

We’ve been working through Jeremiah for a while,
 so it’s probably time for a reminder:
 “Why are we doing this?”

The simple answer is that Paul says that *all scripture* is God-breathed and *profitable*
 “for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,
 that the man of God may be competent,
 equipped for every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16)

But if that is true of *all scripture*, then why Jeremiah?

If we actually believe what Paul says, then we need to hear *all scripture*
 in order for “all scripture” to become profitable for *us*.

In our passage tonight we see a twofold movement
 from the relationship between prophet and people –
 with the prophet as representative sufferer (serving as a picture of Christ),
 to the relationship between Israel and the nations –
 with Israel being the firstfruits of a world-wide inheritance (like the church).

1. The Prophet as Representative Sufferer (15:10-21)

a. Jeremiah and His People (v10-14)

¹⁰ *Woe is me, my mother, that you bore me, a man of strife and contention to the whole land! I have not lent, nor have I borrowed, yet all of them curse me.*

One commentator sees verses 10-21 as an example of Jeremiah giving in to self-pity.

He refers to Jeremiah’s attitudes as sinful –
 “possible hazards for those in leadership and public ministry” (Wright, 176).

It’s no wonder – we live in a day when everyone is supposed to be happy and positive.
 We even expect our worship to make us feel happy.

A saw a Facebook comment the other day that said that most of the Psalms
 aren’t “filled with the language of suffering and agony,
 but rather thanksgiving, praise,
 and God’s power and triumph over the enemy.”

I couldn’t help but wonder whether that person had ever sung the Psalms!

As Carl Trueman put it:

"Christian worship should immerse people in the reality of the tragedy of the human fall
 and of all subsequent human life.

It should provide us with a language that allows us to praise the God of resurrection
 while lamenting the suffering and agony that is our lot

in a world alienated from its creator,
 and it should thereby sharpen our longing for the only answer

to the one great challenge we must all face sooner or later.
Only those who accept that they are going to die
can begin to look with any hope to the resurrection."

Jeremiah is showing us that it's *okay* to complain!

Lamenting – crying out “Woe is me, my mother, that you bore me!”
is not a “hazard” – it is not a shortcoming in Jeremiah,
or in us!

When everyone around you is *cursing you* because you are faithful to God,
then it is *okay* to feel like the world is falling apart!

Because the world *is* falling apart!

Indeed, that is why Jeremiah is a “man of strife” (or better, a man of litigation –
since the word translated “strife” is the word used by the prophets
of the covenant lawsuit).

Jeremiah has been sent by God as a “man of litigation” – a man of contention.
He has been faithful to his calling, and yet his own people curse him.

Verses 11-14 are a bit difficult to understand –
but it is important to know that the “you” throughout these verses is a masculine singular.

The “you” in verses 11-14 is Jeremiah.

¹¹ *The LORD said, “Have I not^[a] set you free for their good? Have I not pleaded for you before the enemy in the time of trouble and in the time of distress? ¹² Can one break iron, iron from the north, and bronze?*

We’ll hear later in Jeremiah what this means.

When the Babylonians attack,
Jeremiah will be spared.

Nebuchadnezzar will hear how Jeremiah had called Jerusalem to surrender,
and so Nebuchadnezzar will offer Jeremiah safe conduct –

a safe-conduct that Jeremiah will refuse,

because Jeremiah is *not* really “pro-Babylon”!

But in the time of trouble, God will protect Jeremiah from the enemy.

As God had said when he called Jeremiah in 1:19,

“I make you this day a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls,
against the whole land, against the kings of Judah,
its officials, its priests, and the people of the land.”

Can one break iron, iron from the north, and bronze?

And yet, the LORD also says:

¹³ “*Your wealth and your treasures I will give as spoil, without price, for all your sins, throughout all your territory.*”

This is *also* 2nd person masculine singular.

Your wealth, Jeremiah, and your treasures I will give as spoil, without price, for all your sins.
Last time we saw how Jerusalem’s repentance was *good* –
but it was too late.
Repentance is necessary to save you –
but repentance is not *sufficient* to save you!

In the same way, Jeremiah is a good and faithful prophet.
He does all that the LORD calls him to do.
But when Judgment Day comes, Jeremiah will not be spared.

¹⁴ *I will make you serve your enemies in a land that you do not know, for in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn forever.”*

Deuteronomy 32:22 says,
“For a fire is kindled by my anger, and it burns to the depths of Sheol,
devours the earth and its increase, and sets on fire the foundations of the mountains.”

We’ll come back to this again next time,
because this is at the heart of God’s contention against Jerusalem in Jeremiah 17:4.

But Jeremiah cannot escape the fire of God’s wrath.
You, Jeremiah, will serve your enemies in a land that you, Jeremiah, do not know,
for in my anger a fire is kindled that shall burn forever.
(Indeed, Jeremiah will go to Egypt).

