

Anglican Church Noosa
From Judgement to Hope - When Judgement Comes
Jeremiah 14:7-22
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Is it easier to perceive spiritual reality in the good times or the bad times?

You would think that it should be in the good times. You would think that when

- people are doing well financially,
- progressing in their careers,
- investments steadily growing,
- children progressing well at school,
- enjoying holidays in 5 star resorts.

You would think that people would want to break out in thanksgiving to God that He should provide so lavishly and abundantly.

However, more often than not, prosperity doesn't evoke the worship of God, it actually distracts people from giving God his rightful place. People start worshipping the created things rather than the Creator God.

This is the definition of idolatry. In the Old Testament people carved images out of wood and stone and we think, how stupid, but it did have a practical intent. People thought this would produce the good weather they needed to have an abundant harvest and give them good luck in every area of their lives.

Today our idols are the material goodies that we think will give our life meaning. When we buy them they give us a good feeling for a time, but they can't give us the sense of purpose and direction in our lives that in the end only following Christ gives.

Over time the pleasure fades, then the new model comes out and we think if only I had all those new features on my phone or in my car or in my house then life would be exciting again.

Our hearts are like the broken cisterns that Lynda talked about last week from Chapter 2. We are looking for living water to refresh our hearts, but our hearts go after idols thinking they will satisfy. Our idolatress hearts are like cracked cisterns. The satisfaction leaks away very quickly and our souls remain dry and parched.

John Dickson Illustration. "If I were God I'd make Myself Clearer." p19

The way we think big but live small is what the Bible calls idolatry. We know there has to be something more; the creation all around us shouts that there has to be a Creator, but we only want the immediate pleasures the creation can give us, so we turn our backs on the loving Creator who has provided so abundantly.

This is the big sin Jeremiah constantly addressed - idolatry.

Let's recap for a minute what we have learned so far in the book of Jeremiah about idolatry. Pew Bible p751 Ch1

The first week in Chapter one;

Jeremiah is called and God indicates the type of message he is called to bring to the people. V16 *"I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshipping what their hands have made."*

That sounds like the sin of idolatry to me.

In our second week, Chapter 2;

the history of Israel is recalled in the terms of first love. V2 God says, *"I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me."* But then the people rebelled so in verse 5 the Lord says, *"What fault did your ancestors find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves."*

And now in our third week we skip to Ch 14 (p769) and Jeremiah is pleading with God on behalf of the people. He acknowledges the sin of the people and the impotence of their idols. V22 *"Do any of the worthless idols of the nations bring rain? Do the skies themselves bring down showers? No, it is you Lord our God. Therefore our hope is in you, for you are the one who does all this."*

What is the worst sin? The person in the street would probably say murder but as I read the Bible and especially the prophets the sin that is constantly talked about is idolatry. This is the breaking of the first two commandments. It is the breaking of these commandments that leads to all the other sins which are dealt with in the other commandments.

We need to have our spiritual eyes opened to see how horrific is the rejection of our Wonderful, Almighty, Holy, Creator God!

So we come to the heart of our passage, v's 11 & 12 and the shocking pronouncement... READ

-Does this sound a bit harsh?

-Is this the sort of passage people are thinking about when they talk about the strict judgmental God of the Old Testament?

-Can we now put aside this understanding of God because we have the gracious loving Jesus of the New Testament?

-Why doesn't God allow Jeremiah to at least pray for the people that they might have another chance to repent and avoid judgement?

The truth is of course that God has already given them many many chances. For over a century now he has been sending them prophets pointing them back to the covenant with Moses and calling on them to repent and renew the covenant. The sad and tragic truth is that the people have ignored God's call and gone their merry way.

In the present time God has been giving them warnings. Verses one to six of this chapter tell us there have been droughts which were meant to be a wake up call.

V3 *"They go to the cisterns but find no water."*

V4 *"The ground is cracked and the farmers are in dismay."*

V5 *"The doe deserts her newborn fawn because there is no grass."*

V6 *"The wild donkeys pant like jackals and their eyes fail for lack of food."*

It's pretty obvious that there is a very severe drought going on here. Yet the people do not turn back to God, and throw themselves on God, and repent of their apostasy.

So God is now saying no more! The time for mercy is over. Let the judgement fall.

It is like a very sad family situation where a wayward son has rebelled against his parents and disappointed them in so many ways.

-He is guilty of break and enters, stealing thousands of dollars worth of goods.

-He has broken into cars, taking them for joyrides.

