

God commanded Jeremiah to remain single. Today being single does not automatically mean being lonely, but in those days it did. Because Jeremiah was denied a home life with a wife and children, and also not able to attend weddings, funerals, or other gatherings, Jeremiah was being consigned to a life of loneliness.

Why? Jeremiah was not just speaking God's message, but Jeremiah's life must show the message symbolically. What was God showing by making poor Jeremiah alone? God was showing what the nation would soon experience. Jeremiah was given a mini-exile, to show that the nation would soon enter exile.

God did a similar thing with Ezekiel, in chapter 24, that the prophet Ezekiel was told that his wife would die, and he would not be allowed to mourn for her.

Thankfully, the chapter also has God's promise for bringing his people out of exile.

So, in this chapter we see that the cause of loneliness is sin and **the cure for loneliness is Christ and His church**. Chapter 16 will go on to describe how **the first exodus would be surpassed by a new 'exodus,' when God would bring His people out of loneliness and exile, and back home together with God and together with each other**. The rest of the story is that Jeremiah would be restored – Jeremiah eventually would be lonely no more, and the people would be in exile no more. Exile is followed by restoration. Loneliness has a cure, because sin has a cure.

1. Jeremiah "took up his cross" of loneliness to embody God's withdrawal from that generation. (v.1-12)

Jeremiah's single life in verses 1-4 reminds us that it may be necessary to abandon our plans and desires if God's purposes are to be accomplished through us. Proverbs 19:21, "*Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.*" Jeremiah embodies a saying of Christ in Mark 8:34, "*If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.*"

In verse 5, Jeremiah was also told that he must not participate in the normal customs of grieving and mourning, such as funeral services and funeral meals. This command would make Jeremiah even more alone. Staying away from funerals would alienate Jeremiah from his people. They would interpret his actions as uncaring. By showing no grief for the dead, Jeremiah's actions would show God's message – God would withdraw comfort from the people of Jerusalem. There would be so much death that there would be no time for mourning, and, in fact, no one left to mourn and attend the funerals! There would not be anyone left to perform the burial of the deceased. The worst curse that the ancient people in Jerusalem could think of was to have no burial for their dead. The cutting of

oneself or the making oneself bald by shaving one's head were the grieving practices of the pagans surrounding Jerusalem at that time. In verse 7, the time would even come when no one would offer food or drink to console the mourning people. No cup of consolation. This is the only time in the whole Old Testament that the custom of a cup of consolation was mentioned. The cup signifies gathering together to enjoy refreshments. But that was denied Jeremiah.

In verse 8, Jeremiah was also not allowed to go to the house of feasting. No celebrating. No graduation parties, no birthday parties. Jeremiah's absence from community events would add to his reputation of being eccentric. His behavior was necessary to accent God's message of judgment. To speak of a coming disaster, but then to join in celebrations would be absurd. All normal living was coming to an end, when all sounds of joy and gladness, such as weddings and wedding receptions, would no longer be heard in Jerusalem.

In verse 10, God instructed Jeremiah to be ready for the people's question. Why has the Lord pronounced all this great evil against us? What is our iniquity? It is incredible that they would be asking such a question. Their question only serves to confirm how blind they were to their sins, which has been a theme in the recent chapters.

The LORD patiently replied to their question with 2 answers. First answer, in verse 11, because their forefathers forsook the LORD and second answer, in verse 12, that the sins of this generation were worse than their forefathers. Judah was not going to be punished for the sins of their fathers, so don't cry out "unfair," but rather Judah was going to be punished for their own sins. The people had behaved more wickedly, and it is described in verse 12, "*every one of you follows his stubborn, evil will, refusing to listen to Me.*" For God's just response, we turn to verse 13, which brings us to the second point of this sermon.

