***THINGS*** as they want."

We've got the society we ***WANT***, we just don't like ***PAYING*** for it. That's our problem. The question we've got to ask is not the ***IMAGINATION OF OUR MINDS***: What do we think ***WE*** want? But what is the ***INTENTION OF GOD'S MIND***: What kind of a society does ***HE*** want us to have? We've got the society ***WE WANT***, and we don't like it now that we've got it. We spent all the sixties trying to get it, and now that the ***BILL*** has come in in the seventies, we don't want it. We've got the education ***WE WANTED*** as a nation. Now we don't like it now that we've got it, but we got what ***WE WANTED***. We've got the government ***WE WANT***, whether you like it or not, it's the government the ***PEOPLE*** ***WANTED***. We've got what ***WE WANTED.***

And so, Jeremiah doesn't like their ***WISHFUL WORDS***....He says, *"Vain hopes."* He says, *"What is THE word if you'd only listened to God?"* In fact, here's what Jeremiah says. He says, *"Don't listen to these men because they have not listened to God. How can a man say what God is saying, unless he's used his* ***EARS*** *before he uses his* ***MOUTH****. I* ***DIDN'T*** *send the prophets, but they* ***RAN****. I* ***DIDN'T*** *charge them, but they* ***SPEAK****. I* ***DIDN'T*** *put words in their mouth, but their mouths are just* ***JABBERING****!!"* And here is the profound ***LESSON***---before a man can ***SPEAK*** from God, he's got to ***LISTEN*** to God. Now I tell you, I maybe rambling a bit this morning, because I'm not as thoroughly prepared as usual. And in fact, this has been quite a week, and I really got down to it about 9:30 last night. But I declare before God, who was there at the time and who fills heaven and earth, that my ***FIRST*** thing was to say, "God, I'm listening. I'm listening." And you know thoughts just poured out of this passage. They just poured out. We've got to ***LISTEN FIRST***!

What is God saying? It was only late last night that he talked to me about the ***EARTHQUKE*** and the ***DROUGHT*** in England. Listen, listen. You see, if it's ***WISHFUL WORDS*** from the imagination of the human mind. It'll be *'vain hopes'*. It'll be, "Cheer up, it's alright. We pull together...the 'spirit of Dunkirk'; come on!" I tell you that's ***NOT*** the word of the Lord for this situation. The word of the Lord is much deeper than that. It is not, *'vain hopes'*. It's the word that Jeremiah says here, listen: *"Behold the* ***STORM*** *of the Lord's* ***WRATH*** *has gone forth---a whirling tempest. It will burst upon the head of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the* ***INTENTS OF HIS MIND****."* And I believe the intent of God's mind is to teach us a ***VERY SEVERE LESSON***. For we have been the nation that has received as much of God's blessing as any other nation in the world. We've been the nation that has sent the gospel out to more countries than any other nation, until America recently. We've ***HAD*** all this, but we don't have it ***NOW***. And every time the pound drops, do you realize that missionary work becomes that much more ***EXPENSIVE***? Do you realize that? That to me is the ***MOST*** ***SERIOUS*** effect of inflation---by far, the MOST serious---that our missionary work is being crippled and crippled by the deflating pound. When did you last hear that said about ***INFLATION***? What is said is, "You are having to may have to pay more for your infant mash." That's what's being said. But I say we are having to pay ***MORE*** to get the gospel overseas! We're having to pay ***MORE*** to build the church of Jesus Christ. And Christians are going to have to be sacrificial in giving, if they're going to keep going with the work that all already is being done. Is God speaking?

***Prophetic Source #3: Deceptive Dreams***

***THIRDLY***, their ***DECEPTIVE DREAMS***. It begins with an extraordinary statement*: "God is everywhere, so he knows everything."* He knows where the message came from. He knows where men get their ideas. You can fool ***YOURSELF***, you can even fool ***OTHERS***, but you can never fool ***GOD***. And if you say God is saying to you something---he heard it, and he will confirm whether it's ***TRUE***.

