

Tonight's passage is about covenant. Specifically, it is about God's gift of us being able to pray based on covenant won for us in Christ Jesus.

In Jeremiah's day, the people were dreadful and incorrigible covenant breakers. At the heart of Jeremiah's preaching was that since the people had broken God's covenant, that therefore they were facing the covenant curses. In particular, they had broken the covenant by worship of false gods.

One curse in consequence for sin was God not hearing their prayers. Thankfully, in Jeremiah 31, a new covenant is announced with the good news that **Because of Christ, we covenant breakers can still pray to God and be heard.** As we will sing in our last hymn, these words, "Lord, we are few, but thou art near; Nor short thine arm, nor deaf thine ear; O rend the heav'ns, come quickly down, And make a thousand hearts thine own." Tonight we see point 1, a review of the covenant, point 2, a consequence of covenant breaking is that our prayers are not heard, and point 3, a consequence of Christ's covenant keeping is that our prayers are received.

### **1. A review of the covenant. (v.1-13)**

Verses 1-2 The LORD through His mouthpiece Jeremiah pointed the sinning people back to the historic covenant. In verses 3-5, the famous agreement of Ten Commandments, sealed centuries earlier at Sinai. Obedience was at the heart of the covenant relationship.

So, a quick review of the covenant, and then at the end of verse 5, Jeremiah expressed his approval of the covenant terms by saying "*So be it, LORD.*" Another way to say that is, "Amen, LORD."

Do you realize what Jeremiah is saying yes to? Not just blessings, but curses.

Look at verse 3, what is the first word? "Cursed..."

Basically, the review of the covenant here was warning the people to be faithful to God or else the covenant curses would be unleashed!

Now go to Deuteronomy 27. Go ahead and turn there, we are working together tonight to see something important. Deuteronomy 27, starting with verse 15. It is a list of curses. "*Cursed be anyone who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the LORD...And all the people shall answer and say, 'Amen.'*" Verse 16, "*Cursed be anyone who dishonors his father or his mother....And all the people shall say, 'Amen' "*" Verse 17, "*Cursed be anyone who....And all the people shall say, 'Amen' "*" Verse 18, 19, and all the way to verse 26. *Cursed...and the people say Amen.* The appropriate response to a threatened curse was amen, or so be it, Lord.

Did you realize that curses are inherently included in a covenant?

Think of a marriage covenant. A husband and a wife vow to God to be faithful to a spouse. Better or worse, richer or poorer, sickness and health, 'til death would part. Do we verbalize the cascade of bad stuff that happens if one breaks those vows? No. Weddings are fun and not heavy enough. We think to ourselves, "the husband says I'll work a job and provide for the family and the wife says I'll make you supper and tend to the children." We don't verbalize the threats of curse if the vow is broken. Let me give you an example – in weddings, we don't have husbands say, "if you cheat on me, I'll smash the headlights of your car with a baseball bat." And she says "So be it, Amen." We don't have brides say, "If you hurt me, my brothers will beat you up." and the groom responds, "So be it, Amen."

We don't say the curses of the covenant.

When Jeremiah says in verse 5, "So be it, Amen, Lord" he is saying that Jeremiah is agreeing to all the curses of the covenant falling down on all the people, if the people do not fulfill the covenant terms.

SI – perhaps closer to us is to think of an arranged marriage. The bride says, "I will perform all the duties of a spouse to you, but I don't love you as a soulmate. I have not given you my heart." That is an external covenant. God says He wants our hearts.

X – From Jeremiah the prophet, we turn to Christ the prophet, and how Christ has said amen to the covenant, and that meant that Christ had to take the curses for us. Christ has fulfilled the covenant for us. He obeyed the Father's will even unto death. Philippians 2:8, "*...[Christ] humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*"

XN – Once Christ has fulfilled the covenant for us, what are we to do? WE are to obey the covenant also. Paul explains in Romans 6:13, "*Do not present your members to sin as instruments of righteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.*"

Back to our passage in Jeremiah, look at verses 6-8. What is the way to keep the covenant? Proclaim the covenant publicly! And to live it out publicly! Verse 6, "*Proclaim all these words...Hear the words of the covenant and do them.* (v.7), "*I warned your fathers....saying, 'Obey my voice...'*" (v.8), "*But they did not obey...were stubborn...therefore I brought on them all the words of this covenant...which I commanded them to do, but they did not.*"

X – what is the way for God's people in our generation to keep the covenant? God says we must preach the gospel Mt 28:20 in the Great Commission, Christ said to go to all nations, and make disciples by teaching them the Word. But that is not all! We must teaching disciples to obey the teaching of Christ. So keeping the covenant requires two things – preach the Word and obey the Word.