Faithfulness to God’s call does not mean that you will escape suffering and death.
On the contrary, as 1 Peter says, “Judgment begins with the household of God.”
Paul rejoices that he is counted worthy to *share in Christ’s sufferings* (Phil 3).

You can see how the second person masculine singular can move from Jeremiah, the prophet,
to the whole people of God.
The case study of the prophet at the end of ch 15 will be reproduced in Israel as a whole in ch 16.

Of course, no suffering is pleasant – and you can hear in Jeremiah’s voice how painful this is:

b. Jeremiah’s Lament (v15-18)

¹⁵ *O LORD, you know;
remember me and visit me,
and take vengeance for me on my persecutors.
In your forbearance take me not away;
know that for your sake I bear reproach.*

Last time we heard Jerusalem's confession.

It was good – but while repentance is *necessary* for salvation,
repentance is not *sufficient* to save you!
Only *God* can save!

And that's why Jeremiah cries out to the LORD.

Remember me – and visit me.

Take vengeance for me on my persecutors.

Jeremiah understands that vengeance belongs to the LORD,
so he asks God to do what he has promised!

Do we really believe that vengeance belongs to the LORD?

It certainly appears as though our nation
is becoming more and more intolerant of Christian belief and practice.

But too many Christians are getting angry and defiant.

“Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord –
unless you can find a political solution to your problems”!

NO!!

“They will know that you are my disciples
by your vigorous defense of moral principles.”

No!

They will know that you are my disciples
because of the way that you love one another.

The church of Jesus Christ needs to be known for how we bear the cross!

That we *bear reproach for his sake!*

How do people see you?

Are you known for how you endure suffering patiently for the sake of Christ?

Do you colleagues at work – your friends at school –

know you as one who suffers injustice meekly as a servant of Christ?

Certainly Jeremiah bears reproach for the LORD's sake!

Jeremiah has devoured the Word of the LORD –

verse 16 may refer to the finding of the Law in Josiah's day.

Apparently the book of the Law had been neglected by the kings and priests,

but in the days of Josiah, they found the book of the Law

(perhaps the book of Deuteronomy):

¹⁶ *Your words were found, and I ate them,
and your words became to me a joy
and the delight of my heart,
for I am called by your name,
O LORD, God of hosts.*

And yet while God's word was a delight,
the result was anything but delightful.

¹⁷ *I did not sit in the company of revelers,
nor did I rejoice;
I sat alone, because your hand was upon me,
for you had filled me with indignation.*

The Word of God brings both delight and pain –
delight, because God made us for himself, and so we find our truest delight in him! –
but pain, because we have turned aside from his path,
and so Jeremiah brings his complaint to the LORD:

¹⁸ *Why is my pain unceasing,
my wound incurable,
refusing to be healed?
Will you be to me like a deceitful brook,
like waters that fail?*

This is hard.
Jeremiah's complaint asks why his wound refuses to be healed.
Jeremiah asks if God will be like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail.

What does he mean?
Hasn't God been very clear?
God had said that Jeremiah will be attacked on all sides.
Everyone will hate him – but God will protect him.

But we know from later in Jeremiah that there were times when Jeremiah was thrown in a pit,
was beaten and threatened with death.
There were times when it appeared as though God had failed to protect him.

Aren't there times when you think to yourself,
"I've been faithful – I did what God said, and it didn't work!"
There are times when it *appears* that God has failed to do what he promised.

And Jeremiah claims that *he* has been faithful,
but that God has left him alone.

The LORD's response is something along the lines of "Suck it up, buddy!"

c. The LORD's Deliverance (v19-21)

¹⁹ *Therefore thus says the LORD:
"If you return, I will restore you,
and you shall stand before me.*

*If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless,
you shall be as my mouth.
They shall turn to you,
but you shall not turn to them.*

The key word in verse 19 is the word “shuv” – “turn.”

It’s used four times: “If you *turn*, I will *turn* you to stand before me” –
and “they shall *turn* to you, but you shall not *turn* to them.”

Perseverance is not perseverance unless it is perseverance *to the end*.

If you say, “Lord, I’ve been faithful,”

God’s response is, “Then be faithful unto death!”

This is the challenge that our eldest sisters and brothers face right now –
Barbara Deliyannides and Rolf Caylor, each in their own way.

And God renews his promise to Jeremiah:

²⁰ *And I will make you to this people
a fortified wall of bronze;
they will fight against you,
but they shall not prevail over you,
for I am with you
to save you and deliver you,
declares the LORD.*

²¹ *I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked,
and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.”*

This is what God had promised in Jeremiah 1.

Do you remember, Jeremiah, what I said?

I will be faithful to my promises!

Look at those three verbs:

I will save.

