

The Old Paths

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The word of our God found this morning in Jeremiah 5:30, read through Jeremiah 6 verse 17. So we'll start at Jeremiah 5:30. This is the word of God.

30 A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; 31 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?

1 O ye children of Benjamin, gather yourselves to flee out of the midst of Jerusalem, and blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and set up a sign of fire in Bethhaccerem: for evil appeareth out of the north, and great destruction. 2 I have likened the daughter of Zion to a comely and delicate woman. 3 The shepherds with their flocks shall come unto her; they shall pitch their tents against her round about; they shall feed every one in his place. 4 Prepare ye war against her; arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe unto us! for the day goeth away, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out. 5 Arise, and let us go by night, and let us destroy her palaces. 6 For thus hath the LORD of hosts said, Hew ye down trees, and cast a mount against Jerusalem: this is the city to be visited; she is wholly oppression in the midst of her. 7 As a fountain casteth out her waters, so she casteth out her wickedness: violence and spoil is heard in her; before me continually is grief and wounds. 8 Be thou instructed, O Jerusalem, lest my soul depart from thee; lest I make thee desolate, a land not inhabited. 9 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel as a vine: turn back thine hand as a grapegatherer into the baskets. 10 To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken: behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it. 11 Therefore I am full of the fury of the LORD; I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out upon the children abroad, and upon the assembly of young men together: for even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with him that is full of days. 12 And their houses shall be turned unto others, with their fields and wives together: for I will stretch out my hand upon the inhabitants of the land, saith the LORD. 13 For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and

from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. 14 They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. 15 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD.

[And the words of our text is verse 16]

16 Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein. 17 Also I set watchmen over you, saying, Hearken to the sound of the trumpet. But they said, We will not hearken.

Thus far we read the holy word of God. May he bless it to our hearts this morning.

We consider as our text verse 16.

16 Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.

Beloved congregation, our Lord Jesus Christ, the word of the Lord comes to the prophet Jeremiah, to the land of Judah in days of great apostasy. The condition in Judah was deplorable. The spiritual state of Judah was horrendous. We're told in verse 31, the prophets prophesy falsely. What are those prophets doing in the land of Judah? They're speaking to the people, peace, peace, when there is no peace. Those prophets are speaking peace that this destruction, which was soon coming out of the north, wasn't actually going to come. What those prophets were doing is they were preaching false doctrine. They were preaching false doctrine to the land of Judah so that none doth turn. And what are the priests? In verse 31, the priests bear rule by their means. Who are these priests? These priests are the rulers that were set up, who were called to judge righteously. Who were called to judge righteously according to the truth. And justice was fallen in the street. But this is the most alarming, God says about the people in Judah, "My people loved to have it so." The people loved it. They loved the false doctrine. They loved that false doctrine that spoke to them smooth words, comfortable words. They loved those priests who judged unrighteously. They loved it. They loved the lie.

That's God's assessment of Judah in our text. And then we have this distinction that's set up at the very end, "And what will ye do?" Ye. Who is this "ye"? So over against the nation of Judah, with their prophets prophesying falsely and their priests bearing rule by their means, and the people who love it, ye. We have God's word to the elect over against this apostasy in Judah. What hope is there for the elect that remain? Will they too be consumed by the same apostasy that was about to consume the nation of Judah? And what a word then that over against this apostasy, God gives us the old paths. That's God's

graciousness in the text. He gives you the old paths and he places his people on the old paths. He places his elect people on those old paths and we are called to these same old paths, Second Reformed Protestant Church, because our natural condition is that we too apostatize. We need to hear this word this morning because this apostasy, this corruption lives in our flesh. That's our nature. We're totally depraved. We're obstinate. We're rebellious. We're unthankful by nature. That's who we are and God calls us to the old paths. "Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein." And that's our hope and comfort too as a church and as a denomination, that God will give us the old paths and that we will walk in those old paths because of God's grace and mercy towards us.

So let's consider then this morning our text under the theme, "The Old Paths," what they are, their goodness, and called to walk in them. The old paths, what they are, their goodness, and called to walk in them.

So immediately in our text we have, "Stand ye in the ways and see." So let's do that as a congregation this morning. Let's stand in the ways. Stand ye in the ways. So we have an illustration before us. We're standing upon a high hill. We're standing upon a promontory looking down and we see these two ways. We see this one way and we see this other way. This first way that we see in our text, it's a beautiful way. It's beautiful. That way we see has paths winding through it, through a lush, beautiful green forest. We see the sun lighting upon that way, upon those old paths, glinting off that path. We see the sky, it's beautiful and it's blue. And next to those old paths we see this lovely stream. It's warm and inviting. That's this first, this other way, this first way, this one way. And that way is very clearly a way of life. That way is a good way. It's a beautiful way. And that way leads seemingly into a high mountain top. It disappears. That's this first way.

