

## Jeremiah Chapter 3 – April 14, 2022

### *Return to the Lord*

J.D. Farag

All right, Jeremiah Chapter 3 tonight!

On Thursday nights, we're going through the Bible book-by-book, chapter-by-chapter, verse-by-verse.

You'll notice by way of, I guess, an apology that we're not taking two or three chapters at a time, not to say that we won't, but these first few chapters are so foundational as we're going to see tonight, so... and there's so much there and I don't want to rush through, especially the beginning of this book because it's really going to set the tone in a way for what we're going to see in all 52 chapters.

Don't look now, but I think the rapture will happen before we get there. Well, let's hope it does. Chapter 52 so...

Why don't we pray?

We'll ask God to bless our Bible study tonight. If you would, please join with me.

Father in Heaven, thank You so much, Lord, for Your Word. Thank You for this book. Thank You for this man that You called, this man Jeremiah, the prophet Jeremiah, the weeping prophet Jeremiah.

Lord, thank You for using him and inspiring him and recording this for us all of these generations later because it is so apropos for where we're at in the world today.

And so, Lord, as we now get into Your Word, we want Your Word to get into us. We're going to search the scriptures, but really, the scriptures are searching us, searching our hearts.

And so Lord, we want to give You unfettered access to our hearts so You can minister to us and speak to us. For those who need encouragement, that You would encourage, for those who need strength, that You would strengthen as only You can and are always so faithful to do. Lord, we ask You in Jesus' name, amen and amen.

All right, here in Chapter 3, there's this re-occurring theme in a word, which is "return."

In fact, in the original language, this word is used in some form 18 times, return to the Lord, return. And God through the Prophet Jeremiah is calling His people to repent and return from their backsliding, which again, another word "backsliding."

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We're going to see that word used seven times in this chapter. So as we're about to see, the whole message from the prophet Jeremiah to the people of Judah; we're going to have references to the northern kingdom of Israel, but this is to Judah.

And it is a message very simply of repent and return from your backsliding. That's the whole message of this chapter.

Now, before we jump in, it is - I don't know if it's possible to overstate the paramount importance of this, but we have to see this through the lens of God's love for us as His people.

Because if we don't see and study a chapter like this through that lens, we're going to misunderstand and misinterpret and really miss, period, miss that which God has for us.

What we're about to see is, I mean, you couldn't imagine it, but God is pleading with His people.

Why?

Because He loves them so much. And that's really going to be the takeaway from our time together in God's Word tonight, as we saw last week and as we're going to see again this week, the reason for this strength, and it's pretty strong, again.

The reason for that strength is because God loves us so much! If we could but fathom the unfathomable love that God has for us, His people.

So let's jump in *verse 1*; right out of the chute here it is. **“They say, ‘If a man divorces his wife, and she goes from him and becomes another man’s, may he return to her again?’ Would not that land be greatly polluted?**

**But you have played the harlot with many lovers; yet return to Me,” says the Lord.”**

This first verse, I mean, it really sets the tone here. It's actually a reference to Deuteronomy Chapter 24, the first four verses. This was the law concerning a man who divorces his wife. She cannot return to him lest the land be defiled.

And so God through the Prophet Jeremiah is referencing this law, which they would have been keenly aware of, intimately familiar with.

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And He says, But wait a minute, I love you so much. I don't want a divorce. Yes, I know that you have had many lovers and played the harlot, but I'll take you back. I love you that much. I love you so much.

Yeah, but I've dirtied myself. I've "polluted" is the word in the New King James.

And yet You'll still take me back?

Yes, just return to Me, says the Lord.

**Verse 2, "Lift up your eyes to the desolate heights and see: Where have you not lain with men?"**

**By the road you have sat for them like an Arabian in the wilderness;**

**and [here it is again] you have polluted the land with your harlotries and your wickedness."**

This "**like an Arabian in the wilderness,**" what that means is that they were behaving like someone who's waiting, pursuing, just on the road waiting, searching for someone to plunder.

