

* These notes are provided for personal devotional and study purposes only. They may not be published, distributed, or disseminated to others without the permission of the author.

From the Ridiculous to the Sublime

Series: The Weeping Prophet

The Village Church at Shell Point

Evening Service

June 12, 2022

I. **Literary Devices**

- A. **Jeremiah 10:5** (ESV) — 5 Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good.”
 - 1. Reminds me of the scarecrow in the Wizard of Oz
- B. Wizard of Oz – movie – 1939
 - 1. Book – The Wonderful Wizard of Oz
 - a. 1900
 - b. Frank Baum
 - 2. Many believe that the book was satirical commentary on debates surround the gold standard in the 1890's
 - a. Yellow brick road = gold standard
 - b. Oz = abbreviation for ounces
 - c. Meaning – removing the gold standard meant there was nothing to back up the currency
 - 3. In the final analysis, Oz turned out to be a fraud
 - a. Pathetic little man pulling levers and pulleys
 - 4. Image is appropriate for understanding idolatry
 - a. While the adventure is enticing, exciting, in the end, there’s nothing to it
- C. Literary devices are used routinely in the Bible
 - 1. If you miss the device, you miss much of the meaning
 - 2. Examples
- D. **Contrast and Comparison**
 - 1. **Psalm 1** (ESV) —
 - a. 1 Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
 - b. 2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.
 - c. 3 He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.
 - d. 4 The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
 - e. 5 Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

- f. 6 for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

E. **Satire**

1. **1 Kings 18:19–39** (ESV) —

- a. 19 Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table.”
- b. 20 So Ahab sent to all the people of Israel and gathered the prophets together at Mount Carmel.
- c. 21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” And the people did not answer him a word.
- d. 22 Then Elijah said to the people, “I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD, but Baal’s prophets are 450 men.
- e. 23 Let two bulls be given to us, and let them choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on the wood, but put no fire to it. And I will prepare the other bull and lay it on the wood and put no fire to it.
- f. 24 And you call upon the name of your god, and I will call upon the name of the LORD, and the God who answers by fire, he is God.” And all the people answered, “It is well spoken.”
- g. 25 Then Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, “Choose for yourselves one bull and prepare it first, for you are many, and call upon the name of your god, but put no fire to it.”
- h. 26 And they took the bull that was given them, and they prepared it and called upon the name of Baal from morning until noon, saying, “O Baal, answer us!” But there was no voice, and no one answered. And they limped around the altar that they had made.
- i. 27 And at noon Elijah mocked them, saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god. Either he is musing, or he is relieving himself, or he is on a journey, or perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened.”
- j. 28 And they cried aloud and cut themselves after their custom with swords and lances, until the blood gushed out upon them.
- k. 29 And as midday passed, they raved on until the time of the offering of the oblation, but there was no voice. No one answered; no one paid attention.
- l. 30 Then Elijah said to all the people, “Come near to me.” And all the people came near to him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD that had been thrown down.
- m. 31 Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD came, saying, “Israel shall be your name,” 32 and with the stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two seahs of seed.

- n. 33 And he put the wood in order and cut the bull in pieces and laid it on the wood. And he said, “Fill four jars with water and pour it on the burnt offering and on the wood.”
- o. 34 And he said, “Do it a second time.” And they did it a second time. And he said, “Do it a third time.” And they did it a third time.
- p. 35 And the water ran around the altar and filled the trench also with water.
- q. 36 And at the time of the offering of the oblation, Elijah the prophet came near and said, “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and that I have done all these things at your word.
- r. 37 Answer me, O LORD, answer me, that this people may know that you, O LORD, are God, and that you have turned their hearts back.”
- s. 38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.
- t. 39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces and said, “The LORD, he is God; the LORD, he is God.”

- F. Satire and contrast and comparison is an appropriate approach to apologetics
 - 1. Reveal the absurdities of the contemporary world view
 - 2. Contrast with the magnificence of God

II. Structure of Jeremiah 10.1-16

- A. Derek Kidner – alternating between polemic and praise

- 1. 1-5 – Polemic
- 2. 6-7 – Praise
- 3. 8-9 – Polemic
- 4. 10 – Praise
- 5. 11 – Polemic
- 6. 12-13 – Praise
- 7. 14-15 – Polemic
- 8. 16 – Praise

- B. Contrast

- 1. Absurdities of idolatry
- 2. Character of God
 - a. Against the backdrop of idolatry’s absurdities, the greatness of God is apparent
- 3. Cf Jeremiah 2.13
 - a. **Jeremiah 2:13** (ESV) — 13 “for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.”

