

Seek The Old Paths!

Text: Jer 6:16

Suggested Hymns:

267, 329, 162, 292, 511

1) Timelines

2) There are the alternative paths

3) The true path

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Jeremiah 6:16, ¹⁶ *Thus says the LORD: "Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The words of our text were spoken to a wayward nation. Israel had heaped sin upon sin and had been visited by punishment after punishment. God had dealt with this nation as a father deals with a headstrong child. He had punished it for its many disobediences, but when the punishment had grown severe and the Israelites had pleaded for peace, God showed great mercy and removed the afflictions.

But always, as soon as God showed favour and the people prospered, they forsook God and followed after the strange gods of the surrounding nations and corrupted themselves with the idolatrous and immoral practices connected with the worship of these false gods.

After many hard, lean years, in which the Israelites had seen their land invaded by foreign kings, themselves put under the yoke, and thousands of their countrymen killed, God raised up a good and righteous king — Josiah.

With him prosperity came again to the land. The Book of the Law, which had been lost and forgotten for many years, was found. During all this time, Israel, the people chosen by God, had been without the Book of Life, in which God describes the way to salvation.

Now this book was found in the Temple, which had fallen into disrepair. And a reform had spread throughout the land, but the Jews could not stand

prosperity. They again became backsliders, falling away from God, their Creator and Redeemer.

And this was the mission of Jeremiah — to thunder against this people and warn them against greater disasters to come if they did not turn from their evil ways.

They had seen the entire Northern Kingdom, composed of the ten tribes, carried away into distant countries. Jeremiah announced to them on behalf of God that the rest of the nation, all of Judah, would suffer the same fate.

Jeremiah loved his people, he brooded over them with the same kind of love that made Christ shed tears over Jerusalem.¹ He loved this straying, fickle nation, and he liked the land in which they dwelt, the bounteous plains, the beautiful valleys and streams, the swelling hills of the Holy Land, the inheritance of the chosen people.

Jeremiah was a tender, gentle soul, but he had a duty which no other prophet had — to tell this wild, turbulent nation, his heart's desire, that there was no hope for them, and that God had utterly rejected them. This message of his is echoed in his very name, Jeremiah, which means, "*Jehovah has cast down.*"

Jeremiah was the greatest of the Prophets in obedience, love, and loyalty, both to God and to his people. The tragedy in his life was that the people whom he loved disobeyed and angered God, whom he loved more, and he had to preach the judgement of God upon this beloved nation of his.

We see him brooding over the ashes of his adored city, Jerusalem, after its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar. We hear him lament as written in Lamentations 1:1-2, 8, 12 ¹ *How lonely sits the city That was full of people! How like a widow is she, Who was great among the nations! The princess among the provinces Has become a slave!* ² *She weeps bitterly in the night, Her tears are on her cheeks; Among all her lovers She has none to comfort her. All her friends have dealt treacherously with her; They have become her enemies.*

... ⁸ *Jerusalem has sinned gravely, Therefore she has become vile. All who honored her despise her.*

... ¹² ***“Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Behold and see If there is any sorrow like my sorrow, Which has been brought on me, Which the LORD has inflicted In the day of His fierce anger.***

That is the tenor of the Book of Lamentations, one of the saddest books ever penned.

In the same strain, the gentle, loveable, loyal Jeremiah, kindly, yet sternly, because it was God’s Word he was speaking, says: ***“Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls.***

Let us consider today the admonition to *ask for the old paths!* May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Timelines

Timelines in the life of a Nation

The clarion call of Jeremiah resounds today in a world that apparently stands on the brink of a far greater catastrophe than Jerusalem’s, a world that may soon weep in the midst of far more tragic ashes than those that caused Jeremiah to shed tears. ***“Stand in the ways and see!”***

Why has God permitted violence and bloodshed, terror and misery, to overwhelm the world? Is not the ancient tragedy of Israel being re-enacted, this time on a tremendously magnified scale? Stand, and see! Have not the nations resurrected Israel’s sin? Is not the same sad story being retold, ***“whatever a man sows, that he will also reap?”***² Have not the nations forsaken God, rebelled against His Commandments, and despised His Gospel? Has not national disaster always followed hard upon the heels of national apostasy? Beware! Beware! ***“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked”***

Timelines in the Life of the Individual

The same note of warning is injected into the life of the individual. In the midst of our crowded, busy, careless lives an alarm sounds. Many have strayed far from God. They have tried to live without God. The everlasting truths of Christianity, the foundations of wise and happy living, have been despised, and forgotten.