This "**Arabian in the wild**" - in other words, sin is not searching for them. They're searching for sin like an Arabian would wait in the wilderness, searching for someone to plunder.

That's what they were doing in their harlotry, in their wickedness.

And this rhetorical question of "**where have you not lain with men**" is not "have you lain with men?" This is spiritual adultery. You've committed adultery. I mean, what men have you not lain with?

Well, that's pretty strong, isn't it?

And isn't it true that, look, you don't have to go searching for sin like they apparently were doing. Sin will find you; don't worry.

There's a proverb, but this is a very loose paraphrase, but basically, this is the gist of it. What you pursue pursues you. You don't have to look too far.

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I mean, if you're on the prowl, if you're like an Arabian in the wilderness, on the search for sin, don't worry, you'll find it. It doesn't have to find you; you'll find it first. That's what he's saying here.

Well, again, you'll forgive me for expounding on this particular verse in this way, but this should bring us much-needed encouragement. And here's how I get there.

Again, God loves them so much. And basically what He's saying to them then is what He's saying to us now. I don't care what you've done, how grievous is your wickedness. I still love you and I still want you back.

I think they call that unconditional love, agape love, where there's nothing that you could do that's going to make Me love you less.

And this should bring us so much encouragement concerning the grace and the mercy of God. We're going to see that here as well in a moment.

**Verse 3, "Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain. You have had a harlot's forehead; you refuse to be ashamed."**

This is kind of an imagery, I guess, for lack of a better word, of, you know, there's no shame on your face. You have no shame; have you no shame? You refuse to be ashamed of what you've done.

Now, this, by the way, speaks to the consequences of sin. Yes, there's the forgiveness for sin, but there's still the consequences of sin. And we see that here in verse 3.

And there's actually a particular irony to this because these pagan gods that they were committing adultery with in the spiritual sense and that they were worshiping, lying with, as we just read, these were gods of weather, gods of rain, gods of fertility, gods of productivity, kind of is reminiscent of in the Exodus with the plagues.

You know, all ten of those plagues were strategically precisionally directed at the gods of the Egyptians. Believe it or not, they worshiped frogs, not Farags, frogs. *(Chuckling)*

It's kind of like God saying, Oh, you like frogs, do you?

And then the plague of the frogs.

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They worshiped the Nile.

Oh, you worship the Nile?

I'm going to turn it to blood. How about that?

Every single one of those plagues was directed at one of those gods, and it was God's way.

And by the way, I think of Elijah too. Same exact thing: The priests of Baal, that contest there on Mount Carmel, for those of you that have been to Israel with us, (*Chuckling*) where they are cutting themselves, interesting, screaming, and Elijah is having a great time with this.

In fact, he's having too much fun with it. And it's recorded for us in detail in the account, I want to say 1 Kings 18. I could be wrong, 18 or 19; I think it is 18.

And so he says to the Baal worshipers, Okay, let's see who's god is God?

And it was really for Israel because it was, you know, you're going to have to make a decision. How long will you falter between two gods? Either Baal is God or Jehovah is God. We're going to settle this right here and right now.

All right, game-on!

So imagine the delight on the part of the priests of Baal when Elijah, who, you'll forgive me again, I think he had a thing for fire.

I think it might have been a pyromaniac thing, but I mean, he went up in a chariot of fire, remember when he's hiding from Jezebel right after this, and, you know, there's a great earthquake and great wind and great fire? And then here he calls fire down.

I'm just saying; I think he had a thing. Anyway, let's get back to what we were talking about here.

So he says to them, here's what we're going to do. We're going to build an altar. We're going to put the sacrifice on the altar.

You can go ahead and go first. And you call on Baal for fire to come down to consume this sacrifice.

And oh, my goodness, these priests are like, whoa, deal. Where do we sign?

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You know why?

Because Baal was the god of fire. They're thinking, oh, man, this is too easy.

And so they start off, and of course, you know how it goes down, or I should say how it doesn't go down.

No fire comes down.

And I mean, they're screaming and cutting themselves.

