***Jeremiah 13:15-27 Hear and give ear: Do not be proud, For the Lord has spoken. 16Give glory to the Lord your God Before He causes darkness, And before your feet stumble On the dark mountains, And while you are looking for light, He turns it into the shadow of death And makes it dense darkness. 17But if you will not hear it, My soul will weep in secret for your pride; My eyes will weep bitterly And run down with tears, Because the Lord’s flock has been taken captive. 18Say to the king and to the queen mother, “Humble yourselves; Sit down, For your rule shall collapse, the crown of your glory.” 19The cities of the South shall be shut up, And no one shall open them; Judah shall be carried away captive, all of it; It shall be wholly carried away captive. 20Lift up your eyes and see Those who come from the north. Where is the flock that was given to you, Your beautiful sheep? 21What will you say when He punishes you? For you have taught them To be chieftains, to be head over you. Will not pangs seize you, Like a woman in labor? 22And if you say in your heart, “Why have these things come upon me?” For the greatness of your iniquity Your skirts have been uncovered, Your heels made bare. 23Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil. 24“Therefore I will scatter them like stubble That passes away by the wind of the wilderness. 25This is your lot, The portion of your measures from Me,” says the Lord, “Because you have forgotten Me And trusted in falsehood.  
26Therefore I will uncover your skirts over your face, That your shame may appear. 27I have seen your adulteries And your lustful neighings, The lewdness of your harlotry, Your abominations on the hills in the fields. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! Will you still not be made clean?”***

We continue with Jeremiah tonight, as he prophesies the coming of the captivity of Judah. The people continue to be called from their wickedness and evil, but refuse to turn. The winds of war blow ever closer. God has seen that the people will not turn and completely repent until things grow utterly hopeless. The pain has not yet grown great enough that the people are willing to endure the pain of changing their ways. There’s an old saying – In order for things to change, the pain of the current situation must become greater than the pain of change before people change. It’s a truth as old as time.

Verses 15-17 *Hear and give ear: Do not be proud, For the Lord has spoken. 16Give glory to the Lord your God Before He causes darkness, And before your feet stumble On the dark mountains, And while you are looking for light, He turns it into the shadow of death And makes it dense darkness. 17But if you will not hear it, My soul will weep in secret for your pride; My eyes will weep bitterly And run down with tears, Because the Lord’s flock has been taken captive.* Hear and give ear – Jeremiah is giving good counsel. If they will hear, things can yet be averted. But, just like people today, so many must learn the hard way, ignoring the good counsel offered by parents, grandparents, and the wise all around. Pride is surely one of the sins that God is bringing judgement upon the people for, lust being the other. 1 John 2:16 says *For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.* We must not pursue the world, but rather give glory to the Lord our God, as our scripture says. Humbly confessing our sins, submitting to God, serving Him as He calls, before the darkness, before the affliction and judgement comes. As we so often see, Light is the symbol in the Bible for joy, peace, and abundance. Light represents the Father. Darkness is the symbol for judgement and calamity. Of course, we know that, when times turn bad, our world doesn’t seem as hopeful and light. We have only to look around today to understand. The time to repent, as Jeremiah points out, is before the trouble, before feet stumble, and people are forced to flee in terror. We must repent before we bring God’s judgement upon ourselves. While the people of Judah look for light and relief, God will be allowing calamities to fall. Jeremiah compares this to the shadow of death. Then Jeremiah states the obvious – obvious then and obvious now – You will not hear – in other words, the people will not hear, will not submit, and will not obey. Their rebellion will continue. Their haughtiness and pride will continue to take top place. Jeremiah will weep for the flock. He will grieve for the folly of his people. All good pastors weep. Seeing their beloved making decisions that do not glorify God tears at the heart of a pastor. But, it’s not just the pastors that grieve for a flock going astray, allowing the world to hold more control than God. The true believer, the true follower of God, weeps as well.

Verse 18 *Say to the king and to the queen mother, “Humble yourselves; Sit down, For your rule shall collapse, the crown of your glory.”* The king and the queen at the time Jeremiah is speaking is Jehoiachin and his mother. They will be carried away to Babylon. We see this in Jeremiah 22:26 and 2 Kings 24:12. Jeremiah calls for them to humble themselves in true repentance and give glory to God. Set the example as Godly leaders for the nation. Sit down and consider what the prophecy says is coming. The end of your kingship and rule is drawing near. In captivity, the king and the queen will not be honored. Bless God and His Kingdom instead, which will never fail or falter.

