

Jeremiah 40:1-16 Waiting for Christmas Falls Church AM 12/4/2022

The bright hope of Christmas is always set against a backdrop of darkness. The name Jesus means that He will save His people from their sins. The more messy our lives are, the more we are reminded that Christ has come, lived, died, rose, ascended, and now we are waiting for Christ to come a 2<sup>nd</sup> time.

In our study of the book of Jeremiah, the whole book has persistently spoken of the darkness of sin, and the whole book pushed toward a dark event that finally happened in chapter 39. The end that was anticipated by the prophet had happened - the fall and destruction of Jerusalem. Why wasn't that the end of the book of Jeremiah? Why was there a chapter 40 written at all?

Because there is a bigger story. Ever since the first sin in Adam, God has promised judgment, followed by restoration. After God judges, God restores. To sinning people, God will send the seed of the woman, who will be bruised by the seed of the serpent, but then the seed of the woman will be victorious. (Gen. 3:15) The people who walked in darkness, saw a great light! (Is.9:2) The bigger story is that God had long promised that Christ is coming, and that means there was still hope for God's people. Life in Jerusalem continued on after the brutal attack! The destruction of Jerusalem showed the final day for the city of Jerusalem as they knew it, but not the final destruction of the world. And in Jerusalem, there were some people left!

Where does this leave us? It leaves us with a lesson about how God will treat the remnant, the remaining people. In times of dark devastation, our God has great mercy to show us.

Ever since the first Adam fell, we wait for the Second Adam to arrive.

Ever since Jerusalem fell, God's people waited for Christ to come to Jerusalem.

Ever since the covenant was broken, we wait for God to enact the new covenant, and provide all that is promised in that new covenant to us.

**Because of our covenant God, we are blessed while we are waiting for Christ to come.**

Let's take stock of where we are now in Jeremiah's story.

Some people still lived in the rubble of Jerusalem. Because people still live there, there was a need for them to organize themselves and have leadership.

But before we get to that in the middle of chapter 40, we start the chapter with one more telling of God preserving our beloved Jeremiah. This is encouraging that in the middle of judgment, God preserves His people.

### **1. Waiting in danger, God preserves His people. (v.1-6)**

Babylon was God's tool for destruction, right? But Babylon was also God's tool for preserving His people. Amazing! Let's look at the contrast with how Babylon treated Jerusalem, and how Babylon treated Jeremiah.

First, we look at how God used Babylon to destroy Jerusalem. It is remarkable literature and fascinating how in verses 1-3, God placed the summary narration and accurate explanation of the fall of the city into the mouth of a foreigner – a Babylonian military officer! He spoke God’s message to Jeremiah!

Listen to verses 1-3, and you determine whether the Babylonian general understood the true reason why Jerusalem fell, *“The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he took him bound in chains along with all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah who were being exiled to Babylon. 2 The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, “The Lord your God pronounced this disaster against this place. 3 The Lord has brought it about, and has done as he said. Because you sinned against the Lord and did not obey his voice, this thing has come upon you.”*

Did you notice that the Babylon military general even used the covenant name of the God of Israel? He said it was God who ordered the fall of the city. He said it was God who executed it and implemented it. He said the underlying sole reason was the sin of the people. And get this, he even said it was because you did not listen, did not shema! Did that general understand the fall of Jerusalem correctly? Yes. *“Because... you did not [listen], this thing has come upon you.”*

The Babylonian general, who is God’s tool, sounds strangely like God’s prophet. Imagine, if you will, the humorous moment this could produce. Jeremiah could look at the Babylonian general and say, “Tell me about it! I have been warning them for 40 years, and they would not shema, would not obey!”

Here is the hope: since God is true to His covenant promises for destruction, we can be equally sure that God is true to His covenant promises for rescue.

What will our God do for His faithful prophet?

