

**Jeremiah 42: 1-22; “The Way to Seek Direction”, Sermon # 47 in the series –  
“Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God”,  
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020,  
in the Morning Worship Service.**

The judgments of God were abroad in the land of Judah at the time of the writing of this chapter, and the judgments of God are abroad in our own land in these days of the coronavirus; that, even if we have not contracted it, it is affecting us and our church so that we cannot meet any more than 10 of us at a time. In this section of Scripture we find that the king and most of the people had been taken away into captivity, or they had died in battle, or they had suffered from famine or sickness. And all of this came upon them, because those in authority and the people who followed them, refused to hear and heed the word of God to repent. There is no doubt in my mind that the reason that we as a nation are experiencing the difficulties that we are experiencing now, is for the same reason. As a nation we need to turn back to God or we will continue to experience national judgments of various kinds, and many will perish in their sins if they have not Christ.

You will recall that in the last chapter, that this man Gedaliah was made governor of the land. He was a believer and a godly man. He had been appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, and his appointment temporarily brought stability back to the land, because those who remained of the military men, Johanan and Johnathan the sons of Kareah and Jezaniah the son of Hoshaiah, who were called captains of the forces in the fields (chapter 40, verse 13), brought all the remnant to live at Mizpah. Gedaliah told them to gather wine and summer fruits and oil, and to put down roots there, for he knew that God would bless them if they would stay in the land and not try to run away from their calamity, but face it. We have need to do the same thing here today. It behooves each one of us, not to run away from our problems, either personally or nationally, but to face them by obeying the will of God as it is found in His word.

You will further recall that Johanan came to warn Gedaliah that he would be killed by Ishmael, a man who professed allegiance to Gedaliah but who was secretly plotting to kill him. Johanan told Gedaliah that Ishmael had been sent by Baalis, the king of the Ammonites, to kill Gedaliah. And he would do so, if Gedaliah did not let him go and kill Ishmael first. Gedaliah was a man who did not believe this report, and as a result, he was killed by Ishmael, and many other people lost their lives as well. When Johanan found out about this, he went after Ishmael and was able to recover all of the people whom he had taken captive. Ishmael himself escaped and went over to the Ammonites. And so now, Johanan and all the people remaining with him, it says in chapter 41, verse 17, departed and dwelt in the habitation of the Chimham, near Bethlehem.

Johanan and the others with him, needed wisdom at this point. And so they came to Jeremiah to seek direction from the Lord. You and I, at many points in our lives, need wisdom and direction from the Lord as well, and so I pray that this message will be very profitable to us all. The question that I will attempt to answer from these verses is this: How am I, how are we, to seek direction from the Lord? When you are seeking direction from the Lord as to where you ought to live, and what you ought to do, there are according to this passage of Scripture, 5 other questions which you will need to ask yourself, so that you might have a favorable outcome from the Lord, if you would secure the Lord's blessing upon yourself and your family.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – Am I seeking the prayers and counsel of godly men?** (verses 1-4)

The approach of Johanan and all the people, to come to Jeremiah and to ask him to pray for them was the right approach. You will notice that they did it in a humble and respectful manner. They make the right request for themselves in verses 2 and 3. “Please let our petition be

acceptable to you, and pray for us to the Lord your God, for all this remnant (since we are left but a few of many, as you can see), that the Lord your God may show us the way in which we should walk and the thing we should do.” Now, this speech that they gave to Jeremiah appears to be a good one unless you examine it more closely. These folks were already on their way to Egypt it says in verse 17 of Chapter 41. They wanted to be safe and they were afraid of the Chaldeans it says in verse 18, because Ishmael murdered Gedaliah. When they came to Jeremiah they were not coming to him in the way of seeking his counsel concerning their religious worship or to determine what was right and wrong in this situation according to God’s commandments, but to determine what was the best course of action so that they would be safe.

If you would have the Lord’s blessing, and have Him approve of your plans, the proper approach is found in seeking direction from God Himself, and then from the most godly persons that you know of. Let’s start with God. James chapter 1, verse 5 – “If any man lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who give to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” But your will notice that when these people came to Jeremiah to inquire on their behalf they said to him – Pray for us to the Lord your God; not pray for us to the Lord our God. Did they really have saving faith in the Lord God? Jeremiah wonderfully turns their attention to this important consideration by saying to them in verse 4 – I have heard, and indeed I will pray to the Lord our God according to your words and it shall be that whatever the Lord answers you, I will declare it to you.” “I will keep nothing back from you.” What a faithful man Jeremiah was.

But we must see that when we come seeking wisdom and a favorable answer from God, we must come in faith, and we must ask in faith. Hebrews chapter 11, verse 6 – Without faith it is impossible to please God, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” And James chapter 1 again, this time verse 6 – “But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.” “For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.” The whole reason that we seek the Lord for direction, is in order to do His will – not our own will. These people didn’t quite grasp this. They wanted to check the Lord’s will like people check their horoscope in the newspapers.

