**BCM Bible Study– September 15/16, 2022, [Jer 11-15]**

**Faithfulness & Difficult Times**

The last “good king” (Josiah) of Israel has died, Israel has refused to repent, and the Lord has sent Jeremiah back to the people to again send warnings to them about the destruction they are about to endure. Upon returning home to Anathoth, he realized that his own neighbors and friends from home are plotting against his life. Jeremiah struggles to navigate faithfulness to God and his calling while being honest before God and seeking deliverance from his challenges.

**Ice breaker**:

When you’re going through a hard time, what’s your prayer life like? Are you more driven to or driven away from God then?

**Read Jeremiah 11:18-23**

* What is Jeremiah saying to God? What does Jeremiah ultimately ask for?
* What does God say back to Jeremiah? How does God’s response ultimately declare that He is in control of what Jeremiah asks for?
* What comfort does it offer you to know that God is ultimately in control of our requests?

**Read Jeremiah 12:1-6**

What is happening in this conversation?

* What is Jeremiah asking God?
* What is God’s answer to Jeremiah?
* Do you find it easy to relate to Jeremiah in these verses?
* When you’ve found yourself in these challenging times before, how has God spoken/met you in those moments?

**Notes:**

Jeremiah’s complaint reveals his impatience with God as he deals with the wicked. Jeremiah personally deals with the dejected state of his faith and being through his questioning of God’s justice.

God’s response is summed up well by Ray Stedman’s paraphrasing:

*"Now, if faith grows cold and faint and weak in the midst of the pressures of today," God's question to Jeremiah, and to us, is, "what are you going to do when it gets worse? How will you compete with horses, when you give in against men on foot?"*

* Where are you feeling weary in believing that God’s justice will prevail over (what can look like) the wicked prospering?
* How can we encourage one another in the belief that God’s perfect timing will deal with injustice and persecution?
* What biblical truths can you think of that encourage you in times of doubt or lack of faith? (example: Isaiah 40:30-31, 2 Peter 3:9, Romans 8:28, etc.)

Jeremiah is expecting God simply to resolve his problems or to just increase the comfort of his situation (which we often do when suffering). Instead, God tells him things will get worse.

* In times of hardship or trouble like Jeremiah is experiencing, how can we continue to find hope in the Lord?
* How do we pursue contentment and even joy in the midst of trial?

**Read Jeremiah 13:1-11**

This passage serves as an example of how physical symbolism was a frequently used method among the prophets to help illustrate their messages to the people. (Hosea is another example!)

* “In the symbolic act not only did his [Jeremiah’s] soul internalize the message, but his very actions were a physical demonstration to his audience (for those with ears to hear and eyes to see) of his prophecy.” Dearman
* How does the linen belt further illustrate Israel’s sinfulness?
  + What does it mean that Israel has failed and become completely useless?
* Do the use of the belt and this illustration make sense to you? How does this help aid Jeremiah’s teaching?

**Read Jeremiah 15:10-21**

Context: Jeremiah and God begin to converse about saving the people of Judah. Although God has told Jeremiah many times to no longer pray for the people of Judah (see note), he asks God to spare the people for God’s namesake. God responds with a firm no, and Jeremiah becomes distraught.

* What stands out to you about Jeremiah’s heartfelt words in v. 18? [leader note: a picture of unrealized hope]
* Would you feel comfortable being that open with God?
* How does God’s response differ this time from the last response he gave Jeremiah?
* Take a look at v. 19-21. Which declaration to Jeremiah [from God] is most encouraging to you where you are in life right now?

“God answers his own questions here. He had asked Jeremiah, "What will you do, if you've been wearied by running with the men on foot, when you contend with horses? And if in a safe land you fall down, what will you do in the jungle of the Jordan?" Now his answer is, "Jeremiah, even in those hours when everything else seems to be collapsing, and nothing seems to be dependable, if in that hour you will rest on me, you will find that I will strengthen you and see you through. I am the only adequate source of strength in any time of trouble. Any other source will fail you. The arm of flesh will fail” – **Ray Stedman ties in 12:5 to 15:19-21**

**Read Philippians 1:12-14**

* How does this passage interact with what we’ve read already?
* What are some ways that we can practice having a mindset similar to Paul’s here?

“Being rejected by one’s contemporaries is deeply painful, and the human toll it takes is evident in the prophet’s candid language. The joining of the lament with the announcement of judgment in 15:1-9 shows the link between the people’s rejection of God (15:6) and their rejection of God’s prophet (15:16-17). These rejections are two sides of the same coin.” (Dearman)

Within these five chapters, the fate of all of Israel seems assured as devastation continues to be apparent for their future. We see Jeremiah suffering both personally and filled with sorrow for Israel. He offers that up and speaks to God about it, but Jeremiah’s struggles continue and he does not seem to understand what God is doing at this moment. While this is going on, we also see Jeremiah still faithfully following God and what God has commanded him to do as a prophet.

* What does this suggest about how we are to follow God daily?
* How can you grow in your honesty before God in your prayer life?

For us as followers of Jesus, how can the illustration of the linen belt still help us? If you’re willing to share: What parts of your ‘belt’ are dirty? What parts is God in the process of or has already redeemed?

**Extra Notes:**

We read these difficult words from the Lord to Jeremiah in 14:11-12 and can read the ongoing conversation between them after this. This is found following the potential lament/plea of the people found in verses 14:7-9, with another lament found in 14:19-22.

“It is difficult to know how one should read the two corporate confessions/petitions of the people. Nothing appears wrong with the sentiments expressed in them, but after both comes language of divine judgment. These units include confession of sin (14:7, 20). We have at least two options in seeking to make sense of this section in the context of Jeremiah’s ministry. 1) The corporate confessions/petitions of the people, which offer the appropriate words of confession and repentance, are actually insincere. This view accords with the aims of the book as a whole, since one of its primary functions is to explain the culpability of the people in facing defeat and exile. 2) These confessions/petitions are confessions that Jeremiah is offering to the people, if only they would take the confessional content to heart.” (Dearman)

Nick’s thoughts: It is very okay for us to wrestle or be uncomfortable with this passage and God telling Jeremiah all of this; it is hard. I think of passages like earlier in Jeremiah (7:21-26) or Psalm 51:16 which both speak to how God’s desire is not simply actions or words of repentance, but a heart of repentance! Ultimately, at this point in Jeremiah and with what God is saying, I believe that the purpose of this is very likely God confirming to Jeremiah that He has made up His mind about the fate of the Israelites and what is to happen to them. At this point, they will surely go into captivity and suffer that experience. However, that is something that is needed and ultimately good for them in how it will hopefully lead to their repentance and a deepening of their relationship with God (see Ezra and Nehemiah)!