And so, Jeremiah contrasts the distraction of ***HUMAN SPECULATION*** and the destruction of ***DIVINE SPEECH***. The distraction of human speculation: ***FIVE*** times in this next section from verse 23 to 32, the word ***'LIES'*** occurs---***'LIES'***, ***'LIES'***, ***'LIES'***, ***'LIES'***, ***'LIES'***. Where did they get these ***LIES***? They said, "I've had a ***DREAM***. I've had a dream." Now, you know that dreams are a very ***UNSURE*** way of getting the word of God. God can speak through a dream. He spoke to Joseph in dreams in the Old Testament. He spoke to Joseph, the foster parent of Jesus, in dreams. God can speak in dreams, but you know as well as I do---and you don't need Freud to tell you this--that many of your dreams at night come, not from God, but from your ***SUBCONSCIOUS***, and are an outworking of your ***OWN*** thoughts, your ***OWN*** desires, your ***OWN*** wishes, and your ***OWN*** frustrations. That's why psychiatrists will sometimes say, "Lie there and tell me what you dreamt about last night". It's clues to the subconscious. And dreams are a very ***UNSURE*** way of finding God's will. And a dream therefore, if you believe it's of God, has to be ***TESTED***---really tested by the word of God, by the advice of God's people.

But these prophets were saying*, "I've* ***DREAMED****, I've* ***DREAMED****."* And you know this is terribly impressive. The pagan prophets of pagan gods used to give their oracles through ***DREAMS***---the Delphic Oracle would have ***DREAMS***. It was a favorite way of imagining that the spirits had spoken in the ancient world. And these prophets were saying, *"I've* ***DREAMED****, I've* ***DREAMED****, I've* ***DREAMED****."* And God says, *"Look, remember I was* ***THERE****. I fill the heaven and the earth. I was THERE when you were dreaming. And I tell you, you didn't even get this from a dream. You pinched this message from* ***ANOTHER PROPHET****. I was* ***THERE*** *when you talked together."* And do you know what these professional prophets were doing? They were going around and saying, *"Have you had any good* ***DREAMS*** *lately?"* And someone said, *"Well I've had a* ***DREAM****."* And they would share it, and then they would ***ALL*** preach it the next Sunday. And they would say, *"I've had a* ***DREAM****,"* and they had nothing of the kind!! This may be devastating revelation of what was happening then, but it was happening. And God says *"They're* ***LYING****, they're* ***LYING****. Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream but let him who has my word SPEAK IT* ***FAITHFULLY****."* That's what God asks. You can be led astray by ***DECEPTIVE DREAMS***; but God's word is ***CLEAR***. That's what's to be passed on.

***God's WORD: a FIRE and a HAMMER--- It BURNS and BREAKS***

When God's ***WORD*** is passed on, rather than the ***DREAM***, you can tell what's happening by ***TWO*** things. ***FIRST***, you'll get ***BURNED*** and ***SECOND***, you'll get ***BROKEN***. That's how you tell. *"Is not My word a* ***FIRE****? Is it not a* ***HAMMER*** *that breaks the rock in pieces?"* I'm afraid, here is an easy ***TEST***. If you've listened to God's word, you feel you've been ***BURNED*** or ***BROKEN***.

Two on the road to ***EMMAUS*** and a third drew near and they didn't recognize Him---it was Jesus. He took them through the Old Testament. Let those who deride the Old Testament note that there was no New Testament then. He took them through the Old Testament---he took them through the word. What was the result? "Did not our hearts ***BURN***?" The word was ***FIRE***. Fire ***BURNS***.

But the word of God is also a ***HAMMER*** that ***BREAKS***. I was reading an interesting book for a bit of light reading the last few weeks since the last visit to Jerusalem: Kathleen Kenyon, *'Digging up Jerusalem'*, the famous archeologist. I came to this little bit where they'd found the old wall of David's city---the Jebusite Wall---dating from before King David. And on top of the wall was some huge lumps of rock, which were covering what they wanted to get at; and they couldn't think how to get these huge lumps of rock out. They were in a deep hole, and they could get no machinery down the hole to lift the rocks out. And so, the only way they could get these lumps of rock out of the way was to ***SMASH*** them. And they broke sledgehammer after sledgehammer trying to break this rock, until finally, Abu Mohammed, with his usual excellent local knowledge suggested that there was someone who would be ***EFFICIENT*** in this particular respect. I don't remember his name, but he was a tough looking individual. The toughness of his appearance was irrelevant to his efficiency. Introduced to a difficult stone in the overlapping fill, he would look here and there, and he would sing a little ***SONG***. I'm emphatic on my evidence of this, but my Arabic is quite inadequate to catch the words of the song. He then struck the stone a blow at just the ***RIGHT POINT,*** and it fell apart into the fragments that we could carry out of the dump. Moreover, I don't think he ever broke a heft. It remains in my mind as an example of complete expertise. I tell you that what God wants to get at in your life is ***OVERLADEN*** with fill, with all kinds of things---with big stones that get in the way.

