

“Jeremiah Was A” Pastor Fritz Wiese. 22 Sept 2024

Bad news and good news. Good news is that a notable guest preacher is scheduled today. Bad news—even though we got the Lord’s permission to bend the laws of time and space, we hit a glitch. All the way from the first millennium BC, the prophet Jeremiah was going to visit us here in PTC, Georgia. But more Good news—even though he couldn’t join us live, the prophet prepared a special message for us, so I’ll at least I’ll be able to read it to you. (So, let’s open it up and see what it says).

Ah. “When you hear the name Jeremiah, perhaps many of you can sing this song lyric from the 7th decade of the 21st century’s band, Three Dog Night. “Jeremiah was a bullfrog.” Well, I am Jeremiah from the 6th and 7th century, BC, and I’m a little less bull-frog. And bit more bull-horn. Well, I guess like a bull-frog, you could hear me when I piped up and croaked a chorus from the Lord. And like a bull-frog, many people found me annoying. But like a bull-horn, the Lord amplified my voice with a specific message of both challenge and comfort to my people. And who knows, maybe even to you people of God today.

I’m glad your Director of Youth & Family, Ethan Miller, is trying to walk the confirmands through the Bible this year. Way to go! So important for everyone to know the Good News. Your bible, of course, now is a bit bigger than the bible of my day. You have 66 unique books, each with a special message driving the wonderful story of our Triune God and the humanity God loves.

Do you remember which is larger? The Old Testament or New? Right—the Old Testament is larger, with 39 books compared to the New’s 27. And out of the 39 OT books, 17 are devoted to the teachings and times of the prophets.

As you might know, God encouraged us prophets to grab people’s attention. Yes, we declared the Lord’s specific messages. But, sometimes, the Lord called us to use colorful object lessons to drive the points home.

You probably remember how the Lord took Ezekiel out to a valley of dry bones. And after preaching to them, the bones started re-assemble and became people again, full of life—a vibrant image of God’s plans to restore God’s people after tough times. I’ll never forget how Lord instructed the prophet Hosea to marry one of the well-known, should we say “ladies of

the evening” of his community. And, instead of being appreciative of a new life, the lady of the evening was not faithful to Hosea. She kept on with her old adulterous ways. God wanted to illustrate how, even though the people Israel kept developing scandalous relationships and worship practices with other gods, that the Lord of Hosts would show incredible patience and faithfulness to the covenant God made with his people—even as disobedient, selfish, and lost as they were.

In case you don't know my story, let me share it at a very high level. From Genesis, you're aware of Joseph's journey. Even though his brothers sold him in bitterness, he landed on his feet in Egypt and then emerged as a life-line for his family when they came to Egypt searching for help in a famine. But good times turned to bad and pretty soon the people Israel were “slaving away” in Egypt. But God used Moses to bust them out with the Passover and after 40 years of getting their hearts, minds, and attitudes prepared, they came to the Promised Land, settling it as 12 tribes, one tribe for each of the 12 sons of Jacob.

For a while with King David and Solomon, the kingdom prospered. But soon, people strayed from the Lord's pathway. Even kings and leaders, entrusted to guide the people in faithfulness, used their positions to pursue power and less of the Lord's purpose. They focused less on celebrating our life-giving covenant with Yahweh, the source of all joy, and listened more to the whispers of other gods.

You can look up the details if you'd like, but 10 of the 12 tribes, known collectively as the Northern Kingdom of Israel were conquered by the Assyrians in 721 BC. All of the skilled citizens were taken to Assyria. Others were killed, farmed out as slaves, or left to struggle in a pulverized landscape.

So, my job was to go to the king of the only remaining part of Israel, the south, which included the great city of Jerusalem, and instruct them to return to the Lord! In chapter 2, I shared the Lord's charge. Judah was evil-like, refusing the life-giving never-ending flow of the Lord's River of love and instead in their hard-heartedness, tried to store water for themselves. But in cisterns, in water-tanks, that were broken!! It reminded me of the foolish travelers in the wilderness with Moses. They tried to hoard the morning manna but it turned moldy. With the Lord, we are to trust in our daily bread. It's the TRUST that's a key covenant ingredient, after all!

When will we learn the Lord will always come through? Perhaps because their territory included the wonderful city of Jerusalem, they were a cocky. They thought they were immune from calamity, despite the warning signs.

To try to break through their stubbornness, the Lord then instructed me to go to a Potter's House. There, as recorded in chapter 19, with witnesses of elders and priests that I brought, I held up a beautiful jar above my head. Then, with all my might, I SMASHED it on the ground. (I was going to ask your pastor to take a jar and smash it right now in front of you to illustrate, but I hear you have a brand-new chancel, so you better not risk hurting it. ☺). But back in my day, the jar broke into hundreds of pieces. It was ruined, beyond repair. It could never be used again the way for what it was designed.

Do you think the leaders took my point that they too could be broken by invaders if they didn't seek the Lord's help? No, they did not!

How about you? Is there any danger lurking in your life that you're trying to avoid? Do you listen to warning signs? Even when your friends go to great lengths to warn you, do you listen? Are you turning to the Lord? Are you willing to humble yourself every once in a while, and admit you don't always know it all or have everything under control? How about your nation? Is your nation listening to the Lord . . . or other voices? Are you paying attention?

