

Jeremiah's Journey

Theo sends out daily email devotions and these are taken from Jeremiah and Lamentations and as such, provide a devotional overview of the prophet, the two books and the message.

2010-11-02 - "Marathon Ministry"

Over the next few weeks we're going to mine some of the nuggets in the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations. This first dev gives some of the background...

2 The word of the LORD came to him in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, 3 and through the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, down to the fifth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, when the people of Jerusalem went into exile. (Jeremiah 1:2-3)

If we unpack the historical clues, Jeremiah was God's spokesman from 626BC-570BC. A ministry of 56 years.

These 56 years were tough. Jeremiah started his ministry with the last of the good kings of Israel and saw only weak kings that followed. He had a tough ministry.

Jeremiah warned Israel that they would be brought to judgement for centuries of idolatry, disobedience and oppression of the weak - unless they returned to the Lord their God in true repentance. If they did not, Jeremiah warned that God would use the Babylonians as agents of judgement to cause Israel to reap what it had sowed.

The Israelites did not listen. They had turned the temple into an idol and believed that it was a guarantee of their safety. It had become their "lucky rabbits foot." The Babylonians came and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple and dragged the leaders and cream of society off into exile in Babylon.

In many ways Jeremiah is similar to Winston Churchill who warned of the danger in Germany and no-one listened. The difference is that when war did break out, Churchill was recognised whereas Jeremiah was not.

When Jeremiah (who remained in Jerusalem) dared to suggest that God was going to use the exiles rather than those who remained behind his popularity decreased further. When he tried to persuade those who had remained behind not to rebel against Babylonian rule, he was branded a traitor. When the people did rebel and Babylon crushed their rebellion, Jeremiah was dragged off to Egypt with some fleeing rebels where he died in obscurity.

The point of today's eDev is that in this series we going to hear from someone who served God in the long haul, experienced the "dark night of the soul", dealt with seeming failure, stuck to his principles and was unpopular and opposed.

But God used Jeremiah in a powerful way!
Are you willing to serve God in the long haul?

2010-11-04 - "More than only a child"

*4 The word of the LORD came to me, saying,
5 "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."

6 "Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child."

7 But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. 8 Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 1:4-8)

I can well identify with Jeremiah. In the face of the tasks that my life and calling place in front of me, I often want to run away and hide behind feelings of fear and inadequacy. Jeremiah's self-description is both cause and cure of his insecurity.

God is incensed at Jeremiah's self-degrading reply. There are a couple of reasons why Jeremiah is wrong:

1. Jeremiah is purpose-made for His life - God thought hard before He even picked up the clay. Jeremiah and you and I are not accidental and our gifts and talents are not incidental. There is no-one as well-suited to my life task as I am.

2. God has called us to our life's task. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet to the nations. We are called by God to be who we are (accountants, business-people, pastors, teachers, parents, spouses.) Our lives have meaning and significance in the light of this calling.

3. Children who are happy and a blessing are children who are secure and comfortable in their parents' love. Jeremiah must learn to be a secure child who will branch out into his Father's will for him. He can be bold, courageous, and safe in the love of his heavenly Father. The good thing about children is that they know who their Father is. There is no reason for us to be insecure! I do not have to be afraid!!!

There are therefore two options:

- Childishness which embodies all the insecurities and weakness of youth and concentrates on me.

- Child-likeness which embraces my creation-purpose and value and concentrates on the provision of my Father.

2010-11-05 - "Being given words"

JER 1:9 Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. 10 See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant." (Jeremiah 1:9-10)

It is an awesome comfort that our loving omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient God will help us to speak His words.

In James we read that the tongue is a fire and an untameable beast. We have all had the experience of wishing we could grab our words out of the air and stuff them back into our mouths! Many of us have had days where it's a case of "open mouth, insert foot."

What a comfort it is that God will give us His Words to speak!

Many of us have an idea that speaking God's Words means that we go into some kind of

trance and God uses us like a megaphone. If this were the case, then Matthew would sound the same as Luke, Peter and Paul! And yet when we read the writings of these Biblical Authors, we see aspects of their personalities coming through.

God doesn't invade us like a body-snatcher. He whispers His words in us and they grow and become part of us. They become so real, so true, so exciting that we want to speak them and they come out with passion and joy.

While we do acknowledge that the Biblical Authors received a special gift of inspiration when they wrote the scriptures and that our "words from the Lord" will never carry the same authority as Scripture, we must be open to the idea that if we spend time in God's presence and if we place our hearts next to His, there is a good chance that our words and speaking will begin to contain truth from Him...

And this is not only true for preachers!

2010-11-10 - "Two thirds destructive"

10 See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant. (Jeremiah 1:10)

Building requires level ground and a good foundation.
Planting requires getting rid of "enemy" plants.

Jeremiah's call involves 6 verbs. Four of them are unpleasant: uproot, tear down, destroy and overthrow. Two are productive: build and plant.

The reality is that sometimes this is how we have to proceed. Before we can begin to build and plant we have to deal with the rubble and weeds in our own lives, in our own environments and in our ministry area.

When one paints a house, the surface prep is almost more important than the painting. When one builds a wall the foundation is almost more important than the wall itself. The weeds may be small now, but when your plants have grown, the weeds will also be bigger...

Good work requires good preparation.

In our own spiritual lives the same is true.

We need to clear the junk:

- otherwise the wall may wobble
- or the plants will be choked by the weeds

Prep and junk-clearing isn't glamorous or stimulating. It requires sweat and determination. One often encounters resistance. But it is the pathway to solid buildings and healthy plants.

2010-11-11 - "Gear up!"

17 "Get yourself ready! Stand up and say to them whatever I command you. Do not be terrified by them, or I will terrify you before them. 18 Today I have made you a fortified city,

an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land--against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. 19 They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD. (Jeremiah1:17-19)

Sometimes God makes the Road easy and sometimes he makes the Traveller tough!

Jeremiah is not promised an easy road.

We know that his story unfolded in ridicule, being thrown into a pit, being locked up in stocks, dark nights of the soul, being disregarded, dragged off into Egypt and many other disappointments and struggles.

There are three things that Jeremiah must do:

1. Prepare: Loins girded (Long flowing robes hitched up)
2. Speak: God's word, not his own.
3. Don't be fearful: If he runs, he will have men and God to contend with

God didn't promise him an easy road, but offered him two other things instead:

- He would make Jeremiah tough.
- He would be with Jeremiah and would rescue him when it got too hard.

Notice the descriptions of Jeremiah's defences: (Fortified city, Iron pillar, Bronze wall)

These are the strongest things people of that age knew. And God promises that Jeremiah will be able to "go the distance!"

