

Jeremiah 5

Self Medication

God shows us comparisons between blessings and curses. A healthy nation should have a stable family structure, good national health statistics, good employment and low crime statistics. We take these things for granted. God can flip that around as we take him out of the national conversations. We are periodically given issues to pray about for a reason. It is to keep pushing God to the top of our pile of priorities. Our hearts need to be stirred periodically to recirculate prayers and thoughts of God into our mind. It can be compared to a chemical or paint tank agitator that keeps a special ingredient in the mix. It is not necessarily a sign of disobedience when things go sideways. It is just time to pray and remember God. We can give them to God, or cope with these things in other ways.

We have gotten to the place in our story where it appears that the men of Judah are just not praying to God anymore. When they face a crisis, they have stopped resorting to prayer. They have quit on God and gone to more-familiar band aids. Step one to their freefall was the addition of idolatry while the temple worship was still going on. We can feel OK about our out-of-bounds behavior if we still attend church. That is man's logic; not God's. God was more like a rabbit's foot to them. They were proud of their godly sayings "As the LORD lives". Even that compromise arrangement fell apart.

Now the temple is essentially shut down or being used as an idol shrine. These Jews are not sober enough to the peril they face to stop what they are doing. They cannot bring themselves to break free of their vices. They are truly enslaved by their passions.

"Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel commits here, to make Me go far away from My sanctuary? Now turn again, you will see greater abominations." So He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a hole in the wall. Then He said to me, "Son of man, dig into the wall"; and when I dug into the wall, there was a door. And He said to me, "Go in, and see the wicked abominations which they are doing there." So I went in and saw, and there—every sort of creeping thing, abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed all around on the walls. And there stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel, and in their midst stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan. Each man had a censer in his hand, and a thick cloud of incense went up. Then He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the room of his idols? For they say, 'The LORD does not see us, the LORD has forsaken the land.' " And He said to me, "Turn again, and you will see greater abominations that they are doing." So He brought me to the door of the north gate of the LORD's house; and to my dismay, women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz. Then He said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Turn again, you will see greater abominations

than these." So He brought me into the inner court of the LORD's house; and there, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east, and they were worshiping the sun toward the east. And He said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence; then they have returned to provoke Me to anger. Indeed they put the branch to their nose. Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them." (Ezekiel 8:6-15)

We talk a lot about how sin is like a drug that anesthetizes us. The drug addict sees the damage and heartache that he has caused. He has become so self-absorbed and indifferent to others that he carries out more and more brazen acts against his neighbor. The adulterer senses that he is exchanging momentary feelings for his children's self-image and mental health and his marital stability. These strange detours are all forms of self-medication. They only leave you at a yet lower level.

You might use food to give your mood a boost or alleviate boredom. You might smoke a joint to help you relax, or have a drink or two before going out to settle your nerves and ease any social anxiety. Or perhaps you turn to Xanax or Valium to help you sleep, ADHD medications to keep you focused during the day, or prescription painkillers to numb any grief or stress you're experiencing at the moment? When you use alcohol or drugs in this way to manage symptoms of a mental health issue, it's known as "self-medication". You may be aware that you have a mental health problem but don't know any healthier ways to cope.

When I was in high school and in my early college years I went out to blues and rock clubs and to parties where I was trying to force *good times* into my life. The price I paid for sleep deprivation and self-condemnation never seemed to be worth it, but I was living in the moment. That is the self-medication cycle.

Drugs, booze, gambling, sex and so forth take you out of yourself. They focus your attention elsewhere. They may rev up your excitement and anticipation of reward (in the case of speed, coke, or gambling) or they may quell anxiety. If we find something that relieves the gnawing sense of internal concerns, we take it, we do it, and then we do it again. It is like an aspirin.

God made us to be needy. We are a trinity of body, soul and spirit in need of spiritual fulfillment. Something was gnawing at Eve to accept Satan's offer to explore outside of God's prescribed boundaries. She was looking to her surroundings to make her happy. She wanted to restructure the organizational structure of the Garden of Eden. The truth was that like Judah and Israel, Eve was assessing her choices without God's counsel.

This dissatisfaction is God's dilemma with Judah as well as within us. Our failures produce introspection. They are supposed to give us cause to pause and to reassess our course with God. God does not want to spank us or to stop a beating heart. It goes against his nature of promoting life and health and joy. It is like a traffic app that keeps telling us to take the exit; but we turn it down and keep on going another way.

Final Call

Read Jeremiah 5:1-5: Prophecies tend to focus on how mankind fails to make their own course corrections. This chapter looks at the problem from God's position, instead of the people's position. God purposefully empowered man to make his own decisions and adapt in a sensible way. We were made to lead and to follow. We were made to work. God made man to be governors over God's creation. God is asking tongue-in-cheek to go talk to the wise men in town (because there are none).

The prophets have been told to be quiet. Pretend prophets are selling their assurances in national pride and personal freedoms. God's voice has been shut off; so, he must use his hands now. God is getting ready to stop the damage being done in Judah. Before he does so, he takes an inventory. He is looking for just one holy man or woman to prevent him from completely turning things upside down.

We always need to go to the root of the original problem, and not be confused by how wicked the tool of correction is. We forget that before this moment of crisis that the prophets literally begged God to put a stop to the madness and sin in Judah and Israel. The children of Israel had become worse than the Canaanites.

