

Return From Backsliding

by Kjell Olsen

Kjell Olsen's sermon emphasizes the importance of returning to God, the true source of living water, after experiencing spiritual backsliding.

Duration: 59:02

Scripture: Isaiah 55:1, Jeremiah 2:11-13, Jeremiah 3:12-15, Jeremiah 3:22, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Spiritual Renewal", "Idolatry"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the first evil that God accuses his people of committing. He describes God as the exclusive fountain of living water and laments that his people have forsaken him. The speaker emphasizes that God personally invites people to come to him as the source of true satisfaction and fulfillment. He warns against seeking satisfaction in sinful behaviors such as lust and adultery, which ultimately leave people thirsty and unsatisfied. The sermon is based on Jeremiah 2:11-13, where God expresses his disappointment in his people for forsaking him and turning to broken systems that cannot provide true fulfillment.

Transcript

Turn with me to Jeremiah chapter 2, and we read from verse 11 to 13. My theme verse being verse 13, but let's start with verse 11. Jeremiah chapter 2 verses 11 to 13.

Has a nation changed its gods, which are not gods, but my people have changed their glory for what does not profit? Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid. Be very desolate, says the Lord. For my people have committed two evils.

They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water. My people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

The setting at the time, let's look at the historical context before we apply it to ourselves. Keeping in mind, as we often say from the pulpit, that the Bible is written not for those people then, because they are dead. It's written for us, we who are alive now.

Yes, these words were said to them and their generation, but they were recorded for us in our generation. In verse 12, God calls on the heavens and says, come and witness this astonishing foolishness of my

people. He is speaking here in particular about his people, Judah.

By this time, the people of God had split into two groups, you could say. Ten of the tribes had gone up, I think it was to the north, and they were called Israel. And down south, the remaining two tribes were called Judah, that's where Jerusalem was.

Idolatry was rife, sin was in total control up north. But God speaks here in a very personal, emotional way to his people. He appeals to their heart.

When you get the chance back home, go and read the beginning of the chapter and see how God reminds them of the love affair. It wasn't an affair as an adulterous affair, but it was the first love that God had with his people, and his people had for God, and they were totally satisfied with the Lord their God. But now something has happened which is so awful, which is so terrible, that God says, sun, moon, and stars, galaxies, come and witness this terrible thing.

Be afraid, O heavens, be desolate, feel terrible at this which has happened. My people, God is not referring to the Jebusites, or the Hittites, or the Ammonites, or whateverites, he's not referring to the pagans, he says, my people have committed two evils. Now, if he calls upon the heavens to witness this terrible thing, let it grasp our attention too.

And let's be before God himself, lest even a trace of this horrible thing should be found in our midst. Not just as a congregation, and I speak more as an individual, as a person, lest any of this in verse 13 should be true of you and me. He says, for my people have done two evils, and he says it then, and he puts the two together, because the two cannot be separated.

The one goes with the other, they cannot be untwinned. You could say in other language, they have forsaken me, their God, for other gods. But God says it with language that is so strong, so colorful, which is such a strong metaphor, it is such a strong illustration to these people who lived in desert land, that it was a picture that not one of them could misunderstand.

Firstly, they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water. That is the main charge, that is written right at the top of the charge sheet, which is presented to all the heavens to come and witness. They have turned aside from me, more than that they have forsaken me, and they have done another thing at the same time, they have replaced me with something else.

And we will look just now at the illustration of the water and the cistern, and what it means to the people in the Middle East at that time and even today. But before we get there, take note of this, that sin always leads to more sin. In turning away from me, they have followed after other gods.

And God's illustration here of the leaking cisterns, actually he is referring to idols, terrible, awful, dead idols. And it is a constant theme through the Bible that sin never remains alone, it always grows, it always manages to increase itself. It somehow cannot stay and survive by itself, it must have friends with it.

Whether they be big or whether they be small, there is always a togetherness about sin. A very common way of greeting now in South Africa, if you ask somebody how are you, is to answer back, I am together. Normally I am together, usually it is a radio announcer has used a lot on, well it has now become a common English phrase, I am together, in other words I am fine.

And you will usually find that sin can say the same thing with some honesty, I am together. I am feeling quite relaxed and at home with my pals. The thoughts that I think are going along well with the things that I drink.