When the road isn't easy God offers Resilience and Rescue.

2010-11-12 - "Divine Sadness"

A longer one today... but there's a special treat at the end... :-)

1 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem: I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown. (Jeremiah2:1-2)

I don't think we think enough about how much God loves us, and how it hurts Him when we wander away from Him. Jeremiah ch.2 is eloquent in this regard. Here are a few selected verses:

5 This is what the LORD says:
"What fault did your fathers find in me,
that they strayed so far from me?
They followed worthless idols
and became worthless themselves.

6 They did not ask, 'Where is the LORD,
who brought us up out of Egypt
and led us through the barren wilderness,

through a land of deserts and rifts,
a land of drought and darkness,
a land where no one travels and no one lives?'

7 I brought you into a fertile land
to eat its fruit and rich produce.
But you came and defiled my land
and made my inheritance detestable.

8 The priests did not ask,
'Where is the LORD?'
Those who deal with the law did not know me;
the leaders rebelled against me.
The prophets prophesied by Baal,
following worthless idols.

11 Has a nation ever changed its gods?
(Yet they are not gods at all.)
But my people have exchanged their Glory
for worthless idols.

12 Be appalled at this, O heavens,
and shudder with great horror,"
declares the LORD.

When we wander away from God it is an affront to His holiness, a denial of His Glory and a rejection of His incredible love.

Keith Green put it very well in his amazing song:
I don't want to fall away from You

After all the things that you have shown me
I'd be a fool to let them slip away
In doing things I know I shouldn't do
But I don't want to fall away from you
From you

After all
I've only grieved Your spirit
And then I don't know why You stay with me
But every time I fall Your love comes through
And I don't want to fall away from You

When the light is gone
And good times are getting old
There's no one left to count on
And all my friends are cold
When I thirst for love oh Lord
You're a fountain to my soul
My soul
My soul

In a way my life is full of burdens
But in a way You carry them for me
Jesus
Cause no one understands the way You do
And you know Lord
I don't want to fall away from You

Well every day I pray to start anew
Cause I don't want to fall away from You

No Lord
I don't wanna fall away from You
No Lord
I don't wanna fall away from You

From You...Lord

(You can listen to a cover version of this song by Petra, a gospel rock band from the 80s and 90s here
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZ-BnClfWD0>)

2010-11-16 - "Double Whammy"

*"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.
(Jeremiah2:13)*

A cistern was a hole dug in the ground which was plastered with clay to make it waterproof and able to contain water. Rainwater would collect in it and would act as a reservoir for dry spells.

But cistern water was not fresh, and often got contaminated. In the case of this passage, the cisterns were cracked and not even reliable storage.

This is the double whammy:

Israel had access to fresh bubbling spring water (a close dynamic relationship with their God), but rejected this for their own crude imitations of the real thing (idolatry and traditionalism). But not only were their cisterns a shadow of the real thing, but their cisterns were broken and contained no living water at all.

This is the story of humankind again and again.

Israel exchanged the glory of God for idols.

Today we exchange God's glory for materialism, alcohol or self-worship.

The end-result is the same:

The water, if there is any, is stale and contaminated, but most of the time there is no living

water at all...

Living water can only be found in one place:

"On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him." (John 7:37)

2010-11-17 - "Shoev"

*'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD,
'I will frown on you no longer,
for I am merciful,' declares the LORD,
'I will not be angry forever.*

*3 Only acknowledge your guilt--
you have rebelled against the LORD your God,
you have scattered your favours to foreign gods
under every spreading tree,
and have not obeyed me,' "*
declares the LORD. (Jeremiah3:12-13)

There is a word that is repeated again and again and again in Jeremiah. In Hebrew the word is "Shoev" - it means "return", "come back" and "do-the-prodigal-son-thing."

It is a visceral cry from the heart of the prophet and the heart of God. God longs for us to return to Him. He longs for us to come back from our wilderness wanderings. He is the Father who runs toward the Prodigal Son even while he is still a long way off.

When we come to the place of knowing our need for Him and we have realised the futility of our sin, He will take us back no matter where we have been, no matter what we have done.

But let's not be fooled. Our confessions need to be honest and heart-felt. There is no sense of "cheap grace" here. The Father longs for us, but He longs for relationship that is real.

When we come to Him in sincere repentance we discover that He is merciful, that His righteous anger has been carried by Jesus on the cross and that there is no frown for we are adopted as His children.

"Shoev" - say it out loud (long "shoe" + heavy V sound)

Hear the longing and the passion!

It is repeated again and again in Jeremiah - it is the heartbeat and longing of God:

"Come back"

"Return"

"do-the-prodigal-son-thing."

Because He loves us with a love that is higher, deeper, wider and longer than we can even begin to grasp.

2010-11-18 - "Repentance: Using God's name truthfully"

1 "If you will return, O Israel,

*return to me,"
declares the LORD.
"If you put your detestable idols out of my sight
and no longer go astray,
2 and if in a truthful, just and righteous way
you swear, 'As surely as the LORD lives,'
then the nations will be blessed by him
and in him they will glory." (Jeremiah4:1-2)*

What does true repentance look like?

Jeremiah gives us some thoughts:

1. Don't procrastinate. Many of us know that we need to come back to God, but we keep putting it off. "If you're going to come back then don't just say it - do it" says the Lord.
2. Get rid of the idols and stop going astray. Take concrete actions to get distance between you and the things that dragged you away from God.
3. Learn to use God's name properly.

Let's look a little more closely at the third one...

In Old Testament times "as surely as the Lord lives" was a commonly used phrase that people used to lend weight to their promises and to look like an upright kind of person. It could be used insincerely and in a manipulative way.

When we get to a place where we only use God's name when we are sure that we are being truthful, just and righteous then that is a sign that our repentance has been real...

It boils down to an understanding that honouring God is not something we can do with empty words if our lives don't match up. When we love God and His name so much that it affects our behaviour, then our repentance is real.

When the tongue, which is a tough thing to tame, is backed up by the way we live, then we have true repentance. And true repentance brings blessing - even to nations.

2010-11-19 - "Doing things differently"

*"Break up your unplowed ground
and do not sow among thorns.
Circumcise yourselves to the LORD,
circumcise your hearts" (Jeremiah4:3-4)*

Einstein defined folly as "doing the same things over and over, but expecting different results." Sometimes this is exactly what we do in our spiritual lives. We don't want anything to change, but we want different results.

