

**Jeremiah 18: 15 – 20: 6; “In Days of Opposition”, Sermon # 21 in the series –
“Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God”,
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 6th, 2016,
in the Morning Worship Service.**

The picture which has been presented to us in Jeremiah 18 is that of a potter making and fashioning clay. God is the potter; men and nations are the clay. God does as He pleases in fashioning our lives, even though we are marred by sin. God does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth.” “No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, ‘What have You done?’” (Daniel 4: 35) God is fully sovereign and righteous in all that He does in making and molding the clay, but many unbelieving people are very sinful and disobedient in the sight of God. So far, in this passage of Jeremiah 18, we have learned that though sin has marred every aspect of our being, we are still in the Potter’s hands. He can re-make the vessel so that it is good and useful, or He can break it, bring His judgments upon either a person or a nation, if that nation will not repent.

Well, this morning we want to examine what unbelief does to a nation. What is it that the opposition of unbelief leads to, in a nation like ours, and how should we conduct ourselves in days when the Lord is bringing His judgments upon our land? I believe that there are 4 very practical things which the Lord would have us to do in these days of judgment and opposition. 1st – When many people have forgotten God, we must remember Him. (chapter 18, verses 13-17) 2nd – When many people are devising plans against God’s ministers we must strongly stand with them and support them in their efforts to declare God’s truth. (chapter 18, verses 19-23) 3rd – When God brings His heaviest judgments, we must justify Him in bringing them, and yet we must also study to keep a tender heart before Him. (chapter 19) And 4th – When those in authority put God’s preachers in the stocks or in prison, we must remember that the Lord will deal with them in His time. (chapter 20, verses 1-6) I pray that the Lord will give us the grace to see the parallels between the nation of Israel in Jeremiah’s day, and our nation in our own day.

1st – When many people have forgotten God, we must remember Him. (verses 13-17)

Verse 15 of chapter 18 says: “Because My people have forgotten Me, they have burned incense to worthless idols.” “And they have caused themselves to stumble in their ways, from the ancient paths, to walk in pathways and not on a highway, to make their land desolate and a perpetual hissing; everyone who passes by it will be astonished and shake his head.” “I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will show them the back and not the face in the day of their calamity.” It is the essence of self-deception to forget God. It is described here as a people’s “causing themselves to stumble in their ways”. The fool has said in his heart that there is no God, but it seems to be something worse than foolish to forget the God you once said that you knew. God reveals His power and His glory in so many ways in His creation, and in His providence, and yet so many in our country are forgetting Him; forgetting that His will is revealed most specifically of all in the Bible, if they would only read it.

This is a great trend in our own country in the last few decades. Even though there used to be many people in our country who would read the Bible, there seems to be a greater and greater number who do not. Many people profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, and His word. They believe in the doctrine of justification, but it is not the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ, and receiving grace to repent of all of their sins. It is rather a doctrine of justification by death alone; that when a person dies, they somehow automatically go to heaven in spite of their many sins. Indeed, these same persons think of God as lovingly watching over them to protect them from all evil; yet they fully believe that He accepts them in their sins; just as they are, with no repentance and no pursuit of holiness. If they become sinfully angry with

people, if they are covetous or idolatrous in their worship, if they are adulterers, fornicators, homosexuals, or Lesbian, Bi-sexual or transgender, if they say that they believe in God, they are believing in their own home-spun yarn that God is only a God of love. He does not disapprove of them in any of their ways or any of their thoughts. And so, they say: Why do I need to repent, when God is an all-approving God. But they say these things, they willfully forget that the Bible says that God is also a God of justice as well as a God of love. God does not love sin, He hates it. And His word says that He will judge the world in righteousness. It says that He will punish all unrepentant sinners with eternal and everlasting torment in the lake of fire. 1st Corinthians 6: 9 and 10 – “Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” “Do not be deceived.” “Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.” “And such were some of you.” “But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”

Many people say “God bless America”, and yet we must wonder – What kind of blessings are they looking for? Most of the people in this country are looking for material and earthly blessings alone. Many people are very refined and culturally approved sinners. They are looking for blessings upon our culture and our society in terms of eating and drinking and being merry; of being entertained continually. They falsely think that this is the meaning of life. But if you were to ask them what they are living for, well, it is the next meal, the next time of entertainment. It is not for God that they live. They do not even thank Him for their daily bread; let alone pray to Him and read His word as He has told us we should do. Perhaps their idol is their job and they greatly desire to be seen as great by people around them. But they do not give God the glory for the great things that He has done for them, or what He has allowed them to do and to become. Instead, they give the glory to their own intelligence and their own cleverness. This is nothing but the flesh and the boastful pride of life.

