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FROM JUDGEMENT TO HOPE - Jeremiah 2
Israel Forsakes God
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Do you remember last week Chris made the comment towards the end of his sermon, that he loves the call passages in the Bible. I do too.

But, there's a problem with call passages. And it's a pretty basic problem. Here's the drill ... you have to do what you've been called to do.

Do you remember Isaiah's call?

He saw the Lord high and lifted up, glory filling the temple. And he said to God - "here am I! Send me!

What a wonderful call passage!

What about Ezekiel - he had an overwhelming vision of creatures and glory and precious stones and fire and brilliant light and he fell down in worship. Amazing!

And we heard Jeremiah's call last week - very different, but intimate and loving - before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart, I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.

Call passages are fantastic!

But what did Isaiah have to actually do?

Well, Isaiah had to tell people that they will never see, never hear, never understand, and he was told that he had to make the people's hearts callous, so they would never understand. What kind of a job description is that?

What did Ezekiel have to do?

Well he got told that he was going to the Israelites who were rebellious, that they had revolted, that they were stubborn and obstinate, he got told again that they were rebellious, and actually he got told again that they were rebellious. God said to him, Speak to them whether they listen or not, and did I tell you that they were rebellious.

Oh, and I'll make your forehead like the hardest stone, so don't be afraid of them. And that was just the beginning.

So here we are today, in Jeremiah chapter 2, the chapter after his call in chapter 1.

The hints in chapter 1 weren't so good. God said to Jeremiah, Do whatever I say and don't be afraid. I'll tell you what you've got to say. My words will be in your mouth.

Let's see how it starts for Jeremiah.

Well, it all starts pretty lovey dovey, as God, speaking through him, reminds them of the wonder and beauty of their early devotion. Young love is great isn't it?

Look at vv. 2 and 3.

I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them, declares the Lord.

Israel was devoted to her God, and God was fiercely devoted to protecting and providing for his beloved and chosen nation.

Surely you'd think these memories would bring about a spark of longing in Jeremiah's hearers.

Lately I have been re-watching an old tv series on 7+ - All Saints - is a hospital drama in the ED and you can imagine what sort of issues they have to contend with. But there's also the personal story of the patients. And in an episode I watched this week a man was in the ED and his wife came to see him all distressed and concerned, but then not too long after another woman came in, also claiming to be his wife. Yes, the man eventually told the staff that he was married to them both. Well, the staff worked hard to keep the women apart and protect the patient, but the inevitable happened, and the two women met. Needless to say it wasn't pretty.

But God continues through Jeremiah, with some truth-telling.

Betrayal has happened. This divine/human marriage which began so beautifully, has a tragic story.

There were lots of things wrong with Israel, but the worst of it was this violated relationship. **That** fundamental truth, is what God is most offended by.

When something or someone else takes the place of God, that is by far, the worst thing, the very worst sin.

It breaks the first commandment, the commandment that everything else is hinged to.

This nation had committed itself to being the people of God. It had signed the covenant so to speak.

But Israel had completely forgotten what that meant and had rejected everything that the covenant with God stands for.

The people knew everything they need to know about God, but they had thrown it all away. They followed worthless idols as v.5 says.

This God who had brought them out of Egypt, and led them through wilderness, deserts, ravines, drought, darkness, who'd led them through places no-one knew, and gave them food, fertile land and a rich inheritance, **this** God had been forgotten.

Even the religious people, the priests, hadn't asked anything about God, and hadn't reminded the people about God. and the prophets had betrayed God and prophesied about Baal.

They had all gone after the non-gods; the worthless idols.

And the one living God takes them to court, and lays down the charges. It's as if God is a prosecuting lawyer, making his case.

And he says ... my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols.....
..... my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols.

And God declares to the universe - 'be appalled at this!'

My people have committed two sins:

They have forsaken me, the spring of living water;

and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

It's really interesting here that God describes himself as the spring of living water. In Isaiah 12:3 it says 'with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation', and in John chapter 4 when Jesus is speaking with the woman at the well, he tells her that his water will be a spring of living water welling up to eternal life.

Living water of course, is always flowing, and in that it stays fresh and able to bring life.

Compare that to a cistern which simply holds water. It's never really clean water, and certainly doesn't hold a torch to flowing water, but what these people had done was, they had not only forsaken the spring, they had dug a cistern that was broken and couldn't hold **any** water.

They had left something that could be eternally satisfying, and created something that could never be satisfying.

This is what happens when we go after other gods.
This is what happened when God's people went after other gods.

Jeremiah is amazed that his people are prepared to settle for a delusion, especially when they actually know the truth.

In your pew Bibles have a look at vv.14-19.