And so looking upon our high mountain, our high vantage point, we look down and we see this other way. What is this other way? Well, if you look at this way, this way is a bad way. We look and we see it runs through a large section of a forest that's been charred. It's been burned down by a raging fire with the smoke still billowing. We see that way is a deadly way, that way is a bad way. It's a way of death. We see darkness over that way. We see dark clouds and lightning and thunder crackling all around that way. And that way itself is on fire. But it's what we see next to that way. What do we see as we look upon this high hill upon that way? We see thousands and thousands of charred and burned up bodies strewn across that way. This other way in our text, it's a bad way. It's a way of death. It's a way of destruction. It's damnation. And where does that other way lead? It leads into a smoldering pit that disappears into the earth.

That's the two ways that we see as a congregation. Standing upon, we see these two ways. We have one way and we have this other way. What's the explanation of these two ways? These two ways are antithetical ways. The one way is a good way, it's the old paths. And the other way, it's a bad way. It's a bad way for the church, that's these new paths. We have the old paths and we have the new paths. So what we have that we have life and we have death. We have truth and we have the lie. We have rest in these old paths. We have peace in these old paths. And in this other way, this bad way, these new paths, we have

death and destruction. These ways are antithetical ways. That's what we see in our text as, "Stand ye in the ways and see."

So the great question sitting in our text is what are these old paths? That's the question that we have to answer this morning. What are these old paths? And the answer is this: Jesus Christ is the old paths. Jesus Christ is the old paths. And that's John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me." Jesus Christ is the old paths. He's the good way. He's the one way for the church to worship him. One way for the church to praise him. One way to the Father. It's Jesus Christ. One way to glorify God. One way of salvation. Jesus Christ is the old paths where is the good way.

What else are these old paths in our text? These old paths are the truth, the gospel. And what Jeremiah is getting at here in our text is he's talking about sound doctrine then, sound doctrine that's preached in the pulpits and taught in Catechism rooms. It's sound doctrine that's preached off pulpits. That's the old paths in our text. And that's what false doctrine does, false doctrine isn't the old paths. False doctrine is a bad way. It's not the old paths. And where false doctrine is preached, you can't know Jesus Christ, the old paths. The truth and the gospel, the truth and the truth of the gospel is the old paths. It's sound doctrine that's taught, that's taught in this pulpit and every pulpit in the true church of Jesus Christ.

And what else are these old paths? These old paths are scriptures themselves. It's the word of God because in the scriptures there's the doctrine of God's word. There's the doctrine of God's word. God is the author of the scriptures and he moved men. God is the author and he moved men to write down this word of God. In every way, in every sense, these scriptures are the word of God and these scriptures are the old paths because everything that's revealed in the word all testifies of Jesus Christ. All of the truth of scriptures testifies of Christ and his glorious work. This word is inspired. God breathed this word. This word is holy. It's infallible. It's perfect in every regard. And faith looks at that word of God and says, "I believe that word of God in every respect."

That word is the old paths in our text. That word is the only rule of faith in life. You can look to that word and it has every answer because that word is Jesus Christ. That's who it reveals. It glorifies Jesus Christ. The scriptures are the old paths. The confessions are the old paths, the one good way. What are those confessions? Those confessions are the doctrine of God's word as it takes in hand and systematizes all the truth of scriptures so that we can understand and know Jesus Christ. It takes in hand all that doctrine and lays it out for us. That's what these confessions are. The confessions interpret the scriptures.

And we had a controversy, we had a controversy over the confessions. We had a controversy which really recovered to us the confessions. The scriptures don't interpret the confessions. The confessions interpret the scriptures. It's a one way street. We hold the confessions so you don't, not every word is up for grabs here that we have in the confessions. So when the Christian school, when the word schools is taught in Lord's Day 38, that means schools. The confessions interpret the scriptures and the confessions are the old paths and they settle, the confessions settle controversy. They settle it. We can

have a controversy in the church and I can point to the confessions and that's all I need because in those confessions is the divine doctrine of the word of God.