And when God's ***WORD*** is preached, it's as if God sings a little song and then with the hammer---with one blow--- all that has covered what he wants to get at is ***SHATTERED***. That's what God's ***WORD*** is like. It's not dreams, it's not airy-fairy things. It's a word that makes your heart ***BURN*** within you---***BURN*** with shame, ***BURN*** with excitement...but ***BURN***. It’s a word that ***BREAKS***, and ***BREAKS UP***, in order that God may get through it what He wants to get. And these prophets were ***NOT*** giving that word. Don't you touch God's word unless you are prepared to get ***BURNED*** or ***BROKEN***. There's a lovely English pun in the last verse of that section, verse 32, *"These ‘****PROPHETS’*** *do not ‘****PROFIT’*** *this people at all."* Do you like that pun? "*Such* ***‘PROPHETS’*** *are no* ***'PROFIT'*** *to you. They may comfort you; they may make you feel safe, but you are no better off. There has been no ‘****PROFIT’****."*

***'The Burden of the Lord' Was Misused by FALSE Prophets***

Having given you an ***ENGLISH*** pun, let me now come to the ***FINAL SECTION*** of chapter 23, which is entirely based on a ***HEBREW*** pun. It's the word ***'BURDEN'***. I'm afraid the living Bible is very misleading at this in this section. So, I'll read it in another version. The word that occurs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 times in just a few verses, is a ***PUN***. It's the word ***'BURDEN'***. You see when men of God become ***PROFESSIONAL***, they develop professional jargon. It happens in every profession, doesn't it? And when men of God become professional, they develop a ***THEOLOGICAL JARGON***, and it becomes a kind of technical term that covers a multitude of things. And in those days the professional term which they had developed was, ***'THE BURDEN OF THE LORD'***. And whenever they said this, people accepted whatever they said after it, ***'THE BURDEN OF THE LORD***, or in modern terms, *'I feel very burdened to share this with you'*. That's what they were saying.

And Jeremiah says, *"God* ***FORBIDS*** *you to use this phrase ever in any connection. It has now been so abused and so misused, it no longer means what it was originally meant to mean."* And people still use this term, you know, "I have a ***BURDEN*** for you brother...I'm ***BURDENED*** to share this with you." Now, that's what they were saying then---only it had become such a technical phrase that ***ANYBODY*** could say ***ANYTHING***. if you didn't like the way a brother prayed in the prayer meeting, you went to him and you said, "The ***BURDEN*** of the Lord. I'm ***BURDENED*** brother, and I must get this ***BURDEN*** off my chest." And then you let him have it. And really, it was ***YOU*** saying it! Or you didn't like the way that person dressed: "I have a ***BURDEN*** about your dress in church. I'm ***BURDENED*** until I've shared it with you!" Sometimes when we're saying that, we're getting a burden off our chest, but it's ***NOT*** the ***LORD'S*** burden; it's just that we've been irritated or frustrated with a Christian brother or sister.

And here the prophets of the Lord were saying ***"THE BURDEN OF THE LORD,"*** and it was nothing of the kind. And the word ***'BURDEN'*** in Hebrew means ***TWO*** things. It means *'something that's* ***HEAVY ON YOU'***; but it also means *'something that you've* ***GOT TO GET RID OF'***. And we say, "I've got to get this off my chest." That's the same kind of language. And God says, *"Tell these people who keep using the phrase, 'The burden of the Lord,' that* ***MY*** *burden is not their message, but the* ***MEN****. My burden is not what they're* ***SAYING****, but what they* ***ARE****". Tell them, "The burden of the Lord is* ***YOU****. Stop unburdening all the things you think about other people to them and saying, 'It's the burden of the Lord.' The burden of the Lord is* ***YOU****."*

