

## Jeremiah 3:6-4:4 (to 5:9) "Return Return!" CCH sermon 25MAY25

V14.

- I wonder if you noticed a repeated theme through the reading?
- Let me point it out...
  - V7a
  - V10a
  - V12a
  - V14a
  - V22a
  - 4v1
    - 7 times in the section.
- I've called the sermon **RETURN, RETURN**.
- And today through these old words, **God calls us back to him**. Return!
  - EACH NONXN: Praying you make a decisive break w old life & come to Christ. Today!
  - EACH XN: through this series (& today's sermon) Praying God would convict you of an area of idolatry in our life & make clean break.
  - (Jer= God's **Sat Nav**).... Saying to you today "**Make a U Turn**"

### LET'S PRAY!

- Big idea & big application: **RETURN TO GOD**.
  - The word can mean repent, or return, to turn back.
    - In this passage **3 main points**.
    - Could call it the **what, why and how** of returning to God.
    - And a **PS**.

### 1) RETURN TO GOD- IT IS MIRACULOUSLY POSSIBLE (v6-13).

- Now this first point starts with a bit of a story. Sad story.
- **A tale of 2 sisters**.
- And you just need a bit of geography and history at this point
  - (apologies any with exams in those at the moment!)
  - When God's people came out of Egypt
  - They became a nation. **Israel**. (yes same region in our news today)
  - they entered the Promised land and began to take it over. The conquest.
- God let them have a King.
  - Good King David.
  - The fortunes of Israel and its borders grew under King Solomon
  - But tragically King Solomon who seemed so good,
    - Had a terrible weakness.
      - He ha many foreign wives.
    - And things started to go downhill from there:
  - The land of Israel and the 12 tribes of the sons of Jacob split into 2.
    - 2 nations: The 10 tribes in the North. Confusingly after the split they are now called **ISRAEL**. (blue on the map)

- And the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and some Levites, they are called JUDAH (orange on the map)
- And here in Jer 3, God describes them as sisters.
  - That's fair- the 2 descendent wings of the family of God.
- But here's the thing.
- Both were supposed to be devoted to God.
- He was their gracious Lord and Master, her husband
  - Who rescued them out of Egypt
  - Made a commitment- a marriage vow, a covenant with them.
  - And how did they get on with it?
- Well let's start with Israel
  - V6b. They committed adultery.
    - Saw this in 2<sup>nd</sup> talk.
    - If God faithful husband who delights in his people, how have they reacted?
    - They have given their body to other lovers,
      - Other gods. (reference to tree there is to Baal worship)
    - ESV. "*played the whore*".
  - So what are they going to do about it?
    - V7a "...not"
    - Return?
    - Did not.
  - But here's shocking thing.
    - V7b "*and her unfaithful sister saw it*".
    - Judah (in the S) watched all this happen.
    - If read through Kings & Chron all these kings, N & S.
    - So what did God do about it?
    - V8. Divorced.
      - Now Bible says "God hates divorce". Mal 2:16
      - But tragically when adultery is involved, the marriage can be broken beyond repair.
      - God issues a "decree absolute"
      - And he sends away Israel.
      - In fact that happened in history because the people of the North were carried away to Assyria around 100 years before Jeremiah's day.
      - The people were thrown out of the land
      - And hardly any of them were left and those who did intermarried with locals,
      - They became the Samaritans, hated by the Jews for the rest of their history.
- (Can I just pause for a moment here, because divorce is an extremely painful and sensitive topic and it affects almost everyone in this room.
  - Some of you have (or had) divorced parents

- Some of you are divorced
- Some of you have friends (as I do) who are considering a divorce right now.
- Can I say, this church is a safe place to talk about this.
  - If you have divorce in your story, **don't panic.**
    - You are loved & welcomed back (where we are going in this first point).
  - If you chat to someone who has divorce in their story **don't judge.**
    - In the gospel someone is not second best because they have experienced divorce.
- I heard the story last week of a vicar's wife who was deserted by her husband
- And instead of the church community rallying around her and her kids, she was judged, excluded, condemned, when she was the innocent party.
  - May our church never be a place where folk with a divorce or any other issue in their past feel judged or condemned.
  - We are all the product of messy lives and messy hearts.
  - It may be right to talk about, but it's not right to judge.
    - Sometimes divorce happens.
    - Sometimes it's tragically right for divorce to happen.
      - Sometimes it's not right and needs repenting of.
  - But God himself can relate- he experienced divorce. He knows the pain.
  - And this is the tragic story of the first daughter parting ways from God.
    - So God and Israel part ways.
      - Israel is sent into exile.
      - It's a tragic part of the history of God's people. V8.
    - What did other sister Judah do at this point? Watching.
      - Did they think,
        - "There is no way we're going to let what has happened to our sister happen to us".
        - "If we go down the same route of worshipping other gods we will be thrown out of the land and we will face the same treatment"
    - Did they do that? NO! v8b-9. No fear.
      - SHE ALSO WENT OUT AND COMMITTED ADULTERY!
        - It's horrendous.
    - The people of the South are doing exactly the same.
      - (▲ I've heard it said that the definition of madness is "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results". Why should they expect anything different?
        - And do they return?
          - Only in pretense.
          - It happens all the time.
      - A man is spotted with another woman (not his wife).
        - At first it's suspicions,
          - And then the truth comes out.

