

“HAVE WE FORSAKEN THE LORD?”  
Psalm 81:5b-16, Hebrews 13:1-9a, Jeremiah 2:4-13  
August 31 & September 1, 2019

As I was preparing the message for today by reading the Scripture lessons designated for this weekend through the common lectionary, I came across a very troubling question that I could not shake off or put away from my mind. The question was and still is, “Has humanity really changed that much since the ancient world of Jeremiah in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C.?” We like to think that we’ve increased in wisdom and knowledge, having grown in technology and science. We’d like to think that we have improved our situation and become more sophisticated in the way that we do things. But the answer to this nagging question of having changed since ancient times is NO! Though much has changed in the world today, the basic problems of humanity have continued on throughout the millennia since Jeremiah’s days on earth.

So that nagging question came to me in a different way, the same way that it came to Jeremiah way back in 626 B.C., “Have WE forsaken the Lord?”

To answer that question, I invite us to quickly look at the WAYS WE HAVE TURNED FROM THE LORD in our own day. Using the Scriptures of Psalm 81 and Hebrews 13 and Jeremiah 2 to compare to, let’s see what our society today here in the United States has done with God.

First of all, We are no longer JOYFUL in the Lord. Psalm 81:1 invites us to “*Shout for joy to God our defender,*” but that seems to happen only if our sports team wins an important game. There’s not much joy in our world today, and it only takes a few minutes listening to any news broadcast to see that. We’ve become sour, disappointed and disgruntled people.

Next We have FORGOTTEN what God has done in the past. Psalm 81:6-11 invites us to recall the victories that God has provided for us when we put our trust and faith in Him. In our self-made society we forget what God has done for us, and we begin to consider what we feel we are entitled to. We have forgotten the gifts and abilities and means provided to us by God by which we have been able to achieve great things. We have short memories as to the great things that God has done for us.

Then, We have **WANDERED AWAY** from God. Because we no longer listen to God, we seek other things, other gods, that we depend upon to bring us security and happiness and peace. Even though our Lord God desires to provide us with whatever we need that will satisfy our hearts and minds, it's never enough, so we go searching for more, away from the loving hands of God. Psalm 81:13-16 pleads with us, *"How I wish my people would listen to me; how I wish they would obey me! I would quickly defeat their enemies and conquer all their foes. Those who hate me would bow in fear before me; their punishment would last forever. But I would feed you with the finest wheat and satisfy you with wild honey."* And yet, even with all this, we have wandered away from God to go our own way.

And because we have gone our own way, We forget... to meet the needs of the **STRANGER**. Instead of welcoming the stranger, our society has become so dangerous that we fear the ones that show up at our door unannounced. They may be wanting to rob or hurt us, so we turn to security systems and alarms to warn us of even those who are in need right there at our door. And if we do start to help them, many will try to take us for all we've got, insisting on more and more help. We forget to reach out to the stranger as the author of Hebrews calls us to do in chapter 13:1.

And We forget... to encourage and build into the **IMPRISONED**. Yes, they have made mistakes. Yes there needs to be consequences to their actions, but that doesn't mean we put them in jail to rot away for the rest of their lives. Most have not heard of the Lord and what He can do when we turn our lives over to Him. But it is easier to forget about them than it is to try to rehabilitate them back into our society. Sadly, many come to know prison life as the only normal they have, repeating offenses because they have it better in prison than they do outside of prison. Jesus changes all of that.

And We forget... to reach out to the **SUFFERING** among us. We get so tunnel-visioned in our own life that we fail to see that there are those around us who have significant needs that we can meet and help out. It could be the hurting, the grieving, the lonely, the oppressed or the persecuted, but there is much suffering going on right around us, and we close our eyes to the need because it might cost us something to care for them. So we forget them out of our own convenience.

We also struggle with **MARRIAGE**. Hebrews 13:4 tells us, *“Marriage is to be honored by all, and husbands and wives must be faithful to each other. God will judge those who are immoral and those who commit adultery.”* Faithfulness to our commitment to the one we marry is very low because we expect the other to meet our needs without our own reaching out to meet their needs. We are a very selfish society looking out for our own personal interests, so we miss the opportunity to serve one another. We miss the command to *“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves”* (Philippians 2:3).

And we have perverted the whole institution of marriage established by God. Same-sex marriages are now “legal” according to the Supreme Court ruling of June 26, 2015. Marriage is no longer a sacred covenant between one man and one woman, but has been distorted to cave into the pressure of a sexually depraved culture crying out for “anything goes.” When God says “NO!” we rule it ok because we think it’s only fair that everyone should have it their way.

And while divorce is at about 50% in America, the statement on your sheet that divorce is equal among Christians as much as it is among non-believers **is not true**. That was my mistake, so cross out that line. That’s E. #3 for those of you following the outline. It is documented that faithful Christians practicing their faith are 90% **less likely** to become divorced than those who do not practice their faith and attend worship regularly.

