

22nd Sunday November 2009 Jeremiah 23.1-8, 24.1-10

Home Group Notes

Next week will be Romans 2.1-6 but then we'll be back to Jeremiah 26-29 so keep reading!

Welcome

What's a favourite speech from a film?

How your week been?

Worship Psalm 46

Word

1. Read Jeremiah 21-25, okay that's a bit unrealistic, so you could at least try Jer 23.1-8 and ch 24.
2. Remember anything James said?
3. What were the three points and where did I get them from?
4. What parallels are there with last week's sermon on Romans (written over 600 years later!)
5. These chapters are all about Kings and Prophets and Shepherds. They don't really apply to me. How would you reply to that point?
6. Ch23v5 who is the person (beginning with J) that this prophecy points to! (painfully easy)
7. Make a link with the prophecy about good and bad figs with Jesus' curse of the empty fig tree. (Mark 11.13,14,20) (a lot harder)
8. Why does God care about other nations. How does that effect how we pray?

Works

Pray, esp for those for whom these chapters deeply resonate. Pray for other nations too.

//*

... These 5 chapters of Jeremiah are a little bit like that. When you first look at it it looks as if its **Only the Kings** and the Prophets who are getting a real telling off but read it again and you realise that actually its **quite widespread** the telling off and **if even the Kings** and the Prophets are being rebuked, what hope is there for the rest of us!

So the Kings are rebuked but it's not just the kings, its **anyone in authority** – the plea is **Do Justice**, deliver the robbed, don't mistreat the strangers, the orphans, the widows. Plead the **cause of the afflicted** and the needy.

The advice is straight forward and it's aimed not just at the king but at his whole household, at the judges and those who enforce the law. It's a straightforward call for **all of us who have authority** over others to do the right thing. Do justice.

And the **Prophets** are rebuked for saying things that God never said, for **pretending** to have dreams and for spreading a **false hope**.

About 100 years earlier, when **Hezekiah** was king, the city was surrounded by the enemy and God sent a plague and killed the enemy off and the rest ran away. **Maybe God** will do the same thing again. It's a good hypothesis but unfortunately it runs contrary to so many of God's prophets saying again and again what Jeremiah says here that **Judgment is a coming**.

Jeremiah is speaking about **588bc**. It's not so easy to tell the date, the book is sort of written in chronological fashion but not always and some bits of it seem to be **more gathered than others** bits. We have in Chs 21 & 22 some comments on how bad different kings have been and then later broad sweeping comments on how bad the **religious leaders** have been. Nonetheless what you've got here is a **bad situation**.

We're **after** the time of **David**, we're after the peaceful and wise period of Solomon, we're after the time when the 12 tribes of the family of God divided in to **two kingdoms**, a north and a south kingdom, usually referred to as Israel and Judah. Israel for many years worshipped a **golden calf** – it sounds barking mad after all the history that they had been through about not worshipping idols but they started to get serious about Baal worship and in due time judgement came to them and they were invaded in **722bc** and many many of them were taken away into slavery in Babylon.

You might think that that would be a **wake up call** to Judah but no, God gives them another **120** years and in **597bc** Jerusalem finds itself surrounded by the Babylonian army. The city is captured and a lot of the upper classes, the rich and the intelligent people are taken away. **Daniel** would be a good example. **Ezekiel** too. But even still there there's no learning of the lesson and so here we are just a few years before the final fall of Jerusalem in 586bc, just before the **temple** that Solomon built is burned and **destroyed** and the city is torn down. It's not a good place to be.

You might be feeling that you're in a similar place, **surrounded by worries**, waiting for an operation, waiting for a judgement of some sort! You look around for people who can **advise** you and all your **friends** do their best to say **there there** it will be alright – and that's nice but they're only saying it. They don't really know. It would seem harsh to call them false prophets but there is here a **lesson to learn about listening** to God, about being with people in the midst of their fears and not brushing away their fears with a lot of nonsense.

But there are 2 lessons we can learn in the midst of all this. Add to it a 3rd lesson if you like and that might be the simple plea to **Do the Right Thing**, seek justice, don't oppress the stranger and orphans and widows. Do the Right Thing. I'll leave you to figure out what that means in your setting.

But we can learn that **God is in control**. It doesn't feel that way of course, the city is surrounded by a vast army that has defeated all the other armies. And the 1 person who has been preaching for **23years** is still continuing to say **unpatriotic nonsense** such as – God is against us and if we are to survive this pain then we have to **go with God**. God has sent this army against us. It's **nothing to do with the Babylonians** being stronger than us, it is everything to do with God.

And of course when you're all wrapped up in your worries you forget that **other people have theirs**. We read how God is bringing this same judgement against all the other nations around. It's not just Judah that's in trouble but Egypt and Edom **and everyone else**.

We tend to think that **life's all about Me** and my problems. And that's understandable. But here we learn that God cares for the other nations too, and it matters to God if they do the right thing or if they oppress people and sin. And so even though **they don't recognise** the **LORD God** as their God, yet He is still their God and He is going to bring judgement on them using this Babylonian army.