Jeremiah challenged God's people to do things differently:
They were trusting the temple (like a talisman or lucky charm) and they put great faith in

their circumcision (culture and tradition) but it was getting nowhere.

They were sowing in soil that was full of weeds, they were circumcising their bodies but not their hearts.

Sometimes we have to break new ground for seed to grow.

This might be:

- Joining a Bible Study Group
- Signing up to serve somewhere
- Getting a daily devotional habit up and running
- Letting go of a long-standing grudge
- Breaking an addiction

If you've been planting seeds in the same old way and they keep being choked by the same old weeds, then break new ground.

But remember that it's not change for the sake of change: it's the heart that matters and not the outward ritual.

2010-11-23 - "Ignoring what is right before them"

22 Should you not fear me?" declares the LORD.

"Should you not tremble in my presence?

*I made the sand a boundary for the sea,
an everlasting barrier it cannot cross.*

*The waves may roll, but they cannot prevail;
they may roar, but they cannot cross it.*

*23 But these people have stubborn and rebellious hearts;
they have turned aside and gone away.*

*24 They do not say to themselves,
'Let us fear the LORD our God,
who gives autumn and spring rains in season,
who assures us of the regular weeks of harvest.'*
(Jeremiah 5:22-24)

One of the first signs of spiritual decline is that we lose our sense of wonder.

God's people had lost a sense of His divine presence in the world around them.

- Sunsets didn't wow them.
- The ocean's restrained power didn't impress them any more.
- They weren't taken with the wonder of the seasons
- And they weren't deeply grateful for the miracle of harvest.

This loss of wonder meant a loss of perspective.

Their lack of observation led to a loss of spiritual perception.

They were caught up in themselves and what they wanted.

They "turned aside and went away."

We can learn a lot from their mistake....

(So let's be sure not to repeat it!)

2010-11-25 - "Looking in the wrong places"

*"If you have raced with men on foot
and they have worn you out,
how can you compete with horses?
If you stumble in safe country,
how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan? (Jeremiah 12:5)*

Jeremiah had to repeatedly call an unrepentant Israel to "shoev" (repent): it was a tough call and a tough congregation.

In ch. 11 he experiences resistance from his own people who plot against him to end his life and silence him permanently. They confront him and threaten him: "Be silent - or else!"

This shakes Jeremiah to the core and he's ready to give up on them. His attitude is "Drag them off like sheep to be slaughtered!"

Surprisingly God does not comfort Jeremiah, but confronts him. Jeremiah had his eyes too closely on the audience. Jeremiah had pinned his hopes on the people's positive response and their readiness to accept his message.

God warns him: "Do you think it's going to get any easier?"

The point of God's question is that Jeremiah can't compete with horses. No man can. And no-one's skin is thick enough for the thorny thickets of Jordan. He will need help.

The only way to survive is to enter the battle with God's help. The only way to manage is to realise that I can't depend on people or my charisma or even my expectations. There will come a time that I have to admit that I need help

2010-11-30 - "Revisionist?"

*This is what the LORD says:
"Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,
and you will find rest for your souls.
But you said, 'We will not walk in it.' (Jeremiah 6:16)*

Some of you will probably cheekily suggest that I am showing my age here, but I think today's topic is well worth considering and I think there are fine-balances and plenty of baby-and-bathwater issues around this subject!

A wise person once told me: "Tradition is a stream we walk beside and not a stagnant pool. Sometimes the stream is shaped by the countryside and sometimes the stream shapes the countryside."

I see a lot of unhealthy revisionism going on today where it is a case of "out with the old and in with the new" simply because people think that "new is better."

Jeremiah had to challenge the people to go back to the ancient paths. Why? Not because they were ancient, but because they were *good*. There are old ways that are not good and we should learn from the mistakes of others.

Isaac Newton said "we have come this far because we have stood on the shoulders of giants." Unfortunately today we are so determined to "do it our way" that we don't want to stand on the shoulders of the wisdom others have already gained in the school of hard knocks.

Proverbs 22:28 offers a similar sentiment: "Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your forefathers."

Here are some ancient good paths that are sadly neglected today:

- Loving but firm discipline of children by parents
- Teaching our children to wait and work for what they want instead of just giving them what they want.
- The value of reading
- The importance of marriage, and waiting for marriage
- The importance of living simply and within one's means
- Respect for privacy for loud in-your-face sensuality in our tv shows, newspaper headlines and tabloids.

Most importantly we seem to have forgotten the centrality of the "old old story of Jesus and His love." We seem to have forgotten the value of regular church attendance, Bible reading, prayer and service.

As a nation we are at a cross-road - may it be that we will look for the good ancient paths.

2010-12-01 - "Fun-spoiler or Protector?"

18 The children gather wood, the fathers light the fire, and the women knead the dough and make cakes of bread for the Queen of Heaven. They pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger. 19 But am I the one they are provoking? declares the LORD. Are they not rather harming themselves, to their own shame? (Jeremiah7:18-19)

Sometimes we kick against God's laws and requirements because we suspect He is out to spoil our fun... Jeremiah gives us another perspective:

The Queen of Heaven was Ishtar, a Babylonian idol. As the Hebrews worshipped her, they descended into immorality and decadence. It was an affront to the holiness and glory of the one true God.

But is just that God is dishonoured by idolatry - it is us who are harmed! High on God's agenda is His loving desire to protect us from the consequences of giving in to our sinful nature.

When we

- worship false gods, we take on their values (fear, excess, greed)
- commit adultery, we damage trust, loyalty and self-image and risk health
- abuse substances, we damage our bodies

- refuse to rest, we risk break-down
 - don't honour our parents, we become unhealthy members of society
 - desire other people's stuff, we become unsatisfy-able.
- and so on.

God wants us to grow into all that He created us to be.
Sin deforms and destroys us - it drives God crazy because He loves us.

The last point here is the very sad picture of the whole family being dragged into this: children, fathers and mothers. How many families will go Christmas shopping on a Sunday morning instead of being in church? It breaks God's heart when this happens and He wants to protect us and our families from ourselves.

2010-12-02 - "True Wisdom"

This is what the LORD says:

*"Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom
or the strong man boast of his strength
or the rich man boast of his riches,
24 but let him who boasts boast about this:
that he understands and knows me,
that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness,
justice and righteousness on earth,
for in these I delight,"
declares the LORD. (Jeremiah9:23-24)*

Isn't it interesting how our gifts (wisdom, strength and riches) which are really gifts and blessings from above are the very things that distract us from Him?

Why is this? Did God make a mistake in blessing us with gifts? No! We can't blame God's generosity, but rather our lack of humility and gratitude. Even my talents are from Him!

