Introduction

How can you have fellowship with the Lord? Sin breaks our fellowship with the Lord. However, the Lord is merciful; He offers us the opportunity to repent.

Jeremiah 3:1-4:4 is a call to repentance. The nations of Israel and Judah had **expressed** repentance, but they lacked genuine repentance. Therefore, their relationship with the Lord had been severed. This passage teaches that **the Lord is merciful to those who repent**.

Before reading this chapter, it is important to acknowledge where you stand in a relationship with the Lord. Some of you have no relationship with the Lord. You are separated from Him by your sin and you do not know Him. The only way to know the Lord is to repent of your sin and believe in the gospel of Jesus. Only through faith in Jesus can you be forgiven of sin and reconciled into a relationship with the Lord.

Some of you have a relationship with the Lord because you have faith in Jesus. If your faith is genuine, then your relationship with the Lord is genuine and is eternal. However, your fellowship with the Lord can still be hindered by living in unrepentant sin. Furthermore, continual unrepentant sin is evidence that we do not have faith. Daily, we should seek the Lord in faith and repentance.

Mercy

First, this chapter answers *why does God show mercy?*

The Lord does now owe mercy

Verses 1-5 explain that **the Lord does not owe you His mercy**. Judah had been unfaithful to the Lord; therefore, He would be completely righteous to reject Judah without mercy. In the same way, the Lord would be right to reject any of us, without showing us mercy.

Jeremiah 3:1–5 CSB
[1] If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him to marry another, can he ever return to her?
Wouldn't such a land become totally defiled? But you! You have prostituted yourself with
many partners— can you return to me? This is the LORD's declaration. [2] Look to the barren
heights and see. Where have you not been immoral? You sat waiting for them beside the
highways like a nomad in the desert. You have defiled the land with your prostitution and
wickedness. [3] This is why the showers haven't come— why there has been no spring rain. You
have the brazen look of a prostitute and refuse to be ashamed. [4] Haven't you recently called
to me, "My Father! You were my friend in my youth. [5] Will he bear a grudge forever? Will he be

endlessly infuriated?" This is what you have said, but you have done the evil things you are capable of.

Verses 1-2 describe Judah's rebellion against the Lord as a promiscuous wife who has abandoned her husband. Judah had rejected the Lord by pursuing other gods. Idolatry is adultery, because redemption is relational. Verse 1 alludes to Deuteronomy 24:1-4, which describes divorce and remarriage. If a husband and wife divorce, the wife marries another man, then divorces the second husband, this passage forbids the first husband from taking her again as his wife. Likewise, Judah should not expect the Lord to take them back.

Verse 3 says that the Lord had withheld rain from Judah. This was more than an act of judgment. Judah was worshipping Baal, whom they considered to be the god who provided rain. The Lord was showing Judah that Baal could not provide rain, because Baal was no real god. Only the Lord could provide or restrain the rain.

Notice Judah's expectation in verses 4-5. Because the Lord had made a covenant relationship with Judah, they expected that He would overlook His wrath against their unfaithfulness. However, Judah was like the divorced wife who had married herself to other gods. The Lord had no obligation to welcome her back into a covenant relationship with Him

The Lord is merciful, but ***the Lord does not owe you His mercy***. There is a false teaching called Universalism, which claims that God will forgive all people because God is merciful. After all, they claim, how could a loving God condemn anyone to eternal judgment?

The Lord IS merciful. He has mercy on sinful people by sending Jesus to bear the guilt of sin and die to atone for that sin. If you do not devote yourself to the Lord through faith in Jesus, then you reject God's mercy. God's mercy is offered to us specifically in the gospel.

Repentance and mercy

Verses 6-10 express a condition of restoration with the Lord. **Repentance must be genuine**. Judah had seen false repentance, yet they now relied on false repentance. If you would have fellowship with the Lord, then you must repent in your heart.

Jeremiah 3:6–10 CSB

6 In the days of King Josiah the LORD asked me, "Have you seen what unfaithful Israel has
done? She has ascended every high hill and gone under every green tree to prostitute herself
there. 7 I thought, 'After she has done all these things, she will return to me.' But she didn't
return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 8 I observed that it was because unfaithful
Israel had committed adultery that I had sent her away and had given her a certificate of
divorce. Nevertheless, her treacherous sister Judah was not afraid but also went and
prostituted herself. 9 Indifferent to her prostitution, she defiled the land and committed
adultery with stones and trees. 10 Yet in spite of all this, her treacherous sister Judah didn't
return to me with all her heart—only in pretense." This is the LORD's declaration.

