

- Prayer
  - Let's pray.
  - Oh Lord, I too do not know how to speak; I don't have words of my own to change hearts or to give this people a sight of your glory.
  - Yet, wherever you send me, I long to go; I want to speak whatever words you command.
  - Put your words in my mouth, I pray.
  - Watch over your word to perform it through the words I preach; ensure that they are faithful, true, and life-giving.
  - In the name of Jesus Christ, the Word of God, we pray. Amen.
- Intro
  - Well, first of all, I want to thank you all at North Center for having me to preach this morning.
    - My name is Adam Physician; I recently graduated from seminary with Pastor Jeremiah.
    - I've known him for a few years now and I'd just like to say that I'm really happy for this church.
      - Your pastor is a good friend and a good man. And I'd bet he's been a good pastor to you all as well...
  - But I'm here to preach about a very different Jeremiah today. So, if you haven't done so already, please open your Bibles to the first chapter of Jeremiah.
  - Now, I want to start today by pointing out the obvious: that the world, as we experience it, isn't *right*.
    - That is to say, we all know deep down that the world isn't what it *should* be.
    - We may not all agree on how to diagnose the problem, but we can agree that something is inherently broken with our very existence.
  - And the fact is that *everyone* is feeling that right now.
    - The deep damage that COVID has wreaked upon the world—death, isolation, tension between friends and family—it isn't how it's supposed to be.
    - The protests that we keep seeing in this country are because people are convinced that *justice* isn't happening.
    - People are *mad*, and they're convinced that there's something wrong with the world.
      - And all these things are affecting churches as well.
  - But whatever you think about what's going on in our culture, the point is this: people are longing for things to be made right.

- They need a reason for hope in dark times.
  - And today, we're going to talk about such hope, but in an unexpected place.
    - So let's turn now to Jeremiah 1.
- Main Point
  - I know you guys are in the midst of a series on every book of the Bible, and today we're going to continue that by looking at the Book of Jeremiah.
  - The main point for our message today is this: **the just God will right all wrongs.**
  - We're going to see this point by looking at three aspects of Jeremiah.
    - First, we'll see the Problem in Jeremiah.
    - Following this, we'll see the Solution in Jeremiah.
    - Lastly, we'll see the Hope of Jeremiah.
    - We will end with some takeaways to put it all together.
  - Before we do that, just a quick note: since this is an overview sermon, I'm going to be jumping from text to text a lot, so don't feel like you need to burn the pages to try to keep up; I'll try to read the texts out loud as we go.
- The Problem of Jeremiah
  - So now, we'll start with the Problem of Jeremiah by looking at the text we already read.
  - In Jeremiah 1, we get Jeremiah's call to be a prophet for Yahweh.
    - I think it will be helpful for us to consider some background to the book for a moment.
      - The text here says that Jeremiah preached in Judah from Josiah's reign until Zedekiah's reign, and even a little while after that.
        - That would make the prophecies in this book span from the late 600's to the early 500's B.C.
      - Now, if you remember from books such as Samuel and Kings, God's people have been divided into two kingdoms: Israel in the north and Judah in the south.
        - Both were in a continual cycle of momentary obedience and regression into sin; this went on and on with each nation getting progressively worse, until Yahweh destroyed the northern kingdom;
          - Judah to the south, however, was not much better.

- The first king during Jeremiah's preaching was Josiah, who led a great reform of the nation and was easily the best king in Judah since David himself.
      - Things were looking up, and there was hope that God's people might be finally getting it together and Yahweh's promises to their ancestors might finally come true.
      - But it didn't last. The very next king reversed all the progress that Josiah made, and Yahweh declared that it was too late: the same punishment Israel to the north received would now come on Judah as well.
- Which leads to Jeremiah's preaching. In 1:9-10, we see the purpose of Jeremiah's ministry.
  - Yahweh says to him:
    - **“Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.”**
  - Now, these verses serve as a purpose statement for the entire Book of Jeremiah.
    - Yahweh intends to work two pairs of negative purposes for the nations (especially Judah), and one pair of positive purposes.
      - Positively, he's going to build and plant nations; but this is only after the negative purposes.
      - Negatively, he's going to pluck up and break down, and destroy and overthrow.
        - So, why *exactly* is it that Yahweh is going to use Jeremiah for such destruction? Why will Jeremiah be a preacher of doom and gloom?
  - Here now we'll look at the problem of Jeremiah, which is **injustice**.
    - Yahweh looks at Judah and says, like we do when we look at the world, "This isn't *right*!"
    - But he doesn't see injustice with the world he has made, but with his people. He doesn't just say "the world is wrong," but "*my people* is wrong"!
    - So, through Jeremiah, he accuses them of injustice.

