

Listen to God, Do Good. Jeremiah 36-38 7th February 2010

Home Group Notes

Worship: Psalm 40 / sing a song of praise, go on you won't wake the kids and the neighbours can say "oh those crazy Christians!"

Welcome & Word

1. Bosses: Who's been the best boss you ever worked for (why) / worst?
2. The All Age service was really different. How? What happened?
3. Why does God say what He says (vs3,7)
4. Does anyone respond vs8-14
5. Read Jeremiah 36.14-26
6. Who's trying to be a good role model here?
7. Its easy to come to Church and let it all was over you. To pick up the bible and skim read it. What advice would you give to someone so that they can glean something from worship, something from reading the bible?
8. How is Jeremiah a good role model?
9. What's good about Zedekiah wanting to secretly hear Jeremiah (37.17)
10. Read Jeremiah 38.1-13
11. How is Ebed Melech a good role model?
12. What's bad about Zedekiah's secrecy (38.24ff)
13. Why do I find 38.28 such a sad, anticlimactic ending?
14. We'll come back to Jeremiah another time, thank you for the feedback so far, now's a last chance to feedback re Jeremiah. I'll make a note of it and promise to revisit your questions.

Works

Pray for persecuted Christians. Give thanks to God for the good role models you've known. Pray for yourself as a role model to all sorts of people! Pray for me as a leader.

Is there anything that we can do as a group over Lent?

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One of the questions I ask myself as I read the book of Jeremiah is Am I supposed to be like these people – **who here is my role model?**

As a Leader, I **look to the Kings** to see if they can help. Jehoiakim shows all the signs of **arrogance** whilst Zedekiah is paralysed by **fear**.

So am I to be **like Jeremiah** – you have to admire, even if you find his message boring and depressing, you have to admire the man's **stickability**, his perseverance.

Am I to be like Jeremiah's **helpers** – we see two today – Baruch and Ebed Melech. Both of them are limited in what they can do but they muck in and do their best.

In Ch 36 we find Jeremiah in the year **605bc**. He is not in prison but his movements are **restricted** at this point. So he gets **Baruch to write down** what God has said to Jeremiah.

I find it interesting that Jeremiah can't write. He comes from an educated family, he was going to train as a priest as his father had done before him. He had a life of privilege and prestige before him. But God had other ideas.

I wonder **what you have heard** as you have read Jeremiah. Do you hear the **doom and gloom** message – we're all going to die, Babylon will invade and we will all be slaves, the best thing we can do is surrender. Its all a bit **wearisome**.

Or do you hear the **call to Repentance**? The only reason why we're in this mess is **because of our sin provoking God into saying IF** you really want to go and worship false gods instead of me, if you really want to be enslaved to them, then go and do it properly, as slaves in the land of Babylon.

God is calling His people to **repent**. Over the chapters, the message that you have **one more Second Chance** comes again and again but as time goes on the offer of a 2nd chance starts to come less frequently.

So the message started off with **Repent now and this won't end in tears**, and now the message is, It's going to end in tears but if you repent now, at least you'll **get to live**.

Jeremiah speaks of **second chances, of God's mercy** and His love **but what do you hear** when you read Jeremiah?

Lots of people talk about the OT God being a **vindictive warring** sort of god whereas the god of the NT is the god of love.

But I think that **you've been told to read the bible** like that. If you read it as coming from the **heart of love**, as one book with one message about God's love and faithfulness and care for all people, then **that will shape** what you take away from reading the bible.

Baruch writes down what Jeremiah says. That's something that **Baruch is good at**. So it's an easy point then for me to say **We need to find out what you're good at** and get you to bring that gift and skill to play in the life of the Church family.

Baruch then goes out to read it what Jeremiah has dictated. Now this is a **step outside the comfort zone**. Yes Baruch can read but not everyone feels comfortable with reading publicly and even fewer of us are comfortable about reading stuff that you know is going to upset the authorities.

When I first stood up to **strum my guitar** in church, when I first took a school assembly – it was all terribly nerve wracking and exhausting. I turned to our little group after we'd first played in one church and said excitedly – I think the Lord has given me a word for us as a group – Yes? They said. I replied “the Lord says Practice!”

Ebed Melech showed up in the next reading from Ch38, the year is now 587 maybe **586**. It is the **eve** of the invasion. Jeremiah has been **caught nipping out of the City** to sort out some home affairs.

Mr **Jobsworth** himself cannot turn a blind eye, **Irijah** the guard doesn't believe him. Frankly I'd've thought that if Jeremiah wants to desert to the Babylonians then let him and good riddance. But no, his enemies decide on a slow and painful **death by starvation** so they lower him into a muddy well.

Ebed-melech – means literally servant of the king – is a eunuch from Ethiopia. **So I count two Ethiopian Eunuch heroes in the bible.** His job is to do whatever the king wants but Ebed **takes a little initiative for himself.**

We don't know of any skills he has other than the simplicity of **seeing a need and wanting to help** out and not simply in telling the king what to do but with the king's authority cracking on with doing it.