But if we continue to look at ways we have turned from the Lord, we see that We have a **LOVE AFFAIR** with money. Despite the warning in Hebrews 13:5 which says, *“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be satisfied with what you have,”* we seem to be totally focused on gaining wealth in all aspects of our lives. Whatever we can do to make our lives better, grow our retirement accounts, pad our savings accounts, grow our stocks and increase our own personal worth is the pursuit of most Americans, as well as the rest of the world. Money brings power, and we crave power more than anything else. We have forgotten John the Baptist’s admonition to the soldiers who came to him for baptism in Luke 3:14. He told them, *“Don’t take money from anyone by force or accuse anyone falsely.*

*Be content with your pay.*” Good advice that we all seem to forget.

Then, We no longer look to **FAITHFUL** leaders as examples worthy to be followed in our lives. Those Christian leaders, those folks who live lives of integrity and honesty and purity are belittled and chastised and made fun of by our media because you don’t get ahead in life by being honest or pure or living with integrity! It seems our whole value system has been turned upside down so that we look to actors and actresses and shady politicians and even questionable business folks and sports figures as the right ones to follow. Again, they are usually the ones that are getting the most money, so they must be the ones doing the right thing to get what they want. We idolize the “zeros” and give up on the “heroes.” Hebrews 13:7 calls us to a different way however, *“Remember your former leaders, who spoke God’s message to you. Think back on how they lived and died, and imitate their faith.”* Oh that each of us would begin to do that. Our society would be so different.

Then, we have turned from the Lord because We fall for “all kinds of **STRANGE TEACHINGS.**” We see program after program, commentator after commentator on TV telling us this is right and that is the way we should be living, all of which are so far away from the truth of God’s way of living. We are barraged by commercials calling us to see ourselves in this way or that way and getting their product to follow their concept of beauty or worth. And public schools are becoming rampant about teaching our young people that the ways of our world are right, in direct opposition to God’s Word. Hebrews 13:9 calls to us, *“Do not let all kinds of strange teachings lead you from the right way.”* Yet the more we hear these messages, the more we begin to believe **them** as truth, so we fall away from the Lord’s truth and follow them instead.

So WHY HAVE WE LEFT the Lord’s Ways? Jeremiah 2 begins to expose our true intentions. As he desperately tried to call the people of Israel back to the worship of God and following His ways rather than the world’s ways with the teachings of the false religions, he points out 6 reasons why we turn from God.

We **WORSHIP** worthless idols. Jeremiah asks the question and then gives the first answer,

“*What accusation did your ancestors bring against me? What made them turn away from me? They worshiped worthless idols and became worthless themselves*” (Jeremiah 2:5). What were the worthless idols that the Lord was talking about? There’s a few listed in your outline; money, fame, entertainment, pleasure. All of these become all-consuming in our lives, and if we are not careful, they become our private gods that we worship and spend time following and seeking.

Then, We no longer **CARE ABOUT** the Lord. Worship of the Lord God has been declining over the last 5 decades where there are more people on a given Sunday NOT attending church than those who ARE attending church. According to a 2018 survey, 28% of Americans never **attend church** or synagogue, compared to 22% of Americans who **attend every week**. And that leaves 50% of Americans who occasionally go to church whenever they feel like it. Our faith in the Lord God is waning largely because all of our society tells us that we no longer need God, or that God is dead, or we’re weak if we turn to God. So many today have given up on their allegiance and loyalty to the Lord. We no longer care about Him **being** in our life, even though He has done so many marvelous things for us (Jeremiah 2:6).

And Though **BLESSED** by God, we assume it is by our own efforts that we have our abundance. Jeremiah 2:7 is clear about how it looks today. God says, “*I brought them into a fertile land, to enjoy its harvests and its other good things. But instead they ruined my land; they defiled the country I had given them.*” Plenty of ecologists and naturalists are saying that our culture is killing the earth. Pollution of the land and sea and air seems to be a natural occurrence for us. We strip minerals out of the earth leaving horrendous dead zones affecting huge areas. Plastic in various forms litter and clutter waterways, killing wildlife galore. God has blessed us so abundantly, but we are treating it as though it will never die.

And there are Church leaders serving in churches who **DO NOT KNOW** the Lord. They serve as pastors and priests, but their hearts are far from following the Lord’s guidelines and commands. Many are so rebellious that they disregard the Bible and teach their congregations things that do not

align with Scripture. Jeremiah 2:8 describes this condition, *“The priests did not ask, ‘Where is the Lord?’ My own priests did not know me.”* Yet churches abound that focus so much on social issues that they reject the teachings of the Lord.

Governments **REBELL** against anything to do with faithfulness, crying separation of church and state, yet doing the most they can to limit the influence of the church on the state. Many of our government officials outright reject anything related to faith or the church but studiously and diligently promote everything contrary to God’s Will and God’s Way. They want nothing to do with God and they want everything wiped clean of His influence in the culture. Jeremiah says something about this, *“The rulers rebelled against me; the prophets spoke in the name of Baal and worshiped useless idols”* (2:8).

