

Sunday 22nd October 2023.

Jeremiah 41-43. Jeremiah 41:16-18; 42:1-3, 7-12, 19 – 22; 43:1-7

Also Revelation 21

Structure:

Recap

Faithfulness

Obedience

Persecution.

Previously in Jeremiah.

Jerusalem falls. Jeremiah is not actually taken away in exile but he is given a choice – go to Babylon – where we assume he'd join exiles like Ezekiel, Daniel etc. Or remain with the few remaining in Judah. If he stays, the Babylonian guard commander says he should stay with the new governor.

The city destroyed much by fire, temple destroyed, king removed. In fact all which God promises – we look at that more next week.

If you think – can things get worse. The governor seems to be a good guy. But a neighbouring nation has sent a Jew, to kill him. The governor is murderer, with many Babylonian soldiers and Judeans.

The remaining Jews in the area, are naturally scared. They think that Babylon will come back and take reprisals. Should they flee to Egypt...

However they turn to Jeremiah and ask him to pray to God for them – and they promise – whatever, even if we do not like it – what God says we will do...

Well, he talks to God, God answers, the people don't like it, and off they go to Egypt...

Faithfulness.

Mother Teresa said: I am not called to be successful but to be faithful.

Jeremiah as we said, began aged 18 or so. Now, he is probably in his 60s. He had been a prophet for 47 years. During his days he has seen his beloved city ruined, he has seen his beloved land occupied and he has seen his beloved people suffer, many die and many taken away in exile. He has seen his beloved God, rejected by so many of the people God chose centuries before.

In all this Jeremiah has faithfully spoken the word of God.

But his message has been consistently ignored and rejected by those to whom he was sent

He has suffered persecution due to their opposition and disobedience. All of this must have been disappointing and discouraging. After all his effort, faithfulness and obedience.

Even after all that happened – he has said the city, the temple, the land, the monarchy would all be taken – though these earlier prophecies have been fulfilled, the people still refused to listen to him.

He had, as 43 says : told all the words of the Lord, everything the Lord sent him to tell them...

Jeremiah was faithfully speaking, he was telling the truth but he had to put up with hurtful words, in fact slander – you are lying!

In spite of Jeremiah's warning, they disobeyed the Lord's command. They entered Egypt in disobedience. Later, in 44, they said to Jeremiah – we will not listen to the message you have spoken to us in the name of the Lord.

Jeremiah's message flatly contradicted by those who heard it.

That is where Jeremiah's story ends – in Egypt. Jeremiah's ministry must have seemed to be a failure. One full of discouragement, disappointment.

But he remained true to the task that God gave him and he faithfully delivered God's words to the people.

One of the messages for us, is: at the end of the day, it does not matter if our life appears – in the eyes of others - to be a failure and ends even in

disappointment. What matters is faithfulness to the Lord. Matthew 25:14-30 reminds us – the parable of the talents – God values faithfulness.

Jeremiah may well have thought in that land, that he was a failure. Yet consider this, few people in history has had as much an impact as he? The prophecies he was given, that were recorded from him, are a key part of God's revelation to the world. Key promises about the Messiah. Where the new covenant is so clearly stated. How many authors can claim a readership of billions over 2500 years after their death...

Obedience.

Jeremiah's obedience stands in such great contrast to the Jews around him. It is such a sad, striking story.

They claim to be willing to obey God but do not.

In fact they only want to obey when God asks them to do something they want to do...

That is the great warning in this text – when we ask God – what do you want – do we want to hear. God I will go where you want me to go – but secretly we say, but as long as it is not there or that...

However it is not surprising perhaps. You see they had not been obedient in the years before, and that had become a habit of picking and choosing when or if to obey. And they were not obedient when things went well.

So when this was a great risk, when God says – stay – they have not learned to obey God when risk was small or not at all. They did not have the muscles for it.

We are aware that the small decisions of faith, obedience, are like plants, they grow... and enable us to take greater steps of obedience perhaps when much more relies upon on it.

The second point is that of what we said – obedience – all or not. Baptism is a statement – an all of nothing kind of one.

Obedience is as modeled in that garden. Abba father, everything is possible for you – Jesus speaks to God in a close relationship – Abba – and he declares his father – everything is possible...he is all powerful.
Take this cup from me – honesty...

Yet not what I will but what you will.
Surrender. Willing to obey no matter what.

Jeremiah walks in those footsteps. Why bother share those words? Why not just walk off and say 'stuff it' go to that field he is owns and ...

Persecution.

They took Jeremiah away – and his scribe Baruch.
Jeremiah lives his remaining years outside the homeland. Again like Daniel, Ezekiel faithful, yet who suffered at the hands of others.

Again, his experience reminds us of the believers today who through faithfulness, obedience to Jesus, they are taken to places where they do not want to go. Prisons, suffering...

Open Doors Netherlands Annual Day was held this month.
Reminded that :
1 in 8 Christians today – experience daily high levels of persecution.

Stories of Somali Christians who live outside their homeland.
Could not go home.
Could not ring home else abuse would be thrown.

Revelation 21 speaks of a promise that pain, tears will be wiped away.

An Iranian church leader spoke of the trauma many can carry do to their suffering in prison and what the authorities did or threatened to do...and then he powerfully said, there will come a day when every tear will be wiped away – healing from all trauma will come...

A day will come when persecution will cease. When healing will come.
When our God will be revealed in his glory and that his victory is revealed...

Yet each of us walk in the footsteps of Jeremiah. We may choose to be faithful and obedient and then Paul tells his young apprentice – padawan I guess is the word now – ‘everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted’.

Learn from the persecuted –
not only pray,
give,
support,
stand alongside –
but learn from them, for scripture promises – we want to live a godly life,
persecution will come.

Jeremiah prompts us to remember and pray for the persecuted.
Yet the reasons for his persecution make us think – and pray –

“Lord let me remain faithful and obedient when persecution comes, even if it means I go somewhere I do not want to go...”

To finish.

Faithfulness, obedience – what our baptisms point to.

Remember the persecuted yet realize to live out our baptisms may lead us down the same paths...

In Jesus name.

Amen.