

THE PROBLEM OF THE IMPOSSIBLE

Jeremiah 13:22-14:22

Introduction: We see in this section of Jeremiah the description of the difficulty that man faces in his quest for significance. We see here the description of man as he is when God is left out of their life. They are religious but they do not have a relationship with God. We saw in our last study that God wants to be close to His people. Look again at **Jeremiah 13:11 (KJV)** For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, **so have I caused to cleave unto me** the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the LORD; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear. God has constantly sought to develop a relationship with His creation. He has sought man as in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve when he called out to Adam, “where art thou?” (**Genesis 3:9**). In fact God has stated in **Jeremiah 29:13 (KJV)** And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart. The tragedy with man though, is that as described in **Romans 3:11 (KJV)** There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. This is the condition God is describing in **Jeremiah 13:22**. Man’s character is just as the leopard and the black man. The nature of man is contrary to the nature of God and the two do not mesh without a mediator. Someone to be a go-between with God and man. The good news is that God has provided that in the Lord Jesus Christ.

- 1. Unchangeable character, Jeremiah 13:22.** An Ethiopian was a black man. We wonder how many Ethiopians the people of Israel would see. Well there was one who served in the king’s palace. Jeremiah became very familiar with him. Look at **Jeremiah 38:7-9 (KJV)** ⁷ Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, one of the eunuchs which was in the king’s house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon; the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin; ⁸ Ebedmelech went forth out of the king’s house, and spake to the king, saying, ⁹ My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is like to die for hunger in the place where he is: for *there is no more bread in the city*. Here was an Ethiopian who not only served in the king’s house but demonstrated a great deal of compassion toward Jeremiah when he had been put in the pit dungeon which we described last week. The people were very familiar with the black man. The leopard was also a familiar creature in the Jordan area according to the historians. What God is saying is important. God is not using these two illustrations to demean the black man or to exalt the leopard. God is using these as illustrations of the condition of man. His character is as dark as the black man’s skin and as impossible to change by himself just as the leopard cannot change his spots. They are indelible marks that are very visible and are provided as an illustration of the condition of man. Just as the black man cannot change the complexion of his skin, so man cannot, of himself,

change the nature of his character. The Bible is very clear in its description of man. **Jeremiah 17:9 (KJV)** *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?* The problem with man is that he loves to satisfy his fleshly desires rather than to turn to God and allow Him to change the heart so his desires can be channeled to the initial purpose, and that is to glorify God.

One of the things we dare not miss is that God has done something for man that he cannot do himself. God has shown His righteousness in Jesus Christ to man and given man the choice to decide if he wants the imputed righteousness that God wants to give to any man, woman, boy or girl who will receive Jesus Christ as their personal saviour and allow God to impute (that is apply to) His righteousness. Man's righteousness is described in **Isaiah 64:6 (KJV)** *But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.* God holds out the offer, all we need to do is accept it. Before that can take place though is for man to admit **he cannot do what is necessary to please God without God**. Man's condition is an impossible task for man. Reform is not enough, there needs to be a character change and only God, who made man, can effect that change. It is called the "new birth" and comes at the point of acceptance of Jesus Christ for salvation. The only thing that can change the faulty character of man is a relationship with the creator.

- 2. Uncertain future, Jeremiah 13:24-27.** This is the theme that has been running throughout the book of Jeremiah. Israel's idolatry has run thin the patience of God and it is time for discipline. God is going to use the Babylonian army and Nebuchadnezzar to be his rod of discipline. God made an interesting statement in **Isaiah 10:5 (KJV)** *O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation.* On three occasions God called Babylon "my servant." **Jeremiah 25:9 (KJV)** *Behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations.* **Jeremiah 27:6-7 (KJV)** ⁶ *And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him.* ⁷ *And all nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the very time of his land come: and then many nations and great kings shall serve themselves of him.* **Jeremiah 43:10 (KJV)** *And say unto them, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will set his throne upon these stones that I have hid; and he shall spread his royal pavilion over them.* God used the nation of Babylon as His "rod" of discipline. It was not a pretty picture for Israel. Suddenly their future was definitely uncertain.

Can I ask you how certain your future is? We must realize that without Christ the future is certainly not bright. It is filled with the wrath of God if you do not know the grace of God demonstrated in Jesus Christ.

