

"How close are you?"

Jeremiah 1-3

Introduction: Today we are stepping away from our study of the Chaos in our World to look at a message for Father's Day. Let me tell you a story first of all.

One day there was an elderly couple driving down the road in their old Ford pickup. The truck was one of those which had a long vinyl bench seat. She was seated against her door and he, of course, was seated behind the wheel. As they drove down the highway she broke the silence with a question. She asked if he remembered the days when she sat right next to him. She said, "I would sit in the middle of the seat and we would hold hands and snuggle close together back then. She then asked another question, "Why don't we do that anymore dear?" She went on to explain how much she missed that closeness she once had with him. Then she pressed him again for an answer as to what had happened. The old fellow thought for a moment and then he asked her a question. He looked over at her and simply asked, "Honey, who moved?"

He was still sitting in the same place but she had moved over against her door of the truck. That story can be a picture of our relationship with our Heavenly Father if we are not careful. If ever there was a time for fathers to be walking close to the Lord it is now. Notice Paul's words to Timothy in two different letters.

1 Timothy 4:1-2

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

² *Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;*

2 Timothy 3:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

² *For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,*

³ *Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,*

⁴ *Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;*

⁵ *Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*

That may be the very condition of some of you who are here this morning. There was a time when you were involved for God and you looked forward to coming to church. But over time you are like the woman in the truck, for you have moved. God is still where He has always been but you are not walking by His side. There have been things which have taken you away from Him and so as the time has passed there is a distance that is growing between you and God. You do not serve anymore; your church attendance has fallen off. There was a time when if you missed a service, it really bothered you but now it is easy. If you are a little tired or if there is something else happening you have no problem skipping church and attending some event that will provide you with some entertainment. Just as a side note, entertainment will never satisfy you! It will make you feel good for a moment but the feeling is fleeting. The bottom line is that you have allowed a distance to come between you and the Lord and if you do not address it the divide will continue to grow. That is what today's message is all about. Your walk with God speaks loudly to your children and they need to have a Godly father to follow. Today we are going to look at the sin of DISTANCE.

The nation of Israel had allowed distance to come between them and their God and in Jeremiah 1-3 that very sin is addressed.

I. The Description of the sin.

Jeremiah 1:16

¹⁶ *And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.*

Here in this verse the sin is described as "forsaking God." The word "forsake" really means "to loosen something that was tied" or "to become untied."

The idea was that Israel was once connected closely to God but when they came into the land of Canaan, they allowed the influence of the people and the lure of stuff to "untie them from God."

Jeremiah 2:5

⁵ *Thus saith the LORD, What iniquity have your fathers found in me, that they are gone far from me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?*

They chased after "things" that may have been perfectly fine for them to possess but they were looking for fulfillment and satisfaction in the stuff and their journey took them further and further away from God. What they did not realize was it was all emptiness.

Jeremiah 3:6

⁶ *The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot.*

Here we are told that Israel was "backsliding." Let me define what that means. The word "backslide" means "to turn away from God." It is a deliberate act of going in a direction that increases the distance between you and God. Let me show you some verses that will help us to see what this sin actually looks like in the life of the believer. There are 2 verses that will paint a picture of the process of the sin of distance in the believer's life.

Jeremiah 2:2

² *Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem, saying, Thus saith the LORD; I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.*

Revelation 2:4

⁴ *Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.*

Peter experienced the sin of distance the night Jesus was arrested.

Mark 14:53-54

⁵³ *And they led Jesus away to the high priest: and with him were assembled all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes.*

⁵⁴ *And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest: and he sat with the servants, and warmed himself at the fire.*

Now let me show you how God views the sin of distance.

Jeremiah 3:21-22

¹⁹ *But I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? and I said, Thou shalt call me, My father; and shalt not turn away from me.*

²⁰ *Surely as a wife treacherously departeth from her husband, so have ye dealt treacherously with me, O house of Israel, saith the LORD.*

Verse 20 needs our closest attention. The word "treacherously" refers to an act of spiritual adultery and God compares it here to a woman who is unfaithful to her husband as she tries to cover it up. That is exactly what it is to allow the sin of distance to happen between us and God. It is spiritual adultery and when it happens you try your best to cover it up. When you come to church you smile and act as if all is great but deep down inside you know there is something wrong.

Matthew 15:8

⁸ *This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.*

That is a how God views every believer that has distanced themselves from Him.

James 4:4

⁴ *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*

These verses help us to see how serious the sin of distance is.

II. The Deception of the Sin

There are 3 lies that the person in the sin of distance believes.

1. Life will be just as good this way.

Jeremiah 2:13

¹³ *For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*

This verse also needs our greatest attention. This verse contains a picture of what happens when a believer turns away from God. It is the same as walking away from a fountain or a spring of water that flows abundantly and then going to a cistern which has

holes in it. The point is noticeably clear that God is making here: there is no refreshment or fulfillment in what the world has to offer. That refreshment and fulfillment you are searching for can only be found in God and the closer we get the richer the fulfillment becomes. To turn from Him is to go in the wrong direction.

2. I will not be stained by sin.

Jeremiah 2:22-23

²² *For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, saith the Lord GOD.*

²³ *How canst thou say, I am not polluted, I have not gone after Baalim? see thy way in the valley, know what thou hast done: thou art a swift dromedary traversing her ways;*

James 1:27

²⁷ *Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.*

You will be stained by sin and your fellowship with God will be broken as long as there is distance between you and God.

3. God does not mind if I backslide.

Jeremiah 1:16

¹⁶ *And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.*

Jeremiah 2:12-13

¹² *Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith the LORD.*

¹³ *For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*

Jeremiah 2:19

¹⁹ *Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that my fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of hosts.*

From these verses we can clearly see that distance is a serious offence against God and there are consequences which are attached to distance which are very severe.

III. The desire of our Lord

Jeremiah 3:1

They say, If a man put away his wife, and she go from him, and become another man's, shall he return unto her again? shall not that land be greatly polluted? but thou hast played the harlot with many lovers; yet return again to me, saith the LORD.

Jeremiah 3:7a

⁷ *And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me.*

Jeremiah 3:12-14a

¹² *Go and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever.*

¹³ *Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD.*

¹⁴ *Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD;*

Jeremiah 3:22

²² *Return, ye backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Behold, we come unto thee; for thou art the LORD our God.*

Conclusion:

The sin of distance can happen very easily and it happens so subtly that many do not realize it is happening and then one day you look around and wonder how you arrived at where you are. We must watch our lives very closely. There must be a constant practice of self-discipline. There must be the discernment to know when something is pulling you away from God.

God desires for you to return back to Him and enter into a close fellowship. Turn now before the Lord does something to turn you.