

***Jeremiah: Shaped by the Potter's Hand***  
Kenwood Baptist Church Fall Sermon Series  
Pastor David Palmer  
September 21, 2025

**TEXT: Jeremiah 2:1-13**



Good morning, Beloved. We continue this morning in our new fall series on Jeremiah, called “Shaped by the Potter's Hands.” Last Sunday we saw that God called Jeremiah when he was a teenager; called him to serve Him with his life; and placed His Word in Jeremiah's mouth. This is one of the miracles in the Bible where God, the living God, who speaks and communicates, actually places His words in the mouths of human beings. God, who does that in the Bible, continues to do that today. He places His Word, the Word of Almighty God, in your mouth, and in my mouth. Jeremiah's calling is a calling to announce the Word of God. The Word of God, we saw last Sunday, in a simple way of understanding it, has a destructive component to it as well as a constructive component. God's Word will break things down, will uproot the weeds of sin and rebellion in our lives, and at the same time will plant righteousness, will build a place for God to dwell. This double movement of God's Word is important for us to remember as we listen this morning and we hear Jeremiah's public preaching.

Jeremiah is a prophet. The word “prophet” means to stand in the courts of God and to receive His message and then to proclaim that message. Jeremiah's ministry is a ministry that is, primarily, in its public shape, a ministry of preaching, and preaching in public spaces. God tells him at the beginning of this passage to proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem. So Jeremiah walks from his village, Anathoth—less than an hour walk—to the city. Later, in these early chapters that depict his preaching, God tells him to go stand at the city gates. So this is a very public

ministry. I want to challenge us all, right at the beginning, as we listen to Jeremiah's public preaching ministry, and remind us that God places His Word in the mouths of human beings. Jeremiah has a very particular calling to do that. But Jesus says the same thing to all of us in Matthew 28:19-20:

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”*

So Jesus Christ entrusts His Word to you as well.

Jeremiah's preaching ministry is a message from God. It's rich. It has a number of rhetorical features. He asks a lot of questions. He communicates with vividness. But this morning I want to invite us to consider his public preaching ministry as the gospel according to Jeremiah. When we think of the gospel, we think of God's message for the world. That is what we have here. The gospel, in its simplest form, has two parts. The first part is to persuade us that we are a people in need of a Savior. The second part is to offer us the way to that Savior. I have preached over a thousand times; this is the most important thing I do. Yet, I would say that the hardest part of preaching is persuading people of their need for a Savior. We have all kinds of ways that we protect ourselves and shield ourselves from that Word. God's Word through Jeremiah is filled with striking images of our waywardness, vivid pictures that help us see sin's stain and sin's pain. Jeremiah's public ministry, the gospel according to Jeremiah, uses many daring images—if it's okay to use that word—of God, images that God Himself uses, images that are surprising to us. So in my prayers this morning I prayed for you and those listening online, that God would take the brokenhearted and put them back together, and that He would take the hard hearts and soften them. Jeremiah's preaching goes after our heart, as we will see. So let's listen.

Jeremiah's preaching begins with the image of a marriage. It is God speaking through Jeremiah. In Jeremiah 2:2, God says to us:

*“I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride ...”*

The very first picture of all the imagery in Jeremiah that God uses is God introducing Himself as our Husband. God introduces Himself as a Husband Who remembers the honeymoon, who remembers the love at the beginning. Do you remember that love, when you fall in love with your bride? When you first come to faith? It's all you want to talk about. God says, I remember your love, your faithfulness. The Hebrew word translated here as devotion is *hesed*. It's one of the most important words in the Old Testament. It is God's steadfast love, His loyalty, His faithfulness towards us. God says, I remember yours. Like a bride, you can followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. God remembers the early part of our relationship. He recalls the

path to Sinai and the journey through the wilderness. It's like looking back at the wedding pictures and remembering why we got married. In our wedding pictures, whatever their format—print, digital—they have a way of reminding us not just that we are getting older, but they remind us of the love that we had and sometimes neglect or drift away from. The imagery is God bringing us to Himself, out of Egypt, to the base of Mount Sinai, where we exchange wedding vows. God speaks in visible glory on the mountain, and of all the things He could say to us after rescuing us, He says, in Exodus 19:4-6:

*“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, you shall be My treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”*

And we respond at the mountain, “Yes! Yes!” In Exodus 19:7, all the people respond:

*“All that the Lord has spoken we will do.”*

God reminds us that we were holy to the Lord. This means to be set apart for God. It means to enter into a covenant relationship.

