

# Do Something!

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<i>Text</i>	Jeremiah 14:7-9
<i>Readings</i>	Hebrews 7:23-28, 9:11-15; Jeremiah 14:11-5:4
<i>Theme</i>	Jeremiah confesses the sin of Judah on their behalf and questions the Lord about his absence.
<i>Purpose</i>	To emphasise the importance of confession of sin and of trust in Christ as our intercessor.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

At various times in the history of the church, both in the Old Covenant and in the New, well-known Christian leaders have fallen into public sin.

The most obvious example of that in the Old Testament was King David with his sin of adultery and murder.

During the Middle Ages many of the popes were notorious for their greed and immorality.

Even the early history of mission in New Zealand is marred by scandal among some of the missionaries who were disciplined because of drunkenness or adultery or because of their involvement in the musket trade.

And we can think of examples in more recent times of high profile televangelists who have had to make a public confession of sin, and there have been examples of public sin among leaders in the church in New Zealand.

When this happens it reminds us that sin affects all of us, including elders and deacons and pastors and missionaries. No one is immune from temptation and sin. The apostle Paul warns us; "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12). And our Lord Jesus taught us to pray; "Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

Yet, even with such prayers, we will continue to sin because we are constantly battling against our old sinful nature. Much of the time we can keep our sins hidden away from public view. At other times they become more visible, and sometimes very public. Yet, whether public or private, all of us need to repent and confess our disobedience to God. When we sin the Lord wants us to come to him in an honest and open confession.

The people of Judah needed to do that too, because of their sins and failure against God and his law. Jeremiah did this on their behalf.

In most of this book the prophet spoke on *God's* behalf – he was a spokesman for the Lord.

Here however, he identified himself with his people and confessed *their* sin. It was a prayer on behalf of the few who were faithful in the land – the remnant – those who mourned over the state of the nation.

But he also wrote it down and made it known so that it might encourage others to repent and pray; so that it might be a model for others to take note of and follow.

Today we want to consider his prayer as a model for us.

**1.** As he **confessed their sin** he described the **nature** of their sin.

In this prayer he used three different words for sin.

The first occurrence of the word sins in verse 7 means to turn away from God. It can also mean to be perverse. Sin is to turn aside from the right path.

The second word used for sin in verse 7 is “backsliding”. Sometimes we fall back from where we were; we slide down; we slip back; we lose the high ground.

The third word for sin in verse 7 is one that means to miss the mark. It was used of shooting at a target and failing to hit it.

All of these are descriptions of our sins *against the Lord*. At the end of verse 7 we read; “We have sinned against you”.

David acknowledged this in his sin of adultery with Bathsheba;

“against you, you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight” (Psalm 51).

You have not understood the nature of sin or its seriousness until you see that you have sinned against *God*; you have disobeyed his law; you have offended *him*.

Jeremiah also acknowledged the **magnitude** of their sin. He came clean and said; “Our backsliding *is great*” (verse 7).

When we sin we often try to excuse our behaviour. That has a long history, going all the way back to Adam and Eve. Adam excused himself by saying; “The woman you gave me...”; and Eve then passed the buck to the serpent.

We do the same.

We excuse ourselves by down-playing it – “it wasn’t really that bad you know”.

Or we pass the buck – “it was her fault”!

We shift the responsibility – “he made me do it; it was her idea!”

Remember that our sin is an offence against God and it is a serious matter. When you sin be sure that you don't minimise it.

Jeremiah also acknowledged the **consequences** of their sin. "Our sins testify against us", he wrote in verse 7.

This is the language of the courtroom. It is as though our sins are a witness against us; they testify against us.

On the basis of this evidence the judge can condemn us and give us the punishment we deserve. As we stand before the law every mouth will be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God (Romans 3:19).

This is our situation – we are sinners under the judgement of God.

In the light of all this we are in desperate need of his **forgiveness**.

It is imperative that God acts on our behalf. This is why Jeremiah pleaded for his people; "O Lord, do something for the sake of your name" (verse 7). He wanted the Lord to forgive them, to look on them with mercy, to wash away their sins and cleanse them of all iniquity.

He asked that God would do this "for the sake of your name".

He could not ask God to do this for their sake. He could not plead any goodness or merit in them because there was none.

This is true of us too. We can't appeal to God because of anything in us.

All we can do is appeal to the Lord and his name. God's name stands for his character – for who he is. He is gracious and compassionate; slow to anger and abounding in mercy. He is a God of love and goodness, of kindness and grace.

That has been seen most clearly in the Lord Jesus. We appeal to him and his work.

"Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to thy cross I cling."

"No merit of my own I claim, but wholly trust in Jesus name."

That's what you need to do. That is your only hope. Jesus' blood and righteousness. The body and blood of Christ for you.

Jeremiah confessed his sin and that of his people. We need to do the same.

2. Then he went on in his prayer to question **THE ABSENCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE AND POWER**.

He felt that God was **not present** with them anymore. He expressed that in a striking picture:

"Why are you like a stranger in the land, like a traveller who stays only a night" (verse 8).

That's how it seemed to him. There was no connection with the Lord; it was as though he was just passing through; he was like a stranger to them, not like the covenant God he had promised to be. God seemed at a distance – far away.

Sometimes we feel like this – it seems as though God is far away, at a distance. We have no sense of his presence close by us.

The Sons of Korah expressed this in Psalm 42:

"Why are you downcast O my soul, why so disturbed within me?"  
(verse 5)

The Hymn writer, William Cowper, also knew this experience;

"Where is the blessedness I knew, when first I sought the Lord?  
Where is the soul refreshing view of Jesus and his word?"