Jeremiah gives us three measures for boast-worthiness: kindness, justice and righteousness.

Think about it: These are the things that really matter.

Kindness = love, graciousness, compassion

Justice = how we treat others (equality, fairness, protect the weak)

Righteousness = all about internal integrity

All three of the above are needed if we are to be of any substance.

There are two kinds of boasting: The kind where people take credit where it isn't due, and the kind where credit is given to the one to whom it is due. When it comes to the measures of kindness, justice and righteousness there is only God who remains standing.

We do better thinking highly of Him than thinking highly of ourselves!

2010-12-03 - "Plans"

11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not

to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah29:11)

Jeremiah was left behind in Jerusalem when the Babylonians dragged the "cream" of Israel's leaders off into exile. But God had Jeremiah write to them, encouraging them to make the most their situation at the "rivers of Babylon."

The unthinkable concept in his letter was that God had a plan for them. Could that be possible? Could they come back from exile with a revived and revitalised faith that was not centred on the temple but the Word of God? Between Jeremiah (in Israel) and Ezekiel (with the exiles) God transformed His people and brought them back after 70 years.

Could God have had a plan with an unlikely people?
History says He did.

Does God have a plan for humanity?
Yes He does!

It was revealed in a babe born in Bethlehem.

But Nathanael wasn't sure: "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" (Try the Saviour of the World!...)

Philip (just NOT getting it) said "Just show us the Father," and Jesus said "If you've seen me, You've seen Him."

God works in unlikely and unusual ways - may your hearts be open to Him this Christmas. For Christmas truly is an "Advent" in that it sneaks up on us with stories of stables, journeys, gifts and the earthy way in which it all takes place. But there is wonder for all who would open their eyes to His great love!

2011-01-13 - "Far and Near"

*23 "Am I only a God nearby,"
declares the LORD,
"and not a God far away?
24 Can anyone hide in secret places
so that I cannot see him?"
declares the LORD.
"Do not I fill heaven and earth?"
declares the LORD. (Jeremiah23:23-24)*

For most of us the question is not if God is a far away God, but if He is a God who is near!
For us, the question is "Does God care?" for Jeremiah the question was "Is God able?"

Jeremiah lived in a world where the "effectiveness" of a nation's god was measured by their military success and divine "turf wars." If your nation was defeated by another nation and you were taken into exile into their god's "turf" was there any way that your nation's god could be with you? To contemporary answer was "No way!"

God brings an amazing comfort to Jeremiah: No distance and no circumstance can prevent God from being with His people. He is not a local god confined to Palestine or a Jerusalem

temple. His plans are not effected by the unfaithfulness of people or the schemes of nations.

Although Jerusalem and the temple have been destroyed and although Israel's leaders are in exile in Babylon, Yahweh (the Hebrew name for the God of Israel) is not a local or limited God. He is the God of the near and far.

Even when we have hidden in the secret places of sin and failure He can see us and He can save us. He does care - He sent His Son for us and that is what we celebrated at Christmas. And He is able to save us - no matter how far we have wandered - He is the God of far away too!

This is awesome comfort for 2011. Not only does He care, but when we were far from Him - He came to us! As He fills heaven and earth, may He fill your and my 2011!

2011-01-14 - "The LORD our Righteousness"

*5 "The days are coming," declares the LORD,
"when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch,
a King who will reign wisely
and do what is just and right in the land.*

*6 In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel will live in safety.*

This is the name by which he will be called:

The LORD Our Righteousness. (Jeremiah23:5-6)

We do not generally associate Jeremiah with Messianic prophecies, but there are a few Jeremiah passages that foreshadow the coming of Jesus the Messiah. This is one of the most significant.

Jeremiah lived in a time of puppet kings, fallen kings, defeated kings and evil kings. The history that he recounted to Israel as their "fall from grace" was littered with the stories of corrupt, greedy and godless kings.

This makes the longing and beauty of this prophetic passage even more poignant. The king Jeremiah foresees will be righteous, wise, just and a saviour who provides security. He will be called "The LORD our Righteousness."

Jesus fulfilled these hopes but not quite as the average person expected:

- His Kingdom is not an earthly Kingdom but transcends earthly regimes which come and go.

- His life was an awesome example of closeness to God (wisdom) and love for people (doing what is just and right in the land)

- He paid an incredible price to save us and offer righteousness to us.

Righteousness is a tough Old Testament word. It was a high call and, as history proved, people were not up to the call. Evil kings didn't attain it and even the good kings fell short. Not only did Jesus live righteously but He died for our unrighteousness and then shared His righteousness with us - therefore saving us.

So here we have it - some 600 years before Jesus would go to the cross as our King of

Righteousness - God has already whispered this hope into the heart of His prophet. What a God and what a Saviour!

2011-01-18 - "Passionate Call"

2 "This is what the LORD says: Stand in the courtyard of the LORD's house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word. 3 Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done. (Jeremiah26:2-3)

Today we look at the passionate call that was extended to Jeremiah. Tomorrow we'll look at his passionate response...

You might argue that this passage does not seem so passionate. If you read it in isolation it doesn't seem too intense, but it is just another brick in a big wall of texts that portray God as very reluctant to bring wrath and very eager to forgive a repentant Israel.

The whole of Jeremiah's call is a desperate outreach to a people that many would consider "long gone" and "dead on arrival" and yet Jeremiah is sent to desperately attempt to resuscitate the faith of the people of God.

This time Jeremiah is sent to the courtyard of the temple. This is the centerpoint of the nation's religious and political life. Jeremiah was doing the equivalent of the country bumpkin preacher who suddenly demands to be on prime time TV with all the notoriety that could earn him.

Not only is Jeremiah called to rush in where angels fear to tread, but he is sent with an uncomfortable message - a call to repentance. It's a call that could endanger the messenger's life, but there is a fervent longing and hope: that Israel would turn (the Hebrew word is "sho'ev" and is repeated with metronomic regularity through Jeremiah)

Here is a picture of powerful and relentless love - a God who would send Jeremiah His servant all the way to the temple courts and who would send His one and only Son into the world and to the cross.

2011-01-19 - "Passionate Response"

Then Jeremiah said to all the officials and all the people: "The LORD sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the things you have heard. 13 Now reform your ways and your actions and obey the LORD your God. Then the LORD will relent and not bring the disaster he has pronounced against you. 14 As for me, I am in your hands; do with me whatever you think is good and right. 15 Be assured, however, that if you put me to death, you will bring the guilt of innocent blood on yourselves and on this city and on those who live in it, for in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing." (Jeremiah26:12-15)

Yesterday we looked at God's passionate call to Israel. Today we see the effect of that passion on Jeremiah.