III. Polemic – Satire of Jeremiah 10 (the Ridiculous)

- A. **Jeremiah 10:1–3a** (ESV) —

1. 1 Hear the word that the LORD speaks to you, O house of Israel.
2. 2 Thus says the LORD: “Learn not the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens because the nations are dismayed at them, 3 for the customs of the peoples are vanity.”
3. Reference is the Babylonian religion’s fixation with the heavens
 - a. Terrified them
4. Signs of the heavens are a delusion
 - a. Those people are psychologically deranged; schizophrenic
- B. **Jeremiah 10:3b** (ESV) — ... 3... A tree from the forest is cut down and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman.
 1. Idols are the result of cutting down trees, fashioning them into objects by craftsmen
- C. **Jeremiah 10:4** (ESV) —
 1. 4 They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move.
 2. Decorate these objects of wood
 - a. Pretty it up
 3. Not too stable; have to nail it down so it won’t fall off the shelf
- D. **Jeremiah 10:5** (ESV) —
 1. 5 “Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good.”
 2. Idols compared to scarecrows
 - a. Those idols crafted and decorated by skilled artisans have the same basic value as scarecrows
 - b. Can’t say anything
 - c. Somebody has to carry them
 - d. Crows might be afraid of them; people aren’t afraid of those things
 - e. Can’t do anything
 - (1) No harm
 - (2) No good
 3. Wizard of Oz – Scarecrow: My head I’d be scratchin’ while my thought were busy hatchin’ if I only had a brain.
 4. Ryken: Consider the scarecrow in Mr. McGregor’s Garden. In Beatrix Potter’s *Peter Rabbit*, Peter gets into all kinds of trouble. After he runs into Mr. McGregor “round the end of a cucumber frame,” the old farmer chases him all over the garden. Along the way Peter loses his entire wardrobe. He loses one shoe in the cabbages and another among the potatoes. He gets caught in a gooseberry net by his buttons and has to wriggle out of his new jacket to get free. Later, when Peter ventures back into the garden, he discovers that the enterprising McGregor has appropriated his clothes and turned them into a scarecrow. That is how a scarecrow is made. Nail a few pieces of wood together, throw on a jacket and pair of shoes and *voilà* – a scarecrow.
 5. Scarecrows – collection of somebody’s leftover and rejected clothing

- a. Who would ever seek to carry on a conversation with their former clothes closet and expect any profit?
- E. **Jeremiah 10:8** (ESV) —
 - 1. 8 They are both stupid and foolish; the instruction of idols is but wood!
 - 2. Those who worship these idols – stupid and foolish
 - a. Lack intelligence
 - b. Lack wisdom
 - 3. Delusion – breath, vapor
 - 4. Bound themselves to nothing
- F. **Jeremiah 10:9** (ESV) —
 - 1. 9 Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz. They are the work of the craftsman and of the hands of the goldsmith; their clothing is violet and purple; they are all the work of skilled men.
 - 2. Think of the effort expended to make these scarecrows
 - a. All the way from Tarshish
 - (1) Symbolic of the farthest reaches of the world
 - (2) Have no idea where Uphaz was
 - b. Dress them all up
 - (1) Scarecrow with good clothes is still a scarecrow
- G. **Jeremiah 10:11** (ESV) —
 - 1. 11 Thus shall you say to them: “The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.”
 - 2. The end of every idol is the scrap heap of history
- H. **Jeremiah 10:14** (ESV) —
 - 1. 14 Every man is stupid and without knowledge; every goldsmith is put to shame by his idols, for his images are false, and there is no breath in them.
 - 2. Herein lies the stupidity
 - a. The idol shames the maker
 - 3. **Psalms 135:15–18** (ESV) —
 - a. 15 The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands.
 - b. 16 They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see;
 - c. 17 they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths.
 - d. 18 Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them.
- I. **Jeremiah 10:15** (ESV) —
 - 1. 15 They are worthless, a work of delusion; at the time of their punishment they shall perish.
 - 2. Worthless = vain, empty
 - a. Cf Ecclesiastes – vanity
 - 3. Worth only to be mocked, derided
 - 4. But eventually, destroyed
 - 5. **Psalms 2:1–9** (ESV) —

- a. 1 Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?
- b. 2 The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against his Anointed, saying, 3 “Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us.”
- c. 4 He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision.
- d. 5 Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, 6 “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”
- e. 7 I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.
- f. 8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.
- g. 9 You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

