Lena waited anxiously for Ole to return from the cities. He was not use to driving in all that traffic. She turned on the news. A car was speeding down the Interstate going the wrong way. She called Ole to warn him. **Be careful. There's a maniac going the wrong way on the interstate.**

It's even worse, Ole answered. **There's a whole bunch of them going the wrong way.**

Although we might smile at the joke, going the wrong way is no laughing matter. Now and again the news reports that a driver, often drunk, went the wrong way. It usually ends in fatalities.

The people in Jeremiah's day were speeding away from the Lord. He sent Jeremiah to call them to turn around before a disaster far worse than a head on collision. They were to listen and turn before it was too late.

The Lord's call continues to ring out today. Listen and turn before it's too late. That is the theme. **How earnestly the Lord calls to you! How disastrous to ignore his words!**

Around 609 BC Jehoiakim became king in Jerusalem. The previously king, Josiah, had reigned for 31 years. Josiah had followed the Lord and tried to lead the people back. But months earlier he had been killed in battle. Had his reforms taken root in the people's hearts? Would his son, Jehoiakim, follow the Lord? Which way would they go?

The Lord longed for their faithfulness. His goodness and mercy reached out for them. He fervently desired their repentance. **Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil ways,** he told Jeremiah. So at this critical time he earnestly called out to them: **This is what the Lord says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened).**

Although the people had outwardly conformed, the Lord knew their hearts. They were not set on walking in his ways. They would do it their way and follow their path. They were speeding in the wrong direction. But the Lord had not given up. His mercy continued to call out to them for now.

Still today the Lord earnestly calls: **Listen and turn before it's too late.** We live in a world that needs to hear that call. Many are headed in the wrong direction. Either you are walking with the Lord or you are not. Either you are listening to him or you are not. Just as a road has only two directions, so also if we are not following the Lord, we are going the wrong way.

But this call to turn and repent is not just for people out there. Notice where the Lord sent Jeremiah. The Lord told him: **Stand in the courtyard of the Lord's house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the Lord.** It is not only the people out there that need to listen and turn in repentance, but you and I as well - yes, even the best church-goer. How earnestly the Lord calls to you!

Rather than actively listening and following, how easily complacency settles in our hearts! Complacency may masquerade as contentment, but how vastly different it is! Christian contentment trusts the Lord, gladly listening to him. Complacency is self-
satisfied, focused on my own happiness. Contentment rests in the Lord's promises. Complacency rests on past accomplishments. Contentment eagerly follows the Lord, walking according to his commands. Complacency coasts along on autopilot figuring we know enough. Complacency lulls us to sleep while contentment energizes us to serve.

Were the towns of Judah complacent? They came to the Lord's house. They brought their sacrifices. But where were their hearts? Is that why the Lord called them to listen and turn from their evil ways? Evil ways certainly include complacency. It may not make the headlines like some sins, but it is still going the wrong direction.

What about your heart? Where do you struggle with complacency? Are you slow to appreciate the greatness of God's forgiveness, so attending worship becomes a chore or an optional choice to postpone for other things? Rather than confessing our complacency, how tempting to blame the pastor, the music, the schedule, the pace of life, or the attitude of other members to excuse our absences. Are you slow to treasure the Word of your God, reading it, studying it, walking in it? Rather than confessing our complacency, how tempting to say that the Bible is too hard to understand or we already know enough. Are you slow to pray figuring God already knows so why bother? Are you slow to fight against sin, especially pet sins, figuring God will forgive you anyway? In whatever form it takes, confess your complacency. Hear the Lord's call, his earnest call. Listen and turn.

Listen and turn before it's too late – it is disastrous to ignore his words! God says: If you do not listen, I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth. At one time Shiloh had been the worship center of Israel where the Tabernacle had stood. But in Jeremiah's day, it was desolate. Twenty-three years after Jeremiah spoke these words, the temple and Jerusalem lay in ruins. The people had not listened. The Lord had carried out his curse. He is serious about his word.

To keep his promise of the Savior, the Lord preserved a remnant and brought them back to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple. But later after the people rejected Jesus, the temple was destroyed again in 70 AD. Still today over 1,946 years later it still lies in ruins. Only remnants of its courtyard's outer wall remain - a bleak reminder. And Jerusalem itself is a divided city. When you hear of this, remember how disastrous to ignore God. He is serious about his word.

Someone might object: But doesn't God say later in Jeremiah that he has plans to prosper us and not to harm us, plans to give hope and a future? Why talk of disaster? The Lord spoke those words of promise in Jeremiah 29, but they do not contradict his warning here. Nowhere does the Lord promise to prosper people in whatever ways they choose. Rather when people go their own way, the wrong way, the Lord clearly reveals his plan to bring disaster. He is serious, deadly serious.

But notice how much he would prefer not to destroy. He longs for people to listen and turn before it is too late, so that he can prosper and bless them. That is why he sent Jeremiah: Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done.

And that is why he sent his Son the first time, because he longs for us to listen and turn before it is too late. Yes, Jesus will come again to judge all. The end is coming, just as it came to the temple. On that day, woe to all who have surrendered to complacency and gone the wrong way! Hell never ends. Then it will be too late.
But Jesus came the first time to save sinners, like you and me. The Father so longed to bring us rebellious creatures into his family that he did not spare his own Son. That is how great the Father's love is! The Son so longed to make us his brothers and sisters that he became flesh and lowered himself to death on the cross in our place. That is how great the Savior's love is! Through Word and Sacrament the Holy Spirit entered the cesspool of our hearts and convinced you and me of God's promise: You, dear sinner, are forgiven. Jesus' blood has washed you clean. That is how great the Spirit's love is! Even when the Lord threatens disaster, his love is speaking. He longs for sinners to listen, so that each one turns before it is too late.

This time of year reminds us how urgent it is to listen and turn to our Lord each day. The corn is in the bin; the husks are blowing around, fit only for burning. The final harvest is coming. What disaster for those who have gone their own way! But for you who have heard the Lord's urgent and earnest call, for you who have listened and turned, what a day of joy and thanksgiving! Our Savior comes! Our Redeemer returns! He, who died to save us, returns to bring us safely to the heavenly harvest-home! That is nothing to be complacent about. Live each day listening to the Word of your Savior and turning to him, walking in his ways in all that you do. Amen.

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