That's a challenging word. And God says, "Because ***YOU*** are my burden, I'm gonna cast you off---you and your city. I'm gonna get rid of this heavy thing on my chest. The heavy thing is not the message ***YOU*** say is my burden. My heavy thing is the ***MESSENGER***, and I'm gonna get you off my back, and you'll be an ***EVERLASTING REPROACH*** and ***SHAME***, including the ***CITY***.” And when one goes to Jerusalem, as some of us were just two weeks ago, you feel so ***BURDENED*** for that city. I***T’S THE CITY THAT GOD THREW AWAY***... It's the city that God threw away. Thank God, He's not finished with it. But, He says, *"You are my burden, and I've got to get YOU off my chest. Not your message, but* ***YOU****!!"* Sometimes when we are tempted to go to someone and say, "I'm BURDENED for you and I must get this ***BURDEN*** off my chest," God might just be saying to you, *"****YOU*** *are my burden. Not what you're gonna say.* ***YOU*** *are My burden".*

***The TRUE Prophets***

And though we've thought about nothing but ***FALSE* *PROPHETS*** right through chapter 23, chapter 24 comes in from the ***TRUE PROPHET***. And thank God, that wherever there are ***FALSE*** prophets, there are ***TRUE*** prophets. Otherwise, there wouldn't be false ones. There's no point in counterfeiting something that isn't real. Nobody, as far as I know, is counterfeiting half-crowns at the moment. He'd be a fool if he was, because there are no half-crowns around. And it is a sign that there are ***TRUE*** prophets speaking, if there are ***FALSE*** prophets around, right? And there were ***TRUE*** prophets, and Jeremiah was one of them. And though from 23 to 24 we jump a period of many years---it's one of the problems in the book of Jeremiah that you go backwards and forwards through the years--- you don't where you are ***CHRONOLOGICALLY***. Now that's not because God is a fool or, because He edited this bit badly. The gospels are in order, but this is ***OUT OF ORDER***. God had a purpose in putting two things next door to each other that belonged years apart. And so, suddenly we jumped ***FORWARD*** to, after the year 597 BC, when all the leaders of the nation had been taken away into ***EXILE***; Jeremiah's worst predictions had come true!!! And the royal court, the politicians, even the skilled craftsmen, had all been taken to ***BABYLON***. And we suddenly ***JUMP AHEAD*** to the years when already the cream of the nation is in chains in Babylon and has been led off through the desert.

***WHY*** should God jump the years and put together two things that didn't happen together? I'll tell you ***WHY***. Because God is interested in more things than chronology. He wants us to see what a ***TRUE*** prophet says.... (as distinct from the ***FALSE*** prophet). And, through the years, we go ahead; and God says, "*Jeremiah*." And Jeremiah's listening and looking to God before He speaks. ***THAT'S*** why he was a ***TRUE*** prophet. He was prepared to listen and say*, "God, what do You want me to say?"* He ***DIDN'T*** come out with the first dream he had. He ***DIDN'T*** tell the people what they wanted to hear. He ***DIDN'T*** cry, *"Peace, peace,"* when there was no peace. He said, *"God, what do You want to say?"* And he ***DIDN'T*** care what the people thought.

 And God said, *"Jeremiah, what do you* ***SEE****?"* Jeremiah had a ***VISION***. It wasn't a dream (you have dreams at night when you're asleep), but Jeremiah, here, was ***AWAKE***...broad daylight! And a ***VISION*** in broad ***DAYLIGHT*** is usually much more ***RELIABLE*** than a ***DREAM*** at midnight. And he saw a vision and he just saw ***TWO BASKETS OF FIGS***. And ***ONE***, were the ***FIRST RIPE FIGS***, (that's the first crop on the fig tree---and they're the sweetest; they're the delicacy). They're just appearing on the fig trees out in Israel now. The first ripe figs, (beautiful, tasty, sweet figs), a basket full. Then he saw ***ANOTHER*** basket, and he looked there were ***MOLDY, ROTTEN FIGS*** (you wouldn't touch them)!! And ***BOTH*** baskets were sitting on the steps of the Temple of the Lord, as if they were being offered to Him.

*"Jeremiah, do you* ***SEE****?"*

"*Yes, Lord, what does it mean? I'm* ***LISTENING*** *as well as* ***LOOKING****."*

 *"Jeremiah, you see those lovely* ***RIPE, SWEET FIGS****? They're the people of God away IN* ***BABYLON****. The people who have already been taken away---and they're sweet. I like them. I'm gonna accept them, and* ***I WILL BRING THEM BACK INTO THIS LAND****. I WILL plant* ***THEM****. I* ***WILL*** *build them up."* **I WILL! I WILL! I WILL**! *"They're sweet to me, those people away in Babylon."* And what a lovely positive note there is here. Very positive. But I ask you this question, "***WHY*** were those people ***SWEET*** to God?