Materialism has crowded religion from the lives of the vast majority. The broad road that leads to destruction is crowded. God's call is urgent. *Stand in the ways and see.* Examine your way of life. Where is it leading? Does it lead to God? Seek the old paths. We stand at the crossroads of life.

1. There Are The Alternative Paths

Pleasure. — Shall we travel the broad road of pleasure? Cheerfully swing down the primrose highway of forgetfulness, which beckons so smilingly? Unthinkingly trip down the way which promises fun, luxury, the joys of the flesh, and the pleasures of Satan?

Will we find God and heaven that way? That way ends in suffering, in shame, in disease, in horror, in despair, in hell. The Prodigal Son went that way. He was fascinated by the whirlwind of pleasure. He revolved on the riotous wheel of extravagance. What did it leave? Dizziness, a bad taste in the mouth, bankruptcy of body and soul. He ended in the swine's trough, asking for the food that the pigs ate, but not one gave him to eat. Will we find God that way?

Philosophy. — Shall we follow the intricate trail of philosophy, such as the new age movement? Shall we let our thought travel to the forests and find in them an expression of God? to the mountains and find in them a bit of God? to the oceans and find in them an aspect of God? Shall we study the complicated but exquisite structure of the flower and there discover a phase of God? Shall we scrutinise man, who is fearfully and wonderfully made, and there find God to worship?

Such is the characterless, colourless, bodiless religion called pantheism, new age, which teaches that everything in the world is a part of God and so is to be worshiped. Shall we find God this way?

Certainly the wonders of a mighty mountain, rearing its snowy head into the skies, the magnificence of a blue ocean tossed by an invisible hand into towering waves, the wonderful firmament of heaven with its hosts of stars and sun and moon — all these are the work of God's hands. And just because they are the work of His hands, they cannot be part of Him. Shall we find God there?

But God as the mighty Creator and Sustainer of all creation, a God proclaiming that He is your Maker; a God who, clothed in all His majesty, says

in Leviticus 19:2, '*You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy;*' a God who demands what you can never produce; a God whose very power frightens; a God who overwhelms us rebellious creatures; a God before whom no excuse will stand up and from whom there is no escape.

The ancient Greeks, like many of the godless of our day, took that way. In the first chapter of Romans we read of this knowledge of God: Romans 1:18–21, ¹⁸*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,* ¹⁹*because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them.* ²⁰*For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,* ²¹*because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God.* Shall we find God that way?

The Occult Religions. — Or shall we follow any of the many secret paths, those occult religions that spring up, grow for a while on the deception of foolish men and women, and then die? What disillusionment for those who take men's word for something that God's Word alone can guarantee!

The Sects. — Or shall we follow any of those numerous paths which at first seem to be those of God's Word and then suddenly and unaccountably deviate? Those systems of religion, for reasons of their author's own, follow God's Word part of the way, but then follow human convictions for the rest of the way. They set out to show salvation in Christ, but obscure that salvation with a mixture of error? Shall we find God in these paths?

In all of these ways lies confusion, the monster of uncertainty that plagues all religions that are of human origin. It is religion adulterated with human reason and human speculation, so that the traveller does not know where he is going.

2. The True Path

The Problem. — Where, then, can we find the old paths? Our text says *Stand in the ways and see*. Look carefully, scrutinise, study the paths. See whether they are the old paths laid down by God. Ask: "*Where is the good way?*" Make a careful examination of your beliefs, of your life.

Do you believe what you believe because you were taught that from childhood and never looked into the matter yourself? Or are you very vague and hazy about religious matters, never having given them careful consideration? Have you grown careless, so that your feet do not walk in the path with which your lips you pretend to follow? In our text, God calls for an earnest examination of our faith and life.

But how shall we know which is the right path? With what shall we compare our beliefs and our behaviour that we may correctly judge ourselves? Is religion merely a matter of personal taste and preference? Are there many paths to heaven, so that each may choose his own?