There is a question that God asks - is Israel a servant, a slave by birth?
This is a rhetorical question, because the answer is NO.
A definitive NO.

Israel's relationship with God is not as a slave, but as a son, as family. That family relationship comes through again, from the beginning when God describes it as a failed marriage, here He is saying, why are you living as a servant of others, when you should be living as a son of mine.

In v 15 the reference to 'lions' is about the nations from the north being a threat, and then the reference to Memphis and Tahpanhes is from the south, they are places in Egypt. So they have put themselves in a position where they are surrounded by those who will attack them.
You've forsaken the living water that you could have freely, and now you are thinking about going to Egypt to drink from the Nile or to Assyria to drink from the Euphrates.

The only conclusion that can be drawn is that this is self-inflicted punishment, because of their backsliding as we see in v.19.

And there's another terrible pronouncement at the end of this section, in v. 19 - God makes this terrible pronouncement, 'Your wickedness will punish you, your backsliding will rebuke you. Consider then and realise how evil and bitter it is for you when you forsake the Lord your God **and have no awe of me.**

And then as we move on, the prosecution case continues.
And God describes Israel in damning terms.
He compares them to a prostitute, a corrupt wild vine, a deluded she-camel and a wild donkey on heat.
Not very flattering descriptors.

And their guilt remains even though they think they have washed themselves.

Have a look there in v. 22. 'Although you wash yourself with soap and use an abundance of cleansing powder, the stain of your guilt is still before me, declares the sovereign Lord.' And the reason the washing doesn't work is given in v 25. - But you said, it's no use! I love foreign gods, and I must go after them.'

The washing doesn't work, because there is no repentance. They are full of lies and deception.

And then the foreign gods are described. Have a look at vv 27 and 28.

They say to wood, 'you are my father,'
and to stone, 'you gave me birth.'
They have turned their backs to me and not their faces;
yet when they are in trouble, they say, 'Come and save us!'
Where then are the gods you made for yourselves?
Let **them** come if they can save you
when you are in trouble.
for you Judah have as many gods as you have towns.

This is why we had Psalm 115 as a complementary reading today.

Idolatry is the great sin of this ancient nation.
And I dare say that idolatry is our great sin today.

Listen again to Psalm 115 -

Their idols are silver and gold,
made by human hands.
They have mouths, but cannot speak,
eyes, but cannot see.
They have ears, but cannot hear,
noses, but cannot smell.
They have hands, but cannot feel,
feet but cannot walk,
nor can they utter a sound with their throats.

What should a mouth/eye/ear/nose/hand/feet to????

Not living; not real.

And the Psalm comes to the conclusion...

Those who make them will be like them, so will all who trust in them.

Israel is described as doing just that

v.27 - they say to wood, you are my father,
and to stone, you gave me birth.

Do you recall Elijah and the prophets of Baal, and the contest they had on Mt Carmel. Elijah was the only prophet of God left, but there were hundreds of prophets of Baal.

Elijah taunted the prophets of Baal, saying call louder, perhaps your gods are on the toilet.

How foolish we are when we turn away from the living God.

How foolish were the Israelites when they did the same.

God is trying to say to them through Jeremiah,
'remember'.

'remember how it was.;

remember my love for you and your love for me.

v. 31 Have I been a desert to Israel or a land of great darkness?

Does a young woman forget her jewellery, or a bride her wedding ornaments?

Yet my people have forgotten me, days without number.

And listen to the distress in vv.34,35.

'Yet in spite of all this you say, 'I am innocent; he isn't angry with me.'

But God says, I will pass judgement on you because you say, 'I have not sinned.'

They are in denial. The turning away from God, the forgetting of the truth about relationship with him, caused this great delusion for the Israelites.

How could they possibly say, I'm innocent. God's not angry. I haven't sinned!!!

But my friends, don't we say it too?

Don't I say it?

Don't you say it?

That's not sin. God won't judge me! I haven't sinned.

Do we live in a delusion as well?

God is pointing out the truth to Israel.

He says to them, you will be disappointed by Egypt just as you were by Assyria.

You will not be helped by others, your only help is me.

Friends, have you understood that for yourself?

Our **only** help is the Lord. Our **only** help is Jesus.

The one God has sent,

to do for us what we cannot do ourselves.

Israel needed to repent. That's all.

It really is that simple.

God says to Israel in v.35, I pass judgement because you say 'I haven't sinned.'

They simply haven't acknowledged the reality of their own sin.

Have you acknowledged the reality of your own sin?

If you haven't, then that's a dilemma.

1 John gives us the answer to our dilemma and the answer to Israel's dilemma.

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his Son purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

Lord, we have sinned. Forgive us.