

Sermon to the Saints of God assembled at Topeka, KS: Sunday, August 27, 2023

### **Emptied from Vessel to Vessel**

Jeremiah 48 prophesies of the coming destruction of Moab at the hand of the Chaldeans. As we were recently reminded, the Moabites were a dedicated enemy of God and His chosen people, Israel. We will read the first 17 verses of the chapter, but our focus for today is not primarily on Moab and her destruction, but rather on how we can apply the particular lesson of verse 11 to ourselves.

**Jeremiah 48:1-17** *“1 Against Moab thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Woe unto Nebo! for it is spoiled: Kiriathaim is confounded and taken: Misgab is confounded and dismayed. 2 There shall be no more praise of Moab: in Heshbon they have devised evil against it; come, and let us cut it off from being a nation. Also thou shalt be cut down, O Madmen; the sword shall pursue thee. 3 A voice of crying shall be from Horonaim, spoiling and great destruction. 4 Moab is destroyed; her little ones have caused a cry to be heard. 5 For in the going up of Luhith continual weeping shall go up; for in the going down of Horonaim the enemies have heard a cry of destruction. 6 Flee, save your lives, and be like the heath in the wilderness. 7 For because thou hast trusted in thy works and in thy treasures, thou shalt also be taken: and Chemosh shall go forth into captivity with his priests and his princes together. 8 And the spoiler shall come upon every city, and no city shall escape: the valley also shall perish, and the plain shall be destroyed, as the LORD hath spoken. 9 Give wings unto Moab, that it may flee and get away: for the cities thereof shall be desolate, without any to dwell therein. 10 Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood. **11 Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed.** 12 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will send unto him wanderers, that shall cause him to wander, and shall empty his vessels, and break their bottles. 13 And Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel their confidence. 14 How say ye, We are mighty and strong men for the war? 15 Moab is spoiled, and gone up out of her cities, and his chosen young men are gone down to the slaughter, saith the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts. 16 The calamity of Moab is near to come, and his affliction hasteth fast. 17 All ye that are about him, bemoan him; and all ye that know his name, say, How is the strong staff broken, and the beautiful rod!”*

Let us now focus on verse 11, particularly how these words apply to the reprobate (Moab), and to the saints of God: *“Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath*

*settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither hath he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed."*

Jeremiah is using a metaphor that describes the wine making process. In order to understand the application of these words to Moab, or to ourselves, we must understand what the metaphor is referring to. Wine making is a diligent, lengthy process. If any part of that process doesn't go right, then the wine will be spoiled.

- Of course the process starts with growing the grapes - a difficult, years long process of planting and diligently tending the vineyard. That process is often used as a metaphor in the scriptures, but in this passage we are talking about the process of making the wine itself. Once the grapes are grown, harvested, and cleaned, then they are crushed / pressed, and yeast is added to begin the fermentation process.
- Over a period of days or weeks, the fermenting vessel needs to be kept in a tight temperature range so that the yeast won't die during the primary fermentation phase. The mixture has to be stirred regularly as the carbon dioxide keeps pushing the skins and grape fragments to the surface. This grape pulp is the "lees" or "dregs". While the wine is fermenting, it is resting on its lees, which makes it stronger in flavor and aroma. If it is removed from the lees too early, it doesn't develop flavor; if left on the lees too long, it becomes too strong, and bitter.
- After primary fermentation, the wine has to be poured out into a different vessel; this process is referred to as "racking" the wine; lots of vessels are used for this, but frequently an oak barrel is used. Here you have the wine poured from vessel to vessel to clarify / purify it; pour the wine to the new vessel, and leave the lees behind. The first racking removes the "gross lees". The wine continues to ferment (secondary fermentation), but much slower than before. After a period of time, the wine is racked a second time, further purifying it by removing the "fine" lees. Finally the wine is racked a third time to ensure that the wine is clean of the lees before bottling. This process of pouring from vessel to vessel can be done over the course of several years.