XN – same thing in 2 Thessalonians 1:8 God inflicts punishment (like covenant curses!) on those who will not OBEY the GOSPEL of our Lord Jesus. It is not merely that we believe the gospel. We must obey the gospel. Same as in the days of Jeremiah. It is not merely that we verbalize our assent to the covenant, we must also live out the stipulations of the covenant in holy living. We see the same thing echoed in 1 Peter 4:17, for judgment begins at the house of God, and if judgment is happening for those who are in the covenant, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? Covenant curses. God’s wrath.

Back to Jeremiah 11, now look at verse 9, is there a conspiracy? Not formally. However, the turning away was so common in the days of Jeremiah, so widespread were the sins of Canaanite fertility worship, and the resulting idolatry of heart, that it could appear to an onlooker (such as God looking on from heaven!), that they had deliberately planned and plotted to renounce their covenantal obligations together and en masse. It looked like a conspiracy, even though it was not a formal conspiracy!

Verse 10, good King Josiah’s rediscovery of God’s law and his good changes seemed temporary, because the next generation turned against the covenant made with their fathers. Verse 10, God stated that both Judah and Israel, “...*broke My covenant that I made with their fathers.*” Verse 11, “*Therefore I am bringing disaster...though they cry to Me, I will not listen to them...*” How can it get worse? Well, there is always idolatry. Verse 12, when God won’t listen to their prayers, they cry to their false gods, but of course the false gods “*cannot save them in the time of their trouble.*” Now how can it get worse? Well, there is always MORE idolatry. Verse 13, they added yet more false gods and continued to proliferate until the number of their false gods was as many as the number of streets in the city.

So, that was point one tonight. We have sufficiently reviewed the covenant, and we see that the problem is not God and the problem is not the covenant, but rather the problem is the people. Specifically, the sins of the people. Their refusal to follow God loyally with their hearts. We move on to point two, and verse 14.

## **2. Consequence of covenant breaking - prayers forbidden. (v.14-17)**

In verse 14, Jeremiah was forbidden to intercede for an idolatrous nation that insisted on Baal worship. Their worship of offering sacrificed animals to God did not provide immunity to those whose hearts were still following idols. Such appalling moral corruption of being two-faced could only be rectified by the punishment of covenant curses!

Verse 15, notice that God called them “*my beloved.*” This phrase was a term of special affection. What we have here is still a love story of God loving His people. The people had been unfaithful, and yet God still thinks of Himself as the faithful lover for His bride. This evokes a sadness and irony as we consider

covenant breaking from the perspective of the loyal lover - God Himself. What an insight verse 15 is! The anger of God in bringing covenant curses arises out of His heart of love and longing. God is love, and He continues to love His beloved people, who are cheating on Him repeatedly!

So, why has God's love for His beloved not solved the problem yet?

After all, He is God, and these are His beloved. Solve it.

Where are they right now? Um, yes, that is the delicate situation in verse 15. The irony is contained in the fact of where they are. They are in the Lord's house of worship, committing vile deeds of idolatry! After they commit idolatry, they go through the external motions of worship – of bringing an animal for their sins, and then they figure everything is alright.

