

Where to Go? What to Do?

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking guidance from God through prayer and waiting on the Lord, and surrendering our will to His leading.

Duration: 27:10

Scripture: Jeremiah 42:1-3, Jeremiah 42:5-7, Jeremiah 42:11, Jeremiah 42:19-20, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Direction"

Description

In this sermon, the pastor emphasizes the importance of preaching the whole counsel of God, rather than catering to what people want to hear. He uses the example of Jeremiah, who was called by God to deliver both favorable and unfavorable messages to the people. The pastor highlights the need to be led by the Spirit and to wait on the Lord for guidance. He also mentions the story of Jewish people who sought Jeremiah's advice on what to do after being defeated, showing their spiritual inclination.

Transcript

Jeremiah was the prophet. By the way, anyone know what they called him? What prophet was he? The weeping prophet. And he wept because he was called to prophesy to the southern kingdom, which had turned away from God.

The priests were corrupt, the prophets were corrupt, and he was telling them the word of the Lord, which was a word they didn't want to receive. But it was a word of mercy, like all of God's words are. If you turn to me and you get right vertically, then I will spare you.

Otherwise, I am bringing Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian army, and they are gonna knock this city down. And your vaunted temple, it's all coming down. You boast in your religion, you boast in Solomon's temple, which had been built hundreds of years earlier, but it's all coming down.

It's all coming down. Won't you turn? But the people wouldn't turn. The people persecuted him.

He started, I believe, prophesying under a great king named Josiah, but the people who followed Josiah, Jehoiakim, Jehoiakim, and then finally Zedekiah, who was the last king before Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to the land. There were a lot of adventures and drama in the whole thing, but finally the Babylonians came in and they gave a beat down to the Jews, just like God had promised. And they had locked him in a cistern, they had thrown him in a prison.

In fact, they arrested him at times for speaking the word of the Lord, and there were other prophets who were false prophets telling the king, do not believe what Jeremiah says, for thus sayeth the Lord, you will not go down, you will go up. You will be victorious. Nebuchadnezzar will never come here.

And Jeremiah said, well, we'll see in the end who's the real prophet. Because being a true prophet doesn't mean you prophesy good things or bad things, it's you prophesy true things. Saying positive things or judgment things doesn't make it right or wrong, it's whether God has sent you.

Now the beat down has come, Jerusalem has been messed up, and armies been defeated, and now the Babylonian empire has taken the key leaders, the key young men, and shipped them out, just like the Assyrians had done into the northern kingdom when they conquered them 150 years earlier or so. So now the Jews have been sent all over the place because they believed in divide and conquer. If we get rid of the rascals and we get rid of the young men of promise and send them throughout our Babylonian empire, they won't be here to foment trouble because these Jews are always causing trouble.

Some of the army and generals escaped into the countryside, like at the end of the Civil War when some of the southern generals and leaders didn't lay down their arms when General Lee surrendered in Virginia, but they fled, and a lot of them ended up in Texas, in fact. They were like, let's see what will happen. So now you got Israeli generals and leaders out in the land, the Babylonians have massacred everybody, sent everybody back but left, a lot of Jews left, but the land is desolate.

The Jerusalem is no more. The temple is down. Everything's shut.

These generals know, especially one main one, they know that they're in a bad spot in the land because they are under the heel, as it were, of Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. It's still their land, it's Israel, but it's no longer the Israel they grew up in, and their position means nothing. They're on the run.

They're like criminals. God has vindicated Jeremiah, and Nebuchadnezzar gives the order to his leaders, you go and get him out of jail because we heard about his prophecies. He's the man.

You just give him whatever he wants and let him live in the land. You see, when you serve God, you'll always have the last word. God will always repay you in the end, even if the end is in heaven.

There always will be, God will never fail to bless those who trust him. This odd story, which takes up a lot of verses, but I'm gonna read them all because not one out of 100 of you know this story because it's an obscure story in Jeremiah, but it has a very important truth for all of us. Now, these people who are on the run, they come to Jeremiah with the strangest request.

They come to Jeremiah, and they're Jewish. They've been defeated, but they escaped, and now they wanna know what to do, where to go. What should we do? Instead of just figuring it out on their own, they show some spiritual inclination by coming to Jeremiah, and here comes the story, okay? I'll speed read some of it so that we don't take all night.

