

God was gearing up to destroy the city, so God gave Jeremiah a chance to save it. All that Jeremiah would need to do is to find is one righteous person. Just one. He had the whole city of Jerusalem to choose from. In verse 1, God said *“Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem...”* He could take as long as he wanted to keep looking, he could even divide the city into quadrants, and God said, *“Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her (pardon Jerusalem).”*

If Jeremiah found one trustworthy person, God would forgive the sins of the entire city.

**God commanded Jeremiah to begin searching for one good person, and the results illustrate a vital lesson.**

### **1. Who is righteous? (v.1-19)**

If you were given this command, where would you start searching?  
Jeremiah started searching among the church-going people.

Quickly he found the true condition of the people, in verse 2, *“Though they say, ‘As the LORD lives,’ yet they swear falsely.”*

There were two wrongs. 1) Not following God and 2) lying about not following God. They came into God’s presence in worship, recited Scripture, sang songs and prayed, saying things like “As the Lord lives,” but they were faking it. Could God accuse us of not meaning what we are saying in worship?

Next Jeremiah went to the people who had endured suffering. Verses 3, *“O LORD, ...You have struck them down,...”* Maybe their suffering had turned them to God? Their hardships are not listed in verse 3, but we know what they were: sickness, disability, pain, relationship struggles, abuse, crime, evils, and death of loved ones. But Jeremiah discovered that their suffering did not produce good character. We know from verse 3 that they suffered, *“...but they felt no anguish; You have consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rock they have refused to repent.”*

The suffering people became spiritually callous, stubborn, and obstinate. Their suffering did not drive them to godliness, even after all of Jeremiah’s warnings. Jeremiah concluded in verse 4, *“...‘they have no sense; for they do not know the way of The LORD....”*

Jeremiah moved on to search among another group. Verse 5, *“I will go to the great and will speak to them...”* The privileged statesmen, the educated religious leaders, the wealthy businessmen, had all received training and schooling. They

could read the Scriptures. As Jeremiah observed their education, he said in verse 5, “...*they know the way of the LORD.*” They had been taught the great lesson of Deuteronomy 6:4-5, that they should “...*love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*”

But next Jeremiah gives expression to his disappointment of the lives of society’s well-educated in verse 5b, “...*But they all alike had broken the yoke; they had burst the bond.*” The best-trained people were compared to oxen breaking a yoke. The oxen, did not use the strength that God gave them to plow the field, but to break the yoke and run away from God.

The spiritual condition of the elite and privileged was darkness and unfaithfulness, as God said in verse 7, “*How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken me and have sworn by those who are no gods. When I fed them to the full, they committed adultery and trooped to the houses of whores.*” The people’s spiritual condition was obvious - they were lining up, and taking a number, and waiting in lines to follow false gods instead of their own God.

In verse 8, “*They were fell-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for his neighbor’s wife.*” The people were not morally decent, but rather they were saturated with immorality. In verse 9, God said He must punish them, and in verse 10, God ordered that they preserved from full extinction. In verse 11, God pronounced the assessment that the people had mistreated the Lord, and in verse 12, the people had spoken falsely of God.

Where are the prophets? It is the job of the prophets to correct the people, but God explained to Jeremiah the problem with the prophets. Verse 13, “*The prophets will become wind; the word is not in them. Thus shall it be done to them!*” The Hebrew word here for wind is also the word for Spirit, so it is bitter irony. Instead of preaching in the Spirit, they were full of hot air. Even the preachers were not righteous.

When we hear about Jeremiah searching through a whole city for a good person, it reminds us of Abraham’s discussion with God about the embarrassingly small number of good people in the city of Sodom in Genesis 18:16-33. Pastor Tony recently taught us in his sermon series that Sodom was a very wicked city, and God planned to destroy it. Abraham wanted to save his city, so Abraham bartered with God – if there were 50 righteous persons found, the city could be spared. But Abraham lived there – and so Abraham understood the difficulty of finding 50 righteous people! So Abraham bartered with God, down to 45, then 40, then 30, then 20, and then just 10 righteous souls. God agreed – yes, “*For the sake of ten [righteous persons], I will not destroy [Sodom]*” Genesis 18:32 God knew

that 10 could not be found in Sodom, but perhaps that was to be expected for a well-known pagan and wicked place. Jeremiah was searching in God's capital city of Jerusalem, and Jeremiah only needed to find one. He couldn't find one!