The northern nation of Israel had also been unfaithful to the Lord, pursuing idols. The Lord gave them opportunity to repent; however, they refused. Verse 8 says that the Lord sent Israel away with a certificate of divorce. This refers to Him giving Israel into slavery to the Assyrians.

Judah had witnessed Israel's unfaithfulness and the Lord's judgment against them. Yet, verse 8 points out that they did not rightly fear the Lord's judgment. Instead, Judah continued to worship idols, gods of stone and wood, rather than the living God.

Notice that verse 10 says that Judah returned to the Lord in pretense, but not with her whole heart. Genuine repentance is not expressed by our lips; it is expressed by our hearts and displayed in our lives.

However, we should be careful to not reduce repentance to what we ***do***. In fact, throughout the OT, the Lord condemns Israel and Judah because they ***did*** works of obedience ***without*** repentance of the heart. Repentance should be an expression of love for the Lord.

The Lord is merciful

Verses 11-14 explain that **the Lord is merciful to those who repent**. Israel was unfaithful and completely lost. Yet, the Lord called the nation to repent and promised to show mercy. This promise is true for you as well. If you repent and turn to Jesus in faith, the Lord will be merciful to you.

Jeremiah 3:11–14 CSB
11 The LORD announced to me, "Unfaithful Israel has shown herself more righteous than
treacherous Judah. 12 Go, proclaim these words to the north, and say, 'Return, unfaithful
Israel. This is the LORD's declaration. I will not look on you with anger, for I am unfailing in my
love. This is the LORD's declaration. I will not be angry forever. 13 Only acknowledge your
guilt— you have rebelled against the LORD your God. You have scattered your favors to
strangers under every green tree and have not obeyed me. This is the LORD's declaration. 14
" 'Return, you faithless children—this is the LORD's declaration—for I am your master, and I
will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.

Remember that Jer 3:8 says that the Lord had divorced Israel; He had ended their covenant relationship because Israel had broken the covenant. In light of Deuteronomy 24, Israel should not expect another opportunity to return to the Lord. Yet, even now, the Lord invites Israel to return to Him. They should acknowledge that their idolatry was sin and a rejection of the Lord.

The Lord is merciful. If Israel repents, He will be merciful to them. Verse 14 points out that He will not restore all of Israel, only a portion. However, He will relent from His wrath against them.

Verse 12 makes a significant point. The Lord does not show mercy because He owes mercy. The Lord shows mercy because of His own love. While you should not expect the Lord to overlook your sin (because He will not), you can trust that He will be merciful to you if you will repent and believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins.

Reconciliation

Verses 15-18 explain that **God shows mercy by reconciling us to Himself**. Here, God foretells how He will bring about reconciliation through Jesus. God's mercy to you is not merely a declaration of forgiveness - it is an eternal covenant relationship.

Jeremiah 3:15–18 CSB

15 I will give you shepherds who are loyal to me, and they will shepherd you with knowledge
and skill. 16 When you multiply and increase in the land, in those days—this is the LORD's
declaration—no one will say again, "The ark of the LORD's covenant." It will never come to
mind, and no one will remember or miss it. Another one will not be made. 17 At that time
Jerusalem will be called The LORD's Throne, and all the nations will be gathered to it, to the
name of the LORD in Jerusalem. They will cease to follow the stubbornness of their evil
hearts. 18 In those days the house of Judah will join with the house of Israel, and they will
come together from the land of the north to the land I have given your ancestors to inherit.' "

In Jer 2:8, the Lord rebuked Israel's shepherds (leaders) for participating in the sins of the nation. In verse 15, the Lord promises that He will give them shepherds who are loyal to Him - literally this phrase says "shepherds after after My own heart." This is an allusion to David, the king whom God had given, who was a man after God's heart.

In verse 16, He promised that they would no longer miss the presence of the ark of the covenant. Throughout the OT, the ark of the covenant represented the dwelling place of God; that is, it was the place that God dwelt with His people. Here, the Lord promised His presence with them, but not in the representative sense of the ark of the covenant.

Notice also in verse 17, that this is a promise for all nations. Verse 18 shows that the promise of God's presence does not **exclude** Israel and Judah, but it is also not **limited** to Israel and Judah.

These promises are fulfilled in Jesus in two ways. First, Jesus described Himself as the good shepherd who would bring all of His sheep into one flock, under one shepherd (John 10:14-16). In that context, I think Jesus is saying that He will do exactly what is described here in Jeremiah 3; He will shepherd God's people, including believing Jews and believing Gentiles (John 10:25-27) ***by*** giving His life to save them.

