



Sermon Growth Guide

March 9, 2025

Turned



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“Turned”

Jeremiah 31:18-20; 31-34

Key Verse: Jeremiah 31:33

“I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people.”

Big Idea: The new covenant is fulfilled in Jesus.

Foundations

The first words Jesus speaks in the Gospel of Mark are: “The time has come... The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” In our text for today, the prophet Jeremiah both predicts and illuminates Jesus’ announcement. Jeremiah said that the day would come when God would make a new covenant with his people (Jeremiah 31:31-34). This covenant would be different. Instead of being conditional on Israel’s obedience, it would be a covenant of grace. Instead of the law being an outside standard, impossible to attain, God would write the law on the hearts of his people, enabling them to be holy from the inside out. Instead of needing teachers, each person could know God and pray to him directly. Instead of needing a sacrifice every time they committed a sin, they would walk in forgiveness, and God would always look on them as clean. At last, God will be their God, and they will be his people, walking together in perfect relationship.

Jesus announced that the day had finally come. The kingdom of this world is being replaced by the kingdom of God. But just as Jeremiah said, the way into this kingdom is through repentance (Jeremiah 31:18-20). The Mosaic covenant revealed something important: Sin can’t reside with a holy God. If we want to live in God’s kingdom, our sin can’t come with us. We have to understand ourselves as we really are and grieve that reality. But when we do, something wonderful happens. Through the blood of Christ, we become part of the beautiful new covenant. And that is very good news.

Understanding God’s Word

Read Jeremiah 31:18-20; 31-34 together. What parts of this passage resonate with you? What questions do you have? Read Hebrews 8:6-13 and Galatians 5:1-6; 13-26. Do these passages help us understand the new covenant in Jeremiah?

Applying God’s Word

What is your experience with repentance? Have you ever really grieved the presence of sin in your life? Jeremiah says that God will “write his words on our hearts.” Can you name specific ways in which the Spirit helps you obey the law by “serving one another humbly in love” instead of “gratifying the desires of the flesh?” (Galatians 5:13-16)

Witnessing God’s Word

In Jeremiah 31:29-30, God makes it clear that in the new covenant we are all responsible for our own sin. And yet, he makes it clear that he will always be in the business of creating a people for himself (Jeremiah 31:31, 33). The new covenant is still for Israel, but anyone can become a child of Abraham through faith in Christ. (Galatians 3:26-29)

Think about all of your relationships. If you haven’t already, begin praying for someone you know who might need to hear the good news of Jesus. Ask the Holy Spirit to open doors for loving spiritual conversations.

Change is possible. Your life can change. You can change from the inside out. Do you believe that? Most of us believe that because we experienced it ourselves, didn't we? This is a room full of Christians. Maybe some of you are here exploring what this is all about, maybe waiting for some more questions to be answered or for something to grab you in your inner core. Most of us remember being changed. That's why we are here. Well, for the next seven weeks, I want to challenge you. It is time to make this offer to others. It is time to introduce people to Jesus Christ. I wish I could turn into Billy Graham! You might want to invite a few friends along. See, we believe change is possible in Christ because we have experienced it ourselves, but do you believe it is possible for those around you?

This is a series about conversion. Turn Again. A life can turn around. A person can turn around. A man can be interrupted in his life and transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the majesty and glory of Christ's everlasting light. A woman can go from blind to seeing, from lost to found. We can be forgiven, redeemed, changed. And the truth of the matter is, this is the hope of the world. This is the change the world needs. Coming to Christ. I don't know if you wish the world would change a little. Anyone? See some places where this world needs to change? The most important plot of ground to gain for Christ, the place where the world changes, is this tiny plot of ground called the human heart. Change that, you will change the world. Speaking of Billy Graham, he said once, "I am convinced if the church went back to the main task of proclaiming the Gospel it would see people being converted to Christ, and it would have a far greater impact on the social, moral, and psychological needs of people than anything else could possibly do."

So, Turned. We start with Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a prophet during a time of national decline and crisis. He was

around for the last godly king, King Josiah, but after that, things really went to pot. Most of Jeremiah's life was lived in fear of the rising power of Israel's hostile neighbors. King Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem in 597 BC and carried the people off into exile to Babylon. Jeremiah was taken to Egypt, where eventually he died—legend says by stoning—and not by Egyptians; by his own people. Here is the remarkable thing: here's a man who saw nothing but decline, nothing but mistakes after mistakes, a taking apart of things, a spinning apart, and he never gave up on one idea: God can bring it all back. God can turn it all around. God can turn you around. "Shub" is the word in Hebrew. Turn. Turn around. Repent. Turn again to the Lord and He will turn everything around for you.

This passage is God speaking. Ephraim is God's tender nickname for his people. "I have surely heard Ephraim's moaning: 'You disciplined me like an unruly calf, and I have been disciplined. Restore me, and I will return, because you are the Lord my God.'" (Jeremiah 31:18) Restore me, and I will return. The old King James says, "turn me and I will be turned." Turn me, God! Like Psalm 85 in the King James, "Turn us, O God of our salvation, And cause thine anger toward us to cease." (Psalm 85:4 KJV) Turn us, we pray. "Wilt thou not revive us again: that thy people may rejoice in thee?" (Psalm 85:6 KJV) See, Jeremiah knows, the Psalmist knows, we need God to turn us around. Raising three boys, and one girl too, I played a lot of Thomas the Tank Engine on the floor. You would build the track, link up the train cars with their little magnets, and let it fly! But there's only one way to turn Thomas around. Sometimes he needs to turn around. Only one way: pick him up and flip him around. Are you on the tracks headed in the wrong direction. Do you feel like there is no way to turn? "Turn me, Lord, and I will be turned."