The answer is in verses 4-6. We are supposed to notice the difference between how the two kings treated Jeremiah. The previous King of Israel had Jeremiah lowered into a pit, and then kept under house arrest; this enemy general released Jeremiah, and assigned people to care for Jeremiah! It seems backwards, doesn’t it? But there is more - this same Babylonian general now speaks to Jeremiah about Jeremiah’s safety, and it is considerate, deferential, and accommodating. It is as if the conquering general has become Jeremiah’s chauffer, asking where Jeremiah would like to go, and nearly asking if he can re-fill Jeremiah’s drink. Listen to the words, *“Now, behold, I release you today from the chains on your hands. If it seems good to you to come with me to Babylon, come, and I will look after you well, but if it seems wrong to you to come with me to Babylon, do not come. See, the whole land is before you; go wherever you think it good and right to go. 5 If you remain, then return to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon appointed governor of the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people. Or go wherever you think it right to*

*go.” So the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present, and let him go. 6 Then Jeremiah went to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, at Mizpah, and lived with him among the people who were left in the land.”*

Why are these verses in the Bible? To show us that the same God who keeps His promises for judgment and destruction, also keeps His promises for our salvation and blessing. Between verses 1-3 and verses 4-6, look what we have. The first two words in verse 4 tell us the contrast. “*Now, behold...*” This is stated by the mouth of the Babylonian general in order to differentiate between the judgment of God on the city, and the careful attention that the God of heaven gives to protecting and providing for His servant Jeremiah.

God is saying to Jeremiah, “You are free. Choose your own future.”

Jeremiah is vindicated! 40 years of preaching, now vindicated.

Jeremiah is now given a government allowance of food! Brings us to pt. 2.

## **2. Waiting in need, God provides for His people. (v.7-12)**

The community of Jerusalem had for a long time imagined itself to be able to do whatever it wants to do. Sound familiar? Same sinful nature as our day.

So, how do you set up leadership of the defeated remainder of an autonomous people, who have recently been attacked and overthrown?

Warning to the reader - this new administration may not end well, because something is needed for the people in their hearts, not just in their government.

Here goes. Verse 7. The king of Babylon appointed a local leader. His name was Gedaliah. The same Gedaliah who in verse 5 was to take care of Jeremiah.

Gedaliah seems to be trusted enough by the Babylonians to be put in local leadership, and trusted enough by his own people to lead them. It is a delicate situation for the new leader Gedaliah. He and his fellow Israelites are forced to come to terms with having an occupying army. They were soundly defeated and have no bargaining power. Gedaliah would need to cooperate with the occupiers without earning the scorn of his own people. We have a word for that – a Quisling is a person who excessively accommodates to a foreign occupying force. How can he stay vigilant for his own people, while pleasing the enemy force?

In verse 7, the people heard that Gedaliah was appointed leader. Verse 8, the people gathered to meet with Gedaliah. Verse 9, Gedaliah told them to serve the king of Babylon. Verse 10, Gedaliah said he would do his best to represent the people to the enemy king. Notice that Gedaliah did not say he would represent Babylon to them, but rather that Gedaliah would represent his people to Babylon! Gedaliah encouraged the people that serving Babylon will cause them well-being. He asked the people to enjoy the fruits of the land and live their lives.

Verse 11, the people who had run away to other countries heard that there were some survivors back home, and that Gedaliah was the new leader, so in verse

12, those runaways returned home, too. They enjoyed the blessing of gathering produce, and a lot of it! Sounds like King David, gathering the poor around him.

What is God's message to us? That God will provide one day through the coming Messiah, and that in the mean time, God provides for us every day.

Consider how Jesus taught us to pray, "*Give us this day our daily bread...*" We look to God to provide for us in dark times, and God does!

Consider what leader God has placed over us, as we wait for the second coming of Christ. Isaiah 9:6, "...*to us a child is born, ...; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, of the increase of His government, no end...*" God provides.