There are three important things to note from Jeremiah's words here:

1. He is crystal clear that God has sent him and called him to this ministry. This call motivates, drives, inspires and focuses him. Jeremiah knows there is nothing better that he can do with his life than follow this call. Jeremiah's passion comes from his sense of being privileged to have received a call.

2. The stakes are very high! If the people hear him, disaster will be averted. This is an important and urgent message. The analogy often given is "What would you do if you found the cure for cancer?" Here Jeremiah has found the key to turn back the Babylonian invasion, prevent the 18 month siege of Jerusalem and avoid the exile of Israel's brightest and best. His passion stems from the urgency of the message!

3. He is willing to lay down his life for this call. Notice how in v.15 he speculates "if you put me to death you will be guilty of shedding innocent blood..." but their guilt won't bring him back to life! His passion is so hot that self-preservation fades into the background!

You and I have been called by name by a God who meets us in the quiet of prayer and Bible Study. He meets us in worship and in sunrises and sunsets. He has made us His children and has called and entrusted us with the message of the gospel which is the cure for sin and the key to life and peace. It is an urgent and important message! We have our one life here on earth to devote to this message, but this one life (even if it is cut short on earth) stretches into eternity because of Christ's resurrection.

Shouldn't we be PASSIONATE?

2011-01-20 - "The God who restores"

The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying:

"I have loved you with an everlasting love;

I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

4 I will build you up again

and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel.

Again you will take up your tambourines

and go out to dance with the joyful.

5 Again you will plant vineyards

on the hills of Samaria;

the farmers will plant them

and enjoy their fruit.

6 There will be a day when watchmen cry out

on the hills of Ephraim,

'Come, let us go up to Zion,

to the LORD our God.'" (Jeremiah31:3-6)

Israel had failed, failed and failed again.

They had sinned, cheated and rebelled.

They rejected the prophets, broken the law and disregarded their God.

But God continues to love!

They won't initiate a return but He is willing to draw them back to Him.

And He will build them up again.

Why?

Because He is just a big softy and just takes our nonsense?

No!

But because He paid an incredible price to forgive and restore us.

Jesus' life, death and resurrection secured our forgiveness.

The Holy Spirit living in us secures our restoration.

The promises Jeremiah offers his people are based on God's plan.

His goodness and patience with His people stems from His plan for us.

What a good and gracious God!

No matter how we have failed and no matter what we have done, God wants to renew and restore us! Now, go and read the passage again and see what God would do with the broken areas of our lives...

2011-01-25 - "Scapegoat Theology"

29 "In those days people will no longer say,

`The fathers have eaten sour grapes,

and the children's teeth are set on edge.'

30 Instead, everyone will die for his own sin; whoever eats sour grapes--his own teeth will be set on edge. (Jeremiah31:29-30)

Many people (many of them very well-meaning) have built what I call a "lopsided scapegoat theology" out of Exodus 20:5 which reads:

"for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me"

The lopsided theology is that if I suffer from arthritis or asthma or cancer it may well be because my great-great grandfather was involved in some occult activity that I didn't even know about. (Some people call these "bloodline curses.") It is a scapegoat theology that seeks to apportion blame in what is often the wrong place.

Here in Jeremiah (and Ezekiel 18:2-3) we are offered a valuable counter-balance: If sour grapes make our teeth ache, let's check our own teeth for holes before we look at Grandad's teeth!

Please note that I am not saying the Ex20:5 isn't true - but we shouldn't take it out of context or take it too far. Christians are very quick to apply it to themselves - but read it carefully: who is it is directed at? God says it is directed at "those who hate me."

We know that there are legacies that can be passed down generations. Alcohol abuse, family violence and genetic defects can be passed down from parent to child. BUT there are some things that we must take responsibility for. AND there are some things that are simply the result of living in a broken world and we (and our forbears) have done nothing to "deserve" it.

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel were making a very sad point: previous generations had made tragic mistakes, but even with the history lessons available to them, the current generations were doing the same and worse. Both prophets were emphasising personal responsibility. We are responsible for our walk with God.

More on this tomorrow...

2011-01-26 - "Responsible but not alone"

"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD.

*"I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.*

*I will be their God,
and they will be my people.*

*34 No longer will a man teach his neighbor,
or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,'
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,"
declares the LORD.*

*"For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:33-34)*

Yesterday we discounted "scapegoat theology" that abdicates the responsibility for our spiritual, mental, emotional and physical health to our forebears.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel both emphasised individual and personal responsibility. Ezekiel put it bluntly: "The soul who sins is the one who will die" (Eze 18:4)

Jeremiah also emphasises the need for each of us to have a personal relationship with God, but he offers us this incredible comfort: We do not have to take the initiative. We do not have to take the first steps. God takes the first steps and we must respond...

God's new covenant with his people is one in which God works individually in each person:

- * He will write His truth in our hearts
- * He will (re)assure us that He is our God
- * He will place an awareness of Him in us - we can "know the Lord."
- * He will forgive our sins - we get a fresh start.

So, not only are we free from the past - but God takes 99 steps toward us and even in the 1 step that we take towards Him, He is working in us to help us.

We are the ones who must take responsibility for our walk with God.
BUT we don't have to do it alone!

2011-01-27 - "Confession"

"I have surely heard Ephraim's moaning:

*'You disciplined me like an unruly calf,
and I have been disciplined.*

*Restore me, and I will return,
because you are the LORD my God.*

*19 After I strayed, I repented;
after I came to understand,*

*I beat my breast.
I was ashamed and humiliated
because I bore the disgrace of my youth.'* (Jeremiah31:18-19)

Confession is not a popular facet of modern day faith. We hide behind the excuse that confession was abused in the church in the dark ages and we raise the problem of indulgences or question the competence of a human priest to hear a confession. We talk about how we are under grace and not under law.

But let's be honest. The real issue is that confession means admitting that we were wrong - and none of our egos like doing that!

The Bible has a lot to say about confession:

- * Psalm 32:1-5 The psalmist feels physically ill until he confesses
- * Nehemiah confessed the sins of the nation (Neh 1:6) and then the nation did it (9:2)
- * In Ephesus people confessed their sins and burnt their occult stuff (Acts19:18)
- * James (5:16) encourages us to confess our sins to one another
- * 1John1:9 re-assures us that we are forgiven and that the Holy Spirit takes away our desire to sin as we confess.

So what is confession?