But it is always good to seek the counsel of men who will consult the Bible and use Biblical principles to give us help in our assessment of what we should do. Proverbs 18: 1 – “A man who separates himself (or isolates himself) seeks his own desire.” “He rages against all wise judgment (against all sound wisdom). And Proverbs 11: 14 – “Where there is no counsel, the people fall, but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.” But I also want you to see how readily Jeremiah agreed with their request. He knew that they had their problems, but he would still attempt to give them God’s word on their situation.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Ask yourself – Am I willing to do God’s will whether it is pleasing or displeasing to me?** (verses 5 and 6)

“So they said to Jeremiah, ‘Let the LORD be a true and faithful witness between us, if we do not do according to everything which the LORD your God sends us by you.’ “Whether it is pleasing or displeasing, we will obey the voice of the LORD our God to whom we send you, that it may be well with us when we obey the voice of the LORD our God.” So you see – These people willingly took an oath that the Lord would be a true and faithful witness against them if they did not do according to all that Jeremiah spoke to them. They used the best words of promise, and they took the position that whatever the Lord’s word was, they would obey it that it might go well with them. The real issue in our discovery of God’s will as it relates to where we move to, and what we do, relates directly to how we can best obey him and serve Him. “If any man is willing to do His will he shall know of the truth whether it is of God or whether the prophet speaks from himself. (John 7: 17) These people assert that they are willing to do the right thing, but we find that their hearts were not right, later on.

The true disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ realizes that it is entirely possible for him to fool others and even to fool himself with promises that he cannot keep and intentions of doing God's will, when really he is only held by his own proud and selfish way of thinking. If these people had been praying this way in secret, before God, in the way that they spoke to Jeremiah in public, then their sincerity would have been borne out, and the Lord would have blessed them with a favorable answer. This ought to show us the great importance of our humbling ourselves before God, confessing our sins and our inability to do any good thing without God's aid. Ecclesiastes 5: 2-7 – "Do not be rash with our mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God." "For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few." "For a dream comes through much activity, and a fool's voice is known by his many words." "When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools." This ought to show us that there are going to be many things displeasing our flesh; many things which will go against our natural conception of things when we are seeking to God's will.

To do the right thing is often not going to be pleasing to our own selfish interests. The apostle Peter was told in John 21, verse 18, after Jesus restored him from his denial, it says – "Most assuredly I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and take you where you do not wish." The beautiful thing in the Christian life is when you are pleased to please God in stead of yourself; when you are willing to be led by God to the position of usefulness in which He would have you. When you have this willingness, then a beautiful thing happens.

Look with me at Psalm 16: 1-8. "Preserve me, O God, for in You I put my trust. O my soul, you have said to the LORD, 'You are my Lord, My goodness is nothing apart from You.'" "As for the saints who are on the earth, 'They are the excellent ones, in whom is all my delight.'" "Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god; Their drink offerings of blood I will not offer, nor take up their names on my lips." "O LORD, You are the portion of my inheritance and my cup; You maintain my lot." "The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; Yes, I have a good inheritance." "I will bless the LORD who has given me counsel; My heart also instructs me in the night seasons." "I have set the LORD always before me; Because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved."

David tells us here that there was no goodness in him apart from the Lord. Everything in him that was good, he had by grace from the Lord's working in his heart. Further, we should recognize that the Lord delights in us when we trust in Him, but if anyone hastens after another God, their sorrows will be multiplied. We, as a nation, have made a god out of our material possessions and our financial security. Do we see that the Lord will provide for us if we are intent upon doing His will? If we do so we will prove to ourselves that He is the portion of our inheritance and our cup. We come to have great assurance, and we drink deeply spiritually speaking from the cup of blessings which God pours out upon us, even in times of difficulty, trial, and trouble.

We come to see that the lines have fallen for us in pleasant places. We know that we have a good inheritance because we have proven God to be faithful in every situation. You have Christ, and you are given counsel in your heart and mind in the night. Let me ask you whether you have experienced this kind of help from Christ? If you are troubled, do you pray for the Lord to guide your heart into the right conclusion of things. The Lord works in respect to the thoughts of your heart. If you know Him you will receive this kind of help; His Holy Spirit working in your heart and mind to guide you in your decisions as you agonize over them. No decision which you come to, will violate the clear teaching of the Scripture if you know the leading of the Spirit and follow that leading in connection with the word of God. Those who are led of the Spirit are the sons of God.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> – When you seeking for direction, are you willing to wait?** (verse 7)

“And it happened after ten days that the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah.” We need to see from this that the Lord does not always make His will known immediately. There are many for this. In this case it may have been because of their hypocrisy; God having them think about the oath that they had taken, before He answered. He would try question their sincerity by trying their patience. If you are really seeking guidance from God, you will be willing to patiently work through issues of moving to another place or finding a different occupation. The reason that you will want to do this is because you want God to be considered and honored by your decisions. And, you want everyone in your family and your close associates to see and understand that God is in your decision. If you proceed this way, the Lord will make it evident what His will is in the matter.