Verse 19-21 *The cities of the South shall be shut up, And no one shall open them; Judah shall be carried away captive, all of it; It shall be wholly carried away captive. 20Lift up your eyes and see Those who come from the north. Where is the flock that was given to you, Your beautiful sheep? 21What will you say when He punishes you? For you have taught them To be chieftains, to be head over you. Will not pangs seize you, Like a woman in labor?* The cities in the south of Judah will be besieged. Many believe that this also refers to the cities of Egypt failing to defend Judah against Nebuchadnezzar. Of course, Judah had made alliances with Egypt and we know that Egypt reneged on these agreements, for fear of Babylon. Jeremiah returns to prophesying as though the events were happening at that very moment, though we know it is all still a few years away. The enemy in Jermiah’s mind is so close that, if the people lift their eyes, they will see them. Jeremiah asks the leaders of Judah – what will you answer when God inquires, “Where is the flock I entrusted to your care?” Of course, there will be no answer other than that the king and the priests, the shepherds charged to care for Judah, have utterly failed the people and God. The kings and the priests have drawn the Chaldeans and the Babylonians to their door. They have taught them to be captains. Judah sought alliances with other countries rather than seeking God. Recall with me that Ahaz became the vassal of the Assyrians in 2 Kings 16. Hezekiah gave the Babylonian ambassadors a tour of his palace and treasuries in 2 Kings 20 about 115 years before Babylon conquers Judah. They sought to endear themselves to the enemy rather than trusting in God who brought them into the land they now live. Now, their wickedness and rebellion have put them outside of God’s providential protection. They have lost the flock God entrusted to them through their own failure to teach the people to follow God properly.

Verse 22 *And if you say in your heart, “Why have these things come upon me?” For the greatness of your iniquity Your skirts have been uncovered, Your heels made bare.* Just as is true now, hypocrites will not confess their own failures. They rarely admit their own unrighteousness. They fail to acknowledge God’s righteousness. Instead, they ask here – why has this happened to me? In other words, “God why have You allowed this?” God doesn’t hesitate in His answer, “For the greatness of your iniquity”. It is by your sin that this is happening. In ancient times, conquerors would force the conquered to strip naked, take off shoes, and be paraded in front of the conquering people, to shame and humiliate the conquered and give the conquering a sense of superiority. This is exactly what will come when Judah is led into captivity.

Verse 23 *Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil.* In the Chaldean language, Ethiopian is denoted as a person of the Cushi area, a place in the southern part of Ethiopia, Africa. The people there are known for their very deep, black skin tone. Can a leopard change it’s spots? That’s a saying we still use today. The answer is that it is highly improbable. Likewise, someone accustomed to doing evil and sinning will not, by anyway other than the power of the Holy Spirit and the Grace of Almighty God, change. It is only through God’s grace that we change inwardly from the sinner we are.

Verse 24-25 *Therefore I will scatter them like stubble That passes away by the wind of the wilderness.25This is your lot, The portion of your measures from Me,” says the Lord, “Because you have forgotten Me And trusted in falsehood.* God will scatter the people of Judah. Some will go into captivity, others will flee to Egypt and places in Africa. He will disperse them. They will be as chaff, as stubble on a strong wind, scattered completely with no permanent resting places or houses in many cases. Blown along by every stray wind. God is allowing this. It is His portion from His hand to His people because they forgot Him and trusted in the falsehoods and lies of their own desperately wicked hearts. Of course, we remember that this is in keeping with the blessing for obedience or cursing for disobedience that Moses delivered back in Deuteronomy 28 – probably about 900-1000 years prior. When they obeyed, they were blessed. When they disobeyed, they have now been cursed.

Verses 26-27 *Therefore I will uncover your skirts over your face, That your shame may appear. 27I have seen your adulteries And your lustful neighings, The lewdness of your harlotry, Your abominations on the hills in the fields. Woe to you, O Jerusalem! Will you still not be made clean?”* We return to the humiliation, the shame and the disgrace that Judah will endure because of their harlotry. Adulteries or their idolatrous worship of false gods. They have lustfully pursued these false gods, neighing like horses in heat. They have behaved lewdly, worshipping idols on the hills and in the fields. Everywhere is an altar to a false god. Woe to you, O Jerusalem – miserable are you, and many miseries are yet to come. Bitter fruit is coming as a result of your sin. Then Jeremiah asks – *will you still not be made clean*? After all of this, will you still not turn from your sin and seek God. The Hebrew held the idea of an emphatic begging from Jeremiah to the people. He is desperate and still they will not hear.

And so we leave Jeremiah tonight, desperately begging his people to turn and repent, to bring true reform. Likewise, we find ourselves speaking to so many that will not hear today. So many now embrace the sin of the nation and, though not partaking in the sins themselves perhaps, they condone the sin they see all around them. Romans 1 tells us that condoning is sin as well. We must continue to stand strong, rooted in the Bible, loving the sinner, while hating the sin, refusing to condone and accept what we know God has called wrong. The winds of war blow ever closer to Judah, judgement is coming. Likewise, we see judgement in our own nation. May we cry out to God that He will move in a mighty way that our nation might repent and turn back. May we do so before it is everlasting too late.