And then He said, *"Now look at the basket of* ***ROTTEN FIGS****. Who are they? Those are the people who* ***ESCAPE THE EXILE****, who are right here in the land still, and who are still comfortable and safe. And I don't like them one bit. And even if they flee to the other superpower (Babylon and Egypt were the two superpowers)...even if they change sides and go to the other superpower in* ***EGYPT****, even* ***THERE*** *I will follow them and make them a* ***TAUNT****, A* ***JOKE****---* ***CONTEMPTIBLES****!! And* ***WAR*** *and* ***FAMINE*** *and* ***DISEASE*** *will decimate their numbers until there are none of them left."*

Now what is the ***DIFFERENCE***? Some could say, "Well, this was the upper class taken to Babylon; these were the working class." No, that's not the ***DIFFERENCE***. "These were skilled craftsmen, and these were unskilled laborers." No, those who still think that God somehow belongs to one class rather than the other; no, that's not the ***DIFFERENCE***. Shall I tell you the ***DIFFERENCE***? These had been ***BURNED*** AND ***BROKEN*** by God's word. They had been chastised. They were willing to be punished...and they'd been punished. And so, God could do something with them. And the people whom God can use ***TO PLANT FOR THE FUTURE***, are those who've been ***CHASTISED***, who've **SUFFERED**, who've gone through it for Him.

Yesterday in Hyde Park corner, we stood there (some thousands of us), and there on the back of the lorry, were two men in navy blue suits: Russian men. One of them just five weeks out of Russia, telling us he'd spent five years in jail for the Lord. Do you know I wanted to run up and jump on that lorry. It would've been a disturbance; it would've been out of order. But I wanted to run up and jump, and say, "This man is a ***BETTER CHRISTIAN*** than I am. He's been in ***EXILE***. He's been through it for his Lord. He's been ***CHASTISED***, he's ***SUFFERED***. He's been ***BURNED***, he's been ***BROKEN***, and he's ***SWEET FIGS***!! And we (the thousands sitting there licking ice creams), we.... it cost us nothing to walk a mile and a half through London. We weren't being burned. Because I was leading the singing in our group, the police closed in on me very definitely. They saw a ringleader here, and they just closed in. And they looked at me sideways, and my wife said, "They're watching you." And they were!! They thought, "Here's a troublemaker." What was that to what those men had been through? ***NOTHING***. ***NOTHING***!!

God says, *"Are you a* ***GOOD FIG*** *or a* ***BAD FIG*** *for Me? Do you just want to stay in your own land---comfortable---and escape the troubles that are coming? Or* ***ARE YOU WILLING*** *to accept My word that* ***BURNS*** *and* ***BREAKS****? You* ***WILLING TO GO THROUGH IT****? 'Cause those are the people whom I can accept and use."* Now, that's a ***TRUE*** word from God. It doesn't mince matters. It doesn't offer easy comfort. But it does offer ***HOPE***, doesn't it? It's not, “An old Jeremiah kind of word," as people say. It's ***NOT*** depressing!! It offers ***HOPE***! It offers ***JOY***!....but it offers ***SHAME*** first. It says*, "Those who like the Lord...look unto Jesus, the pioneer and perfector of their faith; and who, for the joy that is set* ***BEFORE*** *them,* ***ENDURE*** *the* ***CROSS*** *and* ***DESPISING*** *the* ***SHAME****."*

You know, as I listened to those two Russians, I felt embarrassed. What kind of Christianity have you found in the ***WEST***? I wondered if Georgi Vins got out to the west, what he would think? I know what Solzhenitsyn thinks. He's come out of the west. And I know from my own visits to east and West Berlin, that the ***REAL*** Christians I met were in ***EAST*** Berlin, not the ***WEST*** Berlin; the ***REAL*** ones. So, God says, *"I look to those in exile and I see a basket of RIPE FIGS. They've been through it. They're* ***SWEET****. They're* ***REFINED****. They've been* ***THROUGH THE FIRE****.*” That's a ***TRUE*** prophecy. And I believe that ***WE*** are not the man God wants us to be until we've been ***CHASTISED*** of the Lord. *"Those whom the Lord loves, He* ***CHASTISES****. And if you're never punished by God in this world, then you're not a son of God. You're a bastard,"* says the scripture*---“You're not, legitimate.”* Hebrews 12, (we read it last Sunday night).