The confessions settle controversy and the confessions settle controversy regarding exclusive psalmody. Our confessions settle this. What's going on right now in our churches as proponents of exclusive psalmody, they take in hand Lord's Day 35, they take in hand Lord's Day 35 and they say, "Nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word." So what the proponents of exclusive psalmody are doing is they say, "Well this confession, Lord's Day 35, what it's doing here, yes, yes, we understand the previous controversy, the confessions settle scripture but not here. What this is telling us is that we need to go back to the scriptures now to find the answer." But that's not what the confessions are doing here. What the confessions are doing is they're saying something about worship. The confessions are saying about worship, it's word regulated worship. That's what that's saying. It's the word that's preached. It's the word that's read. It's the word that's administered. It's the word that's prayed and it's the word that's sung. The question here isn't man-made hymns versus psalms. It's not even what we desire or what we don't desire. The question is, is exclusive psalmody the law? Is exclusive psalmody the law as grounded in the regulative principle? And the confessions say no.

The first four commandments are really the regulative principle. We have it in Lord's Day 35. We have the how. But in the first commandment we have who, who are we to worship? We have God. Second commandment, how? How are we to worship God? In the third commandment, wherein are we to worship God? In the fourth commandment, where are we to worship God? In Lord's Day 38, Lord's Day 38 gives the prescriptions for worship. Lord's Day 38 says publicly call upon the name of the Lord. The singing and prayer are the same thing. When you publicly call upon the name of the Lord, that's singing. When you publicly call upon the name of the Lord, that's prayer, that's our congregational prayer. When you call upon the name of the Lord, that's our reciting of the Apostles' Creed.

The confessions tie together as singing and prayer as the same thing. So if it's true, if it's true, it's not, but if it's true, that you may only sing the psalms, that's the law grounded in the regulative principle, then we can only pray the psalms as well. 1 Corinthians 14:14 and 15 makes that connection between singing and prayer. "For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." Singing and prayer are the same thing. That's in Lord's Day 38. You publicly call upon the name of the Lord.

And so if it's true that this law of exclusive psalmody, if it's the law grounded in the regulative principle, then this morning in my congregational prayer, we've erected an idol. That's where this leads. And we'll erect another idol tonight when we recite the Apostles' Creed. And your minister next week will recite, your minister next week will erect another idol when he preaches from the Heidelberg Catechism. That's where this leads. Lord's Day 38 is your bulwark against exclusive psalmody. This is all you have to point to. They can drive up a truckload of documents, of previous articles, Puritan,

Presbyterian articles, and say, "Look, see, exclusive psalmody." All you need to do is you hold up and say, Lord's Day 38 condemns it, because it combines singing and prayer as the same thing. So if I can pray the word, then I could certainly sing the word as well. This is your bulwark. Stand on this.

The confessions are the old paths where is the good way. They settle controversy and they settle this controversy that we're in. What else does our text say these old paths are? These old paths in my text, what Jeremiah is getting at is he's saying they're ancient paths. That's literally the meaning. They're ancient paths. They're old paths. So we stood on that high promontory looking down, and we look and we see that these old paths are well-trodden paths and so that all our fathers and fathers who have gone before, they've all walked, the church has all walked these ancient old paths and there's something that we can learn about church history. We can look at church history and see that line of the gospel. We can see that line of the gospel since the very beginning, and we can see the way the church has walked in the world. So if we stand upon our high hill at the trailhead, church history to us is like that plaque that sits at the trailhead that tells you all the different sites you're going to see as you walk along this path. It's going to reveal to you and say, "Hey, there's danger up ahead. There's unseen things on this path." And so we can learn from church history. We can learn from church history.

These old paths, they're exactly that. They're ancient paths. They're old. And so what are these old paths, what aren't they? These old paths aren't just merely tradition. They're not merely tradition as what this man thought or what that man thought. That's not binding. That's not binding. What's binding is the confessions and the word of God as interpreted by the confessions. That's binding. That has the authority to bind your conscience and my conscience. And so what happens is when men try to make merely tradition the old paths, and maybe you've had this, it becomes an endless back and forth. You've got your quotes from Reformed fathers. I've got some of my own quotes from Reformed fathers. And we're just going to send these quotes back and forth, back and forth in an endless loop, and no one's going to get anywhere. That's what happens when you try to make merely tradition these old paths. They're not the old paths.

Now in our text, the word old, they're ancient, they're ancient paths. The church has walked in these old paths since the beginning but what Jeremiah is really getting at in our text is that these paths, they're ancient, eternal paths. And so what that does in our text is that takes us right out of the earthly and right into the being of God himself. They're eternal and everlasting paths. And God is the "I Am that I Am." There was never a time where God was not. He stands eternal in the heavens as a sovereign God of all things. And God's a decreeing God. That's what we mean when we say God's eternal counsel. He decrees the end from the beginning, and he decreed these eternal paths. And these eternal old paths are Jesus Christ then. They are Jesus Christ. God decreed Jesus Christ. So Jesus Christ proceeds from God and comes back to God that God might be glorified.