And Elijah's like, hey, maybe scream a little bit louder. Maybe your god can't hear you, and maybe he's on vacation. Maybe he's in the bathroom; actually, that's what the original says. He's relieving himself. You know, maybe, maybe just wait. I don't know, you know?

And then Elijah's like my turn, more like God's turn. Get out of my way.

And, oh, by the way, so there's no mistaking here, let's pour more water on this.

Okay, so they pour more water, and it's not enough; pour more.

That's not enough; pour more.

Okay, so they pour all this water on the sacrifice.

And all Elijah asks, no yelling, no cutting, no screaming, he just calls out to God, WHOOSH!

Ah, I would've loved to have been there. I mean, it consumes everything!

And if I'm Elijah - of course you know that he ends up, which is why Jezebel wanted to kill him, but he slays 450 of these prophets of Baal, false prophets.

But if I'm Elijah, I would like... which is why I'm not. And you're not either, so don't look at me all spiritual.

But I would have had a little bit more fun with it. You guys want to try again? You want to go for double or nothing?

*[ Laughter ]*

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I know they have clinical terms for that, but... This is what's happening here.

Oh, you are laying with these gods of weather and fertility and productivity and rain?

Okay.

Like we saw last week: Hey, you worship these gods, and then when you're in trouble, who do you go to for help?

You come to Me?

I mean, it's not like that.

Why don't you go to them?

Oh, that's right, they can't help you because they're not gods. I am God.

Throughout the Old Testament, it's, I believe, the emphasis is on I am the Lord your God who delivered you out of Egypt. I am the Lord your God. They are not your God. I am the Lord your God.

**Verse 4, "Will you not from this time cry to Me, 'My Father, You are the guide of my youth? Will He [verse 5] remain angry forever? Will He keep it to the end?' Behold, you have spoken and done evil things, as you were able."**

What? What does that mean?

Oh, they were sinning as much as they were able to sin.

Remember now we just got done reading that they were actually looking for sin, looking for ways in which they would be able to sin.

And here again, God is just come back to Me, cry out to Me, return to Me. Yeah, but Lord, they've done evil, wicked, unspeakable things that are just so evil you cannot even speak of them.

I know, but I want them to come back to Me, I'll take them back.

**"The Lord said also to me [verse 6] in the days of Josiah the king: [Hang on to that, we're going to come back to that]**

*[That's going to come into play]*

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**“Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree and there played the harlot.”**

I was praying about this today in anticipation of teaching this tonight. But I want to be - I want to be prudent. But I don't want to go to the other extreme and sanitize the strength out of it.

But this is speaking directly to the sexual practices of these pagan gods in their worship. And this is specifically where these acts would take place.

And this is why God through the Prophet Jeremiah is making mention of them. It was gross sexual immorality, and they had committed these abominable acts and evil and wickedness in the sight of the Lord and even the location in which they would practice this.

**"And [verse 7] I said, after she had done all these things, 'Return to Me.' But she did not return."**

This is speaking now again of Northern Israel, which, by the way, has already been taken into captivity by the Assyrians.

In fact, it's believed that at the time of this prophecy from Jeremiah, a hundred years had already passed.

So God through the Prophet Jeremiah is bringing up Israel to Judah, and here's why. **"And her treacherous sister Judah saw it."**

They were there; they saw their sister as they're referenced here. They saw their sister in the northern kingdom of Israel commit the same abominable acts.

And here, God had extended the same invitation to Israel, return to Me. But Israel didn't. And look at the consequences of what happened to them.

**Verse 8, "Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear but went and played the harlot also."**

Okay, bear with me. This is again very important. It speaks to a very powerful principle. And I want you to think this through with me.



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So now we're going to see this even more graphically in a moment. But Judah, this treacherous sister Judah, this treacherous sister of the northern kingdom of Israel, saw what had happened, and they didn't learn from it.

This is that adage of old, learning the lessons of history, learning not to repeat history.

Well, Judah, this treacherous sister Judah, was repeating the same exact sins that the Northern Kingdom of Israel had done.