- I'm organizing this as a series of "charges" that Jeremiah levels at his people, which summarize themes from the book.
  - So, Charge 1: "This People Has Rejected Me"
    - How so? Let's look at chapter 2 verses 11 through 13.
      - **Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit. Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.**
      - Yahweh calls for the skies above to look down and be shocked at the injustice in the world.
        - And what should they see and be disgusted by?
          - Two things: God's own people have rejected him as their source of life, and have sought that life for themselves.
          - They were called to be satisfied in God alone, to be devoted to him alone, to worship him alone; instead, they looked at the things God made and turned them into idols.
            - The other nations wouldn't even exchange their gods, but that didn't bother Judah!
              - The peoples with gods made of wood and stone were more loyal to their gods than Judah was to the God of Life Himself!
            - They thought they could find satisfaction apart from God, and exchanged God's truth for lies.
      - And for God's covenant people, he has harsh words about what this really means.

- Look a few verses down to 2:20:
  - **“For long ago I broke your yoke and burst your bonds; but you said, ‘I will not serve.’ Yes, on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down like a whore.”**
  - Consistently in the prophets we hear God refer to his relationship with Israel as a marriage. And here, we see Judah's lack of faithfulness—her idolatry—as adultery.
    - Though he freed this people from slavery and "married" them in the wilderness, they cheated on him by worshipping pretend gods made of the very stuff that he created!
  - Jeremiah, like the prophets before and after him, depicts God as the ultimate "jilted lover."
    - The God of the universe—rejected for rocks and trees. [pause]
- Charge #2: "This People has broken the covenant with me"
  - Let's look at chapter 11 verse 10:
    - **They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear my words. They have gone after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers.**
    - Judah's ancestors had made an agreement to do all that Yahweh said, and to be a holy people for his own possession.
      - This agreement was also binding on their children; the whole nation was part of this covenant, they were expected to *know it* and to *obey it*.
        - That's why it was so important that the parents teach their children what

Yahweh had done for them and what he expected them to do in return.

- But neither the fathers nor the children obeyed. So, both are guilty.
  - Let's look back at chapter seven, verse 25:
    - **From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day. Yet they did not listen to me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers.**
    - At times in Jeremiah, we see that the people of Judah think that their sufferings are undeserved; that they're being punished for their ancestors' sins.
      - But Jeremiah makes it clear: yes, they're being punished for their ancestors' sins—*and* their own, as well.
  - This covenant that they've broken came not only with terms, but with consequences.
    - Their ancestors not only agreed to the terms, but to the punishments as well.
      - There is no sense in which the punishments coming to them "unfair" or "too severe." They were told ahead of time what would happen, and warned over and over again that they were breaking the covenant.
  - None of them can claim to be "innocent" or that they "didn't know better";
    - from God's perspective, he's done nothing but give them chance after chance and warning after warning, but they have refused to listen or change.