Then all the army officers, including Johanan, that's the key guy, son of Koreah, and Jezeiah, son of Hosea, and all the people from the least to the greatest approached Jeremiah the prophet and said to him, please hear our petition and pray to the Lord your God for this entire remnant. For as you now see, though we were once many, now only a few are left. Pray that the Lord your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do.

Let's just stop there for a second. What he came to them with was a request. He came to Jeremiah.

Now, back in that day, if you wanted to get a word from the Lord to know what to do, you went to a prophet. We don't do that today. We live in the New Testament, and every one of us can be led by the Spirit of God.

We learn that from the Gospels and the Book of Acts and the Epistles. We don't go to a prophet. Can somebody get a word of direction from the Holy Spirit to you? Yes, the Bible indicates that in the New Testament, and there's no verse anywhere in the New Testament that God would stop doing that, although it's abused by many people.

They come to Jeremiah, and they ask, what are they asking? Not a moral question. Should we steal or not steal? Should we lie or not lie? Should we kill or not kill? No, it's not a moral question, because you never ask the Lord on any moral question. The Bible gives us the moral questions, the answers to all the moral questions.

You never pray, should I slander that person? Should I hate my mother-in-law? Should I do whatever? You don't ask that. That's tempting God. God gets grieved by that, because he's given us his word on a moral question.

But this is not a moral question. This is another question. Like, for example, my dear brother and his wife.

Do we or do we not adopt from Rwanda? Is it a sin if you adopt from Rwanda? Certainly not. Is it a sin if you don't adopt from Rwanda? It is certainly not. Does God have a plan for my brother and his wife? He certainly does.

Well, then how do you know what that plan is? You inquire of the Lord, and you say, God, it's not a moral question, I don't know what to do. Should I or shouldn't we? These are momentous questions. They're responsible for that boy as long as he lives.

That's momentous. Should they just do it based on, what, a computer printout, their own IQs? Of course not. God has a plan.

Now, for people who don't believe that God leads and guides, that's all they're left with, their brain power and figuring out things and being clever. But that's not the Christianity of the New Testament. Notice where we should go, what we should do.

I've heard you, replied Jeremiah the prophet. I'll certainly pray to the Lord, your God, as you have requested. I will tell you everything the Lord says and will keep nothing back from you.

See, the ministry of a prophet was, you never held back anything the Lord said. You didn't ever go by what people wanna hear. Right, pastor, the leaders that are here at that Temple Texas church? A lot of the church growth is based on, what do people wanna hear? We're gonna give it to them.

That's the last thing the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches, give them the whole counsel of God. Whatever God says, that's what you give them because you're not smarter than God.

How many are with me? Say amen. So, he says, everything God says, I'll hold nothing back from you. Then they said to Jeremiah, may the Lord be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act in accordance with everything the Lord, your God, sends you to tell us, whether it is favorable or unfavorable.

We will obey the Lord, our God, to whom we are sending you, so that it will go well with us, for we will obey the Lord, our God. Now, that's a key to being led by God. This little talk is very brief because when the verses end, I end.

Where do I go, what do I do? You ever face that in life? Where do I go? And I believe the Lord has laid this on my heart because there's some people here, you need to know, where do I go and what do I do? And you can't find it in the Bible. Because the Bible doesn't have the word Rwanda in it. The Bible doesn't say, yes, adopt a child from Rwanda or from Ethiopia.

Or go to Haiti and start a work like L.C. Larrison. The Bible has no verses like that. But the Holy Spirit is alive, he's not dead.

A lot of churches think he is dead, but he is not dead. He is alive. Because God is alive, and God's only agent on planet Earth is the Holy Spirit.

The Father sent the Son, the Son sent the Spirit. Jesus is not here, only through the Holy Spirit he is. He's seated at the right hand of the Father.

So the only experience anybody can have of God is through the Holy Spirit. No, I read the Bible. No, you won't even understand the Bible unless the Holy Spirit teaches you the Bible or you'll become a Pharisee because the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible and he's the only one who can teach us the Bible.

Christianity is hopeless without the Holy Ghost. It's hopeless. And that's why Christianity is in decline in America today because there's been a turning away, not from the Son, but from the Holy Spirit.

We want control and we're afraid of him. One of the keys to getting a word from the Lord is you gotta be open to do whatever God leads you. If you have an agenda, you'll never hear from God.