The burden which the prophet Habakkuk saw. O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" And You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, And cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; There is strife, and contention arises. Therefore, the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore, perverse judgment proceeds. "Look among the nations and watch—Be utterly astounded! For I will work a work in your days Which you would not believe, though it were told you. For indeed I am raising up the Chaldeans, A bitter and hasty nation Which marches through the breadth of the earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. (Habakkuk 1:1-6)

We see through the lives of Noah and Lot and others that God will spare an entire population center for one righteous soul.

And Abraham came near and said, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there were fifty righteous within the city; would You also destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous that were in it? Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from

You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" So the LORD said, "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes." (Genesis 18:23-26)

God sent angels to tally a righteous head count before destroying Sodom. He also performed this same census and ID labeling in Judah. These corrections are extremely painful to God, and he uses his helpers (angels) to carry out this *regrettable act of tough love*. He really hates doing it.

*For the LORD will rise up as at Mount Perazim, He will be angry as in the Valley of Gibeon—That He may do His work, His awesome work, and bring to pass His act, **His unusual act.** (Isaiah 28:21)*

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. (Genesis 6:5-8)

"Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it." To the others He said in my hearing, "Go after him through the city and kill; do not let your eye spare, nor have any pity. Utterly slay old and young men, maidens and little children and women; but do not come near anyone on whom is the mark; and begin at My sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the temple. Then He said to them, "Defile the temple, and fill the courts with the slain. Go out!" And they went out and killed in the city. So it was, that while they were killing them, I was left alone; and I fell on my face and cried out, and said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Will You destroy all the remnant of Israel in pouring out Your fury on Jerusalem?" Then He said to me, "The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is full of bloodshed, and the city full of perversity; for they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see!' (Ezekiel 9: 1-6)

And he said to him, "See, I have favored you concerning this thing also, in that I will not overthrow this city for which you have spoken. Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there." (Genesis 19:21-22)

Read Jeremiah 5:6-17: We can divide the world into two groups. We can divide it into *us and them*. We may conclude that we are good people protected by God; and that others are unbelievers who need to be stopped. We can conclude that we are victims of circumstance and that we deserve special consideration. What happens when we wake up, and we have run out of excuses, and discover that our lives are lived more like those who are not ruled by God? Should

we be allowed to do our harmful things? What happens when our good intentions never play out? What about those people who we have stepped on? What happens when we become *nose blind* to our impact on others? There are things that God does not want us to experience because we cannot handle the temptation. You cannot give somebody heroin and then just tell them to repent. You cannot expose someone to child porn for a long period of time and then just tell them to forget it. We are like recording devices that make lasting impressions that are hard to erase.

When a man cannot stop himself to becoming a menace to society he needs to be stopped by other means. Many bullies may not see themselves as harmful. I know Christian businessmen who feel that being a good steward is taking as much advantage as they possibly can. Even some shooters and terrorists see themselves as vigilantes of some sort; towards some greater good.

The Jews had become self-deluded. After all, they were the children of Abraham. The false prophets appealed to the desire to see themselves as being the exceptions who God favored. There is intellectual dishonesty that takes place in each of us to some degree. We are all hypocrites in that we see ourselves a little differently than others see us. This is where the Holy Spirit comes in. He will not give us peace with ourselves. A pig will wallow in the mud and garbage in peace. Sheep will fall in the mud; but cannot stand laying in it for long.

The bible describes those who have become deaf to God as brutish animals that live without introspection. They do not worry about who they have become, or how they impact others.

But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet. These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever. (2 Peter 2:12-17)

The men of Judah were lusting after their neighbor's wives. They were calling out to them like out of control boys. They somehow justified their latitude to act out in passion contrary to God's rules for all sustainable societies. Like a wandering sheep in peril to a lion or wolf or leopard, these strays have to be separated if the flock is to have any chance to survive. When Christians go *off of the reservation* they can encounter some serious damage or death. We never only endanger ourselves. We drag the whole flock down. Likewise, when we repent, we serve to protect the whole village.

Read Jeremiah 5:18-31: We are saved by faith; not by good works. If our footsteps look a little too worldly, then we need to get a little uncomfortable and make some serious changes.

They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. (1 John 2:19)

Shipwrecked

God places a heavenly beacon inside of us when we are saved. It warns all ships about crashing into the rocks and becoming shipwrecked in our faith. Paul describes what it means to have a *shipwrecked faith*.

This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, (1 Timothy 1:18-19)

A shipwrecked faith means that you have essentially incapacitated yourself by not heeding the warnings that *God's lighthouse* is sending your way. Severe damage has been done; ruining your witness and testimony. Like the thief on the cross, or Lot, you may still make it to heaven...but without any benefit to others. You might even need to be killed, and brought home for your neighbor's benefit. Paul handed out-of-control believers over to Satan for a season, in order to bring about some hard circumstances to curb their enthusiasm for sin. God would rather just give us a look or a feeling to react to, instead of whipping us into position.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, Which have no understanding, Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, Else they will not come near you. (Psalm 32:8-9)

God has a big challenge. How do you make men turn to you to have eternal life? We are infamous for making bad decisions since we were created.