

## Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

## "A Day with Jeremiah"

### Sermon Reflection Notes

The book of Jeremiah reflects the historical crisis of the last days of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. It culminates in the destruction of the temple and of all Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E., the watershed moment for all the Old Testament. Jeremiah himself was a prophet, someone who bears a true message, from God, usually to those in places of power or influence. Pastor Andy pointed out that no one liked Jeremiah's sermons; in fact, they landed him in prison at one point. His prophecies were recorded even though they weren't popular with the rulers. The prophecy of Jeremiah is one of the major components of extensive theological literature addressing the event of 587 B.C.E.

The prophet Jeremiah witnessed the collapse of the Assyrian Empire, and its prompt displacement by the Babylonians under the governance of Nebuchadnezzar. Judah, the Southern Kingdom, was also faced by threats from Egypt to its south. Judah was precariously caught between the ambitions of Babylonia and the fear of Egypt. The kings of Judah vacillated between Babylonian and Egyptian alliances until the Babylonians would no longer tolerate it and moved against Jerusalem to end its political independence. 587 B.C. was the end; Jerusalem was destroyed. The temple was destroyed. Judah was no longer a political entity.

So what was Jeremiah's prophecy? What did he say that was so compelling that kings moved against him and believers recorded his words? To the kings of Judah he kept saying: "You HAVE to keep covenant with God. Lead like Josiah. Care for the immigrant, the orphan, the widow, the poor." Essentially Jeremiah said: Love God. Love Neighbor. He also warned the kings: "Don't fight Babylon. We will lose. We will die. This will not end well." To everyone, he said again and again: "We are already in exile. Exile is the new normal." The question for Jeremiah was not whether exile would happen—it was how to live in exile where they already were. It was a choice between living as if life were a desert and therefore a desperate struggle, or living as if rooted by a flowing river even while being tested and tried.

Jeremiah spoke truth to power and railed against structures, systems, practices of injustice, idolatry, and unfaithfulness. He did not turn a blind eye. In fact, he reminded people that "The Lord will probe the heart and discern your hidden motives..." It's the choice again: do we rail against the world while in exile, or do we remain rooted by the Water of Life in the midst of strife? How do we change injustice? It starts in our hearts. We all wish the world was better. We see its brokenness; kings and subjects alike act foolishly. Jeremiah calls us to reach deeper, to give shade and relief where we can. To bear fruit to share with others.

Jeremiah knew that Judah's destiny would be shaped finally not by power as the world understands power, but by the way Judah kept covenant with God – the way Judah

understood power to reside in God's sovereignty and God's power over against the power of the current world leaders. We too can be "like trees planted by the streams, whose roots reach down to the water." We too can stay with God.

## Scripture

*Jeremiah 17:5-10 (CEB)*

<sup>5</sup>The LORD proclaims: Cursed are those who trust in mere humans, who depend on human strength and turn their hearts from the LORD. <sup>6</sup>They will be like a desert shrub that doesn't know when relief comes. They will live in the parched places of the wilderness, in a barren land where no one survives.

<sup>7</sup>Happy are those who trust in the LORD, who rely on the LORD. <sup>8</sup>They will be like trees planted by the streams, whose roots reach down to the water. They won't fear drought when it comes; their leaves will remain green. They won't be stressed in the time of drought or fail to bear fruit.

<sup>9</sup>The most cunning heart—it's beyond help. Who can figure it out? <sup>10</sup>I, the LORD, probe the heart and discern hidden motives, to give everyone what they deserve, the consequences of their deeds.

## Discussion Questions

1. What is the historical context for the book of Jeremiah and why do we think Pastor Andy spent time explaining it during the sermon?
2. Jeremiah is considered a prophet. What characteristics did Pastor Andy give that make someone a "prophet" or something "prophetic speech"?
3. "It is our want to read the prophetic texts, more than any other biblical texts, as contemporary to our own time, place, and circumstance. It is important to remember that these are ancient texts that cannot easily be read in contemporary ways. But such texts do indeed feed our imagination and sometimes embolden us in our own social circumstances." (Walter Bruggemann, *TheThoughtfulChristian.com*, 2013)  
--How do ancient prophecies "feed our imaginations" when viewing the contemporary world? What types of things to the texts help us imagine?
4. Pastor Andy said part of Jeremiah's message was that "exile is the new normal." What is exile then? What does it mean to be "in exile"?
5. At some point in our lives, we all find ourselves in exile. The drought will come. The question, then, is how will we live in exile. What are the options?
6. What can we do to actively keep ourselves rooted by the Water of Life?

## Closing Prayer

O God, we live in a world and in a time where we can see that our covenant with you is not being kept. We live in a place where we can see that your children are hungry, where the sojourner is not given hospitality, where the sick do not have access to healing, where the blind do not see what is wrong. We pray this day that you will be your faithful self, we pray that our hearts will be transformed, and we pray that we will trust you for our future.

Help us to trust beyond our seeing, to risk beyond our fear, and to yield to our love for you and for our neighbor in ways that bring us freedom – a freedom that is fleshed out in obedience to your covenant. We pray in the name of Jesus, who is the sign of your suffering love. Amen.

*"Choose to trust God. Choose to seek the living water."*