

## HIS LIFE A RANSOM

In the days of the divided monarchy of Israel, when Josiah was king of the southern kingdom of Judah, God spoke to Jeremiah concerning the people. The Book of Jeremiah records the following:

The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD. (Jeremiah 3:6–10)

The people of both kingdoms had rebelled against the Lord, and worshiped and served the false gods of the heathen nations. They were like a man's wife who is unfaithful to him, giving herself to other men. God sent prophets to call the people to repentance, but the people would not listen to them. They made a pretense of returning to the Lord, but they did not return to Him with their whole hearts. Because of the rebellion of the people, God caused the Assyrian army to conquer the northern kingdom of Israel and carry the people away into captivity. Yet, the southern kingdom of Judah did not learn from Israel's destruction, and they did not repent. So, God threatened to destroy them, as He had destroyed the kingdom in the north. There were in Judah, however, false prophets who contradicted the true prophets. Jeremiah prophesied:

Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place. Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed. And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them, them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them. (Jeremiah 14:13–16)

False prophets prophesied falsely, and wicked priests followed them, and all of this pleased the people. God said, "The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so: and what will ye do in the end thereof?" (Jeremiah 5:31) The false prophets were selfish cowards who told the people what they wished to hear. They desired the approval of men, and not of God. They had no fear of God; they feared the people. They did not love the people, and so they would not sacrifice themselves for their good.

God would destroy the wicked kingdom of Judah, and He forbade Jeremiah pray for it. Yet, Jeremiah loved the people, and did not wish to see them destroyed, and so he interceded for them. He prayed:

Hast thou utterly rejected Judah? hath thy soul lothed Zion? why hast thou smitten us, and there is no healing for us? we looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble! We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee. Do not abhor us, for thy name's sake, do not disgrace the throne of thy glory: remember, break not thy covenant with us. (Jeremiah 14:19–21)

Concerning the people, God said:

Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit. (Jeremiah 17:5–8)

If a man trusts in man, then He is accursed, and his life will be a barren desert. If a man trusts in God, then he is blessed, and his life will be a lush garden. The people of Israel, especially the leaders, put their trust, not in God, but in man. They did not rely upon God's wisdom, but upon their own. They did not rely upon God's strength, but upon their own. So, their lives, and their land, would be a wilderness.

God told Jeremiah to go to the potter's house, and there He would give Jeremiah a message. So, Jeremiah did as the Lord commanded, and he reported what he saw there:

Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. (Jeremiah 18:3, 4)

The potter was working with clay on the wheel, and the vessel he made was marred, so, with the same clay, he made another vessel. The Lord explained to the prophet the meaning of this object lesson. He said:

O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the LORD. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; If it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good, wherewith I said I would benefit them. Now therefore go to, speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return ye now every one from his evil way, and make your ways and your doings good. (Jeremiah 18:6–11)

God is the potter, and Israel is the clay. Israel was marred, and so God could destroy Israel, and then make a new nation. If a nation is evil, then God may threaten to destroy it. If the people of the wicked nation repent of their sins, then God will not destroy it as He threatened. If God says that He will bless a nation, but the people

rebel against Him, then God will not bless it as He said He would. So, God told Jeremiah to prophesy to the people that God planned to destroy them, but, if they would turn from their sins and do good, then God would spare them.

Jeremiah faithfully recorded the response of the people:

Then said they, Come, and let us devise devices 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 smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words. (Jeremiah 18:18)

The people, rather than heed Jeremiah's warning of their coming destruction, conspired to destroy him. They considered Jeremiah to be a false prophet. In their conceit, they believed that their priests, their wise men, and their prophets, would not mislead them, and they regarded Jeremiah as a false prophet. So, they plotted to ruin him. They agreed to reject Jeremiah's prophecies, and to speak lies against him. Jeremiah had before wept over the people's slanders. God had said of them:

And they bend their tongues like their bow for lies: but they are not valiant for the truth upon the earth; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they know not me... Their tongue is as an arrow shot out; it speaketh deceit: one speaketh peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth, but in heart he layeth his wait." (Jeremiah 9:3, 8)

Concerning the people's slanders, Jeremiah said, "Give heed to me, O LORD, and hearken to the voice of them that contend with me. Shall evil be recompensed for good? for they have digged a pit for my soul. Remember that I stood before thee to speak good for them, and to turn away thy wrath from them. (Jeremiah 18:19, 20) The people would discredit Jeremiah by slandering him, and he appealed to the Lord for justice. Jeremiah had, in his compassion, interceded for the people, so that God might spare them. In turn, the people laid a trap for him. They repaid good with evil. They repaid his kindness with slander. So, Jeremiah prayed to God for vindication. He prayed an imprecation against them: He prayed:

Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and pour out their blood by the force of the sword; and let their wives be bereaved of their children, and be widows; and let their men be put to death; let their young men be slain by the sword in battle. Let a cry be heard from their houses, when thou shalt bring a troop suddenly upon them: for they have digged a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet. Yet, LORD, thou knowest all their counsel against me to slay me: forgive not their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from thy sight, but let them be overthrown before thee; deal thus with them in the time of thine anger. (Jeremiah 18:21–23)

Jeremiah had interceded for the people. He prophesied to them. Yet, they rejected his prophecy, and slandered him. So, because they would not repent, he prayed that God would give them what they deserved, and God did so. He sent the army of Babylon to conquer the kingdom of Judah, destroying the city of Jerusalem, and carrying the people into exile in Babylon. Jeremiah was vindicated. Yet, he wept for the destruction.

On one occasion, Jesus said to His disciples:

Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, And shall deliver him

to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again. (Matthew 20:18, 19)

Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He was the Great Prophet foretold by Moses. Jesus, like Jeremiah, faithfully spoke the word of God. He preached repentance to the people, and He interceded for them. As the religious leaders rejected Jeremiah, so they would reject Jesus. They would condemn Him to death, and turn Him over to the wicked Gentiles for execution. Saint Luke recorded what Jesus said after after He made His triumphal entry into Jerusalem:

And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation. (Luke 19:41–44)

God would vindicate Jesus by raising Him from the dead, but Jesus, being exalted to the right hand of God, the position of authority, would vindicate Himself by destroying the city of Jerusalem. As God destroyed the city of Jerusalem of Jeremiah's generation, so Jesus would destroy the city of Jerusalem of His own generation. Just as Jeremiah lamented the destruction of the city, so would Jesus.

After Jesus revealed this to His disciples that He would die, and rise from the dead, James and John, with their mother, approached Jesus, and their mother asked Jesus to do something for Him. Jesus asked her what she would have Him do, and she answered, "Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom." The mother of James and John believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and she believed that He would soon come into His kingdom. So, loving her sons as she did, she asked Jesus to give them the most powerful positions in His kingdom, after His own. Jesus said to James and John, "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Matthew 20:22) The disciples, through their mother, asked Jesus for positions of authority in His kingdom. Jesus told them that they did not know what they were asking. An important principle of God is that God would exalt Jesus to the position of king of the world, but Jesus would first have to suffer humiliation. He would prove His love for God by obeying Him even unto death and He would prove His love for His people by giving Himself as an atoning sacrifice for their sins. Because of Jesus's love and sacrifice, God would make Him ruler of the world. James and John wished to be rulers in Christ's kingdom, so Jesus asked them if they were prepared first to prove themselves worthy of such a position by suffering along with Him. They told Him that they were prepared. So, Jesus said to them, "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with: but to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father." (Matthew 20:23) James and John were right; they were prepared to follow Jesus into death, and so prove themselves worthy. Yet, it was not Jesus's prerogative to appoint them to such a position in the kingdom; that belonged to God.

The other disciples heard the conversation, and they were indignant at the presumption of James and John, and their desire to rule over all men, including the disciples. Jesus said to them:

Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great

among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:25–28)

Jesus saw that a rivalry was developing among His disciples, and so He would make peace among them by giving them perspective. Pagans, heathens, unbelievers; these are the people that seek to dominate others, to bend them to their will. Pagans consider men to be great when they can dominate others. This is not the way of the Christian, because it is not the way of Christ. Jesus said that He did not come into the world to subjugate men; He did not come by threat of violence to compel them to serve Him. He rather came into the world to serve men by giving His life so that they might be freed from the tyranny of the devil and bondage to sin. God has ordained different kinds of authority, and a Christian may serve others by rightly wielding authority; but the Christian must not take pleasure in ruling over other men, and he must never abuse his authority. The Christian is a follower of Christ, and so he ought to follow the example of Christ by humbly serving the needs of others. In this way, the Christian will be a great person in the greatest kingdom, the kingdom of God.

Let us faithfully call sinners to repent and believe in Jesus. Let us pray for our enemies. Let us not desire to dominate our fellow man, but to serve him.

Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.