I tend to think of **Jeremiah as being all alone**; many of his whining prayers at the beginning of the book are all about him and his struggle with God. Certainly early on he does seem to be alone. **He is disowned by his family and beaten up by some men from his village.** But there are all sorts of people who help, some of whom are named (**Ahikam** son of Shaphan Jer26.24) and most of whom are not.

We get to various points in our lives and **we feel very alone** and it's only me against the trials and tribulations of this difficult life but the truth is that **there are other people** who loves us and pray for us and are near to us and help us. We don't always appreciate that.

But **Jeremiah is not alone**, these two people Baruch and Ebed-melech – they see a need and they do what they're good at and for both of them they **end up doing** things that are out of their **comfort zone** but they are trying all the same.

There are two Kings in these two readings today. The First King, Jehoiakim is **arrogant**. Baruch reads the words of God to the People and the people don't really take much notice, some of the **officials** that hear the message, they hear it and are afraid, they take the **bold step** of making sure the king hears it.

I wonder whether they hoped that the king would listen and **take notice**, perhaps he might repent because then the **nation would wake up**.

If you see your **boss being lazy** its not conducive to a hard working office ethic. On the other hand if you see your boss leaving at 5pm and as he strolls out of the office he shouts to you all – go home, get a life! See you on Monday! Then you know he's a **good role model!**

What kind of **role model is Jehoiakim**. He listens to the words of God and then with a *scribes* knife – **I love the detail that we read in this book, I don't always understand it but the attempts made to help the reader know where exactly we are in the palace or temple and when this is all happening and with what –**

the king takes the scribes knife, **cuts the scroll** where one piece of sheepskin has been sown into another (rather than parchment) and he burns them.

He doesn't even have the **decency** to be afraid like the officials. With that kind of arrogance at the top, that kind of role model, **what hope is there for the ordinary** people?

Meanwhile **Zedekiah** is paralysed by **fear**. The enemy is at the door, the pressure and the stress are so overwhelming that he no longer seems to be **able to cope** or deal with anything.

His officials are supposed to be helping but all they can do is **indulge in their own revenge** - slowly killing Jeremiah in the muddy well.

So Zedekiah doesn't make for much of a role model. But that's okay sometimes we can **learn more off bad** role models than good ones.

Zedekiah is so close to his problems he doesn't know the way out. Curiously, he keeps coming back to Jeremiah, which is good. But he really doesn't want to hear what God is saying.

Its odd isn't it. In the **first reading**, the people go to the temple, **they hear** Baruch reading the words of God and they pay little or **no attention**. Perhaps they think that they are being religious enough? Whatever they think there's a clearly a **spirit of arrogance** that is deafening their ears.

Then in the 2nd reading its as if Zedekiah is **keen to be spiritual** but still he is **paralysed by a spirit of fear**.

How do you **help a boss** who is like this? How do you help yourself when you're like this?

The next thing that happens is that the **Enemy will break down the city gates**. They will burn Jerusalem to the ground and take away to slavery any who are worth anything and they'll leave a ghost town behind.

If you were writing a book on it, you would be hoping for **some climactic speech** on the eve of the last battle. But the last conversation that we hear with **Zedekiah is of a scared** man, who is more worried about keeping his meetings with Jeremiah **secret** than he is worried about doing the right thing.

Jeremiah comes to him with a **last offer of mercy**. Its astonishing, after so many chapters of telling the kings how this is going to end if they don't buck up, even now, Jeremiah tells the King, **if you surrender** now your **life** will be spared. You know that this is the truth, all those false prophets who promised that the Babylonians would be gone, where are they now? Jeremiah **pleads** with the king – Obey the Lord, surrender, think of your family.

But the scene closes with **Zedekiah too scared** of his officials, too scared of surrendering, a **rabbit** caught in the headlights.

Its sad and it calls for an **evangelistic close** to this sermon series.

We've seen good role models and bad ones. **Jeremiah's stickability** and desire to listen to God. He has not enjoyed the last 38 chapters, the last 23 years. But he has held on to God and **God has held on to him**.

Baruch and **Ebed-Melech** are great role models – people who see a need and **muck in** with their skills and end up doing things they thought they'd never do. It's a wonderful picture of **what we should be like**.

Jehoiakim and Zedekiah – **two bad kings** – one full of **arrogance**, surrounded by officials who don't care or who are too afraid to challenge the king. The other **paralysed** by fear, surrounded by officials who carry out their own whims rather than **help**.

That's all good moral preaching, please take it on board.

But more importantly than that perhaps is the **plea to us from Jeremiah to listen to God**.

There comes a time when the **offer of mercy and grace closes**, when the warnings and teachings that have come to us year upon year **cease** and all that is left is the **judgement**.

Each of us we have experienced something of the mercy of God, we know something of the gospel and of the cross, we have the **beginnings of a faith**.

The plea is **not** to leave it too late but to look **to God for forgiveness and mercy**, to receive from Him the love that He longs to give and in that power, that light, to live and work to His praise and glory. Amen.