Then God describes us, in Jeremiah 2:3, as the firstfruits of His harvest:

*“Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of His harvest.”*

Here the imagery shifts from the imagery of a marriage to the shared imagery of a mission. I just met for the first time some of the leadership from Bill Glass Behind the Walls Ministry. I love these guys. The reason you feel such love so quickly is when you share that mission that Jesus Christ had, and all of a sudden, you just look, and you realize, “I’m on a mission!” The imagery to call us the firstfruits of God's harvest, is mission language. Because the firstfruits of a harvest are the first plants that grow up and then are harvested. The beginning of that harvest is the guarantee of the rest. God said, “The whole earth is Mine; I’m starting with you, and I intend to reclaim all the world.”

He says all who ate of it incurred guilt, referring to every hostile reaction to God's people as we came out of Egypt and brought disaster on those who stood against God's purposes. The mission that we have, the Old Testament version of it, is when God says to Abraham, “I'm going to bless you, and in you, all the families of the earth will be blessed.” In Deuteronomy 4:7, Moses, in his last sermons, said that the nations of the world would look to Israel and say:

*“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon Him?”*

Yet in God's gospel according to Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 2:5, God asks a devastating question:

*“What wrong did your fathers find in Me that they went far from Me and went after worthlessness, and became worthless?”*

What evil did people find in Me, that they went far away from Me? This is a daring image of God our Heavenly Father, to depict Himself as a wounded lover. “What fault did you find in Me? Was I not a faithful God and loving Husband? And you walked away from Me.”

We didn't just walk away from God. We went after things that are utterly worthless. We exchanged faithful love in the bonds of covenant for something that would not last through the night. The word translated “worthless” is the key word in the book of Ecclesiastes. “Vanity of vanities.” It is the Hebrew word *Hebel*, which means like a puff of smoke. Gone. To trade the weight of the glory of the goodness of God for a puff, when you do that, it's not just the tragedy of the moment, but it's the anguish of what happens as a result.

When a marriage vow is broken it can be one of the most painful things a human being can experience. One of the most intense moments of my pastoral life was being asked to mediate a reconciliation of two wives who had experienced the pain and anguish of marital unfaithfulness. In the midst of that meeting, one woman came with a heartfelt letter of apology, and the other came with a very long letter detailing all the things she lost. It wasn't just the loss of the moment; it was the distraction of the husband at a family gathering. It was the consequence of sin that spins out in our lives.

In the Bible, when you worship something, you become like it. You can't prevent this from happening. If you worship a sports team, you're going to end up dressing like them, you're going to end up giving more of your time to it than you should, and 99.9% of all sports fans end the season with heartbreak. It's not a great investment. I'm not saying don't watch sports. Just don't worship it. If you worship something that is worthless, you are going to become and feel worthless. Listen to that closely. When you give your heart to something that's worthless, relatively speaking, at some moment along the way you are going to feel worthless. If you worship consumerism and making money, then you're going to end up, at some point along the way, feeling like a consumer good. Listen to that. If you think that what this life is all about are products, goods, and services, you can end up feeling like a good or service. If you worship anything, you become like it. That is why it is so important, God says, to worship Him. Because He wants us, for our good, to become like Him. That is where happiness is.