The videos I watch are together with the music I listen to. The stories I tell to my friends at school, they are together with the things that I read in the books or magazines that I get a hold of. Occasionally sin has a little squabble here and there, because Lucifer's house doesn't stand completely together, but generally he is alright in that he is together, but there is an occasional squabble.

I think I read yesterday that there was a robbery last week, four robbers robbed a family, and then while they were robbing, the one robber was found raping the 15 year old daughter. The other robbers said, hey what are you doing to her, that was not on the agenda, we have come here to steal, not to rape. They apologised to the mother and the girl, and they shot their friend twice.

All four are in jail now, but just one is facing a rape charge, the other three are facing the theft charge, because they still stole the goods, because that was on the agenda, not the rape. But generally sin stands together pretty well united, and different sins get along together, although you do find the occasional fight and difference of opinion. You are still with me? I am still with the first point, where God says they have committed two evils, we are looking at the first evil, they have forsaken me.

And this is how he describes himself, me, I who am the fountain of living water. And he means it exclusively, he means I am the only fountain of water. No wonder he says, heavens, come and look at this awful and foolish, astonishing sight, that my people have forsaken their gift of water, which is a spring of water, I am their living water.

That is true throughout the Bible, and it is true throughout eternity, that God is himself the fountain of water. Remember that like in Psalm 36 verse 9 it says, that with you is life, and in your light we see light. In other words, with you is the fountain of life, it means the same thing, life and water, God in the Bible brings the two together, and he uses the same to mean one and the same thing, life and water, for the Middle East it means the same thing, where there is water there is life.

Remember Jesus himself saying, that if any man thirsts, let him come to me and drink, in John 7 verse 31. So it is not that God has bits of water floating around in the universe, a bit of religion here, a bit of this, and you can take whatever mystical pieces of philosophy that are floating around, and sacred texts and mystical experiences that are floating around, no there is but one God, and he is the fountain of water. But at the same time, now let's get to the next point, at the same time simultaneously, they have committed this error, now what comes first or second doesn't matter, but the two things have happened together, they have forsaken me, and they have created for themselves pits, they have dug out pits for their own water.

Now the practice at that time, because there is very little rain in the Middle East, as they predict in Southern Africa, that there is going to be less and less rain, according to scientists, I don't say that I believe it, but they claim that there is going to be less rain, so the practice throughout the ages in the Middle East was to try and find very hard rock which can hold water. And so they would work very hard to create a cistern, that's what they called it, you could call it a pit, in other translations maybe your, if you have the NIV or whatever, it would probably say a pit, but it's a cistern which means it's a hole dug specifically to hold water. It meant spade work, it meant hard pick work, it meant digging, it meant sweat.

And even until today you can go and look at some of the places in Israel where thousands of years ago they dug cisterns which can still hold water today. Like if you go to Masada, up there in that mountain where there was the last holding out of the Jews, they dug cisterns which were quite deep, where they'd carry water from down below and bring it up, carrying it on their backs and pour it in for the very dry months. Now God God is not saying that it's wrong to make a place to hold water.

What he's saying is, I am the fountain of water, there's plenty in me free for you to get. You don't need to sweat and dig your own pit. I will provide you with my living water.

Because there's a little subtle problem with the pit that God describes which Judah has and their particular type of cistern. He's pointing out the fact that they are unsuccessful even at their idolatry. Even though it was, of course this is spiritual language, he's not speaking here of literal, physical H₂O water, but he's speaking spiritual language.

He's saying, look, you can't even do a proper job of worshipping idols because it is a leaking thing. So what God is saying is that when you, my children, you my people, when you copy the sins of the nations, you get a leaking version. Think back of the time when Israel was redeemed out of Egypt and when they got the first opportunity to idol worship again, they created an idol while Moses was not visible for those 40 days.

What they did was, it's not that they forsook the God of Israel, or at least that's what they thought. And that's even probably what these people in the time of Jeremiah thought, we haven't forsaken the God of Israel, our God whom you worship in the temple in Jerusalem. They always felt that they were able to control it and have both at the same time.

