

Sunday, August 12, 2018—Jeremiah 24-26

Human nature leads people to compare themselves to others. Value (or lack thereof) comes from beauty, intelligence, wealth, ability, and other categories in comparison to what others possess in that same category. God doesn't play that game. He values people because He made them in His image, and He wants them to be who He made them to be.

Using an object lesson, God gave Jeremiah a vision of two baskets of figs. One contained good, edible figs. The others were inedible and unattractive. God said the first basket represented those who were sent in exile to Babylon. While seemingly invaluable because they had to leave their homeland and were captives in exile, these were the ones God saw with great potential. "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people, and I will be their God because they will return to me with all their heart" (24:7). Anyone remaining free (for the time being), looking at them in comparison, might have felt far superior.

God was not comparing people to one another. He was comparing His peoples' actions to the expectations He had given them through the generations. They had neither obeyed nor repented (25:7), so they would face great suffering as God poured out His wrath (25:8-38). Hearing this judgment from Jeremiah produced anger (26:8-9) rather than brokenness, but some remembered history and Scripture and defended Jeremiah, preventing his death and further judgment (26:16-24).

Compare yourself to Jesus and the standards of Scripture.

Saturday, August 11, 2018—Jeremiah 21-23

Praying is a good thing. One can never pray too much. In prayer, the one praying treats God as God—acknowledging His sovereignty, celebrating His character, and expressing dependence on Him for protection and provision. Prayer does not always, however, yield comfortable results. Sometimes God is silent. At times, He calls for repentance. Other times, He says, "I am going to discipline you" (21:5).

The king sent messengers to Jeremiah asking him to pray for God's deliverance, but God said He was going to deliver His people into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar instead of from him. God remained gracious, however, and said the way of life was to submit to the discipline and surrender to Nebuchadnezzar. The rebellious could remain and die by famine, plague, and sword (21:8-10).

God was not reacting like a petulant child who didn't get his way. He had, from the beginning, asked His people to obey, and they had not. He had called them repeatedly to repentance, and they had not. He was going to punish them so that people walking by in the future would ask, "Why did Yahweh do this?" (22:8), and others would know the answer—His people had forsaken Him (22:9). They failed to administer justice and righteousness. They exploited the weak and vulnerable. They didn't rescue those in trouble, and they worshiped idols. What other choice did He have?

God promised to raise up a Righteous Branch and restore His people (23:5-6). Praise God for Jesus and the power He gives to live repentantly to meet His expectations. Thank Him for answering prayer.

Friday, August 10, 2018—Jeremiah 17-20

"For the wages of sin is death . . ." Paul told the Romans what God said through Jeremiah over 600 years earlier. "I will give up your wealth and all your treasures as plunder because of the sin of your high places . . ." (17:3). When they thought they were "gaining" blessing, experience, comfort, or joy through their idolatry, the sin would cost them everything.

The contrast was the person who trusted fully in the Lord. That person would be like a well-watered plant (17:8), and God was the one who tested the hearts to determine those who were

wicked and those who were righteous (17:10). The human heart's own wickedness makes it impossible for anyone to be self-righteous (17:9). This comes only from God.

God wanted His people to live differently, and observing the Sabbath was the most counter-cultural decision they could make to declare His sovereignty and goodness. If they weren't willing to honor Him and be different, there was no need for them to have His blessing and the gracious gift of Jerusalem itself. He would remove it and start over. Like a potter with misshapen pottery, He would crush them and begin again.

Delivering this news did not make Jeremiah popular. In fact, the people were making plans to harm him (18:18-23). He could only cry out to Yahweh and trust Him. Despite the hardship, Jeremiah could not keep silent. The message was like a fire in his bones (20:9). Pray for an equally compelling desire to share Christ no matter the consequences.

Thursday, August 9, 2018—Jeremiah 13-16

There are times the Bible discusses completely unexpected things. Some passages can cause the reader to blush in embarrassment or cringe with disgust. Other times, like this passage, there is uncertainty. "So I bought underwear as the LORD instructed me and put it on" (13:2). Why would God tell Jeremiah to do this, and why would Jeremiah tell the reader?

God used this strange request as an object lesson. Like an intimate garment, God had called His people closely to Him, yet they had become useless. Their spiritual prostitution led them to be chaffing and abrasive, like an uncomfortable pair of intimate clothing. They would be discarded without pity or compassion because of their pride.