It's not a lot of comfort to know that whilst you're going through a tough time, so are others, but it might help a little. It might at least **improve your empathy**. Usually in a sermon like this, it's usually attached to a story that all **works out alright**. Someone gets **healed** at the end of it, someone gets **converted** and changes their life around and Zacchaeus starts to give

money away. That sort of thing. But this story is not going to end like this. At least **not for a long time**. There's going to be an **invasion**, people are going to get hurt, **innocent** good people as well as bad people. Those who live will be **dragged off to slavery**, others will run off trying to escape to Egypt but life won't be any easier for them there. There will be a **few people** left in Jerusalem but it will be a shadow of its former glory, it will be an **embarrassment** to live in.

It sounds so odd to say it but **Jeremiah will be right** in saying the very unpatriotic thing – it will be better for you to get captured and to be taken off as a slave.

And if it helps you can **rail against God** and the injustice of it all. Sometimes that's helpful. And others of you will find it more helpful to **cling on to the peculiar hope** that is tucked away in Jeremiah's words – better to be captured and sent away as a slave – that's a good outcome from this story.

So as you find yourself in the **midst of your slavery** you might remember what Jeremiah said and say to yourself, well this is awful but Jeremiah said this was the **best option**.

Brother Lawrence (I think) said I would rather **go through pain with God** than have a life time of pleasure without God. He said I could understand that a life of pain with God would be **paradise** itself but a life of pleasure **without** God would be the very **depths of hell**.

You might not agree with that. And certainly when you're in the midst of it, you might really disagree with it. But it leads us to pray for a **fresh awareness of the presence** of God whether we're having fun or in the midst of our own private hell.

Lesson 2 today is God is in control. Lesson 3 is God has not stopped loving you

It looks that way, the **people of God invaded** and dragged off into slavery. If you were standing to one side of this piece of history and someone said Hey would you like to follow this god? You would probably be saying No thank you, if that's what **He does to His own family** what's He going to do to others?

And you've already heard the first part of the answer to that – God is going to **judge them too**.

But after 70 years. And this will turn out to be a **crucial bit of prophecy** for Jeremiah. Poor Jeremiah spends **over 23 years** of his life telling people to worship the LORD God and to stop doing the wrong thing, to **stop stealing and injustice** and adultery and murder and they won't listen. He makes **no friends** at all, his whole life. No one believes him (except Baruch and one or two others to be fair). None of his prophecies are nice and they **take ages to be proved right** or wrong.

But it is this 70 year bit of prophecy which is going to make Jeremiah one of the most **revered prophets** in the OT. 70 years from here **Daniel** will remember what Jeremiah said and he will start praying and it will be fulfilled.

In the first case the **bullies will have their comeuppance**. The Babylonians will be overthrown, God will visit them with judgement.

In the second case all the **other nations** that were previously judged, they will get to **return to their lands** and God promises to **recompense** them.

Again, we do tend to think that life is all about me, or that God is the **God only of our Church**, our nation, but it would seem that the LORD God is the God of all nations, over the whole earth. And that's got to **help you when you pray** for other nations and governments and it's got to help when you see other nations going through a tough time. **God is their God** too, even if they don't know it! And **God isn't finished with them either!**

Point 3 is **God has not stopped loving you**

But if you go back and read chapters again, then focus upon **what God says He will do**. There are a lot of promises. God says **I will raise up shepherds** who will tend you so that you won't be **afraid** anymore, so that you won't be **missing** anymore.

God **will raise up** a new **David** – a new king, wise, who will do justice and will save people and they will be secure in Him and it won't be done by **you being good** and getting it right it will be **achieved by God**, by God being faithful and right, by God's **righteousness**.

God says to those who find themselves **dragged off** – I'm not finished with you, I will build you up, I will plant, I will give you a heart to know me.

There's a great but violent film called the **Last of the Mohicans** in which Daniel Day Lewis plays Hawkeye, a local tracker who has fallen in love with an English woman who is captured by a tribe of Indians and Lewis gives this terrific **passionate speech** to her just before she is dragged away.

It is I suppose **what every woman** wants to hear her man say and its **what I dream** I might be brave enough to say in such a situation – I can't do the strength of his voice but he says this

“You be strong, you survive... You stay alive, no matter what occurs! I will find you. No matter how long it takes, no matter how far, **I will find you.**”

And this is the **hope** that gives her the **strength to endure** what comes next. The **promise I will find you**.

And it is with that kind of **passion** that God says all these I wills. You're about to go through **terrible times, but I will be with you**, I will **bring you back**, I will **give you a heart** to know me,

I am the LORD and you will be My people and I will be your God.

Lesson no.1 **was Do Justice**, do the Right thing, look after strangers and orphans and widows. And if you can do the right thing by these people then you should be able to do the **right thing by everyone** else.

Lesson 2 is **God is in control**. It's an important lesson that can only really be learned when everything is **awful**. It's boringly obvious when everything is lovely but when you're **surrounded by woes and worries and what ifs** that's when you need to know that is in control and not only in control of what's happening to you but even in control of **what's going on in the lives of others around you**.

God's promise is that **He is with us**.

So it is a truth worth hearing – that **pain with God is a paradise**, compared to a life of pleasure without God. Or as a clergy woman I trained with put it – I'd rather go through this **difficult life with Jesus** than without. (actually she used another word than 'difficult' but it would be rude to say it from the pulpit!). God is in control.

Lesson 3 **God has not stopped loving you**. Hear the I wills, hear the passion in the text – **I will find you!** God has not finished – I will bring you back, I will build you up, I am the Lord, and You will be my people. God has not stopped loving you. Amen.