Confession is understanding who God is and valuing our friendship with Him. When we bring the smelly stuff of sin into our relationship with God, confession acknowledges the smelly stuff and gives God the go-ahead to help us get free of it. Confession acknowledges our brokenness and need for help.

In the above-quoted passage Jeremiah gives us a picture of good repentance and a productive confession.

Look how God responds in the next verse:

Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight?
Though I often speak against him, I still remember him.
Therefore my heart yearns for him;
I have great compassion for him,"
declares the LORD.

God is righteous and so He speaks against our sin - but His heart always yearns for us. Confession means we are expressing the desire to separate ourselves from our sin and this allows God to heal us!

2011-01-28 - "eyes open worship"

Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you. (Jeremiah32:17)

Today's devotion is pretty straight-forward:

Sometimes its helpful if we don't close our eyes when we worship and pray!

If we keep our eyes open when we worship, here's the fingerprints we see on creation:

- It's big - because the Creator is big
- It's diverse - because the Architect abounds with creativity

- It's powerful - because the Builder is matchless in power
- It's beautiful - because the Maker is love and full of light

When we pray - it's good to keep our eyes open because this is what we will see:

- A tiny edelweiss grown on frozen wind-blasted peak
- A rainbow after the storm
- Flowers in the desert
- A mother protecting her young
- The power of the wind and flood
- The calm of a moonlit night
- The joyful song of the birds

And we recognise that God has made us fragile but tough, that there is hope after heartache, that beauty can arise in the most unexpected circumstances, that we are made to need each other, that brokenness can bring devastation but that weeping remains for a night and that joy comes in the morning.

If creation (the work of His hands) can bear the fingerprints of the Creator and so eloquently reflect life's joys and heartaches then surely the Creator is awesome!

Try worshipping with your eyes open this Sunday!

2011-02-01 - "Prayer"

1 While Jeremiah was still confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the LORD came to him a second time: 2 "This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed it and established it--the LORD is his name:3 `Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.' (Jeremiah33:1-3)

Jeremiah's ministry was not popular. For his trouble he had been thrown into a miry pit, held in stocks, confined to the courtyard and he'd had to endure various other forms of opposition

During his time in the courtyard, God promises Jeremiah that he can call on His God.

No matter where we are and no matter what we are going through, we can call on the name of the Lord. What is never guaranteed is that there won't be trouble and that things will always be easy.

The vision that Jeremiah is given in the verses that follow is not an easy or comforting vision at the outset. It describes the devastation of the Babylonian invasion, but it also describes God's long term plan to restore Jerusalem and to bring the Messiah.

The bottom line is this:

Wherever we are, we can always call on the Lord.

He will speak His truth to us.

This will not always be comfortable, but it is always true.

Always it is about bringing us to readiness for the Messiah.

Many say that "Jer 33:3" is "God's telephone number." One should be careful not to take it out of context - if we dial this number to hear what we want to hear, we are heading for

disappointment.

However, the promise is true - if we sincerely call on the Lord, He will prepare us for whatever is coming and even if trouble is on the immediate horizon, there is always the hope of His plan of salvation in the long term.

2011-02-02 - "Compassion and intervention"

Ebed-Melech the Cushite said to Jeremiah, "Put these old rags and worn-out clothes under your arms to pad the ropes." Jeremiah did so, 13 and they pulled him up with the ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the courtyard of the guard (Jeremiah38:12-13)

Relationships between Jeremiah and the king and his officials had soured. Jeremiah persisted in prophesying that Israel needed to repent or otherwise the Babylonians would defeat them.

The king and his soldiers did not want to listen. The soldiers threw Jeremiah into a cistern (a deep hole in the ground lined with clay for water storage.) It was damp, dark, cold and muddy and Jeremiah would not have lasted long there - he was not a young man anymore.

Enter Ebed-Melech. He was a Cushite (probably an Egyptian eunuch.) His name means "servant of the King." He reported Jeremiah's predicament to the king who relented and gave orders for Jeremiah to be rescued and restored to imprisonment in the courtyard of the guards.

What is striking about Ebed-Melech is the simple act of kindness revealed in our text verses. Jeremiah would have been too weak to pull himself out. So he needed to be pulled up with ropes. Ebed-Melech gets old clothes to pad Jeremiah where the ropes would have chafed him. It is an act of compassionate kindness.

Sometimes God sends angels and sometimes he sends people. We don't know all of Ebed-Melech's story (was he a convert to Judaism? What was he doing in Jerusalem as chaos was erupting? What influence did he have with the King? How did he get a Jewish name?) We do know that he was in the right place at the right time with the right influence to make a difference.

But more than that - he sweated the small stuff - apart from rescuing Jeremiah from certain death - he added a simple act of kindness to the elderly prophet: Soft padding under his arms.

Let's learn from Ebed-Melech's example and use the opportunities God gives us with fearless compassionate thoughtfulness.

2011-02-03 - "Truth and Action"

Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, "This is what the LORD God Almighty, the God of Israel, says: `If you surrender to the officers of the king of Babylon, your life will be spared and this city will not be burned down; you and your family will live.

...

24 Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, "Do not let anyone know about this conversation, or you may die. (Jeremiah38:17-24)

It is one thing to hear the truth and another to act on it.

Jeremiah had prophesied that the Babylonians would surround and overthrow Jerusalem. This was the end result of years of idolatry, rebellion and stubbornness on Israel's part.

In a moment of rare insight and wisdom King Zedekiah has a meeting with Jeremiah the troublesome "bad news" prophet. Everyone else has rejected Jeremiah - other prophets were proclaiming deliverance and "get out of jail free cards." Everyone preferred listening to the other prophets. There was one small problem: Jeremiah was the only prophet whose predictions were coming true.

And so Zedekiah meets with Jeremiah and asks for a straight answer: "What should I do?" Jeremiah's answer is shocking, uncomfortable and, on the face of it, downright unpatriotic: "Surrender."

This is not news that Zedekiah wants to hear!!

But Jeremiah isn't blinded by mindless patriotism or romanticism. He knows that resisting the Babylonians is to resist God who sent them. To fight the Babylonians was not a "good fight." To surrender to the Babylonians means a surrender of the pride and arrogance that stood in the way of Israel returning to God. Surrender would circumvent a terrible war of attrition. Surrender meant less casualties, less destruction and a better hope of recovery.

But this is medicine that Zedekiah doesn't want to take. Fear and Pride keep him from doing the right thing. Jeremiah is forced to remain silent about the conversation and the king leads his people into a terrible 18 month siege and horrific destruction.

It is one thing to hear the truth and another to act on it.