Listen, I say this very candidly. I would much rather learn from your mistakes than having to learn them firsthand. I would much rather - please, I say this in love. I would much rather see you suffer the consequences of your sin and learn that way and not repeat that sin, seeing you. *(Chuckling)*

That's horrible, isn't it?

In other words, and here's why, by the way: Our sin always looks worse on someone else than on ourselves.

Oh, come on. Didn't Jesus, I mean, talk about that?

Here's this guy going, Oh, it looks like you have a speck of sin in your eye.

Really? How do you know?

I'll tell you why you know. Because the beam from which that speck in your brother's eye came from is in your eye.

Maybe mo' better: You remove the beam from your own eye so that you can see that speck - it's just a little speck.

But oh, we'll point it out, won't we?

You know when someone says, Oh, man, they're so full of pride?

How do you know? How do you know what pride looks like?

I'll tell you why you know what pride looks like. Because you have a degree in pride. You know what pride smells like because you got the smell of Eau de pee-ew of pride on you.

How do you know?

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It takes one to know one, we say.

How do you know what pride looks like?

The reason why you know what pride looks like is because you're full of pride in spades.

Reminds me of a true story, actually. Stanley Volk: he's with the Lord now. He shared this at a conference. I'll never forget it.

He had somebody, after one of his sermons, come up to him, and say to him - and a pastor will really appreciate this.

Pastor, you are so full of pride.

And this was his response. Brother, you don't know the half of it.

Oh, my goodness: Totally disarmed the guy. I mean, them are fighting' words.

I am so full of - me? What about you? Pride!

I mean - and isn't this in the context of marriage what we do?

Husband and wife, we go back and forth.

Oh, would to God that, especially as husbands because we want to be the spiritual leaders. Well, why don't you take the lead then and set the example, and say to your wife, Honey, you don't know the half of it, you're right, and humble yourself, and watch how quickly that fight dissipates and evaporates. It's hard to fight when somebody humbles themselves, right?

Reminds me of another story. Just bear with me. This is a good one I haven't shared in a while, so I'm going to share it.

So this husband and wife make an agreement with each other that they will not let the sun go down on their anger. So they're going at it, man. They're just having a knock-down, drag-out. They're fighting, going back-and-forth, arguing.

And they don't want to go to bed angry because you know how that stews? You wake up in the morning and I mean, you've had all night to - don't let the sun go- you give the devil a foothold when you do that, by the way.

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So they made a commitment that we will agree to disagree, and we will not go to bed angry, okay?

So sometimes it's 2:00 in the morning, and the husband will say something like, Sure enough, she'll come crawling to me on her hands and knees and she'll say to me, Come out from underneath that bed and fight like a man, you coward!

[ *Laughter* ]

Pastors and pastor's wives don't fight, by the way.

[ *Laughter* ]

As one pastor said, Pastors and their wives have intense fellowship.

[ *Laughter* ]

There is actually a profound principle here that I want to get back to, and I know I digress a little bit, but it's learning from history, the lessons of history.

So you see what happened to your brethren in the North, and they were taken captive by the Assyrians. And you're not going to learn from that?

In fact, worse yet, you're going to replicate that and sin that sin. And actually, sadly, the southern Judah would be taken captive, not by the Assyrians but by the Babylonians. It really speaks to this principle of learning the lessons of history.

**"So it came to pass [verse 9] through her casual harlotry [They made light of it, ah, it's no big deal] that she defiled the land and committed adultery with stones and trees."**

Now, that's again, I'm going to be prudent about that, pretty graphic, though.

**"And [verse 10] yet for all this [Here it is again] her treacherous sister Judah has not turned to Me with her whole heart, but in pretense," says the Lord. Then the Lord said to me, "Backsliding Israel has shown herself [Listen to this] more righteous than treacherous Judah."**

Wait, what? Isn't that backwards?

No, this is breathtaking.

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You mean to tell me that Israel as - keep in mind now, Israel had no good king. There was not one good king in the northern tribes of Israel that did right in the sight of the Lord. Every king in Northern Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord.

Only Judah had good kings and only nine at that. And this is where Josiah comes back into the picture. He was one of only nine good kings at the time, but that was to benefit Judah.