### How does this apply to the reprobate?

- Often, God leaves the reprobate alone to their sin, wherein they become more and more convinced of their own strength and righteousness, right up until the very moment when the cup of their iniquity is full, and He fully and finally cuts them off. *“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.” (Ecclesiastes 8:11)* This applies to individuals and societies.
  - Gill: *“This is an emblem of unregenerate men; who, though sinners from their birth, and liable to the curse of the law, subject to the stroke of death, and must come to judgment; yet stupid and quite at ease, having no sight of sin, nor feeling of the burden of its guilt, nor grief or trouble for it; no sense of danger, or fear of hell; but in the utmost security: all which arise from ignorance, hardness of heart, profaneness, and infidelity; thoughtlessness about their immortal souls; putting the evil day far from them; and being under the influence of Satan, who keeps his goods in peace: and he hath settled on his lees; a metaphor taken from wine; which, the longer it remains on the lees, the better body it has, and the richer and stronger it is; and denotes the great tranquillity of the Moabites; the riches they were possessed of, and in which they trusted. The Targum renders it, “quiet in their substance”; herein they were an emblem of unconverted sinners, who are settled and hardened in the corruptions of their nature; and not at all disturbed at the evil of sin; the wrath of God; his judgments on men; the last and awful judgment; or at the terrors of hell; and likewise of such who trust in their own righteousness, and depend upon that for salvation: and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel; like wine that has never been racked off from the vessel or vessels it was first put into: they were never removed from place to place, but always continued in their land; in which they were an emblem of such who have never seen their own emptiness, and their want of the grace of God, and have never been emptied of sin, nor of self-righteousness: neither hath he gone into captivity; this explains in proper words the metaphor in the preceding clause: the Moabites had never been carried captive out of their own land into others; an emblem of such who have never seen their captive state to sin and Satan; or ever brought to complain of it, or become the captives of Christ; therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed; his wealth, riches, and prosperity, continued without any change and alteration; and also his sins and vices, idolatry, pride, luxury, and which were the cause of his ruin; and for that reason are here mentioned; an emblem of unregenerate men, whose taste is vitiated by sin, and continues as it was originally; they relish sin, and disrelish everything that is good; and savour the things that be of man, and not the things of God; and so are in a most dangerous condition.”*
- In the example of Moab, remember that these are literally the relatives of the Israelites, seeing that they are the lineage of Abraham’s nephew, Lot. They were a

settled nation all the while that Israel suffered in Egyptian bondage. Once Israel was delivered from that bondage, Moab only fretted and assaulted them on their way to the promised land. Throughout the centuries of the judges and kings of Israel, Moab proudly rested in peace and safety, even as Israel was often afflicted under the mighty hand of God because of their sins. This fact had to weigh heavily on the hearts of the true servants of God among Israel throughout those generations.

- *Calvin: "But it was very hard for the Israelites, when God afflicted them with various calamities, to see the Moabites secure and safe from all trouble and all losses. As, then, this thought might have grievously wounded the minds of the faithful, the Prophet here exhorts them not to envy the happiness of the Moabites, because God would at length stretch forth his hand against them, according to what was done by David, who also exhorted the faithful patiently to wait for the day of the Lord, when they saw the ungodly enjoying all kinds of pleasure, and meeting with success according to their wishes. (#Ps 37:1 7 8). We now then understand the object of the Prophet. He yet intimates that this perpetual peace would avail the Moabites nothing, because as the Lord had resolved to destroy them, he would cause the strength of Moab to fail and all his wealth to be reduced to nothing."*
- The fact that God's people are vexed at the perceived worldly prosperity of the wicked is found throughout the scriptures, and I think that we can all testify that our spirits are similarly vexed. Consider Psalm 55 and 73 wherein David and Asaph express this same vexation:
  - **Psalm 55** "1 ¶ « To the chief Musician on Neginoth, Maschil, A Psalm of David. » Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication. 2 Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise; 3 Because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked: for they cast iniquity upon me, and in wrath they hate me. 4 My heart is sore pained within me: and the terrors of death are fallen upon me. 5 Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me, and horror hath overwhelmed me. 6 And I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away, and be at rest. 7 Lo, then would I wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. Selah. 8 I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest. 9 ¶ Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues: for I have seen violence and strife in the city. 10 Day and night they go about it upon the walls thereof: mischief also and sorrow are in the midst of it. 11 Wickedness is in the midst thereof: deceit and guile depart not from her streets. 12 For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: 13 But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. 14 We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company. 15 Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them. 16 ¶ As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me. 17 Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I

*pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice. 18 He hath delivered my soul in peace from the battle that was against me: for there were many with me. **19 God shall hear, and afflict them, even he that abideth of old. Selah. Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God.** 20 He hath put forth his hands against such as be at peace with him: he hath broken his covenant. 21 The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords. 22 Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. 23 But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in thee.”*