The people, Israel, did not say, where is the Lord? In Jeremiah 2:6-7, God tells us:

*“They did not say, ‘Where is the Lord Who brought us up from the land of Egypt, Who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep*

*darkness, in a land that none passes through, where no man dwells?’”*

This is the devastating question that is unasked. God asks the question, “What wrong did they find in Me?” Here, Jeremiah's gospel says that the people did not say, where is the Lord? They weren't seeking God. Where is the God who brought us out of Egypt and led us through the wilderness?

In Jeremiah 2:7, God says:

*“I brought you into a plentiful land to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination.”*

This piece of land is about the size of New Jersey. When you look at it from the air, it is desert all around, and then there is this one big garden area in the middle. It is the only place around that has a lot of water, and it is fertile land. God says, I brought you to this plentiful land to enjoy its fruits. It's good. But you came in and you defiled the land. That's strong language. You made the land unclean. What does that mean?

In the Bible, the first act that defiles the land is a murder, in Genesis 4. When human blood is spilled it defiles the land. God says, you made My heritage an abomination. That is language that is used in Leviticus 18, in particular, to describe all the ways that we sin sexually. These are many and varied and widespread and heartbreaking. And God says, your conduct defiled My land. The world is the Lord's. The land is God's. He allows us to rent it. We are not owners. In the Bible, every fifty years the land reverts back to its ancestral ownership; every generation gets a fresh start. God says, “You defiled it” with our conduct, with our violence, with our economic exploitation of others.

Usually, when we start to hear this first part of the gospel, we think, “Well, that all sounds bad, but that's probably someone else's fault.” “Maybe I've sinned a little bit ...” It's one of the initial defenses of the human heart to say, “That sounds bad, so who's responsible? Oh, the leadership.” It's one of our early moves. In the Garden of Eden, our ancestors of faith blame each other. Another version of that is we say, “Well, it's leadership.” So God speaks to the leadership of Jeremiah's day.

In Jeremiah 2:8, God says:

*“The priests did not say, ‘Where is the Lord?’ Those who handle the law did not know Me; the shepherds transgressed against Me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit.”*

The priests responsible for knowing God did not call out to God. The shepherds, who are the

rulers, transgressed against Him. And the prophets prophesied by Baal. Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility and economic prosperity and god of the storm, rides on a thundercloud. People worship him to protect themselves, have children, amass wealth, and secure pleasure. And if their kids get in the way, then they offer their kids up as offerings. So the leadership is letting us down. All ungodly leadership will let you down. There is only one—just one—perfect leader. Just one: Jesus Christ.

The Lord says in the gospel according to Jeremiah, in Jeremiah 2:9:

*“Therefore I still contend with you, declares the Lord, and with your children’s children I will contend.”*

The Lord says, “I will contend with you.” The word that is used here, “to contend,” is actually the language of the courtroom. In Hebrew it is the noun *rîb*, and the related verb. It depicts Jeremiah and the prophets like prosecuting attorneys of the Covenant. They represent the Law that God had given and hold us to the standard that God's Law has revealed. Jeremiah and most of the prophets in the Old Testament use this language; it will become the focus of our sermon in two weeks. But here, to see the imagery that the gospel according to Jeremiah invites us to see, it is that God's Word is the standard that we are held to.

Then God challenges us. In Jeremiah 2:10-11:

*“Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and see, or send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has been such a thing. 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.”*

Both of these geographical poles of the compass, Cyprus and Kedar, are places that are associated with commerce and economics. The “islands of Cyprus” are shorthand for the commerce by the sea in the west, and in the east, Kedar, the commerce by land. Sometimes we walk away from God because we think that we will prosper. So God asks, “Has a nation ever exchanged its gods?” But my people have exchanged, or changed their glory—that is, the glory of God—and they exchanged it for that which does not profit.

This is the gospel according to Jeremiah, that God is stirred like a wounded lover, that He is reminding us of the marriage, of the mission. All of these images of what sin is like help us to see it and feel it. Sometimes we need a word that God's judgment is real, and it causes to step back. But some of us, when we hear that word, we just harden to it. It doesn't pierce our hearts. Others of us simply need to hear that our sin is like betraying a marriage. Or our sin is like abandoning the mission that God called us into. Our sin is like defiling the land that God gave to be a blessing.