Judah also had the temple, not the Northern Kingdoms, and Judah also had the benefit of seeing what happened to Israel 100 years ago.

So for God to say through Jeremiah that actually Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah, what He's saying is, is that Judah outwardly, it's all pretense.

Oh, outwardly they look like they're more spiritual and righteous than Northern Israel.

But at least with Israel, they weren't being hypocritical about it. They were pretty overt about their sin.

But with Judah, they were actually presenting themselves as being righteous outwardly when inwardly they were not righteous but treacherous. It is the height of hypocrisy, and Judah was more accountable than was Israel for the reasons I just mentioned.

Israel didn't have the benefit of seeing what happened, the consequences that Judah suffered; it's the other way around. So they're more accountable.

Judah or Northern Israel didn't have the temple. Northern Israel didn't have good kings. Northern Israel didn't have a King Josiah.

You know who Northern Israel had?

It was Ahab. How's that one? That explains a lot right there.

**"Go [verse 12] and proclaim these words toward the North, and say: 'Return, backsliding Israel,' says the Lord. 'I will not cause My anger to fall on you. For I am merciful,' says the Lord. 'I will not remain angry forever. Only acknowledge your iniquity,**

[That's all you got to do]

**that you have transgressed against the Lord your God,**

[That's all you got to do]

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**and have scattered your charms to alien deities under every green tree, and you have not obeyed My voice,' says the Lord."**

That's all you got to do, just come to Me and confess your sin.

And by the way, this is probably as good of a time as any to qualify what it means to confess.

Never imagine that confessing your sin is. Oh, Lord, I'm sorry.

Because you understand there's two kinds of sorrow.

Paul, writing to the Corinthians, delineates between the godly sorrow that leads to true repentance and then worldly sorrow, which is basically you're sorry you got caught, and the godly sorrow that leads to a genuine repentance, change, that's godly sorry. It's the sorrow that confesses sin as sin.

That's what that means.

You're confessing to a Holy God that you've sinned. I confess this sin as sin because, see, we're really good at not calling sin: Sin.

We call it something else just to kind of take the edge off of it.

So we don't call adultery: Adultery; we call it "an affair."

It just sounds more palatable, more amicable, more plausible, right?

No, see, if you won't confess that sin as sin, then it's hands-off for a God who is longing, at-the-ready to forgive that sin.

1 John 1:9: It's been affectionately referred to as the Christian bar of soap. I love this verse!

**"If we confess our sins."** It's all you got to do.

It's all you got to do Israel, Judah. If you just will confess your sins, John says He is faithful and just to forgive and cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

All you've got - this is a good deal. This is a two-for-one deal.

All we have to do is one thing: Confess.

And He does two things.

That's a good deal, two-for-one, right?

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He forgives instantly and cleanses, purifies us.

All we have to do confess.

Let's talk about returning, repenting. So it's to do a one-eighty. It's to have a change of mind, a change of direction so that God can change your heart. He does the work in you, but He will never override you.

When there's a genuine repentance that's birthed out of a godly sorrow, and you come to the Lord and you say, Lord, I have sinned against You. I have sinned against You.

That's all you got to do.

You don't have to, you know, pay for it. It's already been paid for. He paid for it.

And don't let the enemy lie to you and say to you, Man, you're going to - that's going to cost you.

What do you mean? What are you talking about? The cost has already been paid.

And never let the enemy lie to you, and say to you, Man, that was... whew...that was...wow, wow! You know, I'd lay low for a while on that one. I mean, this is going to take the Lord a few days.

I mean, I wouldn't ask for forgiveness right away, especially because I think I remember that you made a vow that you would never do that again, and you did it. And I just I don't know, I...

See, Satan will do everything he can to keep you from the cross where that sin that you sinned was paid for. He doesn't want you; he wants to keep you as Romans 6:14, says, Paul writing to the church in Rome, he wants to dominate and master us and crush us under the weight of the guilt and condemnation of our sin.

