

11/19/23 Christ Fellowship

The Prophets Still Speak  
Jeremiah 2:19

On February 27, 1992, Stella Liebeck, a 79-year-old woman from Albuquerque, New Mexico, ordered a 49-cent cup of coffee from the drive-through window of a local McDonald's restaurant. Her grandson parked the car so that Liebeck could add cream and sugar to her coffee. Liebeck placed the coffee cup between her knees and pulled the far side of the lid toward her to remove it. In the process, she spilled the entire cup of coffee on her lap. Do you remember what happened after that? She sued McDonald's and a New Mexico civil jury awarded her \$2.86 million. It's my understanding that she ultimately received quite a bit less than that but because she ordered hot coffee and got hot coffee but spilled it on herself, she sued.

In the summer of 2013, after George Zimmerman's acquittal for the shooting death of Trayvon Martin, the Black Lives Matter movement began and quickly formed national protests against mainly the police for what they saw as unjustified shootings of black people. It started out as a march and a rally here and there and wound up with riots, vandalism, general chaos and even killings in some places because of the racism they saw. They were killing people because people were getting killed.

Occupy Wall Street is the name given to a protest movement that began on September 17, 2011, in New York's Wall Street financial district. The mostly young, white and liberal protestors were upset about social and economic inequality, greed, corruption and the perceived undue influence of corporations on government. It ultimately resulted in many of the protestors being arrested and many, many instances of charges being filed against them for riots, all kinds of sexual misconduct as well as destruction of property and lots of sanitation issues. I remember seeing one of the protestors being interviewed on TV and he was asked what his demands were. He couldn't really answer but basically said, *"Well...we're just mad!"*

*"We're just mad!"* Do you know anybody like that? Maybe it's you. I would dare say that most Americans today would say those same words. We're mad and we're not going to take it anymore! But what are we really mad about? Are we mad because our lives aren't going the way we think they should? Are we mad because somebody isn't giving us what we think we deserve? Is someone not being sensitive to our precious needs? Our lives are a shambles and it has to be somebody else's fault because it surely isn't mine! Right?

Now, some of us sitting here in church this morning might think that maybe it is their sin that is being punished by God and that might not be wrong at all. God does punish sin. But God said through the prophet Jeremiah that sometimes sin...is its own punishment. Let's look at **Jeremiah 2:19** to see what Jeremiah was inspired by God to write 650 years before Jesus was born and I want you to see one of the most relevant passages of scripture that has ever been written to us today in these United States. It's like Jeremiah was watching our evening news and decided to comment on it. This is the root cause of almost all the social unrest in our country and around the world. Yes, we have racism, sexism, inequality, partisanship in government and so many other problems and everybody on every side is thinking that if the other side would just listen that our problems would be over.

Now, I'm not against having a good dialogue about these things but at some point we all have to decide to take responsibility for our actions and declare that change starts with me! If this country is going to survive any more length of time, we have to stop sinning. I know that sounds way too simplistic but that is the root of our problems and our problems will destroy us as individuals and as a country if we don't.

We are continuing with our sermon series on listening to the prophets of the Old Testament so look between the books of **Isaiah** and **Lamentations** at the book of **Jeremiah**. Poor Jeremiah! He preached, prayed and cried for 40 years and

nobody listened. No lives were ever changed and people hated him for saying what he did but he kept on being obedient. That is success in the eyes of God and that's all that matters. Jeremiah was warning the nation of Judah of the Lord's coming wrath but he might as well have been talking to the United States and is talking to us today through God's Word. Let's read **Jeremiah 2:19**.

*19Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the LORD your God and have no awe of me," declares the LORD, the LORD Almighty.*

I heard about a pig that ate his fill of acorns under an oak tree and then started to root around the tree. A crow remarked, "You should not do this. If you dig up the roots, the tree will wither and die." "Let it die," said the pig. **"Who cares as long as there are acorns?"** (Bits & Pieces, February, 1990, p. 24.) There are consequences to our choices, aren't there? Those consequences are so easy to see...in other people. Don't you wish people would just listen to us? Don't you wish everybody would just think like we do and do what we do and act like we do? Wouldn't life be sweet then? If everybody were just perfect like us?