I will deliver.

I will redeem.

This is what the LORD will do for his suffering servant, the faithful prophet.

It is also what God promises his people –

to save, to deliver, and to redeem.

At the moment, God only promises this for *Jeremiah* –
the faithful remnant reduced to one man!

But of course, because God has done this for *Jesus* –
the faithful remnant reduced to one man! –
therefore, God will do this for those who believe in Jesus!

But if you think that it has been difficult so far, just wait!

Because at the beginning of chapter 16, the LORD gives Jeremiah two commands:
first, you shall not take a wife,
second, you shall not mourn for the dead.

2. No Hope in Life, No Point in Death (16:1-13)

a. “You Shall Not Take a Wife” (v1-4)

16 The word of the LORD came to me: ² “You shall not take a wife, nor shall you have sons or daughters in this place. ³ For thus says the LORD concerning the sons and daughters who are born in this place, and concerning the mothers who bore them and the fathers who fathered them in this land: ⁴ They shall die of deadly diseases. They shall not be lamented, nor shall they be buried. They shall be as dung on the surface of the ground. They shall perish by the sword and by famine, and their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth.

It is likely that this word came to Jeremiah fairly early in his ministry.

Otherwise, he would probably have married!

But God says that Jeremiah shall not marry nor have sons or daughters.

Jeremiah will be a sign of the coming judgment.

Why have children?

They will just perish by disease, famine, and sword.

This is the fundamental reason why Jesus never married.

There is a curse of death on all the children of Adam –

a curse that cannot be broken through natural generation.

Jesus was born of the Virgin for this reason –

and he did not beget children for the same reason.

Jesus had to endure the Final Judgment for us!

b. “You Shall Not Mourn for the Dead” (v5-9)

⁵ “For thus says the LORD: Do not enter the house of mourning, or go to lament or grieve for them, for I have taken away my peace from this people, my steadfast love and mercy, declares the LORD. ⁶ Both great and small shall die in this land. They shall not be buried, and no one shall lament for them or cut himself or make himself bald for them. ⁷ No one shall break bread for the mourner, to comfort him for the dead, nor shall anyone give him the cup of consolation to drink for his father or his mother. ⁸ You shall not go into the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and drink. ⁹ For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will silence in this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.

But second, Jeremiah may not mourn for the dead –

not even to enter the house of mourning.

Death is coming upon all the house of Israel –

therefore, Jeremiah is forbidden to do all the normal things

that would bring comfort to the mourners.

The reason why we come together in mourning the death of loved ones is to provide comfort.
But God commands Jeremiah to refrain from bringing comfort,
because “I have taken away my peace from this people,
my steadfast love and mercy” –
so that both great and small shall die – and *not* be buried.

Jeremiah is setting up Ezekiel’s Valley of Dry Bones.
The Bones of Israel and Judah will not be buried –
but will be strewn across the surface of the land.

God will do the same sort of thing to Ezekiel in Ezekiel 24:
except Ezekiel was already married.
God will take away Ezekiel’s wife – and then forbid Ezekiel from mourning for her!

God has removed his *Shalom* – there is no peace.
God has removed his *Hesed* – there is no steadfast love/covenant faithfulness.

Therefore, there is only death.
The reason why we *comfort* those who mourn
is because of God’s *shalom* and *hesed*.

If there is no Shalom and there is no Hesed
then there is only death.

**c. Why Is God Doing This? Because You Have Done Worse Than Your Fathers
(v10-13)**

¹⁰ “And when you tell this people all these words, and they say to you, ‘Why has the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity? What is the sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?’ ¹¹ then you shall say to them: ‘Because your fathers have forsaken me, declares the LORD, and have gone after other gods and have served and worshiped them, and have forsaken me and have not kept my law, ¹² and because you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, every one of you follows his stubborn, evil will, refusing to listen to me. ¹³ Therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor.’

The wages of sin is death.
Why did God take so long to make this point?
Why did God give Israel 700 years?
Why did God allow 600 years between the Exile and the coming of Jesus?
Why has God allowed 2,000 years since the resurrection of Jesus?

Because God is patient.
He wants us to understand that he is slow to anger.
He wants all to repent and come to a knowledge of the truth.

Why is God bringing disaster on Jerusalem?

Because their fathers had forsaken the LORD and gone after other gods.
And now Jeremiah's generation has done worse than their fathers –
refusing to listen to the LORD their God.

In verse 4 the penalty is death – your children will die.
In verse 13 the penalty is exile – I will hurl you out of this land.

It's a distinction without a difference.
If the presence of the LORD is life and steadfast love and peace.
Then the final judgment is death/exile/and wrath.

The last line falls hard upon our ears:
“I will show you no favor.”
The word “favor” is elsewhere translated “grace.”
No peace, No steadfast love, No grace.

