
Day 206 - July 25

Judah after Israel's Fall (725-585 BCE)

Jeremiah the Weeping Prophet

Jeremiah Rebukes an Unfaithful Nation

Readings: *Jeremiah 1:1-19; 2:1-37; 3:1-5*

Reflections:

- Jeremiah, one of the greatest prophets of Israel, begins his vocation with a dramatic call by God. During his lifetime the political scene will be in constant turmoil. In the same year Jeremiah receives his call from God, a new Babylonian Empire will form under Nebopolasser as they rebel against Assyria. Ninevah itself will fall within 15 years under the power of the Medo-Persian Alliance. Within the next seven years, the major superpowers, Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia, will collide at Carchemish and Babylon's Nebuchadnezzar will emerge the victor. Israel during this whole time will be in constant danger as war rages around them. Jeremiah's calling, probably at a young age, informs him that he will be preaching and leading during a dangerous time but God will be with him.
- Jeremiah is from the small town of Anathoth. It is good to know God loves to pick leaders from out of the middle of nowhere.
- "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you (the word for "know you" here sounds like the word for "olive branch") before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." This calling finds a very close parallel to Psalm 139:13-16 as David expresses his own clear sense of God's calling on his life from conception. This helps us understand the intentionality of God. He is a God who does not simply work with random events but he is actively involved in creating us with a vision for our lives. Although we are not his puppets who have no active role to play in shaping our lives, we are his created ones in whom he delights and for whom he has a mission for us to complete. What an exciting way to live life, in partnership with the one who created you and designed you for his purposes! We should also notice that Jeremiah is not just a prophet to Israel, but to the nations. God's heart again we see is for all people.
- Many people feel just like Jeremiah: "Ah, Sovereign Lord...I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." Many leaders feel inadequate (like Moses who was to speak for God even though he probably had a problem with stuttering – Exodus 4:10) or too young and

without the necessary tools (like David facing Goliath). God does this because as he declared to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12: 9 “My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness.” God loves to work through our weaknesses and show us and all the people we encounter that the hope of the world is not humans who have it all together but people who realize that God is their only hope and then choose to totally depend on him.

- God’s promise to Jeremiah is wonderful, “Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must to go everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you.” All those who would follow God whole-heartedly need these same reassurances. Our natural default setting is fear, right from the garden (“I was afraid because I was naked and so I hid” Genesis 3:10). The only remedy for this fear that is common to every one of us is an intimate ongoing relationship with God where we personally experience his power and love changing us from the inside out (see Hebrews 13:5b,6; Ephesians 3:14-21; I John 4:7-19). In this way, God’s perfect love drives out fear from our hearts.
- Jeremiah is then given incredible authority! “Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant.” Ephesians 6 makes it clear that all of God’s people are in a spiritual battle against spiritual authorities that rule humanity. Jeremiah no doubt understood his calling to speak the powerful word of God against the nations who would war around him. We today need the same boldness to speak the truth in love, confronting and demolishing every lie and argument that opposes the truth of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:5) and confidently proclaiming a grace and love that truly builds people up into loving community and a restored, intimate relationship with God (Ephesians 4:14-15). We must remember that God’s authority is not to rule with power and force but is the authority to speak the truth in love and by doing so release the power of God to bring change. Our authority is not coercive and controlling but the words God gives us are powerful to change lives. God does not promise his leaders an easy life but one where they will experience God’s presence with them to complete his will for their lives, “They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you.”
- Jeremiah’s first message is to Jerusalem. The first image he uses is of a bride and bridegroom. This reminds us again how much God loves us. He loves his people romantically, intimately and jealously. Yet as we have come to see and as Jeremiah details, God’s people had consistently rejected the love of their lives and turned to brutal sin, idolatry and other gods. The images Jeremiah uses are familiar and will be used again by the coming Messiah: God as a “bridegroom,” God’s presence as a “spring of living water,” A relationship with God being like a “yoke.”

- The warnings of Jeremiah are vivid and rich in insight. “Israel was holy (set apart) to the Lord, the first fruits of the harvest.” In other words, God wants to save all people, his work with Israel was just the first fruits he gathered in his mission to bring salvation to humanity. “They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves.” We become what we worship. “They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug cisterns that cannot hold water.” God has all we need but we often try to meet our own needs and it simply doesn’t work. These images and warnings remind us of God’s unchanging heart and his unchanging ways.
- May God give us the courage of Jeremiah to speak the truth in love as we seek to build the kingdom of God in people’s hearts, lives and relationships!