

At the Crossroads

<i>Text</i>	Jeremiah 6:16 (read Jeremiah 6:13-30)
<i>Readings</i>	Philippians 3:17-4:9; Matthew 7:13-29, 11:25-30
<i>Theme</i>	At a critical time Judah is urged to choose the path of the Lord and to follow him.
<i>Purpose</i>	To emphasise the necessity of choosing to follow the Lord and walk in his ways.

Congregation,

Many of us have had the experience of travelling by car and trying to head for a certain place. As you went on your journey you came to an intersection – to crossroads. The roads went off in different directions. You had to make a decision: should you turn to the right, or turn to the left or should you travel on straight ahead?

You may have had the same experience when you were out tramping. You came to a fork in the track. It was not clear from the track markers which route you should follow. Should you take the track that went to the left or that going to the right?

What you decide in a situation like that is very important. You will either take the right route or the wrong route; you will end up in the right place or the wrong place; you will either end up where you want to be or not!

What happens to us in our travels and our walking also happens to us in *life*. As you make your way on the journey of life you face certain decisions about what direction you will go, what path you will walk, what course you will follow. This happens to us regularly. Today we want to consider these time of decision, these crossroads of life.

We will do that from the perspective of the choices facing the people of Judah. At this point in their history they faced a time of decision.

The Lord through Jeremiah urged them to **stand at the crossroads and look**.

They faced a number of choices.

The pagan nations around them had many gods. The Assyrians and the Egyptians and the Babylonians each worshipped their own gods – each had their own set of deities whom they sought to please. These pagan empires seemed very powerful so the people of Judah thought they must have powerful gods. With this in mind they followed these gods and worshipped them.

The other path they could have followed was to walk in obedience to their covenant God. The next chapter describes how they gave the appearance of doing this. They kept up the externals of following the Lord, but it didn't come from their hearts. Instead they had turned to idols; and they had the idea that the more gods they worshipped, the better.

In the ancient world of the Roman Empire it was said that all roads led to Rome. Rome was the hub of the empire and the Romans built roads that went all over the known world. Those fine roads allowed troops to move rapidly from one place to another. All those roads led back to Rome.

In our pluralistic society today people use that same idea and think that all roads lead to the same God. People will tell you that it doesn't really matter what religion you follow or what god you worship because eventually they all lead to the same place. It doesn't matter, they say, whether you are Buddhist or Hindu or Baha'i or Christian because in the end everyone will be saved. You follow your own path. You find the truth that suits you and you'll be okay! And, of course, there are plenty of religions to choose from. There is a smorgasbord of religious options. There are any number of paths you can follow.

Jesus, however, reduced that choice to two. When delivering the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said that, despite the huge variety of choice, there are essentially only two choices: there is the broad road and there is the narrow road. The broad road leads to destruction and the narrow road leads to life. Everyone is on one of these two roads. You are either on the wide road or the narrow road. Either you are heading for eternal punishment or for eternal life. That is a sobering thought.

So it is essential that you **“stand and look”**, that you pause and take stock of your situation.

The people of Judah had to do that because they were at a crisis point. At the beginning of this chapter Jeremiah warned them that disaster was looming from the north, a terrible destruction was coming. They faced a critical time in their history. They had to stop and evaluate where they were going. This was a time of decision.

In the same way we too face times of decision in our lives. You too have to take stock of where you are. You have to stand at the crossroads and look. You need to make a careful evaluation of your situation. Where are you going? Where is your life taking you? If you keep going down this path what will lie ahead in the future? What road are you on and where will this road take you? Where will it end up?

As you stand at the crossroads of your life you need to **follow the right path**.

As you think about that you need to **ask** for advice. Don't just rely on your own judgement or knowledge or instinct. Ask for some wise counsel.

Not everyone does that. In the ancient pagan world people looked for guidance in signs and omens. When the King of Babylon was on one of his war campaigns he came to a fork in the road; he faced a choice of attacking Rabbah of the Ammonites or Judah and Jerusalem. To make a decision he consulted his gods by casting lots with arrows (Ezekiel 21:21). The lot, under the providence of God, fell on Judah.

People today will look for the same sort of guidance in the stars by astrology, or by studying tea leaves, or by palm reading or by tarot cards. In the 21st century we are seeing a revival of ancient paganism. All those pagan practices are coming back.

Instead of following these pagan rituals the people of Judah had to ask for advice. The people to ask were the true prophets and priests of Israel. Through Isaiah the Lord had promised them this guidance; “Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it’” (Isaiah 30:21).

That same help is available to young people today through godly parents and grandparents, through your pastor and elders and Christian school teachers. All of us are happy to help you and advise you.

Young people don’t always feel the *need* for advice. The distinguishing characteristic of a teenager is that he knows everything there is to know!

The famous writer Mark Twain said that when he left home at 16 his father knew nothing. When he returned home some years later he was surprised at how much his father had learnt in those few years he had been away!

Young people, don’t ignore the advice of your parents and of others in the church.

But that is true for all of us. We all need to be prepared to listen to advice and to take counsel from others and to ask for help when we are uncertain about what to do.

Jeremiah urged the people of Judah to ask for **the ancient paths**.

Just because something is old that doesn’t necessarily mean it is good.

Just because something has a long history and has been widely used does not mean it is right or true.

But Jeremiah wasn’t claiming only the weight of tradition or history. Rather he was pointing his people to the way of the Lord, to the way of the covenant and to the law of the Lord.