- There are tears, there are confessions.
    - There are lies “it was just a fling”. It was stupid, a one night stand, it didn’t mean anything”
    - There are promises “It will never happen again”.
  - And then he’s back with her.
    - He never returned to his wife.
    - Only in pretense.
  - So v11 Judah is even worse than Israel.
    - Israel is unfaithful
    - Judah is even more unfaithful.
  - Well what is going to happen to Judah?
  - If there’s no change, she’s going to face the same exclusion and will be sent away.
  - It’s very sobering.
- What is your idol?
  - What is the one thing that you can’t do without?
    - What consumes your time and energy?
    - If you got it, your life would be made.
    - If you lost it, your life would be over
      - A relationship
      - Money?
      - Status
      - Career
      - The opinions of others?
  - (Some of us have done the life explored course, super helpful which asks what would make you happy, what would bring you peace)
  - As we study Jeremiah, we’re discovering we are more like Judah (and Israel) than we thought.
  - And do we make a decisive break? Or play with our idols, going back to them like lovers we can’t leave.
    - So here we have these two sisters. Both adulterous.
    - But what is next is astonishing.
    - V12-14.
      - 3:1 this is not supposed to happen.
      - It was actually against God’s law in Deut 24 for a man to remarry a woman who had been divorced. There’s lots of suggestions for why God might be able to do something that his law condemns (chat with me or in lifegroups<sup>1</sup>) but God is inviting them back!
      - He’s inviting the North back!

---

<sup>1</sup> See <https://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com/questions/71189/did-god-in-jeremiah-312-contradict-deuteronomy-244-by-letting-israel-return-to>

- Even a kingdom that is so far gone that it's been disbanded!
  - ▲ Right at the start of our church we had an American couple in our church Mark and Emily.
  - And some of you met their parents: Ray and Patty. Here's their story:
    - They weren't Christians.
    - They had a rocky relationship.
    - They had a child (Emily's brother).
    - Life was messy. They got divorced.
    - And then, they became Christians.
    - And they got back together again and repaired the damage
    - And they got remarried! To each other!
    - And they had a second child- Emily. Who now has kids of her own.
    - And Ray and Patty came to our church and they did a marriage seminar before lockdown. And it was really helpful.
  - Here's the miracle.
  - God actually wants his adulterous wife back.
  - She's slept with other lovers, yet he's calling her to return back...
    - He's calling the North **back** (3:11).
    - And he's calling the south **back** too (4:3).
  - It's a miracle.
    - There's another book in the Old Testament- Hosea- all about it.
  - It's astonishing grace.
    - It shouldn't be possible. Yet it is. **ASTONISHING GRACE**.
    - And today a return to God is possible for you, for me
    - God wants you back.
      - For the first time
      - For the hundredth time.
        - Some of you think that God will only tolerate you.
        - He will never truly love you after what you've done.
        - You've blown it. But v12.
  - Well let's move on to why it is so good to come back to God.
    - And that's the second point.
- 1) WHAT? Return to God... it is miraculously possible.

## 2) WHY? RETURN TO GOD... IT IS INCREDIBLY WONDERFUL (v15-20)

- In v14-20 we have the benefits of coming back to God.

- We'll only be able to whizz through them very quickly, but I hope this smorgasbord of blessings will remind you that
  - Goodness, satisfaction, life is found IN GOD
    - And not AWAY from GOD.
  - Before we get to them, notice in v14 that this is only for a remnant.
  - Even though the nation of Israel is actually no more, God is spiritually going to bring individuals from that region back to himself.
  - And the woman at the well (of John 4) and the Samaritans (of Acts 8) would be examples of this.
  - But it's not all the people, only ones and twos who respond rightly.
- Here is a feast of blessings.
  - V15 SHEPHERDS
    - Now Shepherd was the word for the Kings of the OT.
    - Some were good in parts, most were terrible, especially in the north
    - If people return to God they get good rule.
    - And ultimately that points to the ultimate ruler, Jesus Christ who called himself the GOOD Shepherd.
  - V16 there's MULTIPLICATION. Numbers increase.
  - V16b there's no longer a need for the OLD INSTRUMENTS OF RELIGION- the ark of the covenant. God is going to write his gospel on his people's heart, so they know him deeply.
  - V17 there's WORLDWIDE WORSHIP. People are going to know God from all nations, take a look around church today!
  - V18 there's going to be a REUNIFICATION. If you find reconciliation with God, you find a deep unity with other Christians. Yes there can still be brokenness, but come close to God, and you find that your differences that shut others out come tumbling down.
  - V18b INHERITANCE. It's promised land language- which in the NT points us to the future inheritance of the New Heaven and the new earth we were leaning about in Revelation, a place where the Shepherd King wipes away every tear.
  - These things are available to Israel and Judah if they come back to God? V20 but will they?

