

“God’s Grace and Salvation” From God’s Prophet Jeremiah

Based on commentary by John Calvin
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In the book of Jeremiah, we find the same good news found in the New Testament. God is the God of grace, mercy, and love. He calls us to repentance and faith. As you meditate on God’s grace and salvation, thank the covenant LORD that He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16)!

Jeremiah 1:9 Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: "Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. 10 See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant."

In this opening chapter of Jeremiah, four negative infinitives (“to root out,” “to pull down,” “to destroy,” and “to throw down”) are followed by two positive ones (“to build” and “to plant”).

Though the treachery of men constrains God to use severity, yet He never forgets His own nature. God kindly invites to repentance those who are not completely past remedy, and He offers to them the hope of pardon and of salvation; this is what celestial truth ever includes. For though God’s truth is the aroma of death leading to death for those who perish, yet it is the aroma of life leading to life for the elect of God. It indeed often happens that the greater part of mankind turn the doctrine of salvation to their ruin; yet God never suffers [allows] all to perish.¹

Jeremiah 3:4 “Will you not from this time cry to Me, 'My Father, You *are* the guide of my youth?”

God mitigates the severity of the reproof which we have observed, and shows that He would be ready to be reconciled to them, if they repented; moreover, He waits for their repentance, but of His own accord meets and allures these treacherous apostates: “What!” says God, “shall there be no more any union between us?”²

Most tender is that love which a youth has for a young virgin in the flower of her age. God makes use now of this comparison and says that He still remembered the love which He had manifested toward His people. In short, He shows here that pardon was ready, if the people sought reconciliation.³

Jeremiah 3:5 “Will He remain angry forever? Will He keep it to the end? Behold, you have spoken and done evil things, As you were able.”

¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, Vol. I, trans. Rev. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 47-48. Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New King James version.

² Vol. I., 160.

³ Vol. I., 160-161.

God is not inexorable [relentless], for He is as ready to forgive as He is long-suffering; now, then, what prevents you from living happily again under His government? For He will spare you, provided He finds in you genuine repentance. God does not cherish vengeance. The Jews had no obstacle in their way, except that they shunned God, and that being addicted to their own vices [sins], they were unwilling to receive the pardon that was freely offered to them.⁴

God is both a righteous Judge and a merciful Savior.⁵ He is by nature inclined to mercy.⁶ When God stretches forth His arms, He is ready to receive, not only all, were they with one consent to come to Him, but even just two or three people, even just two or three people from one city or from a whole people.⁷

Jeremiah 22:16 "He judged the cause of the poor and needy; Then *it was* well. *Was not* this knowing Me?" says the LORD."

Where a real knowledge of God exists, men must necessarily have regard to uprightness and moderation. He then who acts cruelly towards his neighbors clearly shows that every thought of religion and every care for it is rooted out of his heart. True piety leads men to all the duties of love. Where God then is known, kindness to man also appears. So also on the other hand we may conclude that all regard for God is extinguished and all fear of Him is abolished when men willfully do wrong to one another and when they seek to oppress or defraud one another. There is therefore no doubt but that gross impiety will be found where the offices of love are neglected.⁸

Jeremiah 36:3 "It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the adversities which I purpose to bring upon them, that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin."

Without the hope of pardon it cannot be that men will repent, as it has been often said; but it must be repeated because few understand that *faith cannot be separated from repentance*. A sinner can never be induced to return truly to God, unless he entertains a hope of pardon, for this is a main truth, according to what is said in Psalm 130:4, "With You is mercy, that You may be feared." Then, according to what is commonly done, the Prophet says, that if the Jews turned to God, He would be propitious [favorable] to them, as though he had said, that men would not be disappointed, if they repent, because God would readily meet them, and be reconciled to them; for this one thing alone, as I have said, is what can encourage us to repent, that is, when we are convinced that God is ready to give us pardon.⁹

Jeremiah 50:5 "They shall ask the way to Zion, With their faces toward it, *saying*, 'Come and let us join ourselves to the LORD *In* a perpetual covenant *That* will not be forgotten.'"

⁴ Vol. I., 161.

⁵ Vol. III, 150.

⁶ Vol. I., 162.

⁷ Vol. I., 180.

⁸ Vol. III, 104.

⁹ Vol. IV, 328, emphasis added.

He calls then the covenant which God could never forget *perpetual* because He would remember His mercy towards the chosen people. Though they were unworthy to receive such a favor, yet He would continue perpetually His mercy towards them to the coming of Christ; for the passage clearly shows that this prophecy cannot be otherwise explained than of Christ's spiritual kingdom.¹⁰

The Gospel of Jeremiah calls us to repentance and faith. Repentance and faith "are the two essentials of religion."¹¹

Jeremiah 26:3 "Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that I may relent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings."

