

23/05/21

## "Being Jeremiah" – Jeremiah 10:17-25

Steve Christian

○ Working with people can be one of the toughest jobs in the world. Have you thought to yourself, "I'm glad that God hasn't called me to be Jeremiah." How frustrating it must have been for him. He hears from God and takes His message to the people, but they do not respond. His message falls on deaf ears. And at times his message fell on antagonistic ears that threw him into jail and into physical abuse. He walked a lonely path of suffering, and he wept for his people as they constantly rejected his message from the Lord. Are you glad that God hasn't called you to be a Jeremiah?

Today we look at a passage from Jeremiah 10. God has made it clear to Jeremiah that doomsday is just around the corner. ○ The people of Jerusalem are under siege. This is probably the siege that preceded the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians in 597BC. If so, the surrounding towns and villages had already been conquered and only Jerusalem stands, protected by her high walls. But the people cannot come and go as they please. They're in lockdown, and the Babylonian army awaits outside; they are building up their ramps made of stone in order to scale the walls. So, the people are under siege, but they may escape at night let down by ropes.

So, Jeremiah advises them to leave. ○ V.17-18, **"Gather up your belongings to leave the land, you who live under siege. For this is what the LORD says: "At this time I will hurl out those who live in this land; I will bring distress on them so that they may be captured."**

For those who remain, they will be captured. Some are too old to attempt an escape. Some are too sick. Others too young. There may be expectant mothers among them. Imagine the distressing level of their fear. The day of destruction is coming. The end is assured. And they'd worry for their future as they know that food and water supplies will have to end at some point. There's no hope! Fear and anxiety dominates conversations with neighbours. If only they could escape!

○ It's situations just like this that cause people around our world today to become refugees. Desperate to leave – they will try anything. And if they do manage to escape with their lives, they carry great distress, trauma and often, open psychological wounds with them. ○ Prov 14:31 says, **"If you oppress poor people, you insult the God who made them; but kindness shown to the poor is an act of worship."** They need kindness, justice and righteousness; they need comfort and compassion. So often though, they are treated with suspicion, mistrust, apathy, and even hatred. The poor; the needy; the homeless are not cared for!

Jeremiah says, "gather up" the few possessions that you need for your get away. "If you are to escape then you can only take what you can carry with you. Leave your homes; your possessions, your gardens and your animals; your friends and neighbours. Grab what you think you'll need and escape this place whilst you can."

Under such a trial one is forced to consider and be thankful for what really does matter in life. What would you “gather up” if you were in their shoes? What really does matter for you? We tend to hold onto a lot of stuff. Perhaps its time to consider and reduce down, to what is really important in life. Let’s not hold on to so much stuff!

Jeremiah warns the people to leave while they can; to escape certain capture. If they can escape, then they may be spared from the disaster that is coming. There are people all around us who are heading for disaster as their day of judgement draws nearer. ○ The writer of Hebrews says, **“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”** (9:27-28) We will all face judgement following our death, but Jesus died in our place to grant us eternal life. We can escape judgement.

The Apostle John saw a vision of Judgement Day ○ and he said, **“I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ..Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.”** (Rev 20:12,15)

Are we warning others that there is a way to escape Judgement Day? Perhaps we are meant to be like Jeremiah?

Jeremiah cares for his people; a people who are lost; lost in their daily pursuit of false gods; lost to the coming destruction of their city, land, homes, and families. ○ In v.19-22 he identifies himself with them, and speaks on their behalf.

**“Woe to me because of my injury! My wound is incurable! Yet I said to myself, “This is my sickness, and I must endure it.” My tent is destroyed; all its ropes are snapped. My children are gone from me and are no more; no one is left now to pitch my tent or to set up my shelter. The shepherds are senseless and do not inquire of the LORD; so they do not prosper and all their flock is scattered. Listen! The report is coming - a great commotion from the land of the north! It will make the towns of Judah desolate, a haunt of jackals.”**

Judah has already suffered great hurt as the surrounding towns have been overrun. Her wound is incurable. She’s like a tent that has been uprooted; her tent is ruined and her ropes have snapped; her sons have left her and there is no-one left to raise the tent again and hang the curtains. The leaders sought their own wisdom, and not sought after the Lord.