What if we searched today in our neighborhood, or in the city near us? Where would we find a good person? In the trailer park? In the luxury condos, at the ballpark or city hall, in the seminary, or the Fiserv Forum, the Third ward? Is there love in our poor families and homes? Is there honesty and generosity in the wealthy? Is there commitment to the Bible in our clergy?

Okay add to our search team, let's get David from the OT and Paul from the New. What David wrote in Psalm 14 and Psalm 53, Paul also quoted in Romans 3:10, "*None is righteous, no, not one.*"

God's lesson here is vital for us. We have a true problem. Where are the good people? We call this problem total depravity. It does not mean that every person is as bad as he or she could be. No. Instead, it means that every human has been corrupted by sin in every aspect of that person's life. Our minds think sinful thoughts, and our mouths say sinful things, and our hearts have sinful attitudes, and our bodies perform sinful acts.

What will happen to all of us? God's judgment!

We must become like kindling for the fire! Verse 14, "*Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of hosts; 'Because you have spoken this word, behold, I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall consume them.'*"

Instead of the words of the prophet Jeremiah announcing a blessing for us, the words of Jeremiah pronounce destruction for us.

God reverts back to the metaphor of the approaching army in verse 15, "*Behold, I am bringing you a nation from afar, O house of Israel, declares the LORD. It is an enduring nation; it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you do not know; nor can you understand what they say.*"

Why does it matter that Jerusalem's inhabitants cannot understand the language of their attackers? Because it adds to the terror of the attack.

The enemy is also very strong. Verse 16 says, "... *they are all mighty warriors.*" What will be the result of the attack? Verse 17, "*They shall eat up your harvest and your food; they shall eat up your sons and your daughters; they shall eat up your flocks and your herds; they shall eat up your vines and your fig trees...*"

The enemy army will consume God's people.

So that we do not despair, we next receive the same glimmer of hope we saw back in chapter 4:27 and again in chapter 5:10, now repeated here in chapter 5:18, *“But even in those days, declares The LORD, I will not make a full end of you.”*

Some will survive. But what are the prospects for the escapees? Their future looks bleak, after being taken off into exile. Verse 19 reveals the mood over in exile, *“And when your people say, ‘Why has the LORD our God done all these things to us?’ you shall say to them, ‘As you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve foreigners in a land that is not yours.’”*

The mood is a somber sense of appropriateness of the punishment – that since the people of God would not serve God, God would sent them to a place where they could serve foreigners in a foreign land, with foreign gods!

## **2. Who is understanding? (v.20-25)**

Verses 20-21, *“Declare this in the house of Jacob; proclaim it in Judah: ‘Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not.’”*

They have eyes, and their eyes work fine. They have ears, and their ears work fine. The problem of foolishness was somewhere else. They had more than enough intellectual power to understand, but still they chose not to accept it. They would not listen anymore, to God’s Word.

Verse 22, *“Do you not fear Me? Declares the LORD. Do you not tremble before Me?...”*

Since they did not grasp the God with whom they were dealing, God gave them a short lesson in verse 22b, *“... I placed the sand as the boundary for the sea, a perpetual barrier that it cannot pass; though the waves toss, they cannot prevail; though they roar, they cannot pass over it.”*

Illustration - I cannot even drive with a two-liter bottle in my car without that 2-liter rolling around as I drive. I cannot control 2 liters. But God rules over the tossing waves, the stormy seas, and every drop of water obeys God. God deserves our respect.

Carl Sagan the secular scientist who was the leading speaker in the 1980s show *Cosmos*, wrote, “Design? Absolutely – without question. Designer? Not a hint.” End quote. The secular mind is shockingly and shamefully irreverent. It takes a stubborn person to study God’s creation and yet refuse to revere God.

Sure enough, that is ancient Jerusalem. Verse 23, *“But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and gone away.”*

The Creator God is also the God who keeps on providing. The rain and the snow are not to be a source of our grumbling. It is an act of God to give us rain.

Verse 24, “*They do not say in their hearts, ‘Let us fear the LORD our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest.’*”

The blind fools back in Jeremiah’s day had forgotten all that God was doing throughout the year to support their very lives. Ingratitude is a sin, and sin has consequences.

Verse 25, “*Your iniquities have turned these away, and your sins have kept good from you.*” Eventually, God will withhold His good rains. But when God sent droughts, thankless people complained even more. Who is understanding?

### **3. Who is great? (v.26-31)**

The problem with the great people in ancient Jerusalem, was that they had gained wealth and power by mistreating the poor.