The only hope for a lost sinner is to repent: God will not be propitious to us, except we repent.¹² Repentance as well as faith proceeds from the truth taught. God shows that the use and fruit of His truth is to turn men, as it is said also by the Prophet Malachi (Mal. 4:6) and repeated in the first chapter of Luke, "He will turn many of the children of Israel" (Luke 1:16).¹³

Jeremiah 26:13 "Now therefore, amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God; then the LORD will relent concerning the doom that He has pronounced against you."

In effect, Jeremiah said to the people, "What was the object of my doctrine? Even that you might repent. And what does repentance bring? Even salvation; for God is ready to forgive you. Now you cannot bear to hear that God would be merciful to you. What madness is this?"¹⁴

Jeremiah 26:17-19 "Then certain of the elders of the land rose up and spoke to all the assembly of the people, saying: "Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spoke to all the people of Judah, saying, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Zion shall be plowed *like* a field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, And the mountain of the temple Like the bare hills of the forest." ' "Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah ever put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and seek the LORD's favor? And the Lord relented concerning the doom which He had pronounced against them. But we are doing great evil against ourselves."

By the fear of God here is meant true conversion. What else is God's fear than that reverence by which we show that we are submissive to His will because He is a Father and a Sovereign? Whoever, then, owns God as a Father and a Sovereign cannot do otherwise than to submit from the heart to His good pleasure. Therefore the elders meant that Hezekiah and the whole people really turned to God. Now repentance contains two parts: first, the sinner becomes displeased with himself on account of his

¹⁰ Vol. V, 131.

¹¹ Vol. II, 12.

¹² Vol. I, 220.

¹³ Vol. III, 310.

¹⁴ Vol. III, 326.

vices, and, second, forsaking all the wicked lusts of the flesh, he desires to form his whole life and his actions according to the rule of God's righteousness.¹⁵

Jeremiah 36:6-8 "'You go, therefore, and read from the scroll which you have written at my instruction, the words of the LORD, in the hearing of the people in the LORD's house on the day of fasting. And you shall also read them in the hearing of all Judah who come from their cities. "It may be that they will present their supplication before the LORD, and everyone will turn from his evil way. For great *is* the anger and the fury that the LORD has pronounced against this people." And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading from the book the words of the LORD in the LORD's house."

Repentance and faith begin with prayer: There are two things mentioned as necessary in order to obtain pardon—prayer and turning or conversion. For if any one only in words seeks to be reconciled to God, he will not succeed. *Turning or conversion cannot be separated from prayer.* But then were a sinner to repent a thousand times, he would still remain exposed to God's judgment; for reconciliation, by which we are absolved, does not depend on repentance, but on the gratuitous favor of God. God does not receive us into favor because He sees that we are changed to a better mind, as though conversion were the cause of pardon; but He embraces us according to His gratuitous mercy.¹⁶ In other words, the Holy Spirit's work of regeneration always precedes our faith and repentance; God makes us willing and able to believe.

Repentance is a change of mind. We must put off sin, renew our minds, and put on Christ's true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:22-24). The true way of repentance is to wash your heart from wickedness.¹⁷ Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17: "Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new." If we wish to be healed of our vices, let us ever begin in this way—let us carefully examine our thoughts and our motives, and not please ourselves nor deceive ourselves by empty flatteries, but strive to shake off whatever is reprehensible and vicious. The very beginning of true repentance is to renounce all deceptions and fallacies and to seek the light, which can alone expose to us our evils.¹⁸

Jesus said, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23). We cannot be the disciples of Christ except we renounce ourselves and the world and deny our own selves (Matt. 6:24; Luke 14:26, 27).¹⁹

Our heavenly Father shows His love to us when He chastises us in order to drive us to repentance: When God severely chastises us, we ought not to stop at the punishment and seek only a relief from our troubles, but on the contrary we ought to look to the very cause of all the evils, even our sins (Jer. 50:20).²⁰ They are bastards [illegitimate children] whom God does not favor with any correction (Heb. 12:8).²¹ So do not envy

¹⁵ Vol. III, 335.

¹⁶ Vol. IV, 332.

¹⁷ Vol. I, 219.

¹⁸ Vol. I, 426.

¹⁹ Vol. IV, 132.

²⁰ Vol. V, 155.