So they said to Aaron, look, we don't see this chap Moses anymore. So we want to see something more tangible, which we can worship with more feeling, with more emotion. Actually, they used a term which was slightly derogatory about Moses.

You could translate it like, we don't know where this oak has gone. We haven't seen him for a long time. Now, the people of God, the redeemed Israel said to Aaron, look, this bloke up there, we don't think he's coming back.

Make something that is tangible, visible, which we can feel, which is real. We want real religion. And so they got the golden and whatever trinkets together, and Aaron put it into a furnace, which they must have built.

And he built for them a golden calf, as you will remember. And the people then were able to get into the spirit. He was visible, he was tangible, he could be felt, this calf, and it was something which they could produce.

They were able to make it, like these people, they were able to dig their own systems. And of course, it was plain idolatry. They didn't see it quite like that.

They felt that they were entering into the spirit, the world of the spirit. They felt spiritual, in fact. But when God's people tried to do the things of the world, they don't accomplish it.

They aren't able to do it in quite the same way, because actually in Egypt, the idolatry there was the worship of the golden bull. All they could manage, the people of Israel, was a golden calf. And so perhaps

they felt that that was a lesser sin, it wasn't quite as bad as back in Egypt.

And as they danced around it and worshipped, maybe some of them even mentioned the name of Jehovah. But to God and to Moses, it was an abomination. It was so detestable that God wanted nothing to do with it.

He didn't want a compromise, he wanted a total separation from it. Now let me just, in closing, use a few examples of what our own systems, our own digging, our own pretense at trying to get our own water to satisfy ourselves might be. Brand name clothing.

There's nothing wrong with having a brand name shirt or boots or whatever, but it can become your idol because you seek it out with a certain thirst. You dig out your system and there's a thirst that is behind it, that is an unhealthy thirst. Usually it's because my friend at school has got that type.

And the water you're trying to create for yourself is that you are envious. You are trying to satisfy a thirst for envy, to be like somebody else. It's just part of the Ten Commandments.

Do not envy your neighbor's donkey, his wife, his house, whatever. And if God has blessed you with Nike football boots, I'm not telling you to throw them away, but I do ask you to check your motive. Was there a thirst to get it, even though it's three times the price of something maybe as good as that, but there's a thirst, a craving and a begging of your parent or whoever to get hold of that or sometimes to even steal it.

Some people don't hold on to a visible idol, it's something that is doctrinal and even Christian. It can be something that you think is Christian and it's got a hold of your heart, it's got a grip on your mind and the Lord God says to you, you have forsaken me, your living water. The thirst to know about the last days and exactly when Jesus is coming back and about the mark of the beast and the beast in Brussels and how the mark will happen, there can be an unhealthy thirst about how it's going to happen.

It doesn't mean that we shouldn't inquire. Jesus said, look at the signs, note that there will be earthquakes, etc. But there can be an unhealthy thirsting after these things where God says, you have forsaken me, I am your fountain.

There are some people even here in South Africa, mostly white people, who believe in a teaching called the British Israelite theory or British Israelite doctrine. There are some people in Africa who believe in a teaching called the British Israelite theory or British Israelite doctrine. But The theory of British Israelitism has crept in and is still believed by some where they believe that white South Africans are part of the lost ten tribes of Israel.

And the whites of America and the whites in England and some other Caucasian groups in Europe. It is absolute nonsense and you can quote me on that, you can interrogate me on that if you will. It is absolute nonsense and you can quote me on that, you can interrogate me on that if you will.

People who follow after that teaching have forsaken the fountain, their fountain of living water. The day before yesterday I got an email from a man who said, how dare you claim that our prophet is not the messiah of this age. And he mentioned his name, I won't mention him here.

He said, how dare you call us a cult when this man is perfect and his teaching is on the same level as Jesus Christ himself. Well, he is not the only one. There is another one living up north who has many more followers.

The one that this one was referring to has only 500,000 followers. There is another one up north in the northern borders of South Africa who claims to have about 5 million followers. There is another one up north in the northern borders of South Africa who claims to have about 500,000 followers.

And these people who follow them have forsaken the fountain of living water. There are those who follow another group, I won't mention their name as well, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but they are very nice people. All of them carry the bible in all of these groups.