Well, some of you might be saying, "you catch more flies with honey than vinegar." Actually, I agree. And I love sharing the positive promises of the Lord. I've asked that your new LED screens share one of my favorites. As recorded in the 17th chapter of my book, I shared these words, which I really hope can encourage all of you today in the 21st century! "Blessed are those who trust in the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. You shall not fear when heat comes and your leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought, you are not anxious, and you never cease to bear fruit." It's one of my favorites, if I do say so myself. ☺

I love that the Great Prophet of the New Testament, John the Baptist, re-introduced the ritual of baptism, and that Jesus elevated baptism in the Great Commission. When each of you trust the Lord, and plant your roots in the promises and values of your baptismal waters, you will always thrive. It's so wonderful. Is this each of you here today? Are your roots in the

Lord and life-giving waters, or are you setting up shop in what will ultimately prove dusty drought-plagued deserts?

Let me tell you, serving as a prophet for the Lord was not an easy gig. Like John the Baptist eating locusts, you would never have been impressed with my wardrobe, looks, or material belongings. Over the course of my ministry, I was thrown into prison (chapter 37), dumped into a well (chapter 38), and was taken to Egypt against my will (chapter 43). With my resume, even you kind people probably never would have hired me for a job or ever invited me to your neighborhood picnic or social club. For, I was rejected not only by false priests and prophets, (chapter 20) but also by my neighbors (chapter 11) and my own family (chapter 12). The kings to which I was sent by God to change their ways and therefore save the people, also ridiculed my message and ministry.

If you ever wonder why things are hard in your life--even though you believe in God and go to church every Sunday--I hear you! But I learned a long time ago that faithfulness does not come with the Lord's promise of earthly popularity, praise, or comfort. Not at all. In fact, like many other prophets, I got pretty down in the dumps. Did you hear what was read in the first part of your first lesson today, which was the assignment from your lectionary? In chapter 11, you hear how I felt like, even with my own people, I was "a gentle lamb led to the slaughter." And like a tree that people want to "cut down from the land of the living."

Do you ever feel that way? Doing God's will but feeling like your swimming upstream? Or even worse, getting abused for it? Well, many of the prophets whose books are in your bible were killed. John the Baptist was beheaded. Jesus was crucified. Even your day's prophet-like Christians like Dr. Martin Luther King are assassinated.

But the Lord encourages us to hang in there! Do you remember how Jesus taught all of you to be fearless prophet-like followers? In his Sermon on the Mount, he told you, "Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." And then Jesus calls on you to bravely be salt and light for the world!

Friends, I'm sad to say, but no one in the southern kingdom of Judah listened to me. And in 586 BC, as recorded in 2 Kings, "the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem. He carried off all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold in the temple of the LORD, which Solomon king of Israel had made, as the LORD had foretold. He carried away all Jerusalem and all the officials and all the mighty men of valor, 10,000 captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained, except the poorest people of the land." (2 Kings 24)

It was very, very sad. And Jerusalem and Israel have never been the same since. BUT, with God. You've heard that phrase, haven't you? But, with God's grace and mercy, there is always hope. In the midst of that horrible devastation and exodus, God was quick to give hope. And he had me proclaim a passage that many of you know by heart, or have framed in your homes, or share with each other on greeting cards. From the 39th chapter in my book: "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope."

And indeed, 70 years after the southern kingdom's fall, God started to call back the citizens of Israel, to begin a new chapter with a new hope. Our God is faithful!

Friends, I'm sorry to hear that your world in your day is still full of sorrow and challenge. Morgan Wiese, the daughter of your pastor I'm asking to read my letter to you, apparently sent a video to him—and me—that we find very meaningful. It is from the war-torn land of Ukraine. You will hear in the video air sirens, warning the people of incoming ballistics and danger. Yet amid this scary sound, you hear a brave woman serving as a prophet. Singing along, harmonizing to the siren. Adding hope to the horror.

If possible, why don't you take a look and listen. (*Play Brad's video of woman harmonizing to air siren in Ukraine*).

Ahh, seeing that woman's testimony does my heart good. Yes, there is always pain, danger and brokenness in our lives. But remember, God has plans for the people of Ukraine and the people of your country too. Indeed, for all countries of the Lord's creation. God wants to offer YOU life, joy, peace and promise!

So, friends, don't be stubborn. Don't clog your ears to the Word of the Lord, even if it's challenging. Listen to those who ask you to ponder the dangers to the beautiful earth, the danger of following the gods of power and wealth instead of the Lord's justice, the danger of rooting yourself in your own perceptions instead of the life-giving waters of the Living God. Worry less about money profits, and thirst instead for the Lord's prophets, in whatever form they speak to you. Be humble and hungry to listen to whomever is sharing the Lord's truth—and then put it into action.

In the name of our great Prophet, Priest, and King, Jesus the Messiah and Lord of All, Amen.

(Thank you Jeremiah. Amen. ☺)

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Part 1: Jeremiah 11:18-20, read responsively

¹⁸It was the LORD who made it known to me, and I knew;
then you showed me their evil deeds.

¹⁹**But I was like a gentle lamb
led to the slaughter.**

And I did not know it was against me
that they devised schemes, saying,

**“Let us destroy the tree with its fruit,
let us cut him off from the land of the living,
so that his name will no longer be remembered!”**

²⁰But you, O LORD of hosts, who judge righteously,
who try the heart and the mind,

**let me see your retribution upon them,
for to you I have committed my cause.**

Part 2: Jeremiah 17.7-8

⁷Blessed are those who trust in the LORD,
whose trust is the LORD.

⁸They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.

It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;

in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.

Part 3: Jeremiah 29.10-14

¹⁰For thus says the LORD: Only when Babylon's seventy years are completed will I visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope. ¹²Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. ¹³When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, ¹⁴I will let you find me, says the LORD, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.