If you have an agenda, you're not gonna hear from God, usually, because you have to come with an open heart and a surrendered will. You can't say, Lord, lead me, but I know what I'm gonna do. Lord, show me your plan, but here's what I'm deciding next week.

God, what about this relationship? I'll never let him go, no matter what you say, God. You'll never be led by the Lord. How many follow that, right? In other words, two people can't be in charge.

Either the Lord is in charge or I'm in charge. Either the Lord's in charge of the Brooklyn Tabernacle or we're in charge of the Brooklyn Tabernacle. God, have mercy on us.

Either the Holy Spirit's gonna lead the church in Temple, Texas and make it even a greater blessing, or they're gonna run it by man's wisdom and man's understanding, then they're in a heap of trouble, no matter how many they're running. It's not a Christian church. A Christian church is a church built according to the plan of the New Testament, which is the word of God, where they were led by the Spirit of God.

So, 10 days later, the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. Why didn't it come in one hour? Why didn't it come in 10 hours? I mean, he's a prophet. Took 10 days.

What does that tell us? It tells us that when you wanna hear something from God, it doesn't come instantaneously. He was a prophet, Jeremiah, but it took time to wait, to listen, to wait on the Lord, and you can't force God to answer when you want. You have to wait.

That's why in prayer meetings, brothers and sisters, listen to me. The more mature saints here will tell you, it's good to pray, it's good to talk, it's good to worship, but you have to learn to wait on the Lord. If you're talking, how will you hear what he's saying? How did Hudson Taylor know to go to China? He didn't get it from a verse.

He got it because the Lord, in some way, spoke a still, small voice in his heart, however you wanna say it. How did Paul and Barnabas go on their first missionary journey? The Spirit said, separate me, Paul and Barnabas, for the work that I've called them to do. Then they went out because they knew the Holy Spirit had sent them out.

No committees were involved, no figuring out personality tests and IQ evaluations. They were going by the Spirit, and whenever you go by the Spirit, the Spirit will back you up. Come on, let's say amen to that.

The Spirit will back you up. So he called together, you know, he had to wait, and he was a prophet. So he called together Johanna, the son of Korea, and all the army officers who were with him, and all the people from the least to the greatest, and he said to them, this is what the Lord, the God of Israel to whom you sent me to present your petition says.

Notice, it's not a moral question, it's where do I go, what do I do? If you stay in this land, in the land of Israel, where you've been defeated, where Nebuchadnezzar is in charge and all the rest, I will build you up and not tear you down. I will plant you and not uproot you, for I am grieved over the disaster I have inflicted on you. Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, i.e. Nebuchadnezzar, whom you now fear.

Do not be afraid of him, declares the Lord, for I am with you and will save you and deliver you from his hands. In other words, in the place that looks illogical and dangerous, in the place that any reasonable person would say, afuera, get out, leave town, hide, because you were once the leaders of the army that was fighting this guy. Any logic would tell you, get out of town.

But the Lord says to Jeremiah, no, stay. I'm gonna be with you in the dangerous position, in the dangerous spot. Do not be afraid and I will show you compassion so that he will have compassion on you.

Notice, God can deal with other people and make them have compassion on us and restore you to your land. However, because of free will, if you say, we will not stay in this land and so disobey the Lord your God, and if you say, no, we will go and live in Egypt where it's safe, quote unquote, where we will not see war or hear the trumpet or be hungry for bread, then hear the word of the Lord, O remnant of Judah. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says.

If you are determined to go to Egypt and you do go and settle there, then the sword you fear will overtake you there and the famine you dread will follow you into Egypt and there you will die. Indeed, all who are determined to go to Egypt to settle there will die by the sword, famine and plague. Not one of them will survive or escape the disaster that I will bring on them.

This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says. As my anger and wrath have been poured out on those who lived in Jerusalem, what just happened, so will my wrath be poured out on you when you go to Egypt. You will be an object of cursing and horror, of condemnation and reproach.

You will never see this place again. So here it is, I'm laying it out. You asked me to seek the Lord, I sought the Lord.

You asked me to wait, I listened. The Lord spoke, so here it is. Stay in the land, I know you think it's dangerous.

I know you got itchy feet, but stay, God will protect you. But if you don't listen to me and you go where God did not tell you to go, you think you'll escape, you think it'll be easier? You're gonna get a beat down in Egypt. I will follow you and judge you there because you didn't listen to me.