And Paul says, "**Sin will no longer have dominion over me.**"

That is not the temptation to sin, which is not sin. Because if temptation were sin, and this is even hard to say. Jesus was tempted.

This is not temptation. We're always going to have temptation this side of glory, the temptation to sin. That's not what Paul's talking about.

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He's saying it's the guilt and condemnation of sin that will no longer dominate me and master me and enslave me and keep me from the cross where forgiveness awaits.

I need no longer be under the weight of that sin than it takes me to get to the cross.

And Satan puts up all the roadblocks. I don't know, not so fast, not this time, man. I just kind of, you know, I just give God some time to cool down because He's had it with you on this one, I'm just saying.

I sure wouldn't go to church; my goodness, if the person sitting next to you - don't look at the person sitting next to you when I say this, but if they knew what you did, oh! You know what? I wouldn't, I wouldn't.

Because all this is going to do is just make it worse because this is going to show you you're sin in 3-D, IMAX, (*Chuckling*) and the technology is even more intense than that now.

So he wants to keep you out of the Word. He wants to keep you away from the cross. And he certainly wants to keep you out of fellowship.

It's been rightly said that sin will keep you from the Bible and the Bible will keep you from sin. David said it in the Psalms, **"Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against You, O Lord."**

And Satan knows that, and make no mistake about it, he knows the Scriptures better than you and I ever will. He knows scripture, and he knows how to just kind of tweak it just a little bit.

Nothing new; I mean, he did it with Eve. He just kind of repackaged it. Why fix it if it's not broken? If it works, keep doing it. And it works, and he keeps doing it all the time. And we keep falling for it, don't we?

He comes to us, and he wants to keep us away from Jesus and forgiveness.

**Verse 14, "Return, O backsliding children," says the Lord. "For I am married to you. I will take you, [I'll take you back] one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. And [verse 15] I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.**

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**“Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days,” says the Lord, “that they will say no more, ‘The ark of the covenant of the Lord.’**

**It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore.”**

Well, now, what's this a reference to?

It's believed that it could be referring to the Kingdom Age, the Millennium when Israel will ultimately be restored.

**Verse 17, “At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the Lord, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts.**

**“In those days [verse 18] the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given as an inheritance to your fathers.”**

Now, again, this could be a reference to the Kingdom Age, but this mention of the "bringing back together" there is no more Northern and Southern Judah. Now you're going to come together, and I'm going to give you the land.

And Israel in 1948 would be regathered to their land, which would, in my belief, be the one prophecy that would push the fast-forward button, as it were, on all of Bible prophecy and start the prophetic clock ticking when Israel was reborn as a nation in 1948.

**"But I said: [verse 19]**

*[And again, this is rhetorical]*

**‘How can I put you among the children and give you a pleasant land, a beautiful heritage of the hosts of nations?’**

**“And I said: ‘You shall call Me, “My Father,” and not turn away from Me.’**

**Surely, as a wife treacherously departs from her husband, so have you dealt treacherously with Me, O house of Israel,” says the Lord.”**

Give me just a moment on this. I don't want to run past this, this verse 20.



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Think about this. The Lord is saying to them and likening them to a wife who has treacherously committed adultery and departed from her husband.

And then He says, **"You have dealt treacherously with Me."**

This is what I want us to think about here just for a moment. Do you ever think about how what you do affects the heart of God?

You know that we all have this proclivity, this propensity to grieve the heart of God. We can grieve the Holy Spirit.

But we always talk about, we flip this around about how God deals with us. You know how when somebody will say, Hey, how's life treating you?

I've had some fun with that one.

Life's treating me horribly, but God is treating me wonderfully.

It's a good opportunity sometimes. You'll know right where somebody's at when you try that with them, by the way.

How's life treating you?

Terribly, but God is treating me wonderfully.

Well, here God's saying, Wait a minute. What about how you treat Me? How you deal with Me? You've dealt treacherously with Me.

Again, think about this, and this is a hard one, but here it goes. Do you realize that everywhere you go, everything you see, everything you say, every conversation you have, the Holy Spirit's there with you? He sees whatever you see. He hears whatever you say. He watches whatever you do.