- But, why haven't they listened? Let's look at the next charge.
- Charge #3: "This People has sinned greatly"
  - Beyond idolatry and covenant-breaking, Jeremiah brings forward many examples of concrete sins Judah has committed.
    - Chapter 5 gives several examples to look at. I won't read them all, but just point them out:
      - In verses 1-2, we see them swearing falsely (especially in order to take advantage of others).
      - In verse 8, the people are committing literal adultery.
      - In verse 26, they're oppressing and ignoring the needy.
      - In verse 30, they are listening to false prophets. It says they love when they feed them lies.
      - Finally, the worst of all, turn to chapter seven verse 31. I'll read that one:
        - **And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind.**
        - They offered up their own children, as if God would have been pleased by the sacrifice!
          - Such a thing never would have pleased him; he is not like the sick gods of the nations.
- All this adds up to give a picture of what this people is like. It's not just that they rejected God and broke his covenant; they are objectively bad people.
  - These sins are the sorts of things any society can look at and see as evil—yet they are coming from God's own people.
  - Why are they characterized by such sin? This brings up the last charge.

- Charge #4: "This People is evil"
  - Let's look at chapter 17 verse 1:
    - **“The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron; with a point of diamond it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of their altars,”**
      - The problem of Judah goes deeper than their actions; those can be changed, but they can't change their evil hearts.
      - It's like their sin is built into their hearts, written on there with permanent marker. There's no getting it off.
  - Yahweh charges them over and over again not just with *doing* evil, but with *being* wicked (and loving it that way).
- All these charges add up to say one thing: this land is filled with injustice; it's a problem in need of solution.
  - So let's turn now to the solution in Jeremiah, which is "Justice"
- The Solution in Jeremiah (Justice)
  - Yahweh responds to injustice in the land with its opposite: justice.
    - In their case, justice comes in the form of punishment.
  - This punishment that's coming on Judah might be the most recurring theme in Jeremiah.
    - Look at chapter 16, starting with verse 1:
      - **The word of the LORD came to me: “You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place. For thus says the LORD concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bore them and the fathers who fathered them in this land: They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried. They shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. They shall perish by the sword and by famine, and their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth. “For thus says the LORD: Do not enter the house of mourning, or go to lament or grieve for them, for I have taken away my peace from this people, my steadfast love and mercy, declares the LORD.**
  - Then skip to verse 9:



- **For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will silence in this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.**
  - This passage is pretty typical of Jeremiah; long, detailed descriptions of what Yahweh's about to do to them. The city will be besieged, the people will be killed, the buildings will be burned; no more happy sounds.
  - Several punishments not mentioned here are also prevalent in the book:
    - The people who survive the siege by Babylon are going to be taken into exile.
    - The nation is rejected for a time.
    - As well, the leadership (including the king) are rejected.
  - All these punishments: they're all deserved, they're all justice, and they're all coming soon.
    - He has delayed justice long enough, and the time has come for him to make good on his word.
- Now, all this paints a pretty dark picture—it's kind of a... downer.
  - That's certainly how it made the few people of the righteous remnant feel.
  - What message does Jeremiah have for them?
    - For those who care about God's promises to their ancestors? To those who longed for God's people to turn back to Yahweh and for peace to be restored?
    - How is any of this good news?
  - Jeremiah does have something to say to those people, so now we turn to the Hope in Jeremiah, which is God's mercy.
- Hope in Jeremiah (Mercy)
  - Though most all of the Book of Jeremiah centers on the people's sins and Yahweh's judgment, parts of the Book remind the faithful remnant that all hope is not lost.
    - This is especially the case in chapters 30-33, which are often called Jeremiah's Book of Comfort (or Consolation).
  - Let's take a look at chapter 31 to see how Yahweh gives the faithful believers in Judah hope.
    - Here we'll see three Mercies that offer hope to the faithful.
  - First, we have the Mercy of Restoration

- The Book of Comfort is filled with the phrase, "I will restore your fortunes."
  - After Judah has received her just judgment, Yahweh promises a great reversal of all the punishments he promised.
    - He reverses their fortunes by returning the exiles.
      - Look at chapter thirty-one verse fifteen
        - **Thus says the LORD: "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." Thus says the LORD: "Keep your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the LORD, and they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future, declares the LORD, and your children shall come back to their own country.**
        - Jeremiah pictures Rachel, one of the matriarchs of Israel, weeping over the exiles that have been sent off to Babylon.
          - But Yahweh will reverse her fortunes, give her a hope for her future, a reward for her work!
          - The exiles will return, and her labor—bearing children to continue God's promise to Abraham—it was not in vain.
            - The promise to make a great nation of Abraham and his descendants hasn't ended; they're coming back!
- God also reverses their fortunes by completely changing their desolate situation.