They all say Jesus is the saviour, by the way. But they also believe in their own present day messiah. But this other group believes in blessing water and so they come with their scruples and drums of water to their services where the bishops bless the water and you will find this whole pulpit area here would be filled with drums and cans of water which they go home with and they anoint the sick, they drink if they don't feel too well.

And it's a cult and it is a water which we have made ourselves or they have made for themselves and they have forsaken the fountain of living water. Now God goes on to say in chapter 2 the results of this terrible thing which the heavens must look upon. He says for instance the land in verse 15, end of verse 15, the land has been laid waste.

The cities are burned without inhabitants. They have broken the crown of your head, verse 16. And then in verse 17, have you not brought this upon yourself in that you have forsaken the Lord your God when he led you in the way? And now in verse 18, now why take the road to Egypt and drink the waters of Sihur? Or why take the road to Assyria to drink the waters of the river? What happened was that after this rebuke many of them went into Egypt and they died next to the Nile, next to one of the biggest rivers in the world.

And so in verse 19 God says your own wickedness will correct you. I don't have to do it. And your backslidings will rebuke you.

I won't have to rebuke you. Your backslidings will rebuke you. But I don't want to end on that note.

I said I'm coming to an end. And let's look at how God is able to turn the situation on its head, to turn it right round. And then we will be closing in prayer after that.

Just a few verses and if you have a pen and paper, I'm not going to turn to it, but I want you to look them up later on. And if the person at the computer is fast enough, he can write the verse up as I say them on the board behind me. Still in this backsliding state, God says, for instance, just one chapter later, in chapter 3, He says, For instance, in verse 12 and verse 13 and verse 14 and 15, where God says, return backsliding Israel.

Verse 14, return, O backsliding children, for I am married to you. Look at verse 22, return, you backsliding children, and I will heal your backslidings. Verse 22, and the response of the people of God in verse 22 is, Indeed, we come to you.

This is the response in prayer. Indeed, we come to you, for you are the Lord our God. Don't you long to be healed of your backsliding habits? The things that you are confessing again and again? Those things that Hebrews 12 speaks of, the things that tie themselves around your ankles and hold you back from running the race? The Lord says, Return, O backsliding children.

Admit that you are a backslidden child. And just imagine that, Grace, He can heal your backsliding. Don't turn to it, but a few more verses.

Just do it free translation. Like, for instance, in Isaiah 55, from verse 1, where God says, Ho to you who thirst. Everyone who thirsts, listen.

Isaiah 55, from verse 1. Don't read it. Isaiah 55, from verse 1. Don't spend your money on that which does not satisfy. Come to Me.

Zechariah 13, verse 1. Where it says, In that day, a fountain shall be opened. It's speaking about the cross of Jesus Christ, He being the fountain. And that fountain shall be opened for sin and uncleanness to be washed away.

In Zechariah 14, verse 8. And living waters shall go forth from Jerusalem. Go and read again in John 4, the Samaritan woman, what Jesus said to her about living water. She was a broken cistern.

She was thirsty again and again. She could not contain the water. He said, I will give you water that will bubble up from inside you.

Revelation 22, verse 17. Where it says, Whoever wills, let him come and take of the water freely. Revelation 22, verse 18.

We stand without excuse. This book is full of invitations. Where God personally invites you to Him.

He who is your fountain of living water. Your sin of lust is a broken cistern. Pornography holds no water.

That flirtatious affair, the water leaks and you are left thirsty and dry and dead. So all the heavens, all the galaxies, the whole universe has been called upon to witness this truth. That God's people have this choice.

Their God, the fountain, or their own hard sweaty labor to create something which leaks and holds no water. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are the living water.

You are the fountain of living water. Thank you that you have promised that if we believe in you, as the scriptures say, a fountain of living water will bubble up from within our belly, from deep within us. Lord, we know we cannot dig for it ourselves.

Our cisterns and the rock we dig can hold no water. The more we pour in, the more it leaks out. So Lord, we come to you, the God of all contentment and satisfaction.

And we pray that you turn our hearts towards you. Turn our backsliding feet away from sin. And help us to be obedient to exactly what you tell us to do in now coming to you, the fountain of living water.

And we ask it, Lord Jesus, for the extension of your kingdom. And for your glory. Amen.

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