Boy, that's a game-changer, isn't it?

Can you just imagine how the Holy Spirit must just wince and like, oh, oh, it's so grievous, so grievous to Me. That's grieving the Holy Spirit.

Even worse is quenching the Holy Spirit, where you put the fire out, and a fire could be put out in one of two ways. You can either douse it and put it out or neglect it and put it out and quench it.

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And we do that with the Holy Spirit in our dealings treacherously with the Holy Spirit, who indwells us.

**"A voice [verse 21] was heard on the desolate heights, weeping and supplications of the children of Israel. For they have perverted their way. They have forgotten the Lord their God. "Return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings."**

**"Indeed we do come to You, for You are the Lord our God."**

Did you notice the order of it?

It's not: Get your act together, then come to Me. You ever heard someone say that, man, you invite them to church, and they always jokingly say something along the lines of, Man, if I walked into that church, the walls would cave in. Wow, you know, I better clean up my act first.

Well, that's as absurd as taking a shower before you take a bath or taking a bath –

No, He cleans you. He heals you. You just come to Him just as you are, and He will heal you. He will heal your backslidings.

One last thing on this, and then we'll move on and finish the chapter in the Bible study.

But, you know, when - I'll just use the example of asking someone if they would like to come to church. You know, you invite them to church.

And commonly, you'll hear something to the effect of, Oh man, the church is just full of hypocrites.

To which I'll usually respond with something like, Well, hey, we could always use one more. Come on in.

Let me flip that around to the other side. You've got Christians who - bear with me. Well, we're going church shopping.

You're church shopping? Oh, well, hey.

And what comes packaged with the church shopping is what do you have to offer? Because I'm the consumer.

Oh, you know, this is on the mainland, so don't worry.

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God's done a work in my heart, is doing a work in my heart in this regard.

When I was younger, of course, I had a lot more energy. You know, I thought I was just maturing spiritually and becoming more godly because I didn't react the way I did before back in the day.

But I realize now it's not spiritual maturity, it's just age. You just, you know, you look at this thing, nah, it's not worth it.

But when you're younger, yeah, I mean, let's do this, right?

So we're church shopping.

Oh, really? Well, I'm so sorry. We're not a church of consumers. We're a church of communers. So you'll need to find another church. And the good news for you, by the way, this is good if you're church shopping, you're looking for the perfect church.

By the way, if you find the perfect church, don't start going there. You'll ruin it, but...

*[ Laughter ]*

I know you've heard that one, too. I couldn't resist.

But see, just at its very core - we're church shopping.

Oh, so in other words, it's about you. So you're going to go to a church that's going to cater to you, that has something to offer to you. Boy, I can save you a lot of time because what do we have to offer? Well, it's pretty simple. We just simply teach the Bible, simply.

Oh, do you have programs?

We simply teach the Bible, simply.

Do you have support groups for people whose dogs lost their hamsters?

Nope, we simply teach.

I know I'm carrying it a little bit too far. You get the point, right?

Even the pastor, a lot of pressure on the pastor today to perform.

Oh, I'm so glad. I'm so glad. I mean, not that I'm not capable. I'm fully capable.

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I think about what Paul said to the Romans. **“I know that in my flesh that is in me, there dwells no good thing.”** I am rotten through and through.

I am fully capable of doing this. But one of the things early on the Lord really ministered to me was the onus is not on me. I don't have to keep your attention; the Holy Spirit does. That pressure's off.

And by the way, I don't have to grow the church. The onus isn't on me. The Lord adds to the church as many as should be saved. The pressure's off.

So what, pray tell, then am I supposed to - feed the sheep.

Do you love Me, Peter? Feed My sheep. Preach the Word. Preach the Word.

Do you love Me? Preach the Word. Feed My sheep. They're starving, you know. Just feed them; it's all you got to do.

Preach the Word; it's all you got to do.

I have the greatest job description in the world, and I'm the most spoiled pastor, by the way, of a church. And I really mean that; I am so spoiled. I just - I am so spoiled. This is such an amazing church. And it's such a privilege and such a joy. And sadly, many pastors cannot say what I just said.