- This is a general picture of the wicked, but it is clearly not the situation for every reprobate soul (or even the majority of them). There are many reprobate people that deal with physical, mental, and situational afflictions that dwarf our own experiences in this life. However, those afflictions are not fruitful – by the judicial command of God, they have **no changes in their spirit!** They are not given faith; their hearts are not broken before God – they are not given meekness, humility, and repentance before the Sovereign King that they have offended. All other changes are meaningless in this context.
- ***Psalm 73*** “1 ¶ « A Psalm of Asaph. » Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. 2 But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. 3 For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. **5 They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. 6 Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment.** 7 Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. 8 They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. 9 They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. 10 Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. 11 And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High? 12 Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. 13 Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. 14 For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning. 15 ¶ If I say, I will speak thus; behold, I should offend against the generation of thy children. 16 When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; 17 Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. 18 Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. 19 How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors. 20 As a dream when one awaketh; so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image. 21 ¶ Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins. 22 So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. 23 Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. 24

*Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. 25 Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. 26 My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever. 27 For, lo, they that are far from thee shall perish: thou hast destroyed all them that go a whoring from thee. 28 But it is good for me to draw near to God: I have put my trust in the Lord GOD, that I may declare all thy works.”*

### **How does this apply to the elect of God?**

- Juxtaposed to the reprobate sinner, God’s elect are not left to rest upon our lees. We are indeed emptied from vessel to vessel by our merciful Father, as He diligently purifies and prepares us for Christ. He does this by many devices: pain, illness, injury, physical decline, mental decline, changes in circumstances, loss, withholding things that we desire, worry, loss of confidence, peace, or clarity, etc. The ways that God can disrupt the momentum of our lives are endless.
- Sometimes it is a specific affliction that is evident to everyone around us; other times it is an internal distress and chastening that we might not even be able to fully put our finger on. But it is always fruitful! It has a very specific purpose, whether we know it or not, and we have to glorify our Father in it. When we feel like we have been stirred up, unsettled, jostled, poured out, weakened, thrust into darkness, etc. we should first stop and acknowledge the hand of God in the matter and ask Him to make the chastening fruitful for our soul. *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28)* The alternative is to be left to rest upon our lees, fooled into thinking we have strength that we don’t have, like brute beasts lumbering toward our own destruction.
  - **Hebrews 12:5-11** *“5 And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: 6 For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. 7 If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? 8 But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. 9 Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? 10 For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. 11 Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”*
- The process of racking us from vessel to vessel removes trust in our own flesh a little bit at a time, and causes us to rely upon God more and more with each passing experience. This weakening of the flesh and strengthening of the spirit leads us to

rest peacefully in Christ, and allows us to make real application of the promises found in the scriptures.

- **2Corinthians 12:9,10** *“9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”*
- These changes all work together to loosen our grip on the good things of the world (temperance) and to teach patience to endure hardness. Such that we can put on godliness in our continual perspective, regardless of the circumstance.
  - **2Peter 1:5-12** *“5 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; 6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; 7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. 8 For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. 10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: 11 For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. 12 Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.”*
- Remember friends: pride, fullness of bread, abundance of idleness, resting upon our lees with a worldly sense of peace – these are all curses that belong to the wicked. If we find ourselves settling into these modes in our lives, it ought to get our attention. We do not want to be conforming to the world – we ought rather be conformed to Christ.
  - **Romans 12:1,2** *“1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”*
- We ought to feel our grip loosening on the things of the world. Our contentment should not rise and fall on whether we have things the way that we want them. If we find that our spirit is thrashing around in discontentment, anger, accusation, etc. then we know we are holding tightly to our flesh. If we find that our time and attention are more and more wrapped up in worldliness – then we ought to pause and consider – are we holding too tightly to our flesh? Are we resting upon our lees? Rather than asking “can I do this?”, challenge yourself with “should I do this?” - “Who is served by me doing this?” – “what example do I set by this?” – “what is the opportunity cost of doing this?”

- **1Corinthians 6:12** *“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.”*
- **1Corinthians 10:23** *“All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.”*
- **Matthew 6:19-21** *“19 Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: 20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: 21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*
- If our time, resources, and thoughts are consumed with worldly pursuits, then our hearts dwell in the flesh. We have to judge ourselves in this matter, and deny ourselves in favor of pursuing God, lest He judge us and count us as those that are left upon their lees, and have no changes in their heart. We must look our wanderlust in the face and resist it.

**Jeremiah 17:5-11** *“5 Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. 6 For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. **7 Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. 8 For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.** 9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? 10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings. 11 As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.”*

I love you all. Amen.