2. God would judge sin with captivity, and yet He promised rescue from exile in a new and better 'exodus.' (v.13-18)

Verse 13, for punishment of this generation, God announced that He was going to throw them out of the land. You might chuckle and say, well not literally throw them. True, but the language is very strong. Verse 13 God says, "*I will hurl you out of this land...and THERE you shall serve other gods...I will show you no favor.*" The same verb throwing or hurling is used here for what God will do with the people, as was the describing verb for Saul hurling a spear at David in 1 Samuel 18. It is the same verb for the storm that God hurled at the boat carrying the prophet Jonah in Jonah 1:4. And it is the same verb used for that boat's sailors hurling the prophet Jonah overboard in Jonah 1:15. God would throw his people out. In that other land, then and there, the people could serve foreign gods all that they wanted, and they would then reap the rewards of their wickedness. The Apostle Paul wrote of this in Romans 1:24, "*Therefore God gave them up in the*

lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves...” Three times in Romans chapter 1, a certain verb is used that says God “gave them over.” In a sense, God still hurls people away into captivity in their sins, since that is what the people keep hankering to have.

So, both Old Testament and New Testament tell us one united message – that a holy God must judge sin. And how a holy God judges sin is to let the sinner go right ahead into his or her sinful ways! God still hurls fools into their foolishness, and wicked men and women headlong into their wickedness.

But both the Old Testament and the New Testament do not end with that message. After judgment, there is restoration!

We see restoration already promised right here in verse 14. Are you ready? I ask whether you are ready because the contrast between what we have studied so far, and what is coming next is striking. There is a sharp reversal here from words of judgment to words of assurance. From words of judgment over to now words of restoration and promise of better days ahead.

Yes, after God denounced the people and described their impending fate with strong and even harsh language, God now announces a surprising and beautiful re-gathering of the people. God now promises a restoration of the people that is such a reversal that it could be called a second Exodus. The first Exodus was that time when God’s people were brought out of slavery in Egypt under the leadership of Moses and the miracle of the parting of the waters of the Red Sea. People are still talking about it today, because it was one of the most significant actions of God in all of world history. But here God is saying that there is another action of God that will take place, that will similarly get people talking.

Verse 14, *“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,*

Verse 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.”

Such a contrast is here between God “hurling” His people out of the land, and then later God bringing his people back to their own land, that it highlights for us the message of hope! There is hope in God’s promise and God’s power and God’s restoration! This is an early hint of what we will see later in Jeremiah chapters 30-33, the section we call the “book of consolation!”

The hint we read here in verses 14 and 15 was needed in order to explain what we just read in verse 5, that God would withdraw His peace, His steadfast love, and His mercy. But all of that withdrawing was only temporary. God would again extend His peace, His steadfast love, and His mercy! What a comfort to us to read these verses! Whew! We did come to the right church. We are studying the

correct Bible! We are warranted to expect a message of good news from every chapter in this book!

Verses 16-18, to emphasize the impossibility of escaping the punishment, God used two illustrations - fishermen and hunters. Like fishermen gather fish into their nets, the enemy army would catch each of God's people and carry them into captivity. No one would escape. And, like the hunters stalking their prey, the enemy army would hunt down and capture anyone who tried to escape. God's eyes were always on them, and just as their sins were not hidden from God, so God would direct the enemy army to find each of His people. Again, why? Verse 18 again explains the warrant – they had polluted God's land with detestable idols and abominations.

It is typical of Jesus that he transformed the negative meaning of the fishing for men and not being able to hide from God's judgment into a positive meaning of not being able to hide from God's salvation and God's fishermen for the good news of the gospel of grace. In Mark 1:17, Jesus said that the disciples were fishing for people, in order to save them. Yet elsewhere, Jesus still could use the original metaphor as a picture to discriminate, separate, and operate the kingdom of God within the world like a fishing expedition. Matthew 13:47-50, "...*the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*"

The lesson is two-fold. Wherever people try to run and hide, they will be caught - either by God's judgment or else by God's rescue. The disciples of Jesus, much like Jeremiah the prophet of God, were invited to respond to, and become agents of the news of the kingdom of God, coming with both judgment and salvation!

3. God revealed a) His power vs. false gods, and b) His name to those coming home. (v.19-21)

Jeremiah chapter 16 closed with Jeremiah affirming His confidence in God as His strength and stronghold and refuge, and even using the name of God. Here in verse 19, Jeremiah saw into the future a time when the nations would finally recognize that idolatry was false, that the gods that they had made and worshipped were not gods at all, and they would come from the ends of the earth and acknowledge the Lord as the true God.

God's response to the people acknowledging Him is given in verse 21, that God would teach the people about His power and His might. And lastly, they will know His name.

