

Waiting on Healing

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Jeremiah 8:13-22

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Series Title Explanation: Advent is a season of waiting and preparation. The Jewish people are still waiting for the Messiah. Christians wait for the day when Jesus the Messiah returns to make all things new. This series explores the topic of waiting and the promises God will fulfill when Christ returns.

Goal: To help other follow Jesus by reminding them of the hope we have in Christ—for this life and the life to come.

The Prophetic books are difficult for most of us to understand:

- 1.) The people/places are **FOREIGN** to us. There's no Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, Peter or Paul. I tend to check out when unfamiliar with something. Curiosity has its limits. This text is quite irrelevant to me. I know the old hymn, "There is a Balm in Gilead" but have to think about what a balm is or where Gilead is located (Balm: An oil or gum with healing properties. it's on the east side of the Jordan River up north and was an important source of spices and medicinal oils)
- 2.) This is dark/very **NEGATIVE**. We prefer the sunny, happy side of life; not judgment.
- 3.) We don't see an **APPLICATION** in this text for us. Without application, it's just Bible trivia. How will this text help me?
But this text **DOES** speak Truth to us. And there **IS** application for us. It is the Word of God for us, too. Though it's very, very old, **WE** can still learn something new and apply it to our lives today.

Jeremiah was a downer as a prophet. He was called "The weeping prophet." He had terrible bedside manners. He's the last guy you'd want showing up because he would tell you that no matter how bad it is now; things would get worse. Jeremiah preached against the Israelites for having worshiped false gods, for tolerating false prophets and for believing that the Temple would always protect them regardless of what they did. Doomsday, in the form of the Babylonians, was at hand. They were beyond healing. Their wound was incurable. Their enemy would prevail. There's no way to spin this - it's not a happy time. Jeremiah didn't get a lot of "likes" on his postings – he had few followers because his message was so unpopular.

His whole proclamation centers on 1 major question: "**Why didn't Israel turn back to God?**" Here are 3 aspects of the people's stubborn refusal to obey God. Their refusal was **IRRATIONAL** (vv. 4-7). Jeremiah used analogies from human life and nature to illustrate his point.

"Say to them, 'This is what the Lord says: "'When men fall down, do they not get up? When people don't get up after they fall down, something's wrong. My granddaughter can hardly walk a step without falling down – and her get up is immediate. We tell her: "You're okay. Get up. But these folks aren't getting up. It's not that they can't – it's that they won't get up. Jeremiah was amazed by this. It's foolish. Why wouldn't you get up?"

When a man turns away, does he not return?⁵ Why then have these people turned away? Why does Jerusalem always turn away? They cling to deceit; they refuse to return. To "turn" means they've fallen away. "Backslidden." They made spiritual mistakes and hadn't learned. They wouldn't repent and go back to God. It's like the Parable of the Prodigal Son. But the Prodigal Son eventually came to his senses. The Israelites weren't. They were stuck, far from home. We all sin – it's a matter of how we deal with that sin.

⁶ I have listened attentively, but they do not say what is right. No one repents of his wickedness, saying, "What have I done?" Each pursues his own course like a horse charging into battle. A horse charging into battle has his blinders on so he will ignore the carnage taking place all around him.

*⁷ Even the stork in the sky knows her appointed seasons, and the dove, the swift and the thrush observe the time of their migration. I don't mean to insult birds, but the people were acting like "Birdbrains!" Birds know what to do – and they do it. Geese aren't the most brilliant creatures, but they know they need to fly south for winter and they do it. *But my people do not know the requirements of the Lord.**

Their refusal was caused by **DECEPTION** (vv. 8-12). Just as they boasted that they possessed the temple, so they boasted that they had the divine Law (v. 8), but **POSSESSING** the Scriptures isn't the same as **PRACTICING** the Scriptures. (There's modern day application for us – just having a Bible doesn't mean we live by its teachings) There appears to be no connection between what people say they believe and the way people act.

⁸ "'How can you say, "We are wise, for we have the law of the Lord, "when actually the lying pen of the scribes has handled it falsely?"⁹ The wise will be put to shame; they will be dismayed and trapped. Since they have rejected the word of the Lord, what kind of wisdom do they have? They are disobeying God's word. They are not putting it into practice. They've avoided the truth so they will have

to live with consequences: ¹⁰ *Therefore I will give their wives to other men and their fields to new owners. From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit.* ¹¹ *They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. "Peace, peace," they say, when there is no peace.* This is the classic quote of Neville Chamberlain who tried to work a deal to appease Hitler before World War 2. After he gave Czechoslovakia to the Nazis he got off the airplane in London and said: "Peace in our time." He was the most popular man in the world until Hitler moved into Poland. Chamberlain made a pact with the devil.

