

Those of us who are parents will remember the days when our children were very young – before they could speak, they couldn't just say 'Mummy, dearest' or 'Daddy, darling' - the only way they could get our attention was to scream their little head off! Remember? Someone once told me that the baby's scream was genetically produced at just the right piercing pitch to especially aggravate the baby's parents. I don't know whether that's true or not

Then there were nighttimes, wasn't there. Every parent dreads nighttimes. The baby cries. Oh what about the neighbours? What'll **they** think? Have to quieten baby. Go to them, cuddle them, feed them, wind them, sing to them – do **anything**, but keep baby quiet. And the next night? Clever baby knows what to do – scream and mummy will come. It goes on, night after night. (Hope I'm not putting anybody off children!) You seek help – the advice? Leave baby to cry and scream, until they realise they aren't going to get attention every time they want it.

You feel cruel, don't you, loads of emotions well up inside you; 'perhaps I should just go and give them a quick cuddle, surely that won't hurt.' No! You've **got** to persevere. Don't worry about the neighbours. Don't worry that you don't get any sleep yourself while you listen to baby screaming. You **must** carry it through, even though it hurts. If you don't stick at it, baby will carry on screaming **every** night. They'll never learn. It's for their good. (pause)

The prophet Jeremiah has a difficult message to bring from God. People won't like it. It'd be a lot easier to just keep quiet. No, God has spoken to him, he can't keep quiet. He **has** to deliver this message, and **keep** delivering this message until people get it. He's sometimes referred to as the weeping prophet – the message he brings causes him sadness, it's a hard message, but he **does** continue. He can't afford to worry about what others will think. He **must** persevere. They'll never learn otherwise. It's for their good.

Let's read Jeremiah 32:26-44. (Bookmarked.)

Before we go on we need to fill in a bit of the background first.

It's about 600 years before Jesus was born, and on the whole, Israel has had a poor set of kings over them so far. We're told in verse 2 of this chapter that '*the army of the king of Babylon was then besieging Jerusalem.*' Jerusalem was under siege – the armies of Babylon were massed around the city. And the taking of the city looks pretty imminent;

verse 24 says, 'See how the siege ramps are built up to take the city.' So it's not looking too good for the people of Israel. That's probably an understatement. In months, weeks, or even days, Jerusalem looks like it will fall, through starvation, or plague or the sword.

What about Jeremiah? For 40 years he preached under five different kings. As we've already said, he didn't waver from the message God had given him. And the **result** of this is that we find him here **imprisoned** – verse 2 tells us he is '*confined in the court of the guard*' - because he refuses to back down from his message of judgement. He isn't saying what the kings want to hear, so they lock him up.

Jehoiakim was one of these kings, and he had Jeremiah's writings **burned** (36:24). But you see, the kings came and went, and God's message continued – as the prophet Isaiah said in chapter 40:7,8 '*Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands for ever.*' Jeremiah was put in prison, but his message is still the same. God's word stands for ever. God's word **will** find you out – it stands for ever.

OK. Let's turn to the message in the passage we read. There are two parts to this message, **opposites**, but they are two sides of the same coin, you can't have one without the other. We as Christians have a responsibility to deliver that coin, both sides of the message. (toss a coin) Tails - oh, oh! **Bad news!**

In verses 28-30 we find the bad news. Jerusalem will surely fall into the hands of the army of Babylon. Jeremiah prays in verse 17, '*Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you.*' Even now, God **could** relent, He **could** have mercy, he could avert the Babylonian army. **Nothing** is too hard for God. But the God of all mankind echoes Jeremiah's words in verse 27, '*is anything too hard for me?*' But he is going to give power to the **attackers** of the city, not the defenders. He confirms that the city will be taken – God **himself** is going to hand the city over to the enemy. He can use any means, people, item or event to fulfil his purposes. Nothing is too hard for God.

But hang on a minute - why is he going to hand his people over to their enemy? These are God's **own** people, surely he's not going to hand them over to destruction? Didn't he say in Leviticus 26:11, '*I will put my dwelling place among you, and will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.*' Hasn't he promised to **prosper** them for ever? Why do **this** to them? God is going to hand the city over to be burned down and captured. Why?

The message is very clear – the reasons are very plain – Jeremiah has told God’s people what was going to happen and why for many years; but they wouldn’t listen, they rejected him and his message.

We see it again here in verses 30-33 (re-read). It can’t be more plain can it? In Exodus 20 God gave the 10 commandments to Moses and his people. You’ll remember they were to have no other gods before him; they were not to make idols of any shape or form; they were not to worship idols; they were not to misuse the name of the Lord. But here in these verses we read that that is exactly what they **have** done, blatantly and consistently.