- Look at verse 27:
  - **“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of man and the seed of beast. And it shall come to pass that as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the LORD.”**
  - You see that? Same phrases as in chapter 1. God used Jeremiah to pluck up and break down, to overthrow and destroy; now, the next phase of God's plan begins.
    - He's going to rebuild the people; they'll have many inhabitants in the land again.
- Furthermore, Yahweh reverses his rejection of them
  - Look at verse 37:
    - **Thus says the LORD: “If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel for all that they have done, declares the LORD.”**
    - Though God did reject Jeremiah's generation, he has not rejected his people or his promises; he's going to restore them as his people.

- But how can God do any of this? The main problem hasn't been solved.
  - This people is still the same people! They're still sinful, wicked, hard-hearted and rebellious.
  - So two more mercies have to take place.
- The second mercy is the Mercy of Change.
  - Look at verse 31:
    - **“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”**
    - When God restores Judah's fortunes, it's not going to just go back to normal; no, if that happens, we'll just see the cycle of "obedience for a little while" then "rebellion against Yahweh" continue into eternity.
    - No, this time will be different:
      - Now they'll have a new covenant, one better and more sure than the one God made with Moses' generation.
        - That one relied on obedience from people who couldn't obey; they had "uncircumcised hearts," and their sin was written on their hearts with an iron pen.
      - Now, God will write his law—his instruction—on their hearts; their obedience will be internal, not external.
      - Yahweh himself will be the one who makes sure it happens; they won't be able to muster enough obedience to please God's justice, but Yahweh will make them obey from the heart, and love him.
      - He will bring about the ideal state—God's people *in* his place, *as* his people, and *with* him forever.
  - But this ideal state needs one more thing—one more mercy.

- What about the sins they've already committed? How can a just God be with a guilty people?
  - So we have mercy #3: the Mercy of Forgiveness.
    - Look at verse 34:
      - **And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."**
      - The New Covenant people will be made up entirely of believers; if you don't really know God, you're not in the covenant.
      - More than this, Yahweh's going to forgive his people. They can know Yahweh and really be his people—the people of a holy and righteous God—because their sins aren't counted against them.
  - All this adds up to the hope Jeremiah gives to the righteous remnant:
    - It's bleak now, but better days are coming! There is hope for your future!
    - God's people will be restored, changed, and forgiven; though you might not live to see it, God's promises will happen, and he himself will make them happen.
- Takeaways
  - So, that's the Book of Jeremiah. There's a lot to this Book, certainly more than I can get at this morning;
    - but I think we can look at some takeaways for God's people (and for this church) today.
  - First Takeaway is this: God *wants* everything to be right again
    - I started this sermon with our longing for the world to be right, to not be so broken; the Book of Jeremiah shows us that this is what God longs for, too.
    - When the first man and woman fell, God's perfect world was shattered, and that's where we get the brokenness in our world.
      - But Jeremiah shows us that it's not just *nature* or *society* or *circumstances* that are broken; no, what's broken with the world is *people*.
        - Over and over, the sinful nation of Israel displayed to the world that people are messy, broken things; God needed to do more than pick a people for himself, he had to change them.