Sin is like a terrible exchange rate. In all my travels, there always came a moment when I had to exchange the money. You know it's coming, and you look around and shop for a good exchange rate. I remember living in another country and needing to exchange some dollars for local currency. The bank published rates that were good, but they weren't that great. Then this guy said to me, "Oh, I've got this shop around the corner with a better rate." I went and handed over my stack of local currency dollars to him. He went behind the counter and exchanged it. It was this great rate. He came back out. Big thick stack of bills. He counted it all out right in front of me. There it is. Great. Awesome. Great rate. I walked away, ended up in another part of the city, got ready to pay for the first thing I needed to pay for, pulled out that stack of currency, and I realized to my absolute horror that all the bills had been folded over in half. So he was counting each bill twice! That great exchange rate turned out to be not that good. You know, Beloved, sin is like that. It is promising you the world, and a better deal, and you end up with half.

God ends His opening sermon in its first movement with another startling image. In Jeremiah 2:12-13, God says:

*"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."*

The Hebrew text conveys the image that the hair of Heaven is standing up. The imagery is to show how utterly appalling it is that this has happened. The cosmos reels. Jeremiah's opening sermon comes to these two images. God says my people have committed two evils, and they are intricately related. On the one hand, they have forsaken Me, the Fountain of Living Water. Instead, they have hewed out cisterns that can hold no water.



Spring water is the best. It just tastes the best. It's healthy and it's wonderful. I am a big fan of freshwater springs. One of my favorite places to hike in in the world is in Crete with its beautiful beaches. Eight of the ten most beautiful beaches in all of Europe are in Crete. Also, the largest gorge in Europe is in Crete. You start this hike at the top of these mountains, and you hike through the wilderness for eight hours, and you end up at the Mediterranean. It is awesome. You might be thinking right now, "Well, how do you stay hydrated?" No problem, because there are fresh springs that emerge from the ground, and they never stop. You don't have to bring any water with you on this eight hour hike. You just bring a water bottle. You hike, and whenever you're thirsty, you just put your water container into the river that's flowing out from

this life-giving spring that never ends. It is the best tasting water I have ever had in my life. God says, "I'm like that. No limits. You don't have to buy it. It's pure. It's life-giving. And springs just come up out of the ground and they just keep going." You think, where does all that water come from? It is a marvel. That is a *lot* of water! And it just comes And it forms into these rivers. It's just so life-giving. God is life-giving.



But instead of simply receiving the life-giving spring water, what do we do? We start hacking into the ground and we start building cisterns. Cisterns are large, human-made, storage pools for rainwater. There are thirty-seven large cisterns around the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Thirty-seven. This is one of them. It is not a small pool.



You see the guy who has walked down the ladder, and he's standing there looking at it. This cistern is from the time of Jeremiah. It takes an incredible amount of human effort to cut through bedrock, and to fill out a large enough container that, when it rains, will simply catch the rain. Think for a minute: If you're really thirsty, would you rather have a glass of flowing fresh spring water, or would you rather dip down into this rainwater that's there, stagnant. Yet, the most striking thing about this cistern today is that it has no water in it! You can make all this effort, huge effort, and you can dig down, and you can reach a crack in the bedrock, and all your effort, all that effort, just drifts away. If you cut a cistern into limestone, the limestone itself is so porous that you have to plaster it. You not only have to dig through, but then you have to cover the walls with plaster to try to make it watertight. This is one of the largest cisterns found in Israel, in Masada. Just think of the effort it took using hand tools. You have to dig it out in the hope that what you have provided for yourself will be enough. This cistern, like the one from Jeremiah's time, is completely empty.