They **have** worshipped other gods – they **have** made idols - they have turned their backs on the God who saved them from Egypt – they have done what **they** wanted, even going so far – we read in verse 35 - as to sacrifice their own children to a foreign god (small g). They have done nothing but **evil** in God’s sight, and have provoked God so much, and made him so **angry** that he is now going to remove this city from his sight. How sad. What a tragedy – despite God’s attempts to speak to his people, they have turned their back on him, they have done evil in God’s eyes. The Bible has a word for this evil, and that is sin. Sin is turning away from God, rejecting him, worshipping things other than the only person worthy of worship – God himself. This is sin, evil in God’s eyes.

The prophet Ezekiel says in chapter 18, verse 4, *‘The soul who sins is the one who will die.’* God clearly says here that sin deserves judgement. God’s people have turned away from their God, they have sinned, they have done evil in his sight, and this will bring punishment for them – their city will be destroyed. What a tragedy.

Good job this happened 2 1/2 thousand years ago; good job it happened in a country thousands of miles away; good job it happened in a culture so different from our civilised society. Oh no! If you’re thinking like that, I’m afraid you’ve got a big shock coming!

The bad news is, God does not change. He doesn’t need to. He is superlative in all things – he is perfect, all-powerful, all-knowing, he is everywhere. He is perfect in every way, he is perfect light, he is perfect love; he is the most high, the most holy, almighty God. He does not change.

His character has not changed, his values have not changed – he’s not like an old man who goes soft in his old age. God’s message is still the same; so sin still makes God angry, sin still deserves judgement and punishment.

We're worried at the moment all over the country, all over the world in fact, about the effects of swine-flu, aren't we. Possibly rightly so. We're wondering how many are going to die because of this terrible disease.

I tell you, there's a disease that is much more common, much more rampant in the world at the moment – and **this** terrible disease will result in the death of many more people than swine-flu. We're **all** infected. Tamiflu won't save us. Epidemic, pandemic? More than that – this disease has reached down through every generation that has ever lived; and it will continue to do so. The disease of sin.

Look at our country, what a mess, every day we seem to be seeing new problems, don't we? Social, economic, problems that attack the very fundamentals and values of our society – why is our country like it is? Listen to these words of Paul in 2 Timothy 3:1-4; *'There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.'*

I think that is a perfect summary of our country today, don't you? I see these attributes every day. Why? I suggest it's because we're under judgement. Just like Jerusalem, we're being besieged, we're under attack. Why? Because we've rejected God – we've turned our back on him, we've done evil in his sight.

Romans 6:23 reminds us that *'the wages of sin is death.'* We need to take this warning seriously. How is it with you? How is it with me? Take this warning – listen to Jeremiah's message – are you still doing evil in God's eyes? Living in sin? God can – and make no mistake he **will** – judge and punish. As he was about to do to Jerusalem, he must remove sin from his sight.

(toss the coin) Heads – hurray! **Good news!**

At the beginning of the chapter we see the title 'Jeremiah buys a field', and in that section we find Jeremiah, surprise, surprise, buying a field. Seem strange to you? It's understandable if it does, for two reasons: I've already said that Jeremiah is confined, he's imprisoned, so why does he want to buy land? And secondly, Jeremiah's been preaching for years that his people are going to be captured and taken into exile. And the land was presently occupied by enemy soldiers. So what does Jeremiah think he's doing buying land **here** and **now**?

All through his ministry, Jeremiah has been obedient to God. He says in verse 6 *'The word of the Lord came to me.'* No questions. He didn't argue with God; the Lord spoke, Jeremiah acted. He **trusted** God, although the idea of buying this field probably sounded strange to **him** too. He trusted and obeyed.

Sometimes trusting God at his word isn't easy, is it? Trusting him for those seemingly 'impossible' promises isn't easy. God says *'I am the Lord, the God of all mankind. Is anything too hard for me?'* We can take Jeremiah's example here, even when he was in a difficult situation, he recognised God's word. **Trust** God, he knows the end from the beginning, he knows what he's doing. We must trust him and obey him. Jeremiah bought a field.

The first part of God's message to his people was the inevitability that Jerusalem would fall, judgement would come, so they should accept the consequences of their sin and comply. By buying the field, Jeremiah becomes an assurance of the **second** part of God's message to his people:

Let's read verses 36-38 *'You are saying about this city, "By the sword, famine and plague it will be handed over to the king of Babylon"; but this is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. They will be my people and I will be their God.'*

So here's the good news - one day they will be **restored**, they will **return** – they will settle in God's land once more. God has promised this land to his people, Genesis 17:8 says, *'The whole land of Canaan ... I will give you as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.'* And God **will** keep his promise.

In v. 43 God says his people will once more buy fields here. So Jeremiah wasn't making a crazy decision and wasting his money when he bought his field – in fact he was making an excellent investment for the future. This field becomes a symbol of **hope** for the future. This land which is now a wasteland, occupied and spoilt by the enemy, **will** be restored to God's people. This is a promise from God. They will dwell here once more in safety (verse 37) and prosperity (verse 42). What a great promise.