Again, God told Jeremiah not to pray for the people (14:11). There was a drought in the land, foreshadowing God's refining process. Jeremiah was troubled because many other prophets were telling the people God would not allow them to suffer (14:14). God told Jeremiah to be patient. The coming sword and famine would prove them wrong.

Jeremiah knew he and his countrymen were sinful and in complete dependence on God (14:20-22). Whether they admitted it or not, Jeremiah was fully aware he was nothing without Yahweh. Nevertheless, God was intent on destroying the people (15:1-14). He had seen enough.

Jeremiah was going to suffer with the others, but God promised to rescue (15:19-21, 16:14-21). Ask God to use suffering to purge your life of sinful ways and draw you closer to Him, making you more useful.

Wednesday, August 8, 2018—Jeremiah 9-12

Jeremiah found himself in a miserable situation. He wept over the condition of his people and their beloved city (9:1), and he hated what his people had become because of their spiritual adultery (9:2-9). God was rightly bringing misery and punishment on disobedient children (9:15-16).

As miserable as they were and were to be, the work of God was testimony to His greatness and power. The worthless idols of the nations around them had no power. Their spiritual adultery was committed with impotent gods. In demonstrating justice and righteousness, God was also demonstrating kindness. He was reminding His people and the world of His identity and calling His people to repentance and endurance (10:1-25).

God was determined to bring judgment on His people to the point He told Jeremiah not to pray for the people (11:14). Intercession would not change His heart. The curses He promised would fall on His people in order to cleanse the land and reestablish His sovereignty. He would preserve some, but punishment would affect all.

Frustrated by what he saw, Jeremiah asked, "Why do the wicked flourish?" (12:1). He had seen so many use spiritual words yet be far from God. Why had God not stopped them in their sinfulness instead of allowing them to prosper? Instead, He was patiently waited for repentance that

did not come and had to give His people over to their enemies. Jeremiah wished there had been another way.

Praise God for His faithfulness, justice, and righteousness—even when life is confusing and uncomfortable.

Tuesday, August 7, 2018—Jeremiah 6-8

On August 6, 1945, Hiroshima, Japan, experienced the devastating consequences of the blast of an atomic bomb. Young and old, rich and poor, educated and simple in an instant were killed or severely injured as a result. The bomb did not discriminate.

What Jeremiah saw happening in Jerusalem was not as physically cataclysmic as a nuclear bomb, yet the spiritual result was as devastating. God did not discriminate as the city fell to invaders (6:11). The leaders had misled the people. The adults had not disciplined the children. The powerful took advantage of the weak, and they openly rebelled against God's expectations. The entire nation would pay the price.

What did God want from them? Where had they gone wrong? The list could go on and on, but God pointed to one thing. When He brought them out of Egypt, before He had given the Law to His people, He said, "Obey me, then I will be your God, and you will be my people" (7:23). God wanted obedient people with obedient hearts. The request was simple, but the people had complicated and corrupted the call. They outwardly "obeyed" with worship practices and festivals, but their hearts were far from Him, and their disobedience harmed others and dishonored God.

Jeremiah had a front-row seat for this devastation, and he could not grasp the depth of the consequences. He wept over Jerusalem. He wondered why God, who was fully capable, did not bring healing (8:22).

Admit your personal sins and the ways they hinder God's work.

Monday, August 6, 2018—Jeremiah 3-5

After a natural disaster, like a wildfire or a hurricane, the assessment period figures what was truly lost and the cost for replacement. Those numbers are quite often staggering. Some things have such sentimental value or were of such unique nature that they can't be replaced.

Jeremiah prophesied to God's people as they suffered the fall of Jerusalem and its aftermath. In Jeremiah 3, God hoped they would see how devastating their situation was. Like a woman who had divorced a man and gone to another, Israel had prostituted themselves with foreign gods (3:1). How could they ever be worthy in His sight again? This was profound loss.

In God's grace, He said, "I will not look on you with anger, for I am unfailing in my love" (3:12b). Though Judah had not learned from the example of Israel, God was willing to accept them both and restore them with faithful shepherds (3:17). There was one caveat. They had to remove their idols (4:1). God was calling them to break up unplowed ground in their hearts for true repentance and new fruitfulness (4:3-4). He wanted them to understand the idols intended to take their lives (4:30).

To return, they would need God to prune away the shoots that did not belong to Him (5:10). They had borne the fruit of unfaithfulness and adultery, and He could have none of that. They would serve foreigners in foreign lands as part of their cleansing process (5:18).

Praise God for His unfailing, cleansing, disciplining love.