Let us ask ourselves – How many people in our land, if they go to church at all, they are going to a church which does not recognize the Bible as the word of God, and those people who they worship with, have accepted, or they have made up, a man-centered religion, with man-centered doctrines. Everything that they believe is important, is related to themselves, and what they can already do. If they can't do it, then they look for some sort of self-help program that they think will benefit them. They do not believe that they need to humble themselves and pray and ask God to give them grace. They are wise in their own eyes. They have forgotten entirely what God is looking for from them; what He expects of them.

Let me show you what God expected of His Old Covenant people. Turn with me over to Deuteronomy 4, verses 1-9. “Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers is giving you.” “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take anything from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord Your God which I command you.” “Your eyes have seen what the Lord did at Baal Peor; for the Lord your God has destroyed from among you all the men who followed Baal of Peor.” “But you who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today, every one of you.” “Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess.” “Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the people who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’” “For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?” “And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?” “Only take heed to yourself and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of

your life.” “And teach them to your children and grandchildren.” And this leads me to my second practical observation of what you can do in these days of opposition:

2nd – When many people are devising plans against God’s faithful ministers we must strongly stand with them and support them in their efforts to declare God’s truth. (chapter 18, verses 19-23)

This is so very important. For it is often faithful ministers who are under attack from Satan and from those who are falsely religious. When they find out, that it has been said by those who preach the word of God, that judgment is coming, they will often attack the preacher of the word rather than look into the matter further. Listen to verse 18 of chapter 19 of Jeremiah once again. “Then they said, Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet.” “Come and let us attack him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.” Now, you understand, don’t you, what they are saying? They know that the office of the priest was appointed of God, and that the law of God contained counsel that was wise in it. But they were willing to listen, only to those prophets, who prophesied good concerning them. They thought that since there were more prophets than one in Israel, that they had the right to reject Jeremiah’s words to them because they did not suit them. He was to be opposed because he was not saying to them, “peace, peace, when there was no peace.” But he was going to faithfully proclaim the judgments of God, and faithfully deliver God’s word to them, even if it consisted of things which went against what the unbelieving leaders and people wanted to hear.

And so they said: “Let us not give heed to any of his words”. They believed that there were many more prophets in Judah who would tell them what they want to hear; that they would have peace, even though they continued on in their worship of false gods and pursued their immoral lifestyle. Since Jeremiah was uncompromising as a preacher, he would be persecuted for it. Lest you think that this only went on in Old Testament times, I would have you turn with me over to 2nd Timothy chapter 4, verse 1. The apostle Paul says: “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ‘Preach the word!’ “Be ready in season and out of season.” “Convince rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” “But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.” You can see here Paul’s warning to Timothy that in regard to the preaching of the word of God, there would be various seasons. In some seasons, the word of God would be readily received and heeded, and at other times there would be great resistance to God’s chosen men, and great resistance and opposition to their ministry. Paul is saying to Timothy that he ought to be watchful and endure this kind of affliction, and do the work which God had called him to do, even so.

We have had a long time in this country without this kind of overt opposition to the word of God, but now in this day, we are seeing more and more of it. There are many people in our day who will not endure sound doctrine. Even many who are professed Christians do not see the importance of sound doctrine. Many have itching ears. They always want to hear something new that would pleasing to their natural man, to their carnal mind. They want to hear that all men are basically good; that they all have the free will to choose to be saved, and to do what is right without grace. Those people who do not believe in Christ have a tendency to want to believe that their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds and that is why they will go to heaven. None of them really believes that they need to be born again. These kinds of people will not endure sound doctrine, and they will heap up teachers to themselves, to justify the false things that they believe. I am saying that if you want God’s word to go forward, then you must stand

with God's ministers and strongly support them in their efforts to declare God's truth. John Gill says: "Thank God for ministers; pastors and teachers after God's heart, who preach according to the word of God; these feed men with knowledge and understanding, but it is a curse upon a people, when they are left to choose teachers after their heart's lusts." (End of quote) When others speak against your pastor preaching the whole counsel of God, will you not take your stand for them, and with them, and for the propagation of God's truth?