- There's a stupid part of us that thinks that happiness is found in going sin's way.

- How many times have we discovered sin to be a sugar coated pill that looks so attractive but brings misery?
- And foolishly we think that God's way is a little bit boring.
- Some of you know a lovely old gent at the Carpenters Arms called David.
  - He's got this little Christian leaflet that he gives to people
  - He was in hospital recently and said he witnessed to 40 people.
  - Here's what he gives them?
    - "Beware of becoming a Christian- you will lose
      - Doubt
      - Despair
      - Worry
      - Anger
      - Greed
      - Fear of death
      - Sin, past or present
      - Some friends
      - Belief in superstition
    - But you will gain
      - Peace perfect peace
      - The God who loves you
      - Eternal life
      - Good Christian friends
      - Joy unspeakable
      - Healing
      - Patience
      - Guidance of the Lord Jesus
      - Holy Spirit confidence!
  - Come back to God. It is incredibly wonderful.
    - You want pleasure, you want deep satisfaction.
    - Drink from the well of God's goodness shown to you at the cross.
  - 1)
  - 2)
  - So how do we come back. Well it's wonderfully simple.

### 3) HOW? RETURN TO GOD... IT'S DECEPTIVELY SIMPLE. (v32-4:4)

- There's turning from and turning to.
- In verse 21 there seems to be the beginning of real repentance.
- V21. The people are crying.
- That's the first sign of genuine repentance. It's a work of God.
  - Real or spiritual tears.
- I've been reading about a revival in the outer Hebrides 1949-1952.
  - There's a common theme.
  - People in a God fearing society that know the 10 commandments are worried about their souls. They fear hell.
  - They are going to meet their maker unforgiven.
  - And they are brought under conviction of sin.
  - Here's Donald Macphail, long before the church meetings, he started coming under a realization of his own sinfulness.
    - "I recall walking on the moorland, and I just sat down sobbing, I did not know why I was sobbing. I spoke to the sheep and said, "I envy you for you are not disturbed by the thoughts that are disturbing me!", then I would think I am heading for eternity and I don't know what eternity holds for me.... I am lost until I find an answer to these questions".
    - Well Donald Macphail found an answer in the preaching of the gospel of Christ, where he learned that Christ died for those sins, that he could be forgiven and found peace with God.
    - He turned back. He returned to God, just like this passage invites us.
- True repentance is a turning from and a turning to.
  - Look at v23.
    - Turning from.
    - Lord pornography is a deception, it promises but it doesn't deliver.
    - Lord the idolatry of relationships. Even if I get it, it won't be everything you can give, because the other person will also be a sinner!
    - Lord alcohol is a deception, it never brings happiness.
    - Lord worshipping work is a deception, it takes me from those I love.
      - It's a scam, I'm turning from those things.
  - You know you can't turn to Jesus without a decisive break.
    - 4:1. Put those idols out of sight.
    - You can't do it without his help, and the help of his people. And it will be a process. There will be fits and starts. But TURN FROM!
  - But also turning to.
    - V1 If you Israel will return then turn to me.
    - The North, (Israel)
    - And the South (Judah and Jerusalem) v3-4.
    - Here God demands a deep repentance.
    - Not just a pretense, not just religion on the outside,
    - But a deep change of heart
      - Which wonderfully by the work of the Spirit is possible.
- But note the end



- This is the PS
- What why, how?
- WHEN?
  - TODAY.
  - Do it today.
  - Because if you don't you'll face judgement.
  - This is the point of v4b.
    - OR!
    - God's wrath is a reality for unrepentant sinners.
    - We don't know when we will die.
    - If we don't return to Christ.
  - And if as Christians we don't return we will face his discipline.
- So **turn from** and **turn to**.
- Let's close our eyes and have a moment of prayer.
  - If you are not a Christian or you are not sure, and you want to turn back to God, I'm going to ask everyone to keep their eyes closed.
  - Raise a hand if you want to put your trust in Christ for the first time.
  - "Lord Jesus, you are the fount of living water, but I've settled for fake alternatives. Please forgive me. I want to turn now from them, and return to you. Please help me to leave those things behind, and in the power of the Spirit may I have a new life with Christ".
- If you are a Christian, think about those things you want to turn from.
  - God has given you his Spirit.
  - He will help you daily to turn from and to turn to.
  - Let's pray about those things you are struggling with now.
  - We're going to use the confession on the screen to do so.
  - Before we do, everyone please keep your eyes closed, and raise a hand if you'd like to talk with someone about something you are struggling with.
- Let's pray.