-He has been living a reckless life, enjoying the parties and getting high on drugs.

He has been picked up by the police on many occasions but every time he comes before the court his parents hire the best QC available and he gets off with a fine rather than having to go to jail. And then his parents pay the fine.

It gets to a point where the parents say, no more!

No more paying fines or bailing you out.

You have to face the full consequences of your wrongdoing.

That is all that's left to us.

This is the point God has come to with his stubborn people.

Now, I mentioned a minute ago that sometimes people read a passage like this and think that the God of the Old Testament is very harsh and strict, but we belong to the NT where Jesus shows us the loving side of God who wouldn't judge anyone.

The truth is Jesus had just as much to say about judgement as Yahweh in the Old Testament. Let me give you just two examples –

There is the parable of the 10 Virgins. Five were prepared and had oil for their lamps and five were unprepared. When the bridegroom arrives the five with oil enter the marriage feast but the five without are locked out. When they appeal to be let in the bridegroom answers, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you." These are chilling words.

There is the story of the rich man and the poor man, Lazarus. The rich man leads a self-indulgent lifestyle and ignores the needs of the poor man at his gate. Judgement day comes and he is cast into hell and Lazarus, the poor man, is in Abraham's bosom. The rich man appeals to Abraham to crossover to join Lazarus in paradise. But Abraham explains there is a great chasm over which no one may cross. Again, chilling words.

My friends the God of the Old Testament and of the New Testament are the same. The Bible is all one story from the beginning of creation in Genesis, to its consummation in Revelation. The Bible story is that there is the one creator/redeemer God who reigns over all but people reject His reign and instead turn to idols.

Let's look a little more closely at how idolatry plays out in the rest of the passage.

Look at v7. Jeremiah confesses sin on behalf of the nation. He says, "*Our sins testify against us*". He says, "*For we have often rebelled; we have sinned against you.*"

But it's interesting, what is his appeal to God in the light of this?

I think the modern day appeal would be, '*But Lord our sins aren't that bad. Our sins aren't as bad as other peoples. You should see what my neighbour gets up to, I'm not like that.*' But what is Jeremiah's appeal, "*Do something, Lord, for the sake of your name.*" The people were only concerned with their own convenience. Jeremiah is concerned with the glory of God's name. '*Whether it is in salvation or judgement Lord may your name be glorified.*'

-This is the prophet's heart concern.

- This is what it means to keep the first commandment and love God above all else.
- This is what it means to reject idolatry and worship only God.

Holding God in such high regard doesn't mean you can't question God. Jeremiah is full of questions about the apparent absence and indifference of God.

V8 He is like a stranger in the land and like a traveller who stays only a night.

V9 He is like a man taken by surprise, like a warrior powerless to save.

He tries to make excuses for the people. V13 It's the false prophet's fault. It's because the false prophets keep telling them there is going to be lasting peace. God says the false prophets will be the first to be judged, but so will the people. They have chosen to listen to preachers who simply tell them what they want to hear, confirming them in their idolatry.

Jeremiah's heart is for God but his heart is also for the people. V's 17-22

V17 His eyes overflow with tears night and day without ceasing.

V19 Why have you afflicted us so that we cannot be healed?

V21 Remember your covenant with us and do not break it. Jeremiah probably has in mind on the covenant blessings but remember there were also covenant curses for disobedience.

So Jeremiah loves the people dearly, he is cut to the quick about the judgement which is coming. But Jeremiah also loves God dearly and rejects all idolatry. He is concerned for the holiness of God's name and that he only should be worshiped.

So my friends the application is this:

- Do you have the heart of the prophet?
- Do you love God above all else?
- Do you detest idols?
- Do you weep over the spiritual indifference of people?
- Will you intercede for the idolatrous who are heading for judgement?
- Do you have a heart to win them back to God?

There are many ways we can do this.

1. God might be calling you to give someone the book of Jeremiah. I have to say when talking to people inquiring about the Christian faith I haven't pointed them to Jeremiah. Although I'm sure for some people it would be highly relevant and exactly what God would use.

2. Another opportunity that is open before us at the moment is Alpha.

Alpha is about prayer and invitation. Praying, inviting, doing some more praying; Seeing what God might do.

One prayer anyone can pray is in v7,

"Do something Lord, for the sake of your name." After you've invited someone to Alpha pray this prayer.

Jeremiah prayed on behalf of his wayward people. Jeremiah invited them to repent and believe. PRAY and INVITE

This is the heart of Jeremiah.

Will you make it your heart too?