So, where verse 19 began with Jeremiah calling on the name of the LORD, and verse 21 ends with God Himself repeating His own name.

CONCLUSION Each of the 3 points of the sermon point to Jesus.

Point 1. Jeremiah taking up his cross – while the cost for Jeremiah of being the embodiment of God’s Word was enormous, the cost for Jesus of being the incarnate word and the bearer of God’s salvation was greater. Rather than a prophet’s loneliness or a nation’s exile being a sufficient punishment, it was required that Jesus would die on the cross for the sins of God’s people.

Point 2. God would judge sin with captivity, and yet rescue with a new and better exodus. The death of Jesus was a lonely death in which all of the people, all of His disciples, and even God the Father turned His back on Jesus while He carried our sins. Yet the resurrection of Jesus was the newer and better Exodus. Luke 9:31, at the glorious change of the appearance of Jesus on the mountain that we call the transfiguration, when two prophets appeared, they spoke of the Exodus of Jesus, which Jesus was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. Jesus’ death is His exodus, a time when Jesus leads His imprisoned people out of captivity. Each previous Exodus was surpassed by Jesus’ resurrection, just as God promised.

Point 3. God revealed His power over false gods, and God revealed His very name to those who would worship Him and come home from the loneliness of captivity into the community of the people who have the true knowledge of God.

SI – you know that cartoon called Ziggy? One of the "Ziggy" cartoons pictured the small, pudgy man, sitting alone in a boat, drifting toward a tunnel with the sign above, "Tunnel of Meaningful Relationships." Loneliness is a recognized and growing problem in our society, only made worse by the current virus.

A study by the American Council of Life Insurance reported that the most lonely group in America are college students. That's surprising, because they have hundreds or even thousands of same-age people on the same campus, in the same classes, and dining hall and dorms! Loneliness can happen even though there are people all around you. After college students, next on the list are divorced people, welfare recipients, single mothers, rural students, housewives, and the elderly.

To point out how lonely people can be, there was an ad in a Kansas newspaper years ago. It read, "I will listen to you talk for 30 minutes without comment for \$5.00." "Sounds like a hoax, doesn't it? But the offer was serious. Did anybody call? Oh yes! It wasn't long before this individual was receiving 10 to 20 calls a day. The pain of loneliness was so sharp that some were willing to try anything for a half hour of companionship."

THE BIG APPLICATION to us is when we are stuck in a sinful world and we find ourselves feeling the effects of it in loneliness, we have the good news of rescue. You can be in a personal wilderness of being lonely. God comes to meet you there in the wilderness, and bring you back home to Christ. You are never

alone when we have Christ. And when we have Christ, we automatically have His people, His church, His community of those who share the true knowledge of God. We come together to call on the name of the LORD. We declare that God is our strength, our stronghold, and our refuge in the day of trouble. We meet other people here in the worship of God. How many singles have literally met their spouse in church over the years? How many lonely children of God have been placed into families? How many grieving people have found new brothers and sisters in Christ to replace the brother or sister that died? New fathers and mothers in Christ, to help us when our earthly father and mother could not help us? We have uncles and aunts, friends and partners in the gospel, who all stand as the cure for our former loneliness.

If you are lonely, start with praying Jeremiah's prayer in Jeremiah 16:19, "O LORD, my strength and my stronghold, my refuge in the day of trouble..."

Second, come to church, and fellowship with people.

Third, pray to God about your loneliness, such as the prayer in Psalm 25:16, "*Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. 17 The troubles of my heart are enlarged; bring me out of my distresses.*"

Fourth, attend the home Bible study and the Christian Ed classes, and the fellowship lunches. Hang around and talk with people. Receive invitations. Give invitations. You can show hospitality, too, and it will force you out of your personal wilderness of being alone.

Lastly, celebrate your rescue. God brings people out of the prison and exile of loneliness. Listen to Psalm 68: 5-6, "*Sing to God, sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts; his name is the Lord; exult before him! Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation. God settles the solitary in a home; he leads out the prisoners to prosperity...*"

And our gatherings on Sundays are a taste of what we will have one day. Revelation 19:9, "*Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*"

The cure for loneliness is Christ and His church.