

Outline

- ****Big Idea:**** God calls His faithless people to genuine repentance from the heart, not superficial religion, and warns that refusal will bring judgment.

- ****Introduction: Can a Faithless People Return?****
 - Chapters 3-6 follow the problem identified in chapters 1-2
 - Chapter 2 exposed Israel's spiritual adultery through idol worship
 - Central questions raised: Can covenant traitors return? Can a compromised heart truly repent?
 - These are not merely ancient questions; they are church, family, and personal questions

- ****I. The Call to Return (Jeremiah 3:1-2, 11-14)****
 - Background: The law of divorce from Deuteronomy 24
 - Judah's sin described as severe: adultery, rebellion, faithlessness
 - Yet God astonishingly calls the guilty home
 - The Hebrew word **shuv**: to turn back, to reverse direction
 - Repentance is directional, not merely emotional
 - It is not a mood, a moment, or a statement
 - God's mercy defined: He calls back the guilty who acknowledge their guilt
 - The necessity of honesty and confession
 - No healing without honesty
 - No restoration without confession
 - The church's tendency to soften God's moral language

- Dysfunction vs. disobedience
- Struggle vs. sin
- Conditional language vs. guilt

- **II. The Danger of Pretense (Jeremiah 3, continued)**

- Comparison of Israel and Judah as two sisters
 - Israel had gone into exile; Judah watched and still followed the same path
 - Judah had more light, more warning, more opportunity
- Judah's repentance was pretense: acted rather than lived
 - Reform movements and external adjustments without heart change
 - Idols not truly renounced; loyalties not truly reordered
- The abiding danger for Bible-believing Christians today
 - Confessing in general terms without getting specific
 - Denouncing culture without self-examination
 - Lamenting decline while protecting personal idols
 - Visible changes that preserve reputation without addressing deeper loves
- God sees through pretense

- **III. What True Repentance Looks Like (Jeremiah 4:1-4)**

- Repentance requires putting away what competes with God
- Repentance is not compatible with intentional, ongoing rebellion
 - Not about sinless perfection or never failing

- About acknowledging failure and sincerely returning to God
- Image of fallow ground: "Plow up the hard ground of your hearts"
 - Hearts become compacted through busyness, neglect, habit, compromise, and self-protection
- The summons: stop treating hard-heartedness as normal
- Stop making peace with spiritual neglect
- Covenant language: circumcise your hearts
 - External signs of belonging are not sufficient
 - The inner life must be addressed: stubbornness, pride, self-rule
 - Covenant signs do not replace covenant obedience
 - External religion without an inward yielded heart is false

- **IV. The Warning of Coming Judgment (Jeremiah 4:5 onward)**
 - Judgment is no longer a remote possibility
 - Sin and refusal to repent open the door to judgment
 - Jeremiah's personal anguish as a model
 - He speaks hard truth with tears, not glee
 - Broken by what he sees, not angered by being ignored
 - The church's need to recover genuine grief over lostness
 - Evangelism has become too programmatic
 - We must be moved by the eternal cost of rebellion and the beauty of grace
 - Courage and tenderness belong together

- **V. The Indictment of a Nation (Jeremiah 5)**

- God's challenge: find one just and honest person in Jerusalem
 - Public life corrupted, soaked in falsehood, emptied of covenant faithfulness
 - Righteousness was not the character of the nation
- The problem of truthlessness
 - Covenant language on the lips; false hearts underneath
 - Religious in speech, rebellious in practice
- Warning to the modern church: good theology is not the same as having the heart of the Lord
- The people no longer believe God will act (Jeremiah 5:11-14)
 - God reduced to a symbol, a tradition, a theological idea
 - When God becomes merely a concept, sin feels safe
- False prophets crying "Peace, peace" when there is no peace
 - Relieving conscience without addressing cause
 - Comforting those who should be trembling
 - Mistaking the absence of discomfort for the presence of health

- **VI. The Ancient Paths and the Tragic Refusal (Jeremiah 6)**

- The call to stand at the crossroads and ask for the ancient paths
 - The path of covenant fidelity, truth, obedience, and holiness
- The people's response: "We will not walk in it"
- The modern church faces the same temptation
 - Pressure to revise the path to remain culturally acceptable and relevant

- Areas where many churches have refused the ancient paths:
 - Biblical morality and ethics
 - The exclusivity of Christ
 - The authority of Scripture
 - The necessity of repentance
 - Male and female as creational realities
 - Holy distinctiveness
- True soul rest is not found through compromise; it is found through submission

- ****VII. Application: What These Chapters Call Us to Do****
 - ****Reject cheap repentance****
 - Cheap repentance: "I feel bad, therefore I am restored"
 - Cheap repentance: a religious adjustment without true turning
 - Cheap repentance: retaining idols while also claiming God
 - Cheap repentance: relying on outward signs without heart change
 - Cheap repentance: demanding peace without genuine turning
 - Jeremiah's answer to each: Return. Break up the hard ground. Remove your detestable things. Circumcise your heart.
 - ****Recognize that true repentance is a gift of grace****
 - The heart is stubborn and false; sinners cannot heal themselves
 - God's summons to return is an invitation into the very mercy that must change them
 - In Christ, God bears the judgment Himself and gives the Holy Spirit to change hearts

- ****Closing Questions for Self-Examination****

- Is your repentance real, or is it pretense?
- Have you genuinely turned, or just changed how things appear?
- Has God's plow gone deep?
- Are you walking in the ancient paths?
- God's call is severe but not hopeless: He still says "Return"
- The tragedy is not that God's mercy was too small; the tragedy is that Judah preferred their own way, and we often do the same