3rd - When God brings His heaviest judgments, we must justify Him in bringing them, and yet we must also study to keep a tender heart before Him. (chapter 19)

"Thus says the Lord: 'Go and get a potter's earthen flask, and take some of the elders of the people and some of the elders of the priests.'" "And go out to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the Potsherd Gate; and proclaim there the words that I will tell you, and say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem.'" "Thus says the Lord of hosts, the god of Israel: 'Behold, I will bring such a catastrophe on this place that whoever hears of it his ears will tingle.'" "Because they have forsaken Me and made this an alien place, because they have burned incense in it to other gods whom neither they, their fathers, nor the kings of Judah have known, and filled this place with the blood of the innocents." It sounds like our society in our own day, does it not? Politically and spiritually, we as a nation are burning incense to the many other gods of the nations. We have become a melting pot, not only of different cultures and different societies, but we have become a melting pot of doctrines and worship. It is as if we truly believe that all faiths are the same. And we parade around the killing of innocents, the killing of children in the womb as the right of the mother who desires to do so. This is why all the terrorism exists in the world today; it is because of false religion. Angry people with a cause that is no righteous cause at all.

And yet, we must understand that God Himself can take His protection away from people when they forget Him and when they depart from Him. What is it that God is looking for? What is it that God expects of every man and woman; every young person and child? God expects you, dear listener, to love Him with all of your heart. But do you? God expects you to love Him with your whole heart; with an undivided heart. It says in our text that these people burned incense to their own idols. What are the idols of our day? Well, mostly it is found in doing what pleases us most and not believing in God's word. Interestingly, people have, for the most part, entirely forgotten the ancient paths, "the paths of eternity" as the words in the Hebrew indicate. They have forgotten that it is God alone who can cause them to understand the meaning of life, and lead them in the good and right way to eternal life. The paths of eternity are the paths laid out in the word of God which direct us to see that a man's way is not in himself; that it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps, it says in Jeremiah 10: 23. God's word the Bible says we should live for God and not for ourselves. It says that we should be holy people who walk in His ways, and keep His commandments. It says that we must come to receive the gospel, and the New and Living Way of worshiping God through the grace which is given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ. It says that we must be converted to Christ in order to know God. We must believe in His promise that the person believing in Him has eternal life and will not come into judgment, but will have the light of life.

In our day, many people would strongly assert that it does not make any difference if a person is a Buddhist or a Muslim, or a person who worships other gods; that "we all worship the same God". They do not see the distinctiveness and the uniqueness of Christ. They have forgotten, or perhaps they have never read the Bible for themselves; that Christ is the only sinless man who has ever lived; that He was born of a virgin, that He is the Son of God; fully God and fully man, and that they must have this Jesus for themselves if they would be saved and really come to know God. Many, many people in our day are going to a supposedly Christian church where God's righteousness and justice are not taught. Instead these essential attributes

of God have been forgotten. If Christ has died for sins, then all people automatically have forgiveness of sins, some think. But this universalism is not true. It is perfectly true that Christ's sacrifice on the cross is meritorious enough to save every man who has ever lived. But the Bible nowhere says that God will apply Christ's redemption in this way. It says, "He will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and He will have compassion on whomever He will have compassion. And yet many in our country, even professed Christians say that all that really matters is if you are sincere in what you personally worship. There is no objective standard of truth; there is only the subjective standard of what I myself think.

What then should Christians do in the days of opposition and judgment? They should study to have a tender heart toward God, and a loving heart toward other people; even their enemies. If you have been given grace by God, you now have the capability of being tender hearted; tender hearted towards God first of all, and then tender hearted toward other people. You think about God first, and you think about He is looking for from you. You remember Josiah in 2nd Chronicles chapter 34? He was eight years old when he became king, he reigned 31 years in Jerusalem, and he did what was right in the sight of the Lord. Where did this begin? In verse 3 of that chapter it says : "He began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images." "They broke down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and the incense altars which were above them he cut down; and the wooden images, the carved images, and the molded images he broke in pieces, and made dust of them and scattered it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. Brethren, he was only sixteen years old, and yet he was in dead earnest about destroying the images of false worship and cutting down their incense altars. He knew that God cannot be served by false worship, but rather He was greatly displeased with it, and He was especially displeased if He saw that His people had been willing to allow it to infiltrate their land and take over His true worship.