Oh, remnant of Judah, the Lord has told you do not go to Egypt, be sure of this. I warn you today that you made a fatal mistake. Wow, these prophets were tough.

Man, to be a prophet. Who would wanna be a prophet? You made a fatal mistake when you sent me to the Lord, your God, and said, pray to the Lord, our God, for us. Tell us everything he says and we will do it.

I have told you today, but you still have not overcome to obey the Lord. He must have read and discerned something, your God, and all that he sent me to tell you. So now, be sure of this.

You will die by the sword, famine, and plague in the place where you want to go to settle. It's a good story, isn't it? Now we're waiting with bated breath to see how this thing works out, right? Okay, here it is. When Jeremiah finished telling the people all the words of the Lord their God, everything the Lord had sent him to tell them, Azariah, son of Hosea, and Johanan, son of Kareah, and all the arrogant men said to Jeremiah, here's what they said, you're lying.

The Lord, our God, has not sent you to say you must not go to Egypt to settle there, but Baruch, some guy, some random guy, son of Nariah, is inciting you against us to hand us over to the Babylonians so that they may kill us or carry us into exile. So Johanan, son of Kareah, and all the army officers and all the people disobeyed the Lord's command to stay in the land of Judah. Instead, instead, Johanan, son of Kareah, and all the army officers led away, they not only went themselves, they got all the people that they could and led all the remnant of Judah who had come back to live in the land of Judah from all the nations where they had been scattered.

They led them to Egypt. Verse seven, so they entered Egypt in disobedience to the Lord and went as far as Tapanes. Now, why in the world would you ask a prophet to pray if you already made up your mind what you're gonna do? But once you go to a prophet and once you say to God, God, show me what to do, you're in a heap of trouble if you don't obey.

There are a lot of decisions we have to make, and I love you all, and I don't wanna see you make wrong decisions, and you know what? We had a double witness from our brother and sister who adopted from Rwanda, because not only did we pray for Rwanda, oh, how they must've prayed. But there's a classic example of where do I go and what do I do? Brothers and sisters, it's incumbent upon us to find out, God, you have a plan for my life. How many believe without a shadow of a doubt God has a plan for your life? Well, part of that plan is where do I go and what do I do? For a pastor, it's what do I preach on Sunday? What do I preach on Tuesday? I prayed that.

I haven't been sleeping three hours a night because of this time change and jet lag from Bangladesh. I got up at one o'clock this morning. I've had a lot of time to sit and wait before the Lord, and I said, God, I wanna give something to the people that will be food, and he, I believe, laid this on my heart.

So it must be that some of you here, you are at a crossroad and you need to hear from God, where do I go and what do I do? But notice that people can ask that and come to an altar, but how are you gonna hear

from God and not get in trouble if you've already made up your mind what you're gonna do? The hard part of being led by God is to surrender your will and say, God, whatever you say, why do they wanna go to Egypt? It's safer in Egypt. It's what your flesh tells you. It's what your mind tells you.

It's logical. Go to Egypt, and sometimes God leads you to do something that seems very, very strange. Sometimes God leads in a way that is just like, how in the world am I gonna do that? And God says, are you asking me to lead you or do you want me to tell you what you wanna hear? How many times have I talked to men and women who are ready to make a bad decision with some unsaved boyfriend or girlfriend? Ask Pastor Burgos, ask Pastor Petri.

We know this like the back of our hand. A woman was crying here on Sunday in the service. She's crying so violently.

If she's here, she knows I love her and I wanna help her. She was crying and crying and crying. So I don't know who she is.

It was her first time in the meeting, I understood. She's crying and crying. So I went over to try to help her.

And what are you crying about? Oh, I'm crying for Cecil, let's say. Cecil, my boyfriend, he's disappeared and he was dealing drugs or whatever the thing was. I'm going, what? Your boyfriend, he's dealing drugs? Nobody knows where he is? That's your boyfriend? Don't cry for Cecil, cry for yourself.

Why are you crying for Cecil? Now do you wanna do God's will? Let it go. Let somebody else take care of Cecil. You gotta get your life together with God.

Come on, somebody say amen. Now that's just, that's simple. But listen, you know what America's filled it with and what the churches are filled with? People who don't seek God and don't wait on God.