*"For God's* ***WORD*** *is like a* ***FIRE*** *and a* ***HAMMER****."* It's not to be played with. It's ***TRUE***. And it brings you through the ***FIRE***---through the ***BROKENNESS***. And then He ***MENDS*** again, and the ***BURNS HEAL***. And He ***PLANTS*** you in the land. And ***HE BUILDS YOU UP*** and He gives you a ***HEART***. It's not just enough to be in the land! *"They shall* ***RETURN TO ME****, the Lord,"* he says. The tragedy of modern Israel is they've got back to the ***LAND***, but not to the ***LORD***. But the people who are sweet to God are those who come back to the ***LORD*** as well as to the ***LAND***.

***New Testament: The TRUE Prophet and The FALSE Prophet***

Oh, I must just go ***ONE STAGE FURTHER***. You see all this is Old Testament stuff. Let me take it into the ***NEW TESTAMENT***. There are still prophets. But supremely above them all stands THE PROPHET. Remember they asked John the Baptist a question, *"Are you THE prophet?,"* (because ever since Moses---and ever since---He promised that one day there’d come; ***THE*** prophet above all others). He promised this; and the Jews have waited for ***THE*** prophet. When John the Baptist appeared, they said, *"Are you* ***THE*** *prophet?"* He said, *"No, I'm not. But there's one coming after me whose shoes I'm not worthy to untie."*

And, Jesus is ***THE TRUE PROPHET***, who---by lip and life---gave the absolute ***TRUTH***: the integrity of God's word. And, whatever anybody can say about any other man of God, and his message or his life, the ***ONE TRUE PROPHET*** you can look at and say nothing against, is ***THE PROPHET, JESUS CHRIST!! THE PROPHET***---whose ***LIPS*** and whose ***LIFE*** gave the ***TRUTH***, and ***TURNED*** men from their ***WICKED*** ways. Whether their wickedness was of the kind the ***WORLD*** would call wicked, or whether it was the kind of wickedness ***GOD*** calls wicked (just being unlike God). And the ***TRUE*** prophet came into the world. And that ***TRUE*** prophet said these things: He said, *"In the last days, there'll be* ***EARTHQUKES*** *and* ***FAMINE*** *and* ***WARS*** *and* ***RUMORS******OF WARS****."* That's not false comfort, is it? And I believe the earthquake in Europe this week was part of the fulfillment of the ***TRUE PROPHET'S*** words.

But He said, *"When these things begin to happen,* ***LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED****. They'll drag you before princes. They'll accuse you falsely for My sake. But let not your heart be troubled. Lift your heads up! The day of your redemption is drawing near. But beware, there'll be many* ***FALSE PROPHETS*** *in that day."* And one of the marks of the ***LAST DAYS*** is that we shall see many, many, many more ***FALSE*** prophets giving the people delusive hopes. Telling the people, *"Peace,"* where there is no peace. Raising human hopes on ***FALSE*** foundations. Pandering to the optimism of human nature. There will be many ***FALSE*** prophets and they will culminate in one man who will be ***THE FALSE PROPHET***. And that man has yet to appear on the world scene. And so, at the end of history men will be faced with only ***TWO*** to choose between: the ***TRUE*** prophet, Jesus, and the ***FALSE*** prophet---the ***FALSE*** prophet, who will say, *"Everything's going to be alright. Everything's fine."* And in that day, the word of God will ***BURN*** and ***BREAK***. But out of it will come a people like a basket of ***SWEET FIGS.*** And God will say, *"I like them. I like them. And from them I will plan to* ***NEW PEOPLE*** *and a* ***NEW HEAVEN*** *and a* ***NEW EARTH****. And I accept them."*

Therefore, the question that you and I have to go away asking is simply this, "***WHICH BASKET WILL I BE IN***? Which basket?"

 Let us pray. "Oh God, it's cost me just a little to give this message this morning. But that's nothing, to what it costs some of Your servants to preach the word of God boldly and openly. And I praise You for the ***FIRST RIPE FIGS*** who are in prison this morning. Sweet people whom You will bring to their own land. And Lord, I ask your forgiveness, if anything I said this morning was not what You said--- or wanted to say. And I ask You to blot it out from the memory of those who heard it. And Lord, if anything I said was what You said to me first, then honor your word. ***BREAK*** us. ***MELT*** us. ***MOLD*** us. ***FILL*** us. Spirit of the living God, ***FALL AFRESH*** on me...."

***SINGING***

"Oh, loving Lord....

***SINGING***