I found this passage to be fascinating. I had never seen anything quite like it before and I immediately saw the problems of this world and of this country so clearly. It was obvious what everybody else's problems were. But then, what do you think God showed me? That's right. He showed me this applied to y'all as well. No! He reminded me of my own problems, past and present. He showed me that sometimes God doesn't have to do the punishing. Sometimes sin is its own punishment. Sometimes we get just what we want and it is miserable.

The nation of Judah had split from the nation of Israel with Israel to the north and Judah to the south and as the prophets like Amos and Isaiah had prophesied, the nation of Israel had been conquered and the people had been scattered. So, surely the nation of Judah saw what had happened to their sister country and saw how the prophecies had come true and surely they decided to repent and follow the one true God, right? Nope. In fact, just a few years later, Jeremiah himself was taken away into captivity along with most of the others. Don't you know it was all he could do to not say, "I told you so" over and over? God has not spoken to me like He spoke to Jeremiah and He has not foretold the fate of the United States to me but I can't help but see the incredible similarities between Israel and Judah and our country. Sexual sin was rampant in Judah in Jeremiah's time. The next verse after the one we just read says, *"Under every spreading tree, you lay down as a prostitute."* They had temples set up for worship that included male and female prostitutes one could visit as part of the worship ceremony and it wasn't just accepted, it was commonplace. It was open to anybody at any time and everybody knew about it and accepted it and evidently almost everybody was doing it.

Today, we hear that and cringe. We can't believe they did such horrible things and we can't imagine how they had slipped so far but I can't help but wonder what they would say about our society. I did some research and you all know what that means. (I googled it.) Now, we all know that the internet is a big deal, right. Most of us use it every day. We check email, get the news, cruise Facebook, look at pictures of the grandkids and watch videos of dogs climbing ladders. Have you seen that?! But did you know that almost 30 percent of all data transferred across the internet is porn? Porn sites get more visitors each month than Netflix, Amazon and Twitter Combined. I read that one professor was trying to do some research on the subject and was going to use men in their twenties who had never viewed porn...but he couldn't find any. It is estimated that every second of every day, there is an average 28,258 internet users watching pornography.

If I stopped right there, I can't comprehend God continuing to have patience with us and not wiping us out for one more minute. But He is patient and He doesn't have to wipe us out because the sins of lust and perversion are going to wipe us out themselves. How many people lose their jobs every day because of porn? How many people lose their marriages every day because of it? How many Christians lose their witness because of it?

The influence of non-marital sex doesn't stop with the internet. Sex is used to sell everything from hamburgers to spark plugs. Every TV show, every sitcom, every soap opera, every movie seems to be telling our kids and grandkids that everybody sleeps around. Nobody even gets married anymore and if you do and it doesn't work out, then just get divorced so you can sleep around all you want. Everybody is doing it. Well, maybe everybody is doing it and maybe that's why our nation is in the shape it's in. You can't keep ignoring God and keep on sinning and keep on doing things He calls perverted and expect to have His blessings. In **Romans chapter one**, God says through Paul, *"Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. 25They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator. 26Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. 27In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men and received in themselves the due penalty for their error."*

He said God gave them over to their desires and they got what they deserved. Do you want to stay away from sexually transmitted diseases, unplanned pregnancies, and heartbreak? Don't sleep around. Want to have a satisfying and fulfilling marriage? Don't sleep around and use the internet for what it's supposed to be used for – watching dog videos!

Jeremiah said, *"Your wickedness will punish you."* The original Hebrew word means to correct, literally with blows or hitting. It is a violent and painful thing to be punished like this and so many people have this in their lives and wonder why God would be so cruel to them. How could He do this to them? God didn't have to do anything. Their own disobedience did it to them. He says, *"Your backsliding will rebuke you."* Backsliding is apostasy. It's what Christians do when they make the decision to not be obedient to God. It means to continue in sin. Jeremiah is talking to God's chosen people, the apple of His eye and His beloved nation, or what was left of it. He is talking to us today. As Christians, our backsliding, our continuing in sin is going to judge us and show the world who we really are.