¹² *Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush.* Blush = a sense of conscience

Their refusal would lead to JUDGMENT (13-22)

So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when they are punished, says the Lord. He's about to describe the calamity that will befall. *"I will take away their harvest, declares the Lord. There will be no grapes on the vine. There will be no figs on the tree, and their leaves will wither. What I have given them will be taken from them."* Fields are destroyed. ¹⁴ *"Why are we sitting here? Gather together! Let us flee to the fortified cities and perish there! Why didn't they call on God? Their cities are destroyed. For the Lord our God has doomed us to perish and given us poisoned water to drink, because we have sinned against him. It's like drinking poison.* ¹⁵ *We hoped for peace but no good has come, for a time of healing but there was only terror.* ¹⁶ *The snorting of the enemy's horses is heard from Dan; at the neighing of their stallions the whole land trembles. Like an earthquake. They have come to devour the land and everything in it, the city and all who live there."* ¹⁷ *"See, I will send venomous snakes among you, vipers that cannot be charmed, and they will bite you," declares the Lord.* ¹⁸ *O my Comforter in sorrow, my heart is faint within me.* ¹⁹ *Listen to the cry of my people from a land far away: "Is the Lord not in Zion? Is her King no longer there?"* Why is God letting this happen? *"Why have they provoked me to anger with their images, with their worthless foreign idols?"* It happened because they were disobedient and unfaithful to the covenant they had made with the Lord. Their situation was hopeless; nobody would come to save them.

²⁰ *"The harvest is past, the summer has ended, and we are not saved."* ²¹ *Since my people are crushed, I am crushed; I mourn, and horror grips me.* The people are crushed/broken & Jeremiah's in his own spiritual crisis.

²² *Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then is there no healing for the wound of my people?*

Gilead was just east of the Jordan River and was known for its healing balsams (like aloe vera). But when Jeremiah went to the Gilead pharmacy they were all out of “the Balm of Gilead.” No medicine and no doctor could cure them of their wounds. The people needed a great Physician.

Since Jeremiah was a faithful shepherd, he identified with the hurts of the people: his heart fainted (18). He mourned in horror as he felt the heavy burden that was crushing the land. "For the hurt of the daughter of my people am I hurt" (21). The false prophets had made a wrong diagnosis and prescribed the wrong remedy, and the wounds of the nation were still open, bleeding, and infected.

¹⁸ *O my Comforter in sorrow*, Jeremiah didn't suffer alone. He had a companion in grief – “My Comforter.” I'm not sure how well the people in the Old Testament understood the role of the Holy Spirit – but here it is in Jeremiah, of all places. Amidst all of the tragedy and sorry he is going through, God has not left him alone. The Holy Spirit comes to us in times of great sorrow and difficulty.

I love that Jesus came to help those who needed healing. **Matt 4:23-25** *Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.*

Luke 4:39 *So he bent over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. She got up at once and began to wait on them.* Jesus rebuked evil spirits. He has authority over all things.

Jesus also came to help those who realized they were sick.

Luke 5:31-32 *Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* It can be hard for us to admit when we're physically sick. “I'll be okay, it's just a little heartburn.” Sometimes it IS just a little heartburn, but sometimes very smart and successful people ignore the messages their bodies are sending and pay for their carelessness. But when confronted and convinced of our illness, we seek the best care possible. Think of all the people who followed Jesus and were desperate for healing (or for someone they loved). They walked (or were carried) miles, put holes in rooftops, snuck up and touched the hem of his robe, sent messengers, pleaded and begged (like we often do in our prayers for healing today). Live long enough and you'll face them for yourself or for someone you love. It's not always a physical healing that's needed; sometimes it's emotional or spiritual.

I love this about Jesus – He was filled with compassion and healed all who came to Him. These healings did two things: they helped the person in need. They were signs to a greater purpose = Jesus was Messiah. He was proclaiming that The Kingdom of God had come.

Jesus was once asked to return to Bethany to heal a close friend, Lazarus. He didn't return immediately. When Jesus finally came, his friend was already dead, wrapped in burial clothes and in a tomb. Lazarus' grieving sister, Martha, asked: "Why didn't you come when we sent word? Why'd you let our brother die? You could've done something." They were raising the "theodicy" question. "Why did God let this happen? Why did one person get healed but another didn't? It all seems so unfair?"

Our problem is the same as the problem with the people Jeremiah was addressing – or with Martha, too; we can't see into the future. After Jesus brought Lazarus back from the dead, He gave us these incredible words: **John 11:25-26** *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"* Jesus then raised Lazarus from the dead...but it's only TEMPORARY. All of our healings on earth are temporary. Lazarus needed more than a band aid, a cast, or a splint or a surgery. He got a 2nd chance. It was wonderful! But...he, and all of the other people Jesus healed...later died.

The story shows us that we yearn for something greater than this life. When Jeremiah spoke of a Messiah, even his vision may have been limited. Here's the big picture and the bottom line – the very end of the Bible. It's the Good News which Jeremiah was yearning for. **Rev 21:3-4** *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

We should seek healing from God and from all of the available sources God has made available to us. But whether healed supernaturally, through diet/exercise, medicine, medical technology and skill – we're still going to die. If we know that in the end, **ALL THINGS work together for good** because of heaven, we can deal with everything else. We can't lose heaven from our hearts. The way we get it = through knowing God. God loves us. We have to confront the hard truth that we've blown it. We are all sinners. God made it possible for us to be reunited with Him through Jesus who was God in the flesh who came and taught us, was crucified for our sins, and was resurrected by God. He's gone to heaven and offers us a place with him. No matter what the economy, government, doctor says – we

win in the end. We're going to go to heaven. That is the ultimate and eternal healing we all yearn for.

Do you have this gift?