Jeremiah's preaching pierces our hearts. It has pierced mine, listening to this. His preaching that we see beginning in Jeremiah 2 continues through the following chapters. It is the first part of persuading us of our need for God that is often the hardest. Jeremiah labors to present the Word of God in this way. But he doesn't leave us there. Beginning in Jeremiah 3, and then throughout the book, he expresses the gospel call. The gospel call is to say, "I recognize I'm far from God." There is a simple and powerful call throughout the Scriptures, and throughout



Jeremiah's ministry from God to us, and that call is to come home. The theological word for that is "repentance." The Hebrew word for that is *teshuvah*, to return, just return. Instead of turning away, just return. Just come back. It is the most daring image of all for God to say that He is like a wounded lover, then, of all the things He could say to us, to say to us repeatedly, "Would you just come home? I want you home." In Jeremiah 3:12, He says:

*"Return, faithless Israel!"*

In Jeremiah 3:13:

*"Return, O faithless children!"*

In Jeremiah 3:22:

*"Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness."*

And the promise in Jeremiah 4:1:

*"If you return, O Israel," declares the Lord, "... then nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him shall they glory."*

He says: "Return; come home!" Our return to God has a compounding impact as people around us discover they can return to God as well. That is God's gospel according to Jeremiah: We have all sinned, in the vivid ways Jeremiah describes it, and we are all invited to repent and return to God.

What a rich beginning of Jeremiah's public preaching. You would like to think that everyone accepted it. But the gospel doesn't usually go that way. But many do. So what does Jeremiah's preaching inspire in us?

Number one: **God speaks to the world through His people.** That includes you. That doesn't mean that you add books or chapters to the Bible. It means that God speaks to the world through you. You might think you're not good at that. But God has called all of us to partake in His mission, His Great Co-mission in the world.

Number two: As individuals, as a people, **we have to assess honestly the seriousness of sin.** And we need all these images, that sin is like love forgotten, mission abandoned, covenant broken; that God calls to us as a wounded lover, to make an honest assessment of a foolish exchange, trading out the infinitely worthy for worthless.

Number three. **We all hear and must offer God's call of repentance.** No one is beyond this call. Praise God. God's offer of repentance, to come home, includes a challenge to return to our first love. As Jesus says to the church of Ephesus, "Come back. Come back." Never forget the

honeymoon.

**Number four. We have to abandon any effort to hack out our own support and supply and stockpile.** We are not designed to live with a stockpile of our own resources. We are called to live with access to the Living Water. Abandon the effort to meet your own needs or find support solutions in any other place, in the broken cisterns that won't hold the water, where all your effort will be in vain. Instead, come to the Living Water, the spring water, and find life.

This is the gospel of Jeremiah: Turn and find life. And this is one of many reasons why, in Matthew 16:13-14, after the people had heard Jesus' preaching and teaching over time, and Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do the crowds say that I am?" a number of the people in the crowd said, "He sounds a lot like Jeremiah," because it was Jesus who said to the woman at the well, in John 4:13-14:

*"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

Jesus stood in the temple courts where Jeremiah had delivered this very sermon. He stood there almost six hundred years later, and, as we read in John 7:37-38, He cried out:

*"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"*

That is the gospel.

We turn from worthless and are embraced by the One infinitely worthy. We abandon the effort. You may be halfway down to the cistern size you think you need. Drop your tools! Drop your tools and come and receive Living Water from Jesus Christ.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we are a thirsty group. We confess, Lord, this morning, our often blister-inducing efforts to meet our own supply, to stockpile what we think we'll need in days to come, and it's just falling through our fingers. So Lord Jesus, we ask You, and we take You at Your Word, trembling—we do, Lord—that "if you return to Me," we will be received. So I pray for anyone here this morning who somehow managed to find themselves far from You—one step away or a thousand miles—that they would return to You, that together we would abandon the effort to hew our own cisterns and receive from You, Living Water. Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You are a God of unlimited grace. You will never run out. Your mercy is new every morning. I pray for each of us, Lord, that You would use us as Your mouthpieces in the world and that You

would extend the offer of Living Water through us to those around us. Lord, we come to You. We come thirsty and we come to drink of Thee, Lord Jesus, unending Fountain of Living Water. Glory to God. Glory to God.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.