Second, Jesus is the eternal God. So, when He was born as a man, He was God dwelling among His people (John 1:14; Matt 1:23). Because of Jesus's atoning death, after His

resurrection and ascension, the Holy Spirit was given to all who know God through Jesus. The Spirit of Christ ***in*** us is God's presence ***with*** us.

All of this is a work of God, not men. **God shows mercy to us by reconciling us to Himself**.

Repentance

Second, this passage answers *what is godly repentance?*

Confession and Devotion

Verses 19-25 describe that **genuine repentance includes rejection of sin and devotion to the Lord**. Some within Israel had begun to confess their sin. The Lord called them to turn from their sins and devote themselves only to Him.

Jeremiah 3:19–25 CSB

19 I thought, "How I long to make you my sons and give you a desirable land, the most
beautiful inheritance of all the nations." I thought, "You will call me 'My Father' and never
turn away from me." 20 However, as a woman may betray her lover, so you have betrayed me,
house of Israel. This is the LORD's declaration. 21 A sound is heard on the barren heights: the
children of Israel weeping and begging for mercy, for they have perverted their way; they
have forgotten the LORD their God. 22 Return, you faithless children. I will heal your
unfaithfulness. "Here we are, coming to you, for you are the LORD our God. 23 Surely,
falsehood comes from the hills, commotion from the mountains, but the salvation of Israel is
only in the LORD our God. 24 From the time of our youth the shameful one has consumed what
our ancestors have worked for— their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters.
25 Let us lie down in our shame; let our disgrace cover us. We have sinned against the LORD
our God, both we and our ancestors, from the time of our youth even to this day. We have not
obeyed the LORD our God."

Verse 19 describes God's plan for Israel. Apart from their sin, they would have been blessed with a relationship with God. However, they left the Lord as an adulterous wife would leave her husband.

However, verse 21 states that some within Israel began to weep over their sins - over forgetting the Lord. Verses 24-25 describes their confession of sin.

So, the Lord calls them to repentance. If they will return to Him, He will heal them. But verse 23 makes an important clarification. They must reject the delusion of worshiping other gods. Only the Lord can save. If Israel wants to be saved, they must devote themselves solely to Him.

I once had a professor that said that choosing a dissertation topic was like choosing a wife. He said, "It is okay to date 3 or 4 girls at a time, but eventually, you have to pick one." Sadly,

more than one of my friends have had spouses who said they wanted to remain married, ***but also*** date other people. That is clearly a misunderstanding of marriage.

Unfortunately, far too often, we want the blessings and joy that come with a relationship with God, but still want to date 3 or 4 sins. **Genuine repentance includes rejection of sin and devotion to the Lord**.

Repentance of the heart

Verses 1-4 explain that **repentance should begin in the heart**. God makes a plea to both Israel and Judah. He calls them to repent, but to do so from their hearts.

Jeremiah 4:1–4 CSB
[1] If you return, Israel— this is the LORD's declaration— you will return to me, if you remove your abhorrent idols from my presence and do not waver, [2] then you can swear, "As the LORD lives," in truth, justice, and righteousness, and then the nations will be blessed by him and will boast in him. [3] For this is what the LORD says to the men of Judah and Jerusalem: Break up the unplowed ground; do not sow among the thorns. [4] Circumcise yourselves to the LORD; remove the foreskin of your hearts, men of Judah and residents of Jerusalem. Otherwise, my wrath will break out like fire and burn with no one to extinguish it because of your evil deeds.

In verses 1-2, the Lord calls Israel to return in truth (as opposed to returning in word only). Repentance is marked by complete devotion to the Lord. He calls Judah (verses 3-4) to repent in their hearts. If they do not, then nothing can save them from His wrath, especially not the false gods whom they are serving.

Scripture says that men look on the outward appearance (1 Sam 16:7). You can change your behavior and convince men that you are repentant. However, Scripture also says that the Lord looks on the heart (1 Sam 16:7). The Lord knows if you appear to pursue Him while holding on to sin. **Genuine repentance begins in the heart**.

Conclusion

How can you have fellowship with God? The Lord does not owe you mercy, but the Lord is merciful. He shows His mercy to us through Jesus's death and resurrection. If you repent of sin and have faith in Jesus, then God will forgive your sin and give you life. If you reject Jesus, the Lord will rightly condemn you. Your repentance and faith cannot be in pretense. The Lord knows your heart. Repentance must be from your heart. This is the message of Jeremiah 3:1-4:4 - **The Lord is merciful to those who repent**.