Rather than point the finger and make accusations, and seek to lay blame; Jeremiah identifies with his people and has compassion toward them. ○ He identifies himself with the people of Jerusalem, and speaks on their behalf. He is saddened for his people; for his nation; for the people that God had set apart and called to Himself. A people that were about to endure great suffering.

W F Albright in his book *The Archaeology of Palestine* has recorded that “there is no known case of a town in Judah which was continuously occupied through the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.” And so Jeremiah’s prediction was, that Jerusalem and every city and town through out Judah would become desolate; uninhabited; a place for jackals to roam as their own. And thus it was!

Do we care for our neighbours, workmates, community, nation? Do we care that they’re lost; lost in their daily pursuit of false gods; and heading for eternal destruction? They’re captive to the power of Satan’s dominion; their eyes are closed to the truth of the gospel and God’s love. They are in darkness; captive to strongholds of deception and addiction; they don’t even realise they are lost and doomed to eternal damnation. Do we care? Or do we sit in apathy – secure in our salvation?

You see, Jeremiah in identifying with his people, recognises his own sin and need for the Lord’s mercy.

○ He says, **“LORD, I know that people’s lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps.”** (v.23) He has learnt this from his own experience. He may have had his own plans, hopes and dreams, but then God called him to be the prophet to the people. He understood too that man’s natural bent is to walk away from God. Left to himself, he will by human nature direct his own paths and they will be drenched in selfishness. **People’s lives are not their own; it is not for them to direct their steps.**

He is not surprised by the direction that the people of Judah have taken, but he is disappointed that they have not sought the Lord and His ways. Better, had they sought the Lord to direct their steps! ○

Last week we saw that God told the people not to bother praying to Him – because on the basis that they would not listen to Him, He said that He would not listen to them. In the next chapter, 11:14 God tells Jeremiah not to bother praying for them either. And so here in verses 24-25 he appeals to the Lord in an attempt to turn back the coming judgement. He asks the Lord to correct any of his faults, and to punish the surrounding nations who don’t seek to follow God’s ways either.

○ **“Correct me, LORD, but only with justice - not in your anger, or you will reduce me to nothing. Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the peoples who do not call on your name. For they have devoured Jacob; they have devoured him completely and destroyed his homeland.”**

Many a parent has wished that they could take the suffering and pain away from their child when they are unwell. They would be prepared to take the sickness themselves if they could. Jeremiah has such compassion for his fellow Jews. He says, correct me if I am in error; but also discipline the surrounding nations. Please turn back your wrath.

He's desperate to see that God doesn't punish his people as they deserve. He knows that justice needs to be metered out, but he also knows that there are two kinds of justice. Punishment according to the gravity of the crime is strict justice.  Or justice soaked in mercy is corrective justice.

Jeremiah is asking the Lord to show mercy and patience with him, and with his people, correcting their behaviour, but justice soaked in mercy, sparing them from destruction. This is corrective justice. Correct me Lord.

But at the same time Jeremiah asks God to bring strict justice upon the surrounding nations. And therein lays the dilemma for Jeremiah, for he knew that many of his own people did not know God well, nor call upon Him alone either. And so, strict justice was probably merited.

Do we care for the lost like Jeremiah?  Do we plead for God's mercy; on behalf of our nation? When we see a brother or sister caught in sin, what level of justice we seek? Often times our self-righteousness demands that strict justice be given. We want the punishment to fit the crime; we want people to get what they deserve. Even for a Christian brother or sister who has done the wrong thing; for the prodigal.

But if we sin, then we plead for mercy; for no punishment, let alone corrective justice. But here in Jeremiah we see a glimpse of Jesus. He is prepared to be corrected if that saves his people, or in the case of Jesus, take the punishment Himself to spare the lives of those deserving the penalty.

Is the salvation of others; is the sharing of the gospel more important to us than our own comfort; our wisdom, riches or strength? Billy Graham said, "the most loving thing we can do for anyone, is to share the gospel with them."

In the previous chapter, we read God's direction... **"Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.**" (Jer 9:23-24)

Ultimately, our wisdom, strength or riches count for nothing. How well do we know and understand God?  How are we exercising kindness, justice and righteousness? How are we demonstrating kindness, righteousness, and justice soaked in mercy? Aren't we all called to be "a Jeremiah" to our people within our circle of influence? Working with people can be one of the toughest jobs in the world, but it can be one of the most rewarding. Is your heart, a heart of compassion for others; for the lost? How are we demonstrating that we care?