IV. **The Serious Side of Satire**

- A. Easy to laugh at Judah’s attraction to decorated blocks of wood
- B. Careful – need to explore what idolatry is
 - 1. Origen (185-254): What each one honors before all else, what before all things he admires and loves, this for him is God
 - a. Idols could be anything that we place in the place of God
 - 2. David Wells: ... trusting some substitute for God to serve some uniquely divine function.... These substitutes need not be supernatural; money, power, expertise, the location of the planets on the astrological charts, and a belief in Progress are among the most popular idols of Our Time.
- C. **Calvin**’s view of the human heart
 - 1. Not homo sapiens (man the wise)
 - 2. Not homo fabricum (man the maker; Marx)
 - 3. But **fabricum idolarum (the idol factory)**
- D. Calvin – idolatry is what human beings create in the heart as substitutes for God
- E. Ryken: Before laughing at the Israelites for bowing down before blocks of wood, feel the tug of idolatry in your own heart. Consider how attractive the idols of this age often seem. Consider the appeal of rich desserts. Or the satisfaction of managing the lives of others. Or the allure of sexual pleasure. Or the comfort of being well-liked. Or the exhilaration of making it to the top of your profession. Or the relaxation of a luxury vacation. Or the security of good insurance coverage. All these things can become idols.... So food, control, sex, popularity, success, leisure, and financial security can all become gods. They can occupy the place in life that God alone should occupy.
- F. Richard Keyes: In this society, our idols tend to be in clusters. They are inflationary, have short shelf lives, and change, adapt, and multiply quickly as if by mitosis, or cell-division. An idol can be a physical property, a person, an activity, a role, an institution, a hope, an image, an idea, a pleasure, a hero – anything than can substitute for God.
- G. Calvin (*Institutes*): Let us learn how greatly our nature inclines toward idolatry,

rather than, by charging the Jews with being guilty of the common failing, we, under vain enticements to sin, sleep the sleep of death.

H. What is it about idolatry that gives it such power to overwhelm the human heart?

1. **Jeremiah 10:2** (ESV) —
 - a. 2 Thus says the LORD: “Learn not the way of the nations, nor be dismayed at the signs of the heavens because the nations are dismayed at them...
 - b. Everybody’s doing it
 - (1) Social, peer pressure
2. **Jeremiah 10:4** (ESV) —
 - a. 4 They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it cannot move.
 - b. Attractive – beauty
 - (1) Many good things, created by God, have a beauty that is legitimate
 - (a) Even a glory of the their own (1 Corinthians 15)
 - c. Those created things may become idols
 - d. Fundamental characteristic of idolatry – exchange
 - (1) **Romans 1:22–23** (ESV) — 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.
3. **Jeremiah 10:9a** (ESV) — 9 Beaten silver is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz. ...
 - a. Exotic
 - b. Sophistication of foreign things

I. How do we figure out what our idols actually are?

1. Ryken: To identify your own idols, ask questions like these: What things take the place of God in my life? Where do I find my significance and my confidence? What things make me really angry? (Anger usually erupts when an idol gets knocked off the shelf.)

J. Idolatry – insidious

1. So easy to rear its ugly head
2. So many good things in and of themselves, raised to the level of fundamental trust
3. So able to be manipulated by Satan, whose subtlety and deception are legendary

K. But once you discover what they are, Jeremiah offers a wonderful solution

1. Mock them!
2. You’re worshipping what?
 - a. You’re relying on, trusting in, what?
3. An image on a computer screen?
4. A promotion at work
 - a. Whoever wishes they spent more time at the office?
5. Accolades and awards from colleagues?