Let me put this scene in the language of marriage covenant. The wife had an affair right in the couple's home, in their own bed, and she and Mr. Affair are in the bed, and her husband is standing at the bedroom door. He caught her in the act, and he is now confronting her about the affair. The wife, still lying next to her lover, and she flippantly says, "Oops, Husband, as you can see, I had an another affair again. Sorry! Mr. Affair, you stay right there. I'm going downstairs to have dinner with my husband and smooth this over, and I'll be right back. Okay, well, husband, let's go down to the dining room and get this over with – what do you want for dinner? Wait, what's that? Husband, why are still upset? Oh, husband, you are such drama, and you are so demanding. I said that I was sorry! I said that I'm going to make dinner with you! Get over it already. What do you want from me? I said that I love you. I told you that Mr. Affair doesn't mean anything. You are my husband. Can't you just calm down."

Now do you understand verse 15 better? No amount of sacrificing of animals to God in worship would cancel out the fact that the people continued to plan evil, and that punishment for evil is inevitable from a holy God.

There is another switch to a new illustration in verse 16, an agricultural metaphor now. The people are now presented as a thriving tree. A healthy and beautiful tree. God is the farmer, and his is His precious tree. The only way to get such a strong olive tree was by deliberate planting and a committed and loving care. A long time of a green thumb in the same direction of planting and pruning, watering and weeding, protecting and harvesting. But now, God will set it all on fire. Why? I think by now we understand why. But what we are seeing for the first time is the pain of such an action for the farmer. For God. Acute pain for God has poured Himself into the tree.

No matter. The tree will be consumed instantly, so great will be the tempest of the fire.

Why? Verse 17, *“The LORD of hosts, who planted you, has decreed disaster against you, because of the evil that the house of Israel and the house of Judah have done, provoking Me to anger by making offerings to Baal.”*

The green tree will be burned up, on account of their sins.

X - In Luke 23, the holy and innocent Jesus, while being led away to be crucified, calls Himself the green tree. *“A great multitude of people and of women were mourning and lamenting”* for Jesus. But turning to them, Jesus said, *“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.”* Why? Much like Jeremiah, Jesus explained in Luke 23:31, because, *“if they do these things (the crucifixion) when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”* Jesus is the well beloved Son of God. When our sins were placed upon Him, and He received the wrath of God, then what would happen to us when we are not innocent, we are not the green olive tree, we do not have good fruit. We will be destroyed faster by the wrath of God than Jesus was upon the cross.

Moments later, when one of the criminals hanged near Jesus, said to Jesus, *“Jesus, remember me when you come into Your kingdom.”* That is a prayer! What is the answer? Jesus said, *“Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in paradise.”*

Because of Christ, we covenant breakers can still pray to God and be heard. That brings us to our third point.

### **3. Consequence of covenant keeping - prayers received. (v.18-22)**

Verse 18, what did The LORD make known to Jeremiah? Whose deeds did God show to Jeremiah? Verse 19, who was devising schemes against Jeremiah? Verse 19, who was saying, *“Let us destroy the tree, with its fruit?”* meaning that they wanted to silence Jeremiah, and any children he might have or new young prophets that he might train up to speak after Jeremiah was gone? Who wanted to kill Jeremiah in order to get the preaching of the Word to stop?

Why did Jeremiah in verse 20 pray for vengeance against them, and who were they?

Verse 21 reveals why they were, the men of Jeremiah’s own hometown, a place called Anathoth, we remember from chapter 1, verse 1. Sure enough, in verse 21, they were seeking Jeremiah’s life, in order to kill Jeremiah. What was so offensive about Jeremiah? His preaching! Verse 21, the men of Anathoth said, *“Do not prophesy in the name of The LORD, or you will die by our hand.”* Tough congregation. They said shut up or die!

No wonder that Jeremiah had said in verse 19 that he felt like a lamb led to the slaughter, because Jeremiah did not know that it was against him that they were devising schemes. Jeremiah’s relationship to the people of his hometown was like the relationship of an animal heading to slaughter, completely and blissfully unaware of the intentions of the owners to slaughter the animal.

Why would the people of Anathoth want to kill Jeremiah. Remember that Jeremiah was the son of a priest. And remember that Jeremiah actively supported closing down places of wrong worship, per the good changes and reforms of the good king. So, Jeremiah was opposed by the people of His own town, His own people.

Wait. What does the LORD say about that? In verses 22 and 23, the chapter does not end before God answers the enemies of His prophet Jeremiah. God “...will punish them...[they] shall die by the sword...by famine...none of them shall be left...I will bring disaster on the men of Anathoth.”