These paths are ancient, everlasting paths. So that's what these old paths where is the good way in our text and so we have now this other way. What is this other way? We said it was a way of death, a way of destruction. We said it was a bad way. This new way, these new paths, is one thing, these new paths are man. That's who it is. These new paths

are man and the origin of these new paths is the heart, mind, and soul of man. These new paths of man glorify man. They have something to say about these old paths too. They look over, they see these new paths, stand and they look over at these old paths, what do they say about these old paths? The new paths look over at those old paths and say, "Those old paths, that's a bad way. Those old paths are bad paths." And so when these new paths come, in that is the displacement of Jesus Christ. Those new paths of man, that bad way, displaces Christ. It says, "Those old paths, Jesus Christ isn't the way to salvation. Jesus Christ isn't the one way to the Father. He isn't the one way to worship him." These new paths look over and say, "That's bad."

Man, that's what these new paths are, man, who glorifies man, and in that, when those new paths come, Jesus Christ is displaced and so we can trace then these new paths. These new paths already in Genesis 3, in Genesis 3 in the garden, that serpent came to Adam and Eve and said, "You could be as gods. You could be as gods. You don't need God. You could be your own god." At Babel, there were the new paths. Those new paths of man, where is the bad way, wants to build the kingdom of man and glorify man. And we have the judges. During the time of the judges, every man did that which was right in his own eyes. He was his own God. He didn't answer to God. He didn't care. And Christ, when Christ came, those new paths according to the determinate foreknowledge and counsel of God, looked over and killed Christ. That's the new paths, it's not in the old paths.

And so now all during the New Testament age, at Galatia, where Paul battled the Judaizers, that man is his own savior. Augustine did the same thing. There was the Arminians, the Pelagians, all said man is his own savior. That is the new paths of man. It's the constant struggle of the church. The Roman Catholic Church teaches this. The Netherlands State Church taught that. The Christian Reformed Church taught that. And the Protestant Reformed Churches teach the new paths of man. And this is how they do it. This is how they do it: Jesus Christ isn't the only way to the Father. And they'll say a lot of really nice things about Jesus Christ. They'll say, "Yes, yes, the ground, the cross, that's the way to the Father and by faith, by means of faith, that's the way to the Father. But also by means of your obedience." Ah, there you have the sulfur from hell right there. If you want to come to the Father and experience his fellowship, you'd better get busy obeying.

And that false doctrine didn't just start in the pulpits. It started in the hearts of the people and eventually began to spew forth from her pulpits in all manner of wickedness. Our mother loves those new paths. She loves them. You're almost stunned and astonished. You look and you see the apostles. You can't even believe how quickly it's happened. Almost every single tenant of the Reformed faith has in some way been corrupted. From total depravity to covenant fellowship to forgiveness of sins, you can't even believe it all. And you sit there stunned, how do you even wade through all of it?

Those new paths glorify man. It's a way of destruction. It's a way of death and damnation. But we need to hear this morning that this isn't just a call for our mother. We too have in our natures to apostatize. We love those new paths by nature. We love them. We love the lie. We hate Jesus Christ. That's all in our nature. And the threat to us is that we say like

in our text, "We will not walk therein," so that God can come with his repeated call, his repeated call, and we say, "No, God. We're not going to do it. We're not going to walk therein." That's the threat to us of these new paths, they're always a threat to the church.

And so what is their goodness? What is their goodness? Their goodness is that Christ is the old paths. That's the goodness of these old paths. That's what makes this way such a beautiful way. It makes it such a lovely way for the church because Christ is in those paths. He is those paths. And there's rest in those old paths for the church because Christ is rest and God's goodness is that he takes his church, who of themselves deserve nothing, he takes his church and he puts them on the old paths. That's God's goodness to you. That's God's goodness to me. He takes us and places him on Jesus Christ.