Josiah was tenderhearted toward God and His word; the book of the law. The book of the law had been largely lost to the kings and the people by the time that Josiah came to the throne. But it was rediscovered one day when Josiah sent men in to repair the temple. They brought it to him, and Shaphan the scribe read him the words of the law of God. And thus, when the king heard the words of the Law, that tore his clothes, and later when Huldah the prophetess spoke to him about the judgments coming upon the nation, she said: "But as for the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the Lord, in this manner you shall speak to him, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Concerning the words that which you have heard – because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place and against its inhabitants, and you humbled yourself before Me, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you, say the Lord.'" "Surely I will gather you to you fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place and its inhabitants." Josiah's great tenderheartedness brought great revival and reformation to the land, and much good was done to glorify God in His worship. Judgments would still come to Judah and Jerusalem because of the heinous sins of many generations. But Josiah and those who followed his lead, God blessed and honored their obedience to His word.

Do you believe in the freedom of religion; that God ought to be worshipped according to the dictates of conscience in relation to His precious word the Bible? So do I. But things are going to have to change in this land of ours if we are going to know God's greatest blessings upon us. We will have to seek the only true and living God for the power to do what is right; to put away the foreign gods, and not permit the propagation of what is false to proliferate the land. Our Constitution needs to be further particularized. Yes, we believe in freedom of religion and freedom of speech as the founding fathers conceived of it; that no particular denomination of the Christian religion would force other denominations of it to worship God as they do. But this was

within the bounds of what was true; that there is only one true and living God, and salvation is only found through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The founding fathers did not believe that there were more gods than one, or that false religion ought to be promoted in our society, or its adherents and laws, govern the nation.

No, my brethren, we will need to rethink the way that we understand the first amendment and revise it to say that only what is true according to God's word will be the basis of our freedoms and the basis of our government. Someday I believe that this will actually happen. No, we will not need to persecute those who hold to false worship; but neither will we tolerate it asserting itself as being true. It is my Biblical hope that the majority of the people of this society will someday understand more clearly, and discern the difference between what is false and true. I believe that new laws related to righteousness and truth will come about by public consensus; not by force, and someday the truth of the Bible will be the basis of the law of the land because the majority of the voting populace will come to the place where they will embrace the truth of the Bible and the gospel of Jesus Christ. This will take great revival, I know, but God is surely able to bring it about. It is false religion that causes terrorism, unrest, agitation of heart, pain in the conscience, and the downfall of everything that is good and right in society. Let us remember it, and pray to be able to tear down, and tread under foot, all idolatry.

And then, 4th and finally – When those in authority put God's preachers in the stocks or in prison, we must remember that the Lord will deal with them in His time. (chapter 20, verses 1-6)

“Now Pashhur the son of Immer, the priest who was also chief governor in the house of the Lord, heard that Jeremiah prophesied these things.” “Them Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord.” “And it happened on the next day that Pashhur brought Jeremiah out of the stocks.” “Then Jeremiah said to him, ‘The Lord has not called your name Pashhur, but Magor-Missabib.’” “For thus says the Lord: ‘Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes shall see it.’” “I will give all Judah into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon and slay them with the sword.” “Moreover I will deliver all the wealth of this city, all its produce, and all its precious things; all the treasures of the kings of Judah I will give into the hand of their enemies, who plunder them, seize them, and carry them to Babylon.” “And you, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house, shall go into captivity.” “You shall go to Babylon, and there you shall die, and be buried there, you and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied lies.”

You can see here, can't you, how all that we have of worldly goods and peace and blessing come to us from the Lord. Our holding on to it does not rest upon our own ability to hold on to it; it is in God's hand to bless and establish any one of us, or our whole society and nation. It was God who was going to reward Pashhur according to his evil deeds. He would lose everything that he owned, and be taken to Babylon with all of his family; and die there, and end up in hell. Why? Because he would not worship and serve God according to His word given to him through the prophet Jeremiah. He made up his own false religion of prosperity and personal peace which he would supposedly bring about, and keep forever; but he had believed a lie. Let us remember that God will deal with every person in his own time. He is a mighty Judge who is well able to judge the hearts and actions of men, and to bring judgments to a nation as well as individual people. Let us receive the word of the Lord to us here today, and pray that this nation, on the eve of our National Elections would not trust in men and their promises, but in God and His promises, which shall never fail, either in mercy or in judgment.