²¹ Vol. II, 62.

the wicked when God defers and does not immediately execute His judgment; for the punishments inflicted by God on His servants are only temporary and limited and intended as medicine, inasmuch as all we suffer are helps to our salvation, as Paul teaches us (Rom. 8:28). As then God paternally chastises us, let us not shun His paternal hand; nor let us think that God deals more kindly with the wicked because He suspends His judgments, for at last they will be hurried into their own ruin, as the Prophet says here (Jer. 49:12).²²

Jeremiah 8:6 "I listened and heard, *But* they do not speak aright. No man repented of his wickedness, Saying, 'What have I done?' Everyone turned to his own course, As the horse rushes into the battle."

We see that men can never be brought to repentance, except they set their own evils before their eyes, so as to feel ashamed, and to ask themselves, as it were in great fear, "What have we done?" For this question is an evidence of terror. Real repentance necessarily requires that the sinner should not only be displeased with himself, should not only be ashamed, but that he should also be filled with terror at his own sins; for this is what is meant by the inquiry, "What have I done?" For it implies astonishment.²³

The real character and nature of repentance is to submit to God's judgment and to suffer with a resigned mind His chastisement, provided it be paternal [fatherly]. Let us then know that this is necessary in repentance—that he who has offended God should present himself willingly, and of his own accord, before His tribunal and bear His chastisement.²⁴

Jeremiah 23:20 "The anger of the LORD will not turn back Until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly."

Today is the day of salvation; so today we ought to repent! We are to seek God while He may be found and call upon Him while He is near (Isa. 55:6). If we abuse His forbearance and despise Him who speaks to us today, we shall find out too late and not without the most grievous sorrow that we have been deceived by the devil because we did not attend to God calling us.²⁵

Jeremiah 23:35 "Thus every one of you shall say to his neighbor, and every one to his brother, 'What has the LORD answered?' and, 'What has the LORD spoken?'"

Those who are truly repentant must willingly come to the school of God, being meek and teachable, so that nothing hinders them from rendering honor to God and from embracing His word. Being terrified by God's threatenings and being allured by His promises, those who are truly repentant must devote themselves entirely to Him.²⁶

Jeremiah 24:7 "Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I *am* the LORD; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart."

²² Vol. V, 76.

²³ Vol. I, 427.

²⁴ Vol. II, 61.

²⁵ Vol. III, 176.

²⁶ Vol. III, 210.

We cannot really turn to God until we acknowledge Him to be the Judge; for until the sinner sets himself before God's tribunal, he will never be touched with the feeling of true repentance.²⁷

Repentance and faith are concomitant events. Repentance and faith are connected together, and it is absurd and an impious sacrilege to separate them.²⁸ Hence the Scripture, whenever it speaks of repentance at the same time adds faith. They are indeed things entirely distinct and yet not contrary; repentance and faith ought never to be separated, as some inconsiderately do. For repentance is a change of the whole life, and as it were a renovation; and faith teaches the guilty to flee to the mercy of God. But still we must observe that there is a difference between repentance and faith; and yet they so unite together that he who tears the one from the other entirely loses both.²⁹

As we conclude this study from Jeremiah concerning God's grace and salvation, let us consider the need for salvation and the blessings of God's salvation.

Jeremiah 32:38 "They shall be My people, and I will be their God." In order to be God's children and to have God as our Father, we must repent and believe in Christ alone by faith alone; we must be saved by God's grace alone. Jesus told Nicodemus, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3). When therefore we have all things in abundance, when nothing is lacking as to every kind of pleasure, when we are favored with great wealth, when peace and security are granted to us, yet all this will prove ruinous to us, except God owns us as His children and becomes a Father to us.³⁰ Therefore, repent and believe in the gospel (Mark 1:15).

Those who truly repent and believe in Christ alone will be the recipients of the blessings of salvation. As the spiritual and celestial kingdom of Christ is the object of the promise, the salvation mentioned must reach to the very heavens. Hence its limits are far wider than the whole world. In short, the salvation of which Jeremiah prophesied is not to be confined to the boundaries of a fading life, nor is it to be sought in this world, where it has no standing; but if we wish to know what it is, we must learn to raise our thoughts upwards—above the world and everything that exists here. The salvation of which Jeremiah prophesied is an eternal salvation. In the meantime, Christ gives us some foretaste of this salvation in this life, according to what is said, "godliness has the promises of the present as well as of the future life" (1 Tim. 4:8). But as this promise ought to be applied to the kingdom of Christ, there is no doubt but that it is perpetual and ought to raise up our thoughts to heaven itself.³¹

Colossians 3:1-2: "Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."

²⁷ Vol. III, 229-230.

²⁸ Vol. III, 311.

²⁹ Vol. III, 336.

³⁰ Vol. IV, 209.

³¹ Vol. IV, 254.