
Day 213 - August 1

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

Jeremiah Rebukes an Unfaithful Nation

Readings: *Jeremiah 17:19-27; 18:1-23; 19:1-15; 20:1-18*

Reflections:

- Jeremiah 17:19-27 captures a prophetic warning about the Sabbath. It is easy for us just to read this legalism in the Old Testament but we need to stare into it to capture a deeper meaning. Consider this: "If all you do is work, work, work, and never stop to focus on your relationship with me, I mean really focus on your relationship with me, then things are going to go badly! I created the Sabbath so that you would slow down, take time to remember my faithfulness, promises and care in the past as well as to have time to simply listen to me. Taking a day a week to focus just on your relationship with me will ultimately make the difference between spiritual life and death. Be very careful on this one!"
- Jeremiah's experience at the potter's house is a fascinating one. First, it reveals how relational God is. He uses a very simple, practical image that anyone can understand to help people understand how he will work in response to what we give him. If we give him soft and surrendered hearts and lives, he will do something wonderful with us. If we have a change of heart though, and reject his purposes, then the plans that he had for us will change. This was the case for Judah. They could have experienced incredible blessing but they fundamentally rejected his will. In fact even as God was telling them through Jeremiah that things could turn back in their favor if they would repent, God was making it clear that he already knew their true heart condition and he knew that they wouldn't respond to this warning. "But they will reply, 'It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart.'" What is the ultimate result that judgment brings against those that reject his grace? It is the death of relationship: "I will show them my back and not my face in the day of their disaster."
- The spiritual leaders show how hard hearted they are by their response: "Let's make plans against Jeremiah: for the teaching of the law by the priest will not be lost, nor will the counsel of the wise or the word from the prophets. So let's come and attack him with our tongues and pay no attention to anything he says." Here we see three sources of revelation from God:
 - Teaching Scripture from those who know the Scriptures;

- Wisdom from those gifted with discernment and insight;
- Specific words from God from those gifted with discerning God's voice.

What is interesting is that because they had people in these roles they felt that even if they rejected Jeremiah, they were still fine. They had their teachers, their wise men and their own prophets. But here is an important lesson, even though God will speak in these different ways within community, God expects that all people, especially those in leadership, are ultimately most interested in just listening to his voice regardless of how he comes to them. People didn't like Jeremiah but it didn't change the fact that God expected everyone to listen to Jeremiah. How did they reject and attack Jeremiah? It was all verbal. They slandered him and mocked him. How often has this happened over the centuries and today?

- Jeremiah is boiling with anger. We get to see him unleash his anger. God can handle our anger and in fact it seems to use it at times to make it clear to people that what they have done is wrong before God. His words are shockingly harsh. Praise God in Christ we experience not only a new heart but also a deeper revelation of grace.
- Jeremiah 19 then returns to the image of the potter and the pot. We see clearly that the vile sin of child sacrifice – “I did not command it or mention it, nor did it enter my mind.” The valley of Ben Hinnon (later will be called Gehenna which we know in Jesus' teaching as “hell”) will be called the “Valley of Slaughter.” This place of judgment was not an eternal place of separation from God but for Israel was a place of judgment where God's wrath was poured out on them because of their relentless sins, including killing their own children.
- The judgment of Ben Hinnon (or Gehenna or hell) is horrifying: “In this place I will ruin the plans of Judah and Jerusalem. I will make them fall by the sword before their enemies, at the hands of those who seek their lives, and I will give their carcasses as food to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth. I will devastate this city and make it an object of scorn; all who pass by will be appalled and will scoff because of all its wounds. I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh during the stress of the siege imposed on them by the enemies who seek their lives.” Sounds like hell, doesn't it?
- This vision of judgment is portrayed with the smashing of the clay pot. In this case the pot is not refashioned but destroyed and made completely worthless. The clay is not soft with a flaw in it, it is hardened and lifeless and therefore it can not be refashioned, only destroyed.
- This section also reveals a bit about the religions they were following: child sacrifice, burning incense to the stars, pouring drink offerings to other gods. There is incredible similarity across the ancient religions around the world. This is what makes Israel's monotheism so unique.
- Jeremiah again suffers persecution under the direction of Pashur the priest. Jeremiah is beaten and put in stocks. It is no surprise he announces judgment against Pashur. It is also

no surprise he falls into depression. He wishes he was never born and died in his mother's womb. He despairs his future and believes they will end in shame. He believes God has deceived him. He believes that obeying God only brings him shame and pain. He believes everyone is out to get him. Sound familiar? Everyone has these moments at some time or another. It is good to see that leaders God uses are very much like us. But it doesn't end here. Jeremiah moves past his depression to remind himself of the truth. "But the Lord is with me like a mighty warrior so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail." He also points out what God really cares about. Once again, is it following religion? Of course not! "You ...examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind..." God is with Jeremiah and he knows his heart. Jeremiah, after being so depressed, ends in praise, "He rescues the life of the needy from the hands of the wicked!"