This is what we call repentance. There is no conversion without repentance.



Conversion has two components: repentance and faith. Repentance looks back with proper sorrow over the past; faith looks forward with promise for the future. Repentance is turning around. Stop headed that direction, turn again to God. Jesus said, “unless you turn.” “Truly I tell you,” he said, “unless you turn and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” (Matthew 18:3) Turn. About face. Turn around. Turn again. “After I strayed, I repented; after I came to understand, I beat my breast. I was ashamed and humiliated because I bore the disgrace of my youth.” (Jeremiah 31:19) That’s repentance. Is there something in you that can admit, that can recognize, I’ve been going in the wrong direction? I have been attaching myself to the wrong things. I have been pursuing the wrong ends, the wrong goals. Correct me, God. Like an unruly calf. Turn me, God, and I will be turned. After I strayed, I repented, I turned around. It takes humility to admit you need a Savior, but a Savior is exactly what you need.

Now comes what many call the single most important passage in the Old Testament. Why? Because it promises a New Testament. This is the passage that makes the Old Testament the Old Testament. Before this, it was just the Testament! A new thing is coming. A new possibility is breaking out, a new covenant. “‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord.” (Jeremiah 31:31-32) A new covenant. A new relationship. The people in Exodus gathered before Mt. Sinai and promised to follow the law. “We will do it!” But they were unfaithful. So, is that the end of the story? No. “‘This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it

on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the Lord. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’” (Jeremiah 31:33-34)

See, as long as the covenant is external, outside, it cannot stand. No one can fulfill the law. As long as your relationship with God is an external set of behaviors, “I go to church, I say my prayers, I try not to cuss or drink... too much, I don’t cheat. That’s enough, God, right? That’s enough.” No one can actually live up to enough in that way. We all fall short. “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23) As long as you are looking at your religion as an outside activity, you will be trying to live out the old covenant. Behave. Do right and you will be alright. But the old covenant was meant to lead us to something else. Jesus lifted the cup. “Drink this, drink it in. This is the New Covenant.” It needs to get inside you, into your heart. God said, I will write my law on your hearts. I will give you a new heart. It’s like Ezekiel says, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” (Ezekiel 36:26-27) Did you know that is what God offers? Not a new set of rules; not a new, enhanced ritual of habits; a new heart. Take the stone; replace it with flesh. A heart soft to the things of God. A heart open to the Word of God. A heart of love for God and for neighbor. A new heart. Turn again. This is total life transformation. The old is gone; the new has come.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali was born to a Muslim family in Mogadishu, Somalia, in 1969. At the age of five, she suffered female mutilation. She witnessed forced marriages, honor killings, all the violent



atrocities of fundamentalist Islam. They were part of the Muslim Brotherhood. Then her family fled to the Netherlands to help her escape forced marriage. When September 11th happened, Ayaan was convinced there is something wrong with Islam. She abandoned her faith and became an atheist. She started advocating for women's rights and eventually became a Member of Parliament. An outspoken critic of Islam, her life was threatened. In 2004, she partnered with Theo van Gogh to make a film called "Submission" critiquing the treatment of women in Islam. Theo was stabbed and killed in the streets of Amsterdam by an Islamist. Hirsi Ali went into hiding, moved to the U.S., but also became one of the prominent voices in the New Atheism. She could make a pretty compelling argument on why religion should not be part of our preferred future.

Then, on November 13, 2023, Ayaan Hirsi Ali hit publish on a blog post no one expected. The title: "Why I Am a Christian." One of the most famous atheists of our generation. Now she follows Jesus. Atheism couldn't satisfy. She wrote, "Yet I would not be truthful if I attributed my embrace of Christianity solely to the realization that atheism is too weak and divisive a doctrine to fortify us against our menacing foes. I have also turned to Christianity because I ultimately found life without any spiritual solace unendurable—indeed very nearly self-destructive. Atheism failed to answer a simple question: What is the meaning and purpose of life? ...The lesson I learned from my years with the Muslim Brotherhood was the power of a unifying story, embedded in the foundational texts of Islam, to attract, engage, and mobilize the Muslim masses. Unless we offer something as meaningful, I fear the erosion of our civilization will continue. And fortunately, there is no need to look for some New Age concoction of medication and mindfulness. Christianity has it all... Of course, I still have a great deal to learn about Christianity. I discover a

little more at church each Sunday. But I have recognized, in my own long journey through a wilderness of fear and self-doubt, that there is a better way to manage the challenges of existence than either Islam or unbelief had to offer."

Do you believe a heart can change? It is possible. And it is possible for you. Right here, right now. Maybe you have sat in church for years. I have known people to say to me, "Tim, I sat in church for thirty years, but I never made it personal. I never let Him in." Jesus said, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." (Revelation 3:20) Jesus said, "This is the cup of the new covenant, drink it in. Drink it in." Jesus wants to move inside your heart. That's where new life begins. That's where change can happen. No more heart of stone. Now a heart of flesh. It happens when you turn again, when you say, "Lord, turn me and I will be turned."

I want to pray for you. You don't have to repeat it as we sometimes do, but make it your own, take this prayer into your heart as I pray. "Jesus, I open my heart to you. I have been turned in the wrong direction. My heart is stone. Turn me, Lord, and I will be yours. I want to know you. I want to follow you. I give you my life today." If that is something you prayed for the first time, please talk to one of us. We will have a baptism service on April 27 at the end of this series. Maybe it is time to come to the water. If you have renewed your faith today, share that with someone. New life is here in Jesus. Amen.