Sometimes in waiting we learn more about the reality of our own motives; whether they are right or not. “He that believes will not act hastily.” (Isaiah 28: 16) In Psalm 106: 13, in recounting the sins of Israel, the Psalmist says – “They soon forgot His works, they did not wait for His counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tested God in the desert.” “And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul.” I think that you will agree with me, that we do not want our souls to become lean because we are too impatient to wait for an answer from God.

### **4<sup>th</sup> – We should ask ourselves – Am I willing to face my fears?** (verses 8-12)

“Then he (that is, Jeremiah) called Johanan the son of Kareah, all the captains of the forces which were with him, and all the people from the least even to the greatest, and said to them, ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, to whom you sent me to present your petition before Him: ‘If you will still remain in this land, then I will build you and not pull you down, and I will plant you and not pluck you up.’ “For I relent concerning the disaster that I have brought upon you.” “Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid; do not be afraid of him,’ says the LORD, ‘for I am with you, to save you and deliver you from his hand.’ “And I will show you mercy, that he may have mercy on you and cause you to return to your own land.”

There are, sometimes, fears that we have in relation to where we live and that causes us to think that we should flee. Johanan and those with him were afraid of Nebuchadnezzar coming back to kill them. They were tired of war, the sound of the trumpet announcing the muster, the charging of the troops. They were tired of being hungry. So, they thought that it would be best to leave their land and go to Egypt. There, they thought, they could find peace. But they didn’t stop to think that God judgments are not upon places, so much as they are upon sinful people. They would not be able to escape. Judgment would follow them there to Egypt. You see, the issue is never primarily one of geography, but it is one of obedience and God’s call. These people – God wanted them to remain in the land. Verse 10 – “Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon.” “Do not be afraid of him, for I am with you to save you and to deliver you.”

God was intending to show them mercy if they would obey Him and return to the land and put down roots there. Let us always remember, that God is able to guard us, to provide for us, keep us in His good care, and establish us if we will just keep His word. In this people’s case, obedience would be to stay where they were. In Abraham’s case it was to leave his native country. His obedience was to go to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise. He was waiting for the city whose Builder and Maker was God. You see, your fears are met and conquered by living by faith. It is not a matter of geography.

### **And then 5<sup>th</sup> – As I examine myself – Am I really sincere in my desire to forsake the world’s wisdom to find God’s will and blessing?** (verses 13-22)

“But if you say, ‘We will not dwell in this land,’ disobeying the voice of the LORD your God, saying, ‘No, but we will go to the land of Egypt where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor be hungry for bread, and there we will dwell’ – Then hear now the word of the LORD, O remnant of Judah!” “Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘If you wholly set your faces to enter Egypt, and go to dwell there, then it shall be that the sword which you feared shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt; the famine of which you were afraid shall follow close after you there in Egypt; and there you shall die.’ “So shall it be with all the men who set their faces to go to Egypt to dwell there.” “They shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence. And none of them shall remain or escape from the disaster that I will bring upon them.” “For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: ‘As My anger and My fury have been poured out on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so will My fury be poured out on you when you enter Egypt.’ “And you shall be an oath, an astonishment, a curse, and a reproach; and you shall see this place no more.”

“The LORD has said concerning you, O remnant of Judah, ‘Do not go to Egypt!’ Know certainly that I have admonished you this day.” “For you were hypocrites in your hearts when you sent me to the LORD your God, saying, ‘Pray for us to the LORD our God, and according to all that the LORD your God says, so declare to us and we will do it.’ “And I have this day declared it to you, but you have not obeyed the voice of the LORD your God, or anything which He has sent you by me. Now therefore, know certainly that you shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence in the place where you desire to go to dwell.”

Now, even though I have said to you that living by faith is not a matter of geography, there is however a symbolism in the geography in this passage. To remain in the land of promise was to obey God’s word. If they remained in it they would find blessing and a favorable outcome to their whole life. To go to Egypt would be to show God their love for the world more than for Him and obeying His word. Going to Egypt would show God that they valued their own worldly wisdom, it’s supposed pleasures and the safety they thought that Egypt could afford them, more than God’s infallible wisdom. These people were not sincere in asking Jeremiah to pray for them. They were indeed hypocrites who had violated their own oath.

They had said – Whether it is pleasing or displeasing to us, we will obey the voice of the Lord. Let us not be as they were, deceiving themselves as to their own sincerity, and pretending to love God more than the world. I am convinced of better things of you, brethren, that those whom we have studied today. I am hoping that you are willing to ask all the right questions and thus secure the Lord’s blessing of a favorable outcome in seeking the direction that you will go. Let us be those who are able by Christ’s grace, to value all that God gives to us in terms of our possessions; and where we will live; our work, and all that we do.

Let us seek first Christ’s kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to us. But let us also hold onto the things of the world lightly, and I pray that each of us will be able to relinquish them if God asks that we do so. Let us also be willing to put down roots where we are; that is, if that is what God would have us to do. And let us learn to be joyful in the Lord, even if the political situation in which we find ourselves in this country, is sometimes something which we would not have chosen for ourselves. God is able to bless us where we are. Let us then bloom where we are planted.