And the goodness of these old paths is that Christ is in these paths, Christ is these paths, and we're given rest by his covenantal work. Rest in our text, rest is the gracious salvation of God's elect in the covenant of grace. That is rest in my text. So we have covenant rest in Christ's covenantal work and that rest, that covenantal work, was at Jesus Christ's incarnation where God became man and dwelt among us. That rest was at the cross where Jesus Christ suffered and died, where he took every single one of your sins upon himself and gave to you his perfect robes of righteousness, where he perfectly obeyed. That's your rest. That rest was at his resurrection, which is proof of your justification that every sin that you have committed, every one of them, they've all been taken to the cross. Every sin that you will commit will never stand in the way of God's purpose. In this salvation, this rest for us is salvation and that's Matthew 11:29, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Rest.

We are saved from our sin and our misery and our nothingness and our natural condition to depart and we're given, we're given freely covenant fellowship. Jesus Christ is covenant fellowship, and you have it by faith. Not by your working. You don't have it by your working or your obedience or your believing. You have it. It belongs to you. And this rest, this covenant rest that God, that Jesus Christ accomplished by his covenantal work, you hear this rest when the gospel is preached. That's where you hear it. When the gospel comes, when the gospel comes, you have rest in Christ because that gospel is Jesus Christ. Those old paths are Jesus Christ. And the Holy Spirit works, he works faith. The Holy Spirit gives the words to speak. The Holy Spirit speaks in the preaching. The Spirit of Jesus Christ speaks. And when that gospel is preached, he establishes you. He defends. He preserves. He feeds you himself. And all he does is all for the rest that he has eternally appointed for you in these old paths, these everlasting paths. And he eternally appointed this rest to you and he eternally appointed to you your eternal destination.

That's what the preaching does. Apart from Christ, there is no rest. Apart from these old paths and the new paths, there's no rest. There's no peace. There's no joy. False doctrine preached off pulpits takes away rest and that's what makes false doctrine so horrible. The prophets in Judah said to the nation of Judah, peace, peace, when there is no peace. They prophesied smooth words, but it wasn't the word of the Lord. It wasn't the gospel. That false doctrine is the new path because it displaces Jesus Christ. And those new paths, they disguise themselves as the old paths. That's how they look. They don't come into the

church with wooden Dutch shoes on and clomp around. It comes in subtly. It comes into the doors of the church and says, "I'm the old paths. Yeah, that sounds good." And it deceives. False doctrine. False doctrine is the new paths.

And so we have the call to walk in these old paths. Second Reformed Protestant Church, "Stand ye. Stand ye in the ways and see." Do you see? Do you see the goodness of these old paths? These old paths are life. These old paths are salvation. These old paths are eternal life. Do you see the badness of this other way? It's a way of death. It's a way of destruction. It's false doctrine. There's no rest there. There's no peace. Stand in the ways. Look at these two ways. Stand on that high hill. Look down at them. Consider them. Those old paths are good because those old paths are Christ. Ask for the old paths. Demand the old paths. Insist upon the old paths. Be zealous for those old paths.

Many don't want you to ask for those old paths. They say, "It's cruel of you to ask for those old paths. Don't ask for those old paths." They say, "Those old paths are cruel because we can't have a relationship anymore. Fathers don't get to see their children. Siblings don't get to see each other. Grandparents don't get to see grandkids. Friends don't get to see friends." They say, "Don't ask for those old paths." Church of Jesus Christ, ask for those old paths. Ask for them. Demand it. And walk, walk therein in these old paths by the preaching of the gospel of grace, the pure doctrine of the word of God, by the pure administration of the sacraments, and by the exercising of Christian discipline. Those are just the three marks. Those are the three marks of the true church in the Belgic Confession 29. And that's how you know as a church that you are on the old paths. That's how you know. You hold in your hands the confessions. You open the confessions and you judge in your office of all believer. As prophet, priest, and king, when you hear the gospel which proclaims Jesus Christ, when the sacraments which signify and seal what Jesus Christ has done, when discipline is administered, that's how you know. Belgic Confession 29.

And God is gracious. God is gracious and merciful and that's the comfort to us. That's the comfort to us beleaguered people. Christ is the old paths and God gave to you this morning the old paths. He spoke this morning, he gave you his word and that's all due to God's graciousness and God's mercy that he gave you the old paths. And we don't have these old paths because we are faithful, because we are good. We have these only because God looks upon his elect people in Jesus Christ and he's merciful and gracious to us.

"Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." Amen.

Our Father, we come unto thee thankful for the word which thou hast brought unto us. Thou hast given unto us the old paths this morning. Thou hast given unto us Jesus Christ in all his perfect work. We thank thee for him. Care for us, Lord. May this word go forth. May it be effectual in a power by the operation of thy Holy Spirit. Pardon all our sins now. Wash us clean in the blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. We ask this in his name alone. Amen.