You know why? They don't wanna hear what God's plan is because they already got their own agenda. And pastors are feeding that by just giving them cotton candy for sermons. Christianity's about following Jesus.

And where he leads us, we're supposed to follow. And a lot of times, he leads us into places like what? I wanna go another way. I know, but you asked me to lead you.

Now if you'll follow me, I'll be with you because it's safer to be in a dangerous place in the will of God than to go out of the will of God. Come on, and see the whole thing blow up on you. Can we all say amen to that? So I'm done.

Let's close our eyes. This gotta be for somebody. Maybe you're on the precipice of making a decision that's gonna blow up your life possibly.

Or maybe you're hungry and you're searching. You don't know what to do and now God is encouraging you and saying, seek my will and wait before me. He could use a verse to help you.

He could use a word, a song. Listen, he leads people in different ways, but that old song the choir recorded some years ago, lead me, Lord, I will follow. Lead me, Lord, I will go.

What else is there to do but go God's way? No, pastor, this other way is the safe way. Listen, if God leads you a certain way, go that way no matter how it looks and learn to listen. If he doesn't speak right away, he

might wanna be breaking down your self-will and your prejudices and your agendas and your plans, what you want, what you see.

Listen, go low and God will lift you up. But if you try to push your own agenda, oh, it's not good. So they went to Egypt and they all died there.

And the sad part why God put this long story in the Bible is they started out by saying, oh man of God, prophet Jeremiah, seek the Lord for us and give us a word and whatever God says we will do. Fat chance they had already made up their mind what they wanted to do. And now they brought judgment on themselves.

Anybody here at a crossroad, you don't know what to do? You need a word from the Lord. I'm no prophet, but God the Holy Spirit will help you. They that are led by the Spirit of God are the sons and daughters of God.

That's a sign of being a child, you wanna be led. If someone doesn't want God's will to be done in their life, that's very little proof that they were born again Christian they might go to church, might be a assembly of God or Baptist or whatever evangelical, but that's not a New Testament concept. If Christ is Lord, we wanna do what he wants, but how can I do what he wants? Listen, I'm a major fighter against God's will.

When he started dealing with me about going in the ministry, he knows I'm speaking in his presence. I fought him hand and foot. I fought him tooth and nail, I am not.

I didn't go to college and get a degree and play basketball and now I can travel around the world for free on my job with an airline. I didn't do that to what? Go to a church on Atlantic Avenue and talk to 12 people? And I'm not even a competent, I can't do it. Ah, but God's way is the best way.

If you're here today and feel a call on your life, but you don't know how, where, what, when, just come. Come and say just simply, where do I go and what do I do? It's God, where do I go, what do I do? I'm not smart enough to figure that out. Lord, give us grace to surrender our will to you.

A lot of us have the question in our minds tonight, Lord, where do I go and what do I do? You who spoke through the prophet thousands of years ago, you are not dead, you are alive. You still lead, you still guide. You led the apostle Paul on his missionary journeys.

You forbid him to go to certain places. You led him to Macedonia. You led Jesus day by day, step by step, and we ask you, gentle spirit, show us what to do.

And where to go. God, take away all stubbornness and self-will from our hearts. Search us out and break us and melt us so that we're like putty, like clay in your hands.

We want you to shape us, so make us soft, so that you can make us a beautiful vessel of honor for your praise and your honor and your glory. Lord, we lift up our friends from Temple, Texas, that you would lead them all in the way that they should go. That you would bless their church like never before.

Let abundant streams of grace flow in that church. Let them multiply and make new converts. Let them disciple the converts that are made.

Let their prayers and their love reach out like arms across the globe, Lord, and let them touch other parts of the world. Even as this beautiful couple have, by adopting their beautiful son. Bless that boy.

Bless that boy. Bless him. We dedicate him in New York City.

No matter where he's been dedicated, we dedicate that little boy to you, Lord. Raise him up as a man of God. Put your word in his mouth.

Send him to places that no one could ever imagine. We just thank you. We're in your hand.

Wake us up tonight. Give us a dream. Speak whatever way you see fit, Lord.

But you have called us, and we have answered. Lead us, Lord, and we will go. We pray this in Jesus' name, and everyone said, amen.

One last hand clap of praise for the Lord. Fuerte aplauso.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/24/SID24045.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jim-cymbala/where-to-go-what-to-do/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net