- 3. Unbearable circumstances, Jeremiah 14:1-5.** The picture here is not very pretty either. The word “dearth” in **Jeremiah 14:1** has the idea of not having anything. It means “an inadequate supply.” It will be a shortage of all things needed. As you work your way through the passage, **verses 1-5**, you get a real bleak picture. Look at **Jeremiah 14:3 (KJV)** *And their nobles have sent their little ones to the waters: they came to the pits, and found no water; they returned with their vessels empty; they were ashamed and confounded, and covered their heads.* The lack of water is a devastating thing. The experts suggest that a person cannot survive longer than 3 or 4 days without water. The people sent their children for water and there was none. Note that they returned with “*their vessels empty.*” Even the animal kingdom is having a difficult time. Listen to me folks. There is a principle in the New Testament about water. We know from the New Testament the word of God is compared to water (**Ephesians 5:26**). Jesus said He was the source of “*living water*” when in discussion with the woman of Samaria (**John 4:10**). Let me ask you something this morning. Would your spiritual life be described as vibrant and well-watered with the word of God? There might be a dearth of the word of God in your life and that will cause difficulties in your life if you are not careful. We all need water to survive physically and also need water (the word of God) to survive spiritually. The passage which mentions the “washing of water by the word” is important. **Ephesians 5:26 (KJV)** *That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.* You and I need to have water to survive spiritually. There needs to be a drinking but also a washing. Listen to **John 13:14 (KJV)** *If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet.* The future without God and His word have some very bad prospects. Hell is described as a place where one wants water and cannot get it.
- 4. Unrestricted hope, Jeremiah 14:7-9.** Jeremiah not starts his intercession for the people of Judah. He is pleading with God to not leave them. He desires that God be in their midst. Look at **Jeremiah 14:9 (KJV)** *Why shouldest thou be as a man astonied, as a mighty man that cannot save? yet thou, O LORD, art in the midst of us, and we are called by thy name; leave us not.* Some expositors compare this plea with that which Moses made when God decided the people of Israel were a “stiffnecked” people and was going to destroy them and make a new nation from Moses (**Exodus 32:7-12**). Moses prayed for the people and told God **Exodus 32:11-12 (KJV)** ¹¹ *And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand?* ¹² **Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say,** For mischief did he

bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Jeremiah is asking God to spare the people. Note **Jeremiah 14:7 (KJV)** O LORD, though our iniquities testify against us, **do thou it for thy name's sake:** for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against thee. The hope of Israel was in the Lord. Jeremiah is appealing to the nature of God and His reputation. One of the things we need not worry about is that God's reputation is only marred by the nature and conduct of man. God does not worry about what man thinks about the way he deals with His people. God is always just and merciful. Yet we need to remember that God cannot/will not allow sin in His presence. One can only come before God with righteousness and that is supplied by His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Man in himself has a future that is not pleasant, yet God has made provision for man to change and allow him into the presence of God.

- 5. Uncharacteristic problem, Jeremiah 14:10-12.** This section recalls one of the unusual characteristics of Jeremiah. It is the fact that God tells Jeremiah not to pray for this people. We are not going to spend much time here because we have broached this subject before. It is a stark reminder though that God gets disgusted with His people. It would be a terrible place to be when God says "Pray not" for this people. Things must be terribly bad for God to say that. One of the dangers we face is living a carnal lifestyle where we would fall out of favor with God.
- 6. Undeniable deception, Jeremiah 14:13-16.** Here is one of the problems with man. He listens to voices that are not from God and not sent by God. Who are you listening to? The world is full of deception. Yet the deception has to find a receptive ear. The false teachers/preachers would not have an audience if people would seek the truth. The tragedy is our world, and especially those who say they are Christians are described in **2 Timothy 4:3 (KJV)** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. This section is talking about the "prophets" who tell the people what they think the people want to hear. Look at the description in **Jeremiah 14:14 (KJV)** Then the LORD said unto me, **The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not,** neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you **a false vision and divination,** and a **thing of nought,** and the **deceit of their heart.**
- 7. Unbelievable compassion, Jeremiah 14:17-22.** What is significant about this section is that Jeremiah begins to pray for the people and he uses the first person plural "we." He includes himself in the condition of the nation. Look at **Jeremiah 14:20 (KJV)** **We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against thee.** This is similar to what Daniel did in his prayer for the people. Look with me at

Daniel 9:3-9 (KJV) ³ And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: ⁴ And I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments; ⁵ We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from thy precepts and from thy judgments: ⁶ Neither have we hearkened unto thy servants the prophets, which spake in thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. ⁷ O Lord, righteousness *belongeth* unto thee, but unto us confusion of faces, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and unto all Israel, *that are near*, and *that are far off*, through all the countries whither thou hast driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against thee. ⁸ O Lord, to us *belongeth* confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee. ⁹ To the Lord our God *belong* mercies and forgivenesses, though we have rebelled against him. Daniel does not divorce himself (as Jeremiah) from the condition of the people. He considered himself as participant in the things the nation had done.

What is the lesson to be learned here? We must be willing to identify with the people of God which today is the church. That does not mean we are all as sinful and carnal as the next person. It means we are in this together. Did it ever occur why there are so many “one another” passages in the Bible? Because we are to “love one another.” When we do that then we have compassion and care for the other people in the church.