

## STANDING AT THE CROSSROADS

Pastors David and Joyce Reed

### Jeremiah 6:16

This is what the Lord says, “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.” But you said, “We will not walk in it.”

### (Joyce) Introduction

If you were to read the first eleven chapters of Jeremiah, you would discover that they are about Israel’s rejection of God’s covenant. The Israelites have strayed from their Jewish heritage to walk the pathways of other gods. In the final verses of chapter 5 God is lamenting about men full of lies & deceit, the rich & powerful who have grown fat & sleek, evil deeds that have no limit, no one is pleading the case of the fatherless or defending the rights of the poor. Even the prophets prophesy lies and the priests rule by their own authority . . . and God sends his prophet Jeremiah with this message in Jeremiah 6:16: *“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.”*

Jeremiah is calling his generation back to the wisdom of prior generations, to be faithful to God’s will. He is telling them that they are at a critical juncture of their faith. They can make choices that will take their journey closer to God, or make choices that will continue to take them further away. He pleads with them to walk the ancient paths of God.

And the people respond by saying, “We will not walk in it.”

It is a choice that will haunt the Israelites for decades to come. They stray away from God’s mission for their lives and begin to wander a shadow journey full of pain and heartache. A journey that is not fully redeemed until the coming of Jesus many centuries later.

Like the Israelites, you and I also come to crossroads in our lives. An intersection of choices that can bring us closer to God, or can lead us farther away. Today, for you and me, what does it mean to STAND at the crossroads?

**(David) STAND: what does it mean to stand at the crossroads today?**

First we must consider that this whole passage has an underlying sense of movement. A journey God gave to Israel and one that Israel has moved away from. The nation of Israel had been given a mission. They were a mission people. They were to be trusting, faithful and obedient and through them God would bring the Messiah to the world. Every errant step away from that mission was a step away from God. I have heard Pastor Brower say a few times that The almighty God, the creator of the universe is limited by our stubbornness...yet when we go astray God mercifully and with grace calls us back to walking with Him in the middle of his journey so the mission can move forward.

Have you ever heard a commanding officer give the order to stand down? It is an order to stop what you doing or are about to do. It is given in tense situations, often when someone is about to be harmed or make a wrong decision That's what Jeremiah is giving to Israel; the order to stand down, to stop what they are doing because it is taking them into harm.

It is interesting to note that Jeremiah does not remind them of their failure to keep the covenant but of their failure to defend the fatherless and the poor...in ancient terms--and in modern times—the fatherless & the poor were and are the powerless who most often experienced injustice. Jeremiah was saying that Israel had become no different than their oppressors.

Israel and each person in this room faces the same question...what does it mean to stand at the crossroads? Romans 1:25 describes Israel as having “exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the creator – who is forever [eternally] praised”. It is much the same today as it was for Israel. God is lamenting about a people who have decided to believe and live the lies the world is dishing out, people who have turned away from truth to trust in themselves, in wealth and their own power...having turned away from God's mission to bring the Messiah into this world by giving drink to the thirsty, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and the imprisoned, caring for the orphan and the widow...This is our crossroads.

Jeremiah calls...stand down! Stop. Look around

**(Joyce) LOOK: we need to take time to observe and assess where we will go.**

The next step we are asked to consider as we stand at the crossroads is to LOOK. In other words, we need to take time to observe and assess where we will go. We need to take time to meditate on Scripture, to pray, to listen for God's response, to seek counsel from trusted Christian friends, to journal, to be quiet, to wait. We need to review how God has taken time to speak to us in the past. God does not work in a vacuum. His fingerprints are all over our lives. If you were to take a serious look at how God has moved, guided, and led you since the day you were born, you should see patterns emerge. Journey patterns. Missions opportunities. Some missions that led to encounters with the world, and others that led to personal spiritual growth.

Everyone's life has several journey themes. Some of mine are writing, missions, and working with women in small groups. Some of these I've been aware of since I was a child, others emerged as I grew older. But God is a part of all of them, and all of them have also involved choices . . . crossroads. Places where I had to Stand and Look.

Looking always involves a space of waiting. And our generation is not good at waiting. As my husband once said, "We want our faith on microwave time. In an instant. 60 seconds and it's done." We want God to drop answers in our laps. Most of us don't want to dig in Scripture, pray without ceasing, practice the discipline of fasting, or even take the time to seek out trusted Christian counsel. We throw up a prayer request to God, agonize a couple hours, maybe days, and then, instead of waiting for God's voice, we often choose what we think is best and go down that path. And since it's the wrong path, we arrive at another crossroads pretty fast.

So Jeremiah cautions us to LOOK.

Where do you need to stop and look in your life?