Jeremiah was right to put his trust in the LORD God for His life. God is powerful. God cares for His own. God always gets the last Word. God had said back in Jeremiah 1:8 “Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you...” When the men of Jeremiah’s hometown tried to kill him, the Lord Himself expressed His commitment to Jeremiah’s protection. Jeremiah had supreme confidence in God. Jeremiah was given the gift of prayer. Like the prayer of King David when under attack in Psalm 7, “O LORD my God, in You do I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers and deliver Me...” This sort of prayer quiets our hearts. It brings us calm and refreshment in the middle of betrayals.

X - Once again here we see a similarity between Jeremiah and Jesus. Both had their own people reject them, and ultimately try to kill them. John 1:11 says, that Jesus, “...came to His own people, and His own did not receive Him.” One of Jesus’ own inner circle of 12 intimate disciples, was the One who turned Jesus over to death for 30 pieces of silver.

XN – Jesus told us that it was not just for Jeremiah and not just for Jesus Himself, but that it would be true for all who follow Jesus, including us. Matthew 10:36, Jesus said that He had come to bring a dividing sword, and that “... a person’s enemies will be those of His own household.”

This is where Jeremiah and Jesus differ.

In verse 20, Jeremiah prayed vengeance on those who betrayed him.

Jeremiah was a prophet but Jeremiah was not the Messiah.

There is only one Messiah.

When they accused Jesus in the official court known as the Sanhedrin, what did Jesus say? Jesus remained silent and made no answer. Mark 14:61.

Isaiah prophesied this would happen in the well-known, well-loved words of Isaiah 53 – He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. ...like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open His mouth.

And when the One and Only Messiah is betrayed by every last one of His disciples for us, what did Jesus pray for them? Forgiveness.

Not just for his inner circle of disciples, but for his murderers.

While Jesus was being murdered, still on the cross, Jesus blanketly said of all of them, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Luke 23:34.

This is the heart of the Messiah, that is greater than the heart of Jeremiah

### **CONCLUSION:**

All of us are fallen in Adam. We see in every age, that people don’t want to hear God’s truth. First thing that a failing church does is attack the sound teaching. Itching ears want to hear what they want to hear. We all have this in small ways – we come up with excuses why we don’t need to listen to the preaching.

Remember that in the time that Jesus lived, this showed itself when in the people conspired against them. They wanted to cut Jesus off from the land of the living. Jesus was truly like a lamb led to slaughter. His own people schemed to murder Him. His own companion betrayed Him with a kiss.

Remember that Jesus’ prayer differed from Jeremiah! Jeremiah asked for vengeance. Jesus asked for God to forgiveness for the enemies. Jesus prayed for us – the enemies of God. Romans 5:10, “...*while were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son.*” In order to turn us as enemies over to God, Jesus had to pray for God the Father, “Let Your vengeance fall on Me”, prayed Jesus. Think of the irony.... while we try to silence Christ’s word, Jesus prayed for us. And Jesus’ prayer was heard, based on the covenant that He fulfilled. God the Father granted the prayer of Jesus, making Him a curse, so that we could be saved in Him. Galatians 3:13-14, “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.*” Christ took the covenant curse, so that we get the covenant Spirit, and the covenant access to our Covenant God in prayer.

Because Jesus’ prayer was heard, and His sacrifice was accepted, Jesus opened access to God the Father. Your prayers are always heard. You will never receive silent treatment from God. God the Father urges you to pray constantly. When you pray, base your prayers on the covenant of Christ. Because of Christ, we covenant breakers can still pray to God and be heard.

This gift of covenant prayer is only one of the promises of the covenant. But in the covenant it is not an exchange of commodities and access and giftedness. In the Covenant it is an exchange of persons. We get Christ. Christ gets us. Christ gives us to God the Father. That is covenant. We pray based on covenant. 2 Corinthians 1:20 says that “*all the promises of God find their YES in [Jesus Christ]. That is why it is through [Christ] that we utter our Amen to God for His glory.*”