By now you may be growing weary of Jeremiah's constant refrain:
You are going to die!!!

Which is why verses 14-15 come as such a shock:

3. But There Is a Future for Israel – and for the Nations (16:14-21)

a. I Will Bring My People Back (v14-15)

¹⁴ “Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when it shall no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ ¹⁵ but ‘As the LORD lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.’ For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers.

It is a common refrain among the prophets that there will be *grace* in the end.
All the prophets – all the way back to Moses –
had promised that after the exile, God would restore his people.
And Jeremiah point out that the restoration from Exile will be so important
that it will *displace* the Exodus as the most important event in redemptive history.
If you read the book of Ezra-Nehemiah,
you would not say that the restoration from Exile was bigger than the Exodus.
But then again, the book of Ezra-Nehemiah does not speak of the restoration of *Israel*.
It only speaks of the restoration of *Judah*.

The restoration of *Israel* only begins in the Gospel of John, chapter 4,
with the Samaritan woman –
and is only brought to a conclusion in Acts, chapter 8,
with the baptism of the Samaritans.

Only when the Holy Spirit is poured out on Jew and Samaritan alike
are the people of Israel *finally* restored to the Son of David!

Of course, Jeremiah only gives us two verses!

Why is Jeremiah so reluctant to talk about the restoration from exile?

Because Jerusalem has become so glib!

“Of course God will judge us for our sins –

but he’ll forgive us! He’ll restore us! He always does!”

When people spend all their time focusing on the “happy parts,”

then God’s prophet *must* focus on the coming *wrath!*

That’s why Jeremiah gives us all of two verses on the “happy part”

before launching back into the coming judgment!

b. But First I Will Doubly Repay Their Sin (v16-18)

¹⁶ “Behold, I am sending for many fishers, declares the LORD, and they shall catch them. And afterward I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and every hill, and out of the clefts of the rocks. ¹⁷ For my eyes are on all their ways. They are not hidden from me, nor is their iniquity concealed from my eyes. ¹⁸ But first I will doubly repay their iniquity and their sin, because they have polluted my land with the carcasses of their detestable idols, and have filled my inheritance with their abominations.”

In verses 16-18, God says that he will send out fishermen and hunters
who will bring judgment on Israel.

Israel cannot hide his sin from God.

God had said, “Israel is my son, my firstborn.”

The firstborn son received the double portion.

Now, in verse 18, Israel receives the double portion of God’s judgment

“because they have polluted my land with the carcasses of their detestable idols,
and have filled my inheritance with their abominations.”

Yes, God will restore his people –

but *only* after his firstborn son receives the double portion of judgment for Israel’s sin.

And because this is true of Israel – and because it is *especially* true of Jesus! –

therefore, there is hope for the nations as well!

When Jeremiah hears that God will restore Israel *through judgment*,

Jeremiah starts to get excited!

And he starts to see that Israel’s judgment is designed for the salvation of the nations!

[read]

c. The Nations Will Come to the LORD and Repent of Idolatry (v19-21)

¹⁹ O LORD, my strength and my stronghold,

my refuge in the day of trouble,

to you shall the nations come

from the ends of the earth and say:

*“Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies,
worthless things in which there is no profit.
20 Can man make for himself gods?
Such are not gods!”*

The Gentiles will come to the LORD in the day of trouble.

The Gentiles will finally realize the futility of their idols.

The word translated “worthless things” is *hebel* – vapor/vanity (from Ecclesiastes).

Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies –
vapor in which there is no profit.

In the book of Acts you see this happen
as the Gentiles turn from idols to the living God!

How did Jeremiah come to such a clear and beautiful understanding
of the gospel to the Gentiles?

We don’t know for certain –

but our text for tonight suggests how:

Jeremiah saw how his suffering related to the judgment upon Israel.

And then Jeremiah extrapolated that out to how Israel’s suffering related to the nations.

Certainly Jeremiah seems to have been aware of the prophecy of Isaiah.

So it’s not surprising to see Jeremiah offer similar reflections –
and build on Isaiah’s themes.

*21 “Therefore, behold, I will make them know, this once I will make them know my power and my
might, and they shall know that my name is the LORD.”*

The Christian ethic is a resurrection ethic.

The Christian ethic *is* an ethic of power and glory and might.

But it only attains power and glory and might *through resurrection!*

And the fundamental premise of resurrection is *death*.

You can only be raised from the dead if you are *dead*.

Too often we want to skip death and go straight to glory.

Too often I have heard people say

that they hope that they are alive when Jesus returns
so that they can skip dying.

That’s wrong.

Paul says in Philippians 3:10-11, I want to know Christ

“and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings,
becoming like him in his death,

that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.”

The Christian ethic starts with “deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow me” –
through death, so that we might also participate in Christ’s resurrection glory.