2011-02-04 - "Interlude: Faithful God"

We've reached the point in Jeremiah's journey where Jerusalem is overthrown by the Babylonians. We're going to cut across to another book written by Jeremiah: The book of Lamentations...

*21 Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope:
22 Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail.
23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
24 I say to myself, "The LORD is my portion;
therefore I will wait for him." (Lamentations3:22-24)*

The book of Lamentations, written by Jeremiah in aftermath of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, is a gut-wrenching exploration of pain. It consists of 5 poems that have been composed with each stanza starting with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

The poem explores the terribly sad circumstances as thoroughly as possible. It is as though Jeremiah needed to document the horror of what had happened. It is in the middle poem, where the stanzas are longer that we find the bottom line: God's love cannot be defeated

by pain.

There is no denying the reality of the pain. The thorough "documentation" of this pain in Lamentations in no way tries to belittle the extent of the pain and loss, but Jeremiah discovers that pain does not have the last say.

God's love is stronger than pain - our problems don't disappear, but we are carried through our loss and sustained in our struggle, we are sustained in our journey even if we can't see the end of the shadowy valley.

The powerful image he connects to is that of a new morning. Sometimes the new morning comes with a stunning sunrise, sometimes it comes in a fairly bland way, other times we can't even see it behind the mist and the rain - but it comes!

In the midst of our pain and loss, let us wait for the Lord!

2011-02-08 - "Be careful of what you ask for"

19 "O remnant of Judah, the LORD has told you, 'Do not go to Egypt.' Be sure of this: I warn you today 20 that you made a fatal mistake when you sent me to the LORD your God and said, 'Pray to the LORD our God for us; tell us everything he says and we will do it.' 21 I have told you today, but you still have not obeyed the LORD your God in all he sent me to tell you. (Jeremiah42:19-21)

Once the Babylonians had defeated Jerusalem and taken the leaders into exile, they left a puppet king and government in place. Jeremiah was also left behind. The ones who had been left behind saw themselves as the "remnant."

There were factions among the remnant that believed that they could rebel and flee to Egypt. They believed that Egypt was powerful enough to resist and overcome the Babylonians.

They assumed that this was a logical plan and decided to ask Jeremiah to enquire of the Lord. Their assumption was that they would obtain a Divine RubberStamp for their plan.

Jeremiah came back with an unexpected answer: "God says 'No'"
From the chapters that follow, we know that they people didn't listen and dragged Jeremiah with them as their captive... It didn't end well.

Here Jeremiah is warning them of the judgement they are bringing on themselves. They asked for God's guidance and then they didn't want to take it. In some ways they'd have been better off if they hadn't asked...

The bottom line - if we are going to involve God in our plans, we should be very careful to be willing to do whatever He says - even if His answer is not what we expect.

2011-02-09 - "Merciful but Just"

*Do not fear, O Jacob my servant,
for I am with you," declares the LORD.
"Though I completely destroy all the nations*

*among which I scatter you,
I will not completely destroy you.
I will discipline you but only with justice;
I will not let you go entirely unpunished." (Jeremiah46:28)*

Many people would not be comfortable with this verse. We prefer passages that tell us that we are forgiven, and that God is merciful. We don't like to think about the consequences of our sin and we don't like to think about punishment.

But before I say any more about this passage, let's look at the circumstances that led to God saying this to Israel...

Jeremiah is in Egypt having been dragged there by a group who believe that Egypt will be safe from the Babylonians. There the Israelites have started sacrificing to idols again. Jeremiah has warned them in the strongest possible terms against this.

But look at their answer:

"We will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the LORD! 17 We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our fathers, our kings and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem." (Jer44:16-17)

There are not many passages in the OT that articulate such defiant, deliberate and determined rebellion as this passage does. It is in the light of this level of intransigence that we must view our text verse and then our conclusion is: "Lord, why have mercy on them at all?"

This is the bottom line: every time we think about situations and circumstances where God has punished His people, we need to say: "He still doesn't treat us as our sins deserve."

It is ultimately Christ who suffered unimaginably on the cross taking on Himself all that we deserved.

2011-02-10 - "Hope and Justice (part 1)"

Therefore this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says:

*"I will punish the king of Babylon and his land as I punished the king of Assyria..."
(Jeremiah50:18)*

After Solomon's death, Israel split into two kingdoms: North and South. The Northern Kingdom was destroyed by the Assyrians in 721BC. The Assyrians were in turn destroyed by the Babylonians.

Later, the Southern Kingdom was defeated and taken into exile by the Babylonians in 586BC. But God promises that the Babylonians would have to pay the price for exceeding their mandate.

What do I mean?

The Old Testament shows us how God judges nations. Here are the key issues:

1. When Israel sinned, their degeneration made them vulnerable for attack. But there was more at play than simple opportunism, God made it clear that He raised nations and that

He marched with them. (Jeremiah tells us that God marched with the Babylonians against Israel)

2. Although God led nations and used them to bring about judgement on Israel and other nations, they were not puppets or automatons. Unfortunately many of them took advantage of the open doors that God had given them and meted out more harshness and cruelty than was needed. So God would judge the nation that had once been His instrument of justice.

Here Jeremiah is proclaiming that although Babylon had been an instrument of justice, they were now in the dock to be judged for doing justice work unjustly. (In Isaiah, Cyrus, King of the Persians, who defeated the Babylonians is called "God's Servant.")

What's the lesson for us?

Sometimes God uses us to expose evil or deal with injustice.

We should be careful about strutting and pridefulness.

Otherwise God may have to deal with us.

2011-02-11 - "Hope and Justice (part 2)"

*19 But I will bring Israel back to his own pasture
and he will graze on Carmel and Bashan;
his appetite will be satisfied
on the hills of Ephraim and Gilead.*

20 In those days, at that time,"

declares the LORD,

"search will be made for Israel's guilt,

but there will be none,

and for the sins of Judah,

but none will be found,

for I will forgive the remnant I spare. (Jeremiah50:19-20)

Yesterday we saw that God judges nations and He also holds the nations He uses as instruments of justice accountable for the the injustice of their "justice."

Now in the verses that follow we move to hope.

Hope for Israel is articulated in two key concepts: Restoration and Forgiveness.

Israel had sinned and had refused to listen even though God used every means possible to get through to them - (think of Ezekiel walking around naked, cutting off his hair, digging through walls and various other symbolic acts) - but they would not listen!

Defeat and Exile brought Israel to her senses.

And God restores - miraculously!