The Answer. — If that is true, why does our text summon us to find the one good way? Jesus knew nothing of such multiplicity of ways to heaven. He tells us in John 14:6, ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.***

He prescribed faith in Himself as the one Way to heaven. Again He says: ***“If you continue in My word, you are My disciples indeed. ³² And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”³*** Very clearly, then, the good way and the old paths are laid down in God’s Word, the Bible.

It was to these paths that Jeremiah was tenderly calling back a nation gone wrong. It was to these paths that John the Baptist called the people in his preaching to prepare them for Christ’s appearance. It was to this way that Abraham directed the brothers of the rich man in hell, the poor wretch who begged that Lazarus be sent to them to warn them against hell. Abraham said: ***“They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.”⁴*** God’s Word, the Bible, is the lamp to our feet, the light to our path.

The Way. — The Word of God presents only one way to salvation. ***There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*⁵** Christ, the Son of God, came into the world to seek and to save that which was lost. The world by nature is lost. It has departed from the way of God. It has left the Father’s house.

And not all the research of scientists, not all the study of philosophers, not all the self-torture of the ascetics, can discover the way back.

It remained for the Son of God to rescue a perishing and doomed world. His blood was shed on Calvary that the chasm between God and man might be bridged, that God and man might be at one again. The Cross of Christ stands as a bulwark against the flood of God's wrath that would engulf us if we were left to our own devices.

The crucified Christ calls to a dying world: ²² ***“Look to Me, and be saved, All you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other.”*** ¹⁶ ***For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.***⁷

Our salvation is summed up in “Romans 3:28, ²⁸ ***Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.*** And likewise in Ephesians 1:7, ⁷ ***In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.*** Christ's substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of mankind is the central theme of the Bible.

No sooner had man fallen into sin than God promised the Woman's Seed as the Redeemer. The faithful of the Old Testament were directed to this Saviour. Christ was prefigured and portrayed in the sacrifices which the Lord commanded through Moses, pictured by the lambs, bullocks, and goats offered on Israel's altars. Christ was on the lips of the prophets sent by God. It was faith in this Saviour to come that gained salvation in those days. And it was a return to these old paths, this good way, for which Jeremiah was pleading with his beloved nation.

Christ's life, death, and resurrection form the sum and substance also of the New Testament. St. Paul, St. Peter, and the other Apostles speak the same grand theme: ***God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.***⁸ The central message of the Bible is that Christ's death on the Cross purged mankind of sin.

Ask for the old paths, for the good way. Do not be deceived by the vaunting boasts of those who in our day say that our modern times has gotten beyond the idea of sin, of an angry God in heaven, of everlasting punishment, of salvation through the vicarious life and death of the Son of God. That cry has been raised in every century since Adam fell.

Each century has claimed that these old paths would soon be overgrown with grass and disappear, but always men have been led by the Holy Spirit to these old paths, and they have rejoiced to find them.

Always through God's grace the good way has been kept open, and men have found it and salvation for their souls. The truth of God cannot be buried, cannot be hidden. The Cross of Christ still looms up as the one landmark whereby men may find their way home. The Word of God, which points to that Cross, is an unfailing light.

Not all the ridicule and opposition of men, not all the malice of Satan, shall extinguish that light. Jesus says in the midst of a reeling world: ³⁵ ***Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.***⁹

The End of the Way. — If you want to find rest for your souls; if you want to find that rest which cannot be disturbed by pain or worry or grief or doubt or fear, even in these fearful and uncertain times; if you want to have that final, and in this world this seemingly unattainable gift, true and lasting peace, seek the old paths.

Christ, who with His head bowed down by anguish and woe, with His hands and feet pierced and stained with blood, invited an unhappy world to find rest in Him, saying in Matthew 11:28, ²⁸ ***Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,*** this same Christ still stands in the old paths and beckons to you today.

Place your body and soul in His keeping through faith; confess your sin to Him; lay your guilt upon Him; surrender yourself to Him; believe Him as your Saviour and your Guide, and the blessed promise is yours as recorded in our text, ***“Then you will find rest for your souls.”*** And that rest shall never be disturbed. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Luke 13:34

² Galatians 6:7

³ John 8:31–32

⁴ Luke 16:29

⁵ Acts 4:12

⁶ Isaiah 45:22

⁷ John 3:16

⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:19

⁹ Matthew 24:35