**(David) Next Jeremiah says to ASK.**

**ASK: for the ancient paths . . . which literally means “eternal”: to seek that which is eternal, God’s way; not your way.** For the Israelites this would be returning to the faith of their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To study and meditate on the law of Moses which they have rejected.

In Jeremiah 18:15 God says this: *“My people have forgotten me; they burn incense to worthless idols, which made them stumble in their ways and in the ancient paths. They made them walk in bypaths and on roads not built up.”* God was calling the Israelites away from lifeless idol worship and into living and eternal worship, from the lifestyle that led them away from relationship with him to one that instead was teeming with life and purpose.

Asking for the ancient paths has everything to do with assessing the affections of our hearts...considering desire. What do we desire? Do we desire what God desires? Do we place our hope in the trust of money and materials? Do we become powerful in life when we are financially secure or when we are we rich in love and mercy and grace? Are we moving with God in his mission for this world?

What are the idols God calls you and me to walk away from today? God IS calling you to walk his ancient path, will you choose to walk with him?

Gustavo was a drunken father who had led his family to a life that was circling the drain. One day he heard the Good News of Jesus. He stopped, looked around, asked for life and to be a part of eternity, then boldly changed the direction of his life and that of his family. Today he serves the Lord with all his might. Gemenis, his daughter, came to Jesus seeing what had happened to her father. She grew in her faith and casually took a few classes at our Bible institute. Through those classes and combined with her experience at church she heard God’s call to a special journey to grow in the knowledge of her Lord and serve him in ministry. Today she is studying full time at a seminary in Oaxaca, Mexico. If you would have asked her a few years ago where her life was headed she would have had a very different answer but she Stopped, Looked, Asked, and Moved

**(Joyce) Jeremiah concludes by saying that we must WALK to FIND REST: To find rest for our souls, we must move.**

We are instructed to WALK. We cannot stand still. There is a need for action. We must walk the ancient path, the eternal footsteps of faithfulness with God if we hope to find soulful rest.

What would it mean to have soul rest? For the Hebrew, the soul consists of 3 parts: nefesh, ruach, and neshama which translate to breath, wind and rest. When the Hebrew person imagines God breathing life into the first human being as God did with Adam, it can be compared to a glassblower forming a vessel. The breath leaves the lips, travels as a wind, and finally comes to rest in the vessel. Soulful rest, therefore, is the breath of God residing in us . . . human beings created in the image of God. It is recognizing, acknowledging that when I walk God's path for my life, then I am respecting God's breath in me. Let me explain this way . . .

Have you ever been physically and mentally exhausted, yet at the same time have total soul rest? When I was a senior in high school, I participated in a mission trip to the Appalachia Mountains of West Virginia. Our team was matched up with a destitute African American woman. We nailed a new roof on her house. The first time I'd ever been on a roof! We also re-built her back porch. At the end of the week, this tiny black woman danced a jig on that porch. There was a smile a mile-wide on her face. And in that moment, I felt soul-rest. The breath of God resting in me. God's servant carrying out her mission here on earth. I was physically and mentally exhausted from all the strenuous work of that week. But my soul was overflowing with grace and peace to see this woman's life transformed.

If you were to talk to members of mission groups that visited La Paz, I'm sure they would have similar stories. If you've part of a mission encounter, maybe you can also identify with this idea of soul rest. Moments of mission where despite your exhaustion from physical labor, your exhaustion from cultural encounters, your exhaustion from anxiety over the unknown . . . you also discovered soul rest.

Moments of connecting with brothers and sisters in Christ. Moments of knowing that you were resting in the center of God's will as you carried out God's Kingdom Mission.

**(David) Conclusion: Stand...Look...Ask...Walk**

**Stop in your tracks...Look at the truth about your living...Desire the eternal ways of God...Move into a life journey in God's mission**

Thirty-one years ago, several people from FBC Scottsdale, AZ met me at a crossroads in my life. And they asked me to Stop, to Look, to Ask God for his direction, and then to Move ahead in faith. That crossroads led me to seminary where Joyce and I crossed paths and together we started a church in Alaska, God sent us on another road to Massachusetts, and then to another crossroads that led to Mexico and into each of your lives.

I have interacted with many of you as God has led you to personal crossroads. . .places where you had to chose if you were going to move with God's mission. I watched and prayed for many of you, and I wondered...where will God take your efforts? And as we united together in this community called Crossroads Christian Fellowship, I wondered: Where will God take **our** efforts?

Today we are standing at the crossroads, on the ancient paths of God. Joyce and I hope to join our voices with Jeremiah's today with the challenge for each person and for this church to stop, look, chose God's ways, and join God's mission.

Like Jeremiah, our desire and hope for each one of you, and for our church, is that as you stand at the various crossroads of your life, that you will desire to pursue God's mission for you life . . . no matter what that means, and no matter where it takes you.

Let's pray.