So, come to the Lord. He will heal your backslidings. It's all you got to do.

**"Truly, [verse 23] in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills and from the multitude of mountains. Truly, in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel."**

**For shame [And I want you to hang on to this word] [We're going to see it again here in a moment] "Shame has devoured the labor of our fathers from our youth, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. We lie down in our shame, and our reproach covers us.**

**For [And here it is, a-ha! Alas] we have sinned against the Lord, our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God."**

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That's godly sorrow that leads to true repentance. Now, this will spill into the first four verses of Chapter 4, which, Lord willing, we'll get to and through next week.

But I want to end the way we begin, in a word, "love." Love.

I love you so much.

Why - here's the question. Let's answer with that word in a word.

Why would God, after all that they had done to Him, against Him, the horrific, unspeakable sin they committed, the wickedness, the evil, why would God plead with them?

Come back. I'll take you back.

Love. Love.

You still love me after all that I've done?

Yeah.

In fact, it could be argued in some ways He loves us even more.

Isn't it the sickest child that gets the most attention? "Special needs," if you will, if you prefer?

This lying down in our shame, our reproach covers us. This is Romans 8:1, by the way, and the entirety of Chapter 8 in Romans, by the way. verse 1, **"There is therefore now [no guilt, no shame] no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."**

[Key word, those that are in Christ Jesus.]

This is not available to those who have not come to the Lord and those that are in the Lord.

Because if you come to the Lord and are in the Lord, all of that shame, all of that guilt, all of that condemnation is gone, taken care of, removed as far as the East is from the West, and God remembers them no more.

It's been said, so aptly so, that when God sees us, He sees not our sin but His son, and we are justified.

It's just-if-I'd never sinned.

**"Though our sins be as scarlet, He has made them white as snow."**

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He sees us through His son who bore our shame, bore our sin. We're going to celebrate this on Sunday. He took all of our sin, all of our shame, all of our guilt upon Himself and paid for it. And it's finished. It's finished. There's nothing else to talk about.

So when, not if, we sin, all we have to do is come to Him and confess our sin as sin. I sinned against You, God, this is sinful, what I've done.

But You're a forgiving God. And I am so ashamed. I'm so wracked with guilt. I'm so covered in this reproach because I have sinned against you.

But God! But God! He forgives. He will always take us back. He's always waiting with open arms, at the ready. All we have to do is come back to Him and return to Him. It's that simple.

Kapono, why don't you come on up? I'll have you stand up. We'll close in prayer and song.

There's almost a somber, reverent, how do I say it? I wish I had the words. But there are no words in the English language as faulty as it is to adequately articulate and communicate the love that God has for us.

He loves us so much.

And never imagine that when we sin, that God is surprised. And it's already been taken care of, if we'll just but come to Him with our sin.

You know, in Isaiah we - that well-known verse – **“Our righteousness is as filthy rags before the Lord.”** That's pretty graphic in and of itself.

But if our righteousness is as filthy rags before the Lord, what is our sin like before the Lord?

Well, we just saw it here. We're going to see it again next week, Lord willing.

Yes, you sinned, but I'm going to forgive you. Just come to Me. Return to Me.

Father in heaven, it's really not possible to thank You enough. Lord, especially for anyone who might be here or watching online that the enemy has just had a heyday with, I mean, just beating them up and wearing them down, Lord, I pray that tonight will just be a turning point, literally in every sense of the word a turning point, turning back to You, a returning to You, a godly sorrow that leads to a genuine repentance.

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Lord, thank You that when we do come to You, You don't turn away from us. You don't cast us aside. You never reject us. You never abandon us. You never forsake us. You'll never forsake us.

And You'll always forgive us no matter what. There's no sin that You cannot forgive except the sin of rejecting You.

Lord, thank You for Your shed blood, for the remission of all of sins.

Lord, thank You that we're forgiven.

Thank you, Lord, for Your love for us. We love You so much, Lord.

Thank you for loving us like this, in Jesus' name. Amen.