### **3. Waiting in faith, God keeps His promises to His people. (v.13-16)**

In verse 13, Gedaliah was approached by a loyal leader under him named Johanan, and in verse 14, received an intelligence report of a threat of assassination of the life of Gedaliah, but Gedaliah would not believe it. Verse 15, Johanan asked permission to execute the person making threats. Verse 16, Gedaliah would not allow it. That is how our chapter ends. We could say, "to be continued" in ch. 41. It is a cliffhanger, with the point that God always cares for His people.

When we consider how Governor Gedaliah refused to believe that someone could assassinate him, that was not how King Jesus viewed the heart of man. When Jesus was in the same city of Jerusalem, re-built and years later, we read in John 2:24, that Jesus "*did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for [Jesus] Himself knew what was in man.*" Jesus knew what man was capable of doing.

We also know about Jesus that he understood it can be the people closest to us who let us down. Matthew 13:57, "...*a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.*" But Christ never lets us down.

Christ keeps His promises to His people, even when we are a little remnant, a little snippet. Our God has always been like this. It is the story of the Bible.

In the days of Noah, God preserved 8 persons in the large ark. 1 Peter 3:20.

In the days of Abraham, the future of God's people rested on one man Isaac, the son of the promise.

In the days of Jacob, God sent Joseph to Egypt to preserve "*a remnant on earth.*" (Genesis 45:7)

In the days of the kings, only a remnant survived the fall of Jerusalem.

In the days of the exiles, the prophets predicted that only a remnant would return. (Isaiah 10:22) Sure enough in the book of Ezra, when the exiles returned 70 years later, they said about themselves, "*We are a remnant that has escaped...*" (Ezra 9:8-15)

This is the story of waiting for Christmas....waiting for Christ to come. But even after Christ came, still there was only a small number. In the days of the ministry of our Lord Jesus, He referred to the disciples as a “*little flock.*” (Luke 12:32) But consider what Jesus was saying to them, “*do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. 30 For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. 31 Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you. 32 “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”*”

The remnant nature of the church is true not just for the church in the first century, and not just the church in good times through the last 20 centuries; it is true for the church in dark times throughout each generation.

The strength of the church is not in her large numbers. The strength of the church is not in strategies for growth, borrowed from the world. The strength of the church is not in better management techniques or in our own toughness. Rather, the strength of the church is in God’s gracious promise that He will preserve His people and give us the kingdom.

#### **Concluding applications:**

1. Admire Jesus as the only one who listened to God the Father, when He came at the 1<sup>st</sup> Christmas to die for our sins. The people of God were waiting for Christ, and He came. This is why Jesus came at Christmas, because He was obedient to God the Father. This is the true leader for whom we were waiting. We admire Jesus for listening (for shema). Jesus did not take steps like Ishmael did in chapter 40, to usurp the throne by killing the king. No. Rather, Jesus waited for God the Father to exalt Jesus to the highest place. Jesus submitted to being born as a human. Jesus submitted to being obedient even to death on a cross, in order to pay the required price for the sins of God’s people. It was not satisfying to God’s holiness that only the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed for the sins of the people – nor was it enough that the ancient temple would be destroyed - it was required that Jesus Himself be destroyed for the sins of the people. What we needed was Jesus to agree to this, to be born for us, and to die for us. We needed Jesus to obey these two major points of the Father’s redemption plan: 1) to come from heaven to earth at Christmas and be born for us and 2) to go to the cross and die for us! We admire Jesus as we listen to the beautiful summary in Philippians 2:6-11, “*though [Jesus] was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name,*

*so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*

2. Trust God to provide for us, until the 2nd Coming of Christ. Just as the ancient people waiting for Christ to come, and He came, so we are waiting for Christ to come, and He will come. And in the intervening time, just as God provided for His ancient people, so also God will provide for us as His people today. We trust God to provide for us, as one of the main lessons of Christmas! Every light at Christmas reminds us of the light of Christ Himself, who is in our hearts by faith. Paul wrote it this way in 2 Corinthians 4:6-11, *“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh.”* Let all mortal flesh keep silent and trust God to provide for us, until the 2<sup>nd</sup> coming of Christ.