The people did not need any new revelation; rather they needed to follow the path God had revealed to them long ago through Moses and the other prophets who followed him.

Jeremiah pointed them back to the God of their fathers – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He directed them back to the God of Moses and Joshua, of Elijah and Elisha, of King David and King Hezekiah. This was the ancient path they needed to ask for and follow.

We need to do that same. Today we need to follow this old path that God has revealed in the Bible. We need to avoid all the passing fads and fashions of the world. We need to be careful that we don’t climb

on the latest bandwagon of popular opinion. Rather follow what God has told you in the Bible – this is a tried and true path that will lead to eternal life. Ask for the ancient paths.

The prophet also urged them to ask for “**the good way**”. The good way is the way of obedience to God and his law. It is the path of faithfulness, righteousness and love.

This isn’t always the easiest path to follow. Other people will offer you an easier route.

Sometimes when you are travelling someone will offer to show you an alternative route; “I know a good shortcut!” How many times have you heard that?! But their shortcut usually turns out to be the *long* way round.

It is the same when people suggest a shortcut to the believer or when they offer to show you an easier way.

In Pilgrim’s Progress Christian and hopeful were travelling on a narrow path that became rocky and difficult. Across the fence they saw a meadow that looked much easier and so they decided to cross the stile into By-Path-Meadow. But that easier route led them to Giant Despair and Doubting Castle where they were trapped for a long time.

Beware of rabbit trails and wild goose chases and easy paths. Ask for the good way.

The good way is the way of Christ. Jesus said; “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). Jesus claimed that he is the good way. He is the only way. The only way you can find eternal life and happiness is by believing in the Lord Jesus and trusting in him. Ask for the good way.

When you have found Jesus and this good way then you need to “**walk in it**”.

You see, it is one thing to *know* the right path and it is another to *walk in it*.

It is one thing to *hear* the word of God and it is another thing to put it into *practice*.

That was the point Jesus made at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. The wise man who built his house on the rock is the one “who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice.” (Matt 7:24).

Are you doing that? Are you a follower of Jesus? Are you hearing the words of Jesus and doing them? Are you walking in the footsteps of Jesus? And will you stay on that path? Will you keep to that road? Will you follow Jesus to the end?

Proverbs 15:21 says that “a man of under-standing keeps a straight course.” The word for course is the word for way or path. Will you keep following Jesus on that path that leads to life?

If you do **“you will find rest for your souls”**

We all know what happens if you take a wrong exit on the motorway and you end up on the wrong road. You have to travel a long way before you can get off and correct your mistake. You end up wasting a lot of time. It often causes arguments in the car between the driver and the passenger and everyone gets frustrated.

In the same way people who follow the wrong path *in life* end up frustrated and anxious. This is part of the reason why so many in our society are on a cocktail of tablets; they need these to cope with the anxieties and tensions of their lives. They have not found that peace that passes all understanding that guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Augustine spoke about that way back in the 4th century AD when he said that “our hearts are restless till they find their rest in thee.” Many people in our present world are experiencing just that. Their hearts are restless because they have not found their rest in the Lord. Maybe you are the same?

If you follow the Lord Jesus then you will find rest for your soul in this journey.

That doesn't mean that life will always be easy and they you won't have any problems.

Nor does it mean that you can take it easy and not do any work.

There is work to do, there are duties to perform, and there are responsibilities to take up. But you will find rest even in those duties, even while doing that work, even when fulfilling your responsibilities.

Jesus promised this when he said; “Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-29) Have you “heard the voice of Jesus say; Come unto me and rest? Lay down thou weary one, lay down, Thy head upon my breast”? (Sing to the Lord 435)

Part of this rest that Jesus promised comes from times of refreshment along the way. In his journey to the Celestial City Christian enjoyed times of rest that gave him strength to carry on, as when he stayed at the house of the Interpreter.

In the same way God gives us times of spiritual rest. One of the most important of those is the weekly Sabbath rest on the Lord's Day. God knows that we need this day to let our souls catch up with our bodies.

We need one day in seven that we can concentrate on the Lord and his word and his worship. We need a day of spiritual refreshment. Be sure you use this day wisely and well for that purpose. Put aside your normal work and study of the other six days so you can rest from your labour and worship the Lord.

This weekly Sabbath rest is an anticipation of the final and eternal rest that God promises to all who believe – the rest of heaven. The writer of Hebrews urges us to “Make every effort to enter that rest” (Hebrews 4:11). Keep your sights on that Celestial City, that New Jerusalem. That is the final destination. That is where every believer is headed. That is where this narrow path is taking us.

There are many situations where you stand at crossroads in your life; times of decision; times when you must choose one path or another.

The people of Judah faced such a choice in the days of Jeremiah. The prophet urged them to ask for the ancient paths, for the good way and to walk in it.

They refused to do that. They said, “we will not listen!” (Isaiah 28:12) Because of that refusal God warned them that the judgement would come and they would be destroyed.

Today the Lord urges you;

“Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,
and you will find rest for your souls.”

This is the invitation of the Lord Jesus.

Horatius Bonar responded by saying;

“I came to Jesus as I was,
weary and worn and sad;
I found in him my resting place,
and he has made me glad.”

Can you say that?

Have you come to Jesus?

Have you found your rest in him?

As you stand at the crossroads which path will you follow?

Will you follow the Lord Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life?

Amen.