I don't have time or inclination to talk about all of **Jim Bakker's** public sins; his sexual deviancy and rip-offs of his television followers back in the '80's. Some of you might remember him as the guy who started the PTL Club on the Christian Broadcasting Network. His backsliding is well-documented and still today the main reason televangelists have such a bad name. In his 1996 book, *I Was Wrong*, he admitted that the first time he actually read the Bible all the way through was while he was in prison, and that it made him realize he had taken certain passages out of context. He wrote: *"The more I studied the Bible, however, I had to admit that my message did not line up with the tenor of Scripture. My heart was crushed to think that I led so many people astray. I was appalled that I could have been so wrong, and I was deeply grateful that God had not struck me dead as a false prophet!"* Maybe it was because God is so patient that He didn't strike him down but maybe God just let his own apostasy take him down; his own backsliding rebuked him. How does a person get to that point? Obviously, Jim Bakker didn't just wake up one day and decide to go crazy with women and money.

The next to last line in our verse today in Jeremiah says, *"when you forsake the Lord your God."* Forsake means to put distance between. It's what happens when we sin. We put a barrier between us and God and then when we continue to sin, we keep putting a distance between us and God. You do that step by step and sin by sin. Jeremiah goes on to say this happens when we have no awe of God or fear of God. In *The Chronicles of Narnia*, an allegory by C.S. Lewis, the author has two girls, Susan and Lucy, getting ready to meet Aslan the lion, who represents Christ. Two talking animals, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver, prepare the children for the encounter. "Ooh," said Susan, "I thought he was a man. Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion." "That you will, dearie." said Mrs. Beaver. "And make no mistake, if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly." "Then isn't he safe?" said Lucy. "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said

*anything about safe? Of course, he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king, I tell you!"* Our Daily Bread, February 17, 1994.

In this life, people have way too much fear of the wrong things and way too little fear of God. He is the Lion of Judah. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He's the Creator of the universe and He is the same God today as He was in the Bible who struck people dead for their sins. He's a good and loving God but He's also a just God. He can't be all-loving without being just. We are to be in awe of Him. We are to fear Him. Because He loves us, He wants us to live full and abundant lives as it says in **John 10:10** but so many of us are mad and bitter about our lives and how things have turned out for us. We want to blame anybody and everybody but ourselves but even that doesn't bring us any peace. It's almost like that Jeremiah guy knew what he was talking about.

*19Your wickedness will punish you; your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realize how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the LORD your God and have no awe of me," declares the LORD, the LORD Almighty.*

So, what do we do? Our lives are bitter. We have backslidden as individuals and as a country. Our own wickedness is punishing us. How do we get out of this? First and foremost, know that in and of yourself, you can't get out of this. It's too hard. We've gone too far and there is no hope for us without repenting of our sins and turning back to the One who loves us but we will talk more about that in a second. What you can do is make sure your life in being lived in biblical truth. Make sure the log is out of your eye before you start working on the speck in your neighbor's eye. Then start with your family. Men, you are to be the spiritual leader, not the wife. **1 Corinthians 11:3** says, *"But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God."* That's God's order of things and it works the best.

**Deuteronomy 6** says, *"Impress these laws on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up."* Mom and Dad, when it comes time to talk to your children about how they should live, especially when it comes time for that talk, you know what I mean, or to talk about the dangers of alcohol and drugs or anything else that is important for them to know, don't just have one talk and check that box as done. If we are going to save this country for our kids and grandkids, it has to be done one at a time and that means pouring ourselves into each other with ongoing conversations, not just that sex outside of marriage is naughty and we don't do it but tell them why (appropriately as they get older, of course). Tell them when it comes on TV why we don't watch that and then turn it off.

Explain, like only you can, to your kids and grandkids the consequences of listening to that music or watching that TV show or clicking on that website. I know it's uncomfortable but so is watching your adult children live evil and bitter lives and seeing them punished by their own wickedness.

The good news is that even if it's too late to keep them from seeing or hearing that, the same God who did miracles in the Old Testament and in the New Testament still does miracles today. He wants to have a relationship with you and He wants to take that away from you because He doesn't want you to live a bitter life. He wants you to have peace and joy even in the difficult times of your life.

Repent – turn away from – those sins and ask God for forgiveness of those sins and the Bible says He is faithful and just to forgive you and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9.) Then ask Him to be Lord of your life and to save you and He will and that is the only way. It's the only way to Heaven and it's the only way we can have true lasting peace and the only way we cannot live evil and bitter lives. Do that today.