The book of Daniel tells us how the Babylonian King Belshazzar (son of Nebuchadnezzar) grabs the temple goblets and uses them for a pagan feast and a hand appears on the wall writing "Mene mene tekel parsin" (Your days are numbered, you have been weighed and found wanting and your kingdom will be divided among the Medes and Persians) And that same night Darius of the Persians marches into Babylon and defeats the Babylonians. The policy of the Persians is to allow subject countries to govern themselves and the exiled

Israelites are sent home. (They'd been held by the Babylonians for 70 years)

But more significantly, God forgives.

And the forgiveness articulated here anticipates Christ's work on the cross. This is not sacrificial forgiveness where the sinner has to do something to be forgiven. This is the complete forgiveness that is offered by a gracious God to an undeserving people. You can search as much as you like for their guilt - but it is GONE. It's not swept under the carpet - it's not hidden away in a cupboard - it's not locked up in a safe for blackmail - it is GONE!

There is justice and hope!

Be in church on Sunday to worship this amazing God!

2011-02-15 - "Conclusion 1: Evaluation"

14 The whole Babylonian army under the commander of the imperial guard broke down all the walls around Jerusalem. 15 Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard carried into exile some of the poorest people and those who remained in the city, along with the rest of the craftsmen and those who had gone over to the king of Babylon. 16 But Nebuzaradan left behind the rest of the poorest people of the land to work the vineyards and fields (Jeremiah52:14-16)

We've reached the end of the book of Jeremiah. Unfortunately it is not a happy ending. Although he had done everything he could to warn the people, Jeremiah had been ignored, resisted and ridiculed.

Now his prophecies were fulfilled. The Babylonians have gutted the city and killed and exiled the people. The verb the author uses for "broke down all the walls" is the same verb that we found in Jeremiah's call: to tear down. It reminds us that that there could have been another outcome if Israel had returned (remember that Hebrew word "shoev"?)

As we conclude there are some questions that remain:

1. Did Jeremiah fail?
2. Did God give him an impossible task?

It is tempting to view Jeremiah as a failure because the people didn't listen to him. But Jeremiah's task was to proclaim a message. He had to explain to God's people:

- Their sin was bringing disaster to them
- They couldn't rely on Egypt or themselves (remember the broken cisterns?)
- They couldn't use the temple as a lucky charm.
- Only true repentance would bring about change.

His calling was to: "uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow"

Jeremiah had to uproot bad theology, tear down idolatry and destroy self-serving nationalistic superstition and overthrow false religious leaders who were hirelings rather than shepherds.

He did this by proclaiming God's judgement on the nation, and when this was fulfilled he was vindicated.

BUT Jeremiah also had to "build and to plant." Jeremiah did this in four significant ways:

- He proclaimed a new covenant to be written on hearts not stone
- He anticipated a Messiah who would be our "Righteous Branch"

- He declared the hardship of exile was not an end, but a beginning
- He modelled an intimate relationship with God (more on this tomorrow...)

2011-02-16 - "Conclusion 2: Intimacy 1"

*7 O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived;
you overpowered me and prevailed.
I am ridiculed all day long;
everyone mocks me.*

*8 Whenever I speak, I cry out
proclaiming violence and destruction.
So the word of the LORD has brought me
insult and reproach all day long.*

*9 But if I say, "I will not mention him
or speak any more in his name,"
his word is in my heart like a fire,
a fire shut up in my bones.
I am weary of holding it in;
indeed, I cannot. (Jeremiah 20:7-9)*

While Jeremiah had a ministry that, to all outward appearances, seemed to have failed, we see an intimacy between the prophet and his God that is breath-taking in its honesty.

In the beginning of ch.20 the priest Pashur has Jeremiah beaten (whipped) and then locked up overnight in the stocks. It was life-threatening, painful beyond description and utterly humiliating.

Jeremiah spills his guts to God:

- He tells God that he feels let down, abandoned and betrayed.
- He felt deceived because he wasn't experiencing the respect that prophets usually had from the people.
- He holds God responsible because he believes that God is ultimately in control and that evil can only do what God allows it to.

In Hebrew the words deceived, overpowered and prevailed have a overtone of sexual assault. Jeremiah is, in effect, saying to God "I feel I have been violated." It is a very personal outpouring of frustration and pain and one has a clear sense that God has patiently heard Jeremiah.

The beauty of this passage is that Jeremiah is so close to God that he is able to express his feelings and frustrations to God and that God hears him and comforts him.

The evidence of the comfort, hope and healing Jeremiah receives is in verse 9: "In spite of all that has happened to me - His name and word are like fire in my bones: I can't keep it in!"

Sometimes our lives take disappointing turns. From Jeremiah we learn:

1. It is ok to tell God how we feel.
2. God's goodness and awesomeness can allow us to transcend our circumstances.

2011-02-17 - "Conclusion 3: Intimacy 2"

*10 I hear many whispering,
"Terror on every side!
Report him! Let's report him!"
All my friends
are waiting for me to slip, saying,
"Perhaps he will be deceived;
then we will prevail over him
and take our revenge on him."
11 But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior;
so my persecutors will stumble and not prevail.
They will fail and be thoroughly disgraced;
their dishonor will never be forgotten.*

*...
13 Sing to the LORD!
Give praise to the LORD!
He rescues the life of the needy
from the hands of the wicked. (Jeremiah20:11-13)*

The masses had a nickname for Jeremiah: "Magor-Missabib" which means "Terror on every side." They thought him delusional and paranoid. They wanted to report him for his treasonous prophecies and they were just waiting for him to go one step too far. He endured terrible cynicism and stubborn opposition from the very people he was trying to save.

It is his intimacy with his God that keeps him going.

We saw his disarming honesty yesterday: "Lord, I really really don't like what's going on - I feel used and betrayed." But in the same breath he says "But the LORD is with me like a mighty warrior!"

He isn't pretending that its all hunky-dory - there is a battle going on, but the long term view is that evil will not prevail.

Jeremiah has relentless faith in God that is definitely not linked to or defined by his circumstances. And so he concludes with praise - for "Sing to the LORD!
Give praise to the LORD!
He rescues the life of the needy"

And so this brings us the end of our reflections on Jeremiah, who is, in my opinion one of the most neglected prophets of the Old Testament. Many call him the "weeping prophet" but that doesn't do justice to the great extent of his ministry:

- Courage to carry out a tough calling
- A passion to reach his people
- His willingness to do the unpleasant breaking of bad foundations
- His brutally honest relationship with God
- His love for and trust in God that carries him through tough times
- The awesome foundations laid for the new covenant
- The prophecies of the coming Messiah
- The hope that he expressed in Israel's worst nightmare (the fall of Jerusalem and the temple.)

I hope you have enjoyed the journey!