Looking at our society here in America, We have **CHANGED** gods. The United States was founded upon faith in the Lord God, realizing that He is the One who has granted us the freedom to worship Him, and promote Him, and guide others to do the same. We, much like the country of Israel, have given up on the God of the Universe and have changed gods to seek our own. Jeremiah 2:11 elaborates: *“No other nation has ever changed its gods, even though they were not real. But my people have exchanged me, the God who has brought them honor, for gods that can do nothing for them.”* When we forsake the Lord God, then anything goes, and we find ourselves attacked by enemies, both foreign and domestic, that seek to dominate and ruin and enslave us. It doesn’t take us long to see that taking place even today.

So WHAT IS THE LORD DOING ABOUT IT? What is God doing since we have turned our backs against Him? Well, just as in Jeremiah’s time, **CHARGES** have been brought against us. Prophets, preachers, teachers and faithful followers of Jesus Christ bring warning to us that what we are doing will only lead to our destruction. God continues to point out our rebellious ways, but it seems not many are listening. And like ancient Israel, we keep focusing on how good we have it and we become oblivious to the warning signs. We don’t think anything will happen in our day, and we keep on going our own way, failing to understand the consequences of our actions. God tells Jeremiah and the people,

*“And so I, the Lord, will state my case against my people again. I will bring charges against their descendants” (2:9).*

God desperately wants to get our attention, so He uses a variety of things to wake us up. The way I see things today, **NATURE** has been turned against us in order to shake us out of our complacency to come to our senses. Look at the number of tremendous storms that have affected us. This last week, when I looked on the satellite radar, there were three major storms in the Caribbean, another one off the coast of California and a third one pounding the central U.S. again. Earthquakes are happening in the most surprising places. Devastating fires are blackening thousands of acres of land, incinerating everything in their paths. It’s like God’s words to Jeremiah all over again, *“And so I command the sky to shake with horror, to be amazed and astonished” (2:12).* Yet the explanation comes to us, *“Well, this is just a tough year for weather here in the U.S.”*

No matter what God sends our way to get our attention, we become blind, deaf and dumb to it all. So God has let us **GO OUR OWN WAY**. As much as He loves us, He will not force us to follow Him. He will not coerce us to live according to His Will and His Way. And He cries out, *“...my people have committed two sins; they have turned away from Me, the spring of fresh water, and they have dug cisterns, cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all” (Jeremiah 2:13).*

Folks, this is not an enviable position to be in, for we are living in a nation that is in direct violation with the commands and guidelines of God. **WHAT MUST WE DO**, then in order **not** to face the eternal consequences of God’s wrath on those who rebel against Him and refuse to follow His way?

We must first follow the call of John the Baptist, *“Repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!”* (Luke 3:3). We need to fall on our faces once more and seek the forgiveness of the Lord. We need to **REPENT** of our sinfulness and plead for God’s mercy and grace so that we do not receive what we deserve (God’s wrath) and instead, we receive that which we do not deserve (God’s forgiveness).

We need to **RETURN** to the Lord as Isaiah 55:6-7 invites, *“Turn to the Lord and pray to Him, now that He is near. Let the wicked leave their way of life and change their way of thinking. Let them*

*turn to the Lord, our God; He is merciful and quick to forgive.” Don’t put this off! Confess your sins to the Lord and He will wipe them clean through the blood of Jesus Christ.*

Then we need to Walk in **HIS WAY**, for it is written, *“Obey faithfully everything that I have commanded you; Love the Lord your God, do everything He commands, and be faithful to Him. Then He will drive out all those nations as you advance, and you will occupy the land belonging to nations greater and more powerful than you”* (Deuteronomy 11:22-23). You see, by following the Lord God, He delights in protecting those who are His, so there will be nothing to be afraid about. Following the Lord and walking in His way brings life to everyone who will obey Him.

Then, we need to **WORSHIP** God **ONLY!** God is jealous and has commanded us not to have any gods before Him. HE is the One who is worthy of our praise and glory. So we need to give up any other idol we have put before God and give our loyalty to Him alone. Psalm 95:6-7 make the call for us to *“Come, let us bow down and worship Him; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker! He is our God; we are the people He cares for, the flock for which He provides.”* When we *“get rid of the foreign gods that we have...and purify ourselves...”* (Genesis 35:2), then God will take notice, and be pleased with us, and He will refrain from bringing disaster upon us, and will make us a living witness to those around us of the true blessing of following the Lord only.

Then we must Let **JESUS** be first in our lives. He tells us in Luke 9:23-5, *“...If anyone wants to come with Me, he must forget himself, take up his cross every day, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. Will a person gain anything if he wins the whole world but is himself lost or defeated? Of course not!”* Jesus must be first in our life, in our thoughts, in our prayers, and in everything we do.

Finally, we need to remember that Jesus is the **ONLY** way! He makes that clear in John 14:6, *“...I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one goes to the Father except by Me.”* In all the world, there is no other way to real life except through Jesus Christ. Stay strong in your faith! Follow Jesus every day, and you will have life, indeed. To the glory of God, in Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.