"What peaceful hours I once enjoyed! How sweet their memory still!  
But they have left and aching void the world can never fill."  
(Psalter Hymnal 453)

There could be a number of reasons for this – they could be physical, spiritual or emotional, or a combination of all three.

Sometimes this sense of God's absence is the result of unconfessed sin in our lives.

That was the experience of David in Psalm 32.

Then when we confess our transgressions to the Lord then he forgives the guilt of our sin.

But at other times it is not the result of any specific sin. We don't know what is wrong and we have to hang in there; we have to hold on to God.

In such situations the writers of the Canons of Dort urge us to "continue diligently in the use of means"; in other words, keep reading the Bible and praying and attending worship and meeting with Christians.

If you are in this position, or if it happens to you in the future, don't give up. Keep praying and keep asking God for "a time of more abundant grace." (Canons of Dort I, 16) That will come; keep on going; don't lose hope. You will regain the sense of God's presence.

Jeremiah also felt the absence of **God's power**

Again he expressed that in a striking picture: "Why are you like a man taken by surprise, like a warrior powerless to save?" (verse 9).

A man taken by surprise is caught off guard and is unable to help himself. He cannot defend himself and he can't help anyone else. This is how it seemed with the Lord. He was not helping Israel against their enemies.

He seemed helpless and inactive.

Sometimes we wonder about that too. Why don't we see more of God's power against the enemies of the church? Why don't we see the kingdom of Christ growing more rapidly?

Why is the media so negative and hostile to Christians? Why are we seeing so much legislation that goes against the family and against our Christian principles? Why does God seem inactive?

Part of the answer to that question, for both Judah and for us today, is sin. Judah was a sinful people. So are we in NZ. God is inactive because this is his judgement. The proverbs tell us; "Righteousness exalts a nation but sin is a disgrace to any people." (Proverbs 14:34). That is what we are seeing at this present time. We are in disgrace. Sin will lead to judgement.

Yet even in this situation Jeremiah was able to **hold on to God in faith**. He closed his prayer with three brief but remarkable statements of faith in God:

*"You are among us O Lord."*

In that OT period God's presence among his people was symbolised by the temple. But that external symbol pictured an inner reality. God was with his people. He lived among them. They were his people and he was their God.

This is even more so in these New Testament days. Jesus has promised to be with us, even to the end of the age. He has promised to live in us and among us through his Spirit.

Sometimes, as we have seen, we don't *feel* as though he is with us. But Jesus assures us that he is. This is the promise of the Bible. Don't live on your feelings; live by what you know to be true. Don't live by what you can see or feel; live by faith in the Son of God. "You are among us O Lord." That is a statement of faith. May you know that too.

*"And we bear your name."*

Earlier in this prayer the prophet had pleaded with the Lord to “do something for the sake of your name.”

If something carries your name it belongs to you. Children at school have to name all their clothing and their books in case these things get lost or misplaced. Then when it is found you know to whom it belongs.

Believers bear God’s name. Christians carry the name of Christ. We belong to the triune God. We are his. This is a great comfort and help to us. God is among us and we bear his name. We are his people – a people belonging to God.

These two statements are the basis for the last phrase of his prayer: “*do not forsake us*”. Don’t leave us alone. Stay with us.

Earlier in verse 8 he had addressed the Lord as the Hope of Israel and as her Saviour in times of distress. The Lord had helped his people in the past; Jeremiah asked the Lord to keep doing that. This is what he had promised – that he would never leave them nor forsake them (Deuteronomy 31:6). That promise is repeated in the NT in Hebrews 13:5; “Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you”.

You need to believe that and hold on to it. If you trust in God he will always hold on to you. You may know the weight of your sin. You may feel as though God is not present and you may not see any evidence of his power. But you can be sure of this: If you confess your sins he will forgive you and he will always be near you and never let you go. So always keep on praying and never give up.

Before we leave this great prayer we need to consider one more matter that seems to contradict this truth.

In chapter 14 verses 11-12 God told Jeremiah *not to pray* for the well-being of this people. He told him that even if they fasted and offered their sacrifices he would not listen.

He repeated that in chapter 15:1. He mentioned two of the great intercessors of the Old Testament – Moses and Samuel – two great praying men who often pleaded with God for the people of Israel; and, at those times, the Lord listened.

But in this case he told Jeremiah that he would not listen. The situation had gone beyond that. A judgement was coming. The Babylonian army would arrive. Jerusalem would fall. The temple would be destroyed. The people would be carried away into exile.

All that was going to happen because, even though Jeremiah was praying, the people were not. They were not repentant. They were not confessing their sins. They were not turning from their evil ways. And so they would be judged.

Jeremiah's prayer, however, was not lost. The Lord heard his prayer for the small but faithful remnant, for the true Israel, for the Old Testament and New Testament church.

The Lord preserved them through the exile and after 70 years brought them back to their own land.

And today? Does the Lord listen to our prayers – to yours and mine? He certainly does.

The people of Israel had some great mediators – Job, Moses, Samuel, Daniel.

But we have the Lord Jesus Christ – the Mediator of a New Covenant (Hebrews 9:15), a better covenant.

Jesus has paid for all our sins with his precious blood, he rose from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and he is there today as a permanent priest. "Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

God the Father will always listen to your prayers because they go through Jesus Christ who laid down his life for his people. God is with you in and through his Son. This is the basis for confident prayer.

Jeremiah expressed it long ago:

"You are among us O Lord,  
and we bear your name;  
Do not forsake us."

Amen.