Those who get rich by stealing from the poor are compared to bird-catchers in verses 26 and 28, “*For wicked men are found among my people; they lurk like fowlers lying in wait. They set a trap; they catch men. (v.27) Like a cage full of birds, their houses are full of deceit; therefore they have become great and rich; (v.28a) they have grown fat and sleek.*”

These are the scammers and thieves, who take money from gullible people.

Verse 28 continues “*...They know no bound in deeds of evil; they judge not with justice the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper; and they do not defend the rights of the needy. (v.29) Shall I not punish them for these things? Declares The LORD, and shall I not avenge Myself on a nation such as this?*”

If we do not steal from poor people, that is good, but it is not enough for God. God expects us to take action whenever we become aware of people being oppressed and hurt. Why? Because as God’s people, we are supposed to be like God, and God stands up for the poor.

Where are the good people who have compassion for the poor? In political campaigns, both liberals and conservatives claim to be helping the poor. But it is not a priority for either party. Only among God’s people, are the poor a priority, but God’s people did follow God’s Word.

Here is how Jeremiah put it to the preachers of his day, “*An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction...*” (Jeremiah 5:30-31)

Jeremiah criticized the spiritual leaders. 250 years ago, the Evangelist George Whitfield (1714-1770), began his sermon on this passage by writing, “...God can send... no greater blessing than...faithful, sincere, upright ministers,

so [also] the greatest curse that God can possibly send... is blind, unregenerate, carnal, lukewarm, and unskillful [ministers].”

Do pastors preach the judgment that is coming? God is holy and righteous and will judge each person according to what he or she has done. Only those who trust in Jesus Christ will be saved, while everyone else will be cast into an eternal ‘lake of fire.’ The vision of the apostle John of how God’s judgment works is recorded in Revelation 20:14, “... *if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*” To be a pastor in this dying world, and not to preach about God’s coming judgment is to be a lying prophet.

What is the response of the people of God to false prophets speaking falsely? Verse 31, God said, “...*my people love to have it so...*”

The people were pleased with preaching that entertains, rather than preaching that instructs. The people were glad for sermons that soothe more than sermons that convict. The people insisted on messages that appease more than messages that confront. Who is righteous? Who is understanding? Who is great?  
**Conclusion: You are not a good person. God has provided one good person, and by faith in Him, you are made righteous before God.**

The same God who sent Jeremiah to run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem to search for a righteous one who seeks truth is the same God who eventually sent to Jerusalem -- His only begotten Son!

Would Jesus meet the conditions God gave to Jeremiah?

Jesus Christ is righteous, He understands, and He is great.

John 1:14 says Jesus came into the world FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH.

John 14:6 goes farther when Jesus Himself said, “*I am the truth.*”

Jesus Christ fulfills what God told Jeremiah to search for, as one who seeks truth. We could go through all the characteristics, and all of them would be fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

In order to enact this forgiveness, it was necessary for Jesus to die on the cross for the sins of the people. The atoning sacrifice had to be offered, and it needed to be a perfect sacrifice.

Now that we have finally found one truly righteous man, He must be sacrificed in order to save us from our sins.

Would Jesus take up this role?

The New Testament writers work very carefully to prove that Jesus Christ did take up this role

The apostle Peter called Jesus “...*the Holy and Righteous One*” (Acts 3:14)

The martyr Stephen called Jesus “...*the Righteous One*” in Acts 7:52, just seconds before Stephen was stoned to death for saying it, by the crowd that was enraged by His words.

The Apostle John wrote very clearly in 1 John 2:1-2, “*we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation [atoning sacrifice] for our sins...*”

In the Gospel of John, the role of Jesus as stated by the high priest in Jerusalem in John’s day. John 11:50, “*Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nations should perish.*” That is exactly what God sent Jeremiah to seek – one man who was righteous in order to save the whole unrighteous nation from perishing!

And in Romans 5, Paul compared the death that came through Adam with the life that comes through Christ Jesus. Romans 5:17-19, “*much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. ...one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's [Adam's] disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's [Christ's] obedience the many will be made righteous.*”

Through the grace of Christ Jesus, the life of Jesus comes to many.

Now look Jeremiah!

God sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, to save a New Jerusalem full of God’s people, sinners made righteous by Christ.

And Jeremiah will see a New Jerusalem full of righteous persons.

**You are not a good person. God has provided one good person, and by faith in Him, you are made righteous before God.**