- a. See how fast they turn on you when you disagree with them
 - 6. Accumulations in the stock market?
 - a. Do we have to even comment on that?
 - L. Ryken: Once the idols on your shelf have been identified, see them for what they really are. Recognize that they are like the scarecrow in the melon patch: man-made, impotent, false, and worthless. Then scorn them the way Jeremiah scorned the idols of his day.
 - M. Lewis: We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.
 - 1. Realize their true value in comparison with the overwhelming pleasure God wants us to experience as we exalt Him above all powers
- V. Contrast of Jeremiah 10 (the Sublime)
- A. The catalog of the nature and character of God
 - B. **Jeremiah 10:6** (ESV) —
 - 1. 6 There is none like you, O LORD;
 - 2. you are great, and your name is great in might.
 - 3. **Incomparability**
 - a. No one like God; all substitutes are inferior
 - (1) More than that – not even in the same category
 - b. Idols – dozens!
 - (1) Judah seemed to experiment with them all
 - (2) **Jeremiah 11:13** (ESV) — 13 For your gods have become as many as your cities, O Judah, and as many as the streets of Jerusalem are the altars you have set up to shame, altars to make offerings to Baal.
 - 4. **Power**
 - a. Idols have to be nailed on the shelf so they won't fall down
 - b. **Isaiah 1:24** (ESV) — 24 Therefore the Lord declares, the LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel...
 - c. **Psalms 50:1** (ESV) — 1 The Mighty One, God the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting.
 - d. How pathetic are idols in comparison
 - (1) **Psalms 2** revisited
 - C. **Jeremiah 10:7** (ESV) —
 - 1. 7 Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? ...
 - 2. **Sovereignty**
 - 3. King of the nations
 - a. Ruler, not just over Judah, but over every king
 - b. No limit to the extent of His kingdom – He's everywhere
 - (1) Scarecrows can't leave their one place in the cucumber patch
 - (2) Omnipresence
 - 4. **1 Timothy 6:13–16** (ESV) —

- a. 13 I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession,
- b. 14 to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,
- c. 15 which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,
- d. 16 who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.

D. **Jeremiah 10:7** (ESV) —

- 1. 7 ... For this is your due; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is none like you.
- 2. **Wisdom**
- 3. **Jeremiah 10:10a** (ESV) — 10 But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. ...
 - a. Pretenders are false, deceptive, errant
- 4. **Daniel 2:20** (ESV) —
 - a. 20 Daniel answered and said: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might.”
- 5. **Romans 11:33** (ESV) — 33 Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!

E. **Jeremiah 10:10** (ESV) —

- 1. 10 But the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.
- 2. **Living God**
 - a. In contrast to idols – alive!
 - b. Ryken: Consider what an advantage it is that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead. When you pray to him, he can answer. When you are sick, he can heal you. When you are in trouble, he can save you. When you sin, he can forgive you. And when you are dead, he can bring you back to life
- 3. **Everlasting King**
 - a. **Eternal**
 - b. **Psalms 93:2** (ESV) — 2 Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting.
 - c. **Psalms 136:1–4** (ESV) — 1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. 2 Give thanks to the God of gods, for his steadfast love endures forever. 3 Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for his steadfast love endures forever; 4 to him who alone does great wonders, for his steadfast love endures forever...
- 4. **Wrath – Justice**

- a. **Exodus 34:6–7** (ESV) — 6 The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”
 - b. Richard Keyes: Jeremiah pictures a tame god, a user-friendly god, who exists by human manufacture, is at human disposal, and is under human control. This god would never rebuke, warn, threaten, or talk back.
 - c. Chronicles of Narnia
 - (1) Aslan – the lion, a Christ figure
 - (2) “Is he safe?”
 - (3) Mr. Beaver: “Safe?”... who said anything about safe? Of course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”
 - (4) “Only you mustn’t press him. He’s wild, you know. Not like a tame lion.”
- F. **Jeremiah 10:12** (ESV) —
- 1. 12 It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens.
 - 2. **Creator**
 - a. **Romans 1** – exchanged the Creator for created things
 - b. **Jeremiah 10:11** (ESV) — 11 Thus shall you say to them: “The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.”
- G. **Jeremiah 10:13** (ESV) —
- 1. 13 When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, and he brings forth the wind from his storehouses.
 - 2. **Providence**
 - a. Sovereignly superintending the function of all natural events and circumstances
- H. **Jeremiah 10:16** (ESV) —
- 1. 16 Not like these is he who is the portion of Jacob, for he is the one who formed all things, and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance; the LORD of hosts is his name.
 - 2. **Lovingkindness** (covenant love)
 - 3. Greatness of God does not remove Him from relationship with His chosen people
 - 4. Portion of Jacob
 - a. Once you have God, you need no other
 - b. Ryken: If God is your portion, you will not need any seconds
 - c. If you don’t have God, you could have everything and you would

- have nothing
- d. If you have nothing, but have God, you have everything
- 5. **Psalm 73:26** (ESV) —
 - a. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

VI. What a Contrast!

- A. Pascal: There once was in man a true happiness of which now remain to him only the mark and empty trace, which he in vain tries to fill from all his surroundings, seeking from things absent the help he does not obtain in things present. But these are all inadequate, because the infinite abyss can only be filled by an infinite and immutable object, that is to say, only by God Himself.