Jeremiah knows that the exile of God's people will one day end with God demonstrating pardon and restoration. Judgement is inevitable, but restoration in the future is **equally** as certain. Jeremiah sees the coming judgement, but he also believes that God wants to forgive, and he sees God will have mercy on his people. God hasn't stopped being their God.

Like a father never stops being a child's father – it doesn't matter whether the child behaves or not, it doesn't matter whether the child is someone to be proud of, or someone to be ashamed of, their father is still their father. God says, *'I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. They will be my people and I will be their God.'* God doesn't stop being their father.

So the good news is that God will restore his people to their inheritance. Exile will not stand in the way of God fulfilling his promise. God keeps his promises to his people – isn't that great to know? *'Is anything too hard for me?'* God says.

But there's more than that here; it's not just fulfilment of a promise here. Do you see the great **depth** of feeling that God has for his people here – God **delights** to do **good** to those who are his. Look carefully at verses 40 and 41 *'I will make an everlasting covenant with them: I will **never stop** doing good to them.'* *'I will **rejoice** in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land **with all my heart and soul.'***

God hasn't just chosen his people and now he's lumbered with them; he doesn't just put up with them with all their weaknesses and failures. No. God **loves** those who are his. He will never stop doing them good. He will **rejoice** in doing them good. His **delight** will be to do his people good. He will look after them in the land he has promised them with **all** his heart and soul. Can there be anything greater than God caring for you with all his heart and soul? I think not.

In Zephaniah's prophecy 3:17, we read *'The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing.'* What an amazing picture that is, isn't it? God takes delight in his people, he rejoices over you with singing. Mighty to save, yet he delights in those who are his. Psalm 147:11 tells us, *'the Lord delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.'* God is **more** than pleased to bless his people – he delights in them, he never tires of doing them good, he rejoices over them with singing. Wonderful pictures.

Isn't it a shame that this was written about 2 1/2 thousand years ago; isn't it a shame it happened in a country thousands of miles away; isn't it a shame it happened in a culture so different from our civilised society. Oh no! If you're thinking like that, you've got a wonderful surprise coming!

The good news is, God hasn't changed. He is superlative in all things – he is perfect, all-powerful, all-knowing, he is everywhere, he is perfect in every way, he is perfect light, he is perfect love; he is the most high, the most holy, almighty God. He has not changed.

His character hasn't changed, his values haven't changed – he's not like an old man who goes forgetful and lethargic in his old age. God's message is still the same; God still delights to do his people good, he still shows his people grace and mercy.

Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, chapter 8, verse 28, '*And we know that in **all** things God works for the **good** of those who love him.*' God takes pleasure in those who love him. John says in his first letter, chapter 3, '*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God.*' God has **lavished** his love on his people, and he works all things together for their **good**.

So we can see that the promise God gave to Jeremiah all those years ago still applies to his people today: '*I will make an **everlasting** covenant with them: I will **never stop** doing good to them.*' '*I will **rejoice** in doing them good and will assuredly plant them in this land **with all my heart and soul.***'

Well, we've seen God's message to his people comes in two parts, but both belong together, they can't be separated, they are parts of the same message, two sides of the same coin. And no matter where you stand, you are on one side or the other, and so I have been talking to **you**.

Matthew's gospel talks of sheep and goats, and of the wise and foolish (chapter 25). What is the distinction? Well, it's what we've been talking about this morning: Are you living in your sins? Have you rejected God? Are you neglecting him? If so you need to be aware that **this** route leads to eternity away from God. This brought destruction to Israel and Jerusalem. Are you standing on this side? Judgement is certainly coming: Hebrews 9:27 says, '*... man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement.*' What is your state this morning?

On the one hand God is angry with sin and will punish it (hold out arm); on the other hand God delights in doing good, he takes no pleasure in the death of anyone (hold out other arm); how do you move to the right side, and know that God delights in you? Through the Cross. Jesus took the punishment for our sin upon himself. He suffered and died in our place, so that we might be the people who God takes delight in.

To get there you have to ask God for forgiveness for your sins, and recognise that your **only** way of forgiveness comes through what Jesus has done for you. It's not enough to know **about** your sins or even **regret** them, God asks you to repent, to ask him for forgiveness and turn to him.

I was watching the local news last Saturday as they reported on the Gay Pride procession, and one of the floats had a cross at the front along with a banner which said: 'Would Jesus discriminate?' Well the answer is simple – No: Jesus met, talked and ate with all kinds of sinners; Jesus loves **every** sinner; he didn't discriminate – he died for **all** sinners; but his message to each one is 'You must repent, turn away from your sins, you must be born again.'

Then you will be saved from judgement, and instead you will know that God knows you by name, and he delights in you, he rejoices over you with singing, almighty God will be more than pleased to do you good, now and forever.

This is Jeremiah's message, this is **our** message, this is **God's** message to us this morning. A message of 2 halves – we faithfully proclaim both – we will persevere until people hear. Do you hear his message to you? God wants to delight in doing you good, he wants to rejoice over you with singing. Is that what's happening with you?