- They say that a newspaper once asked G.K. Chesterton what he thought was wrong with the world.
        - He responded something like this: "Dear Sir: I am."
          - <https://www.chesterton.org/wrong-with-world/>
        - The world is messed up because *I* am messed up, and *I'm* part of it.
  - So yes, to restore the world, God had to change the people.
    - But Jeremiah shows us that he doesn't do that for everyone. Some—most—receive judgment.
    - We see in Jeremiah God's intense hatred for sin.
    - You don't slaughter and exile an entire country if you think sin isn't a big deal.
  - And this anger towards sin isn't a *problem*. It's part of the solution.
    - We don't have a God who just lets injustice *go*. He's not indifferent to murder and sex trafficking and violence and immorality.
    - The God who wants everything to be right again will make sure that the bad guys get what they deserve.
  - But, of course, *we* are part of those bad guys. None of us is sinless, none of us has been free from doing injustice; what will God do with us?
- And so, we need the second takeaway: God *has made* everything right.
  - He doesn't just promise to punish sin, he *did* punish sin for believers.
  - In Jesus Christ, we see the New Covenant promises fulfilled.
    - The people of the New Testament church—including us—receive the promises of God's instruction on the heart, of a people who truly know God, of sins being forgiven.
      - We've been grafted into God's promises to Israel, and so we now get their forgiveness as well!
  - And this is where we see how, in Jeremiah, God has a plan to make everything right.
    - For the unrepentant, God promises justice—there is coming a day when they will receive the reward of their evil.

- And for the repentant, God promises mercy—a mercy that comes from his justice.
    - Jesus, the innocent one, receives the punishment God's people deserve. Justice is poured out!—but not on us.
  - And so, we can rest—and must rest—in this: *no one ever gets away with anything*.
    - There are only two options for every injustice that is ever done: either it gets paid for on the cross, or in hell.
    - There is no *ultimate* injustice; no one has ever gotten off scott-free!
      - There is only justice *paid* by Jesus or there is justice *delayed*.
    - So, when you feel that nothing is right with the world, that the wicked never lose, that God is absent and the bad guys are winning—know this: *justice is coming*.
- Finally, our last takeaway: God *will make* everything right
  - In the end, there will be peace and harmony.
    - For God's people, the ideal state is coming: God's people, *in* his place, *as* his people, and *with* him forever.
  - Whatever we're going through now, whatever in this world just feels *wrong*—know this: it won't last forever.
    - A day is coming, when God will wipe away every tear, repay every injustice, and make peace forever.
      - Somehow, mysteriously, we will be able to say—in spite of all the tears, pain, heartache, and injustice—God is good, and God is just! [pause]
  - They say that John Lennon, the one-time member of the Beatles, said something along these lines:
    - "Everything will be okay in the end. If it's not okay, then it's not the end." [pause]
    - Now, who could that be more true of than us?
      - Who else can truly say it will all be okay in the end?
      - Who else can hold out hope that it's not okay now, but that "not-okay-ness" is how I know it's *not over*?
  - We have hope for our future; an unshakeable, undeniable hope—don't let your troubles cloud it out.
    - Jesus is coming, and he's going to make it all right again.

- Conclusion
  - Now, I want to close by looking at the end of Jeremiah. Look with me at chapter 52, verse 31:
    - **... Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, graciously freed Jehoiachin king of Judah and brought him out of prison. And he spoke kindly to him and gave him a seat above the seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put off his prison garments. And every day of his life he dined regularly at the king's table, and for his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, according to his daily needs, until the day of his death, as long as he lived.**
    - You see how the story ends? Jehoiachin, the former king of Judah, survives.
      - The last hope for a king on David's throne—for a future messiah—lives and receives favor.
      - Picture a field of trees that's been burned to the ground—yet one *sprout* remains.
        - That sprout will grow into a tree, which will plant a forest—one that will never be burned down again.
      - The promised king will come, because God's promises haven't failed—even if we can't see it yet.
      - Like the people of Judah, we wait for the return of the king.
        - He will come on the clouds, take his people, and make all things right.
        - In this, we have hope for dark times.
  - Now, we're going to end with a song that incorporates parts of Jeremiah's Book of Comfort.
    - Join me now as we wait for that trumpet to sound and our hope to rise.
  - Let's pray.
    - Heavenly Father, you are *good* and you are *just*.
    - In your justice we have hope. Let us hope in you today, and have bright hope for tomorrow;
    - Not because our circumstances will change, but because you *never change*.
    - Your promises are sure, and in you we hope.
    - In the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.