Jeremiah’s Proclamation
Jeremiah 2:1-19

Introduction

I remember the first time I preached. It was at Calvary Chapel Ontario. David Rosales invited me to fill in on his Wednesday service. It was terrifying. I can’t even remember what I said. Warren Wiersbe quoted a seasoned preacher, “When you’re young in ministry, you can’t understand why more people don’t come to hear you. But when you get older, you’re amazed that anybody comes to hear you”.

The young Jeremiah begins his preaching ministry with a message that combines courage, compassion and conviction. Jeremiah obeys the Lord. He will go. He will speak. He will demonstrate boldness. Jeremiah will expose the sins of the people and then beg them, plead with them to repent and return to the Lord. Jeremiah will return to familiar themes over and over again; rebellion, repentance, righteousness and retribution (see Wiersbe; Be Decisive).

The Sermon or proclamation begins in chapter 2 and ends in chapter 3:5. The sermon begins with a parable (2:1-3) in which God likens Israel to a new bride when a couple begins their marriage; when a wife is anxious to please her husband. Then something goes terribly wrong. Young love turns to betrayal and unfaithfulness. The perfect marriage turns into a perversion and Jeremiah continues with a description of Israel’s sins and the depths of those sins. In Jeremiah’s first message he likens the people’s commitment to the Lord like a failed marriage (2:1-12). He lists two grave sins that cause the breakup (vv.13-19). The people of Israel were guilty of both spiritual and sexual adultery (vv.20-28). The children of Israel failed to respond to God’s warnings, God’s discipline, God’s repeated corrections (vv.29-37). The people needed to repent (chapter 3:1-5).

In the second chapter Jeremiah likens Israel to many things; he uses pictures, and images that expose the sins of the people. He will liken Israel to an unfaithful spouse (vv.1-8); broken cisterns (vv.9-13); a runaway slave (vv.14-19). Jeremiah will then use the picture of a stubborn animal (v.20); a fruitless vine (v.21); a defiled body (v.22); an animal in the desert (vv.23-25); a disgraced thief caught red handed (vv.26-28); incorrigible children (vv.19-35); and prisoners of war (vv.36-37). What was to become of Judah? Was there any way out? Any hope? Was there any way that Judah could escape the wrath and judgment of God? That would provide the theme of the next point in Jeremiah’s message. Taken in isolation the message becomes pretty bleak.

But the contrast is between a faithless people and a faithful God. If we were to summarize the message in a single sentence we might say “look and know that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord your God” (v.19). Unless we can see and feel in every fibre of our being the wickedness of sin, the foolishness of forsaking the true and living God; we will not appreciate Jeremiah’s call to repentance in the chapter that follows. How would you describe your friendship, your relationship with the Lord? Non-existent? Strained? Cold? Hot? Intimate? Estranged? Do you believe in God but ignore or neglect Him?

How would God describe your friendship, your relationship? Do you spend very little time in prayer, in fellowship, in reading your Bible? Do you obey God or are you living a sinful lifestyle, breaking God’s commands, engaging in wicked, unrighteous behavior? Jeremiah
Jeremiah’s Proclamation
Jeremiah 2:1-19

seems to have preached this message before the discovery of the Book of the Law and the restoration of the temple, which took place in the eighteenth year of Josiah’s reign (2 Chron. 34:8).

Why is this message so important? We were made to know God, and glorify God. The ancient reformers were correct when they wrote that the chief aim of man is to know God and glorify God forever. Why then would people forsake the Lord?

John 6:68 (NKJV) But Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.

The Unfaithful Spouse (vv. 1-8)

Jeremiah 2:1 (NKJV) Moreover the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Jesus is the Word of the Lord.

Jeremiah 2:2 (NKJV) Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, Thus says the Lord: I remember you, The kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal, When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown.

The Lord describes the devotion of the people as a kind of honeymoon. The word translated “kindness” is the Hebrew word chesed or hesed. The word typically speaks of faithfulness to a covenant, fidelity honor affection. The relationship was not simply technical in language or culture or ritual; but deeply personal.

Jeremiah 2:3 (NKJV) Israel was holiness to the Lord, The firstfruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; Disaster will come upon them, says the Lord.

The word holiness speaks of separateness and exclusivity. The early days were like the firstfruits of the harvest, that is the portion dedicated to the Lord; the portion that could not be touched or used by a stranger. The firstfruits were dedicated with great respect and reverence to the Lord (Lev.23:10-14); but they brought a sense of promise; the promise of more fruit to come. A full harvest was on its way. This love and sense of promise paved the way for the New Testament writers to speak of God’s love.

The firstfruits were restricted to the Lord; and those who ignored command and decided to eat the firstfruits for themselves invited judgment. The firstfruits were set aside for the Priest and his family; and other people who ate were guilty of trespass (Lev.22:10-16).
**Jeremiah’s Proclamation**  
**Jeremiah 2:1-19**

When you live a life of holiness and separation the world becomes a strange place indeed. “All the world,” said the Quaker to his wife, “is queer, except me and thee, and even thee is a little queer.”

*Jeremiah 2:4 (NKJV)* Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel.

The Prophet Jeremiah uses the name of heel catcher and supplanter as well as the covenant name “Israel” (Gen.32:22-32).

**The Challenge**

*Jeremiah 2:5 (NKJV)* Thus says the Lord:  
What injustice have your fathers found in Me,  
That they have gone far from Me,  
Have followed idols,  
And have become idolaters?

The Lord issues a challenge. Surely there must be some sufficient reason; justify your action! What fault, what wrong did your fathers find in me? The question implies an emphatic negative. Did God let you down? When did the Lord prove unfaithful? The departure takes place by the people—not the Lord. The departure by the people leave a vacuum that is soon filled by idols.

Every idol is a God-substitute.  
But look what the Lord says; “And have become idolaters”! You will become like what you follow, what you pursue, what you desire! That is the repeated message in the Scriptures (Hos. 9:10; 2 Kings 17:15; Ps. 115:4-8).

*Jeremiah 2:6 (NKJV)* Neither did they say, Where is the Lord,  
Who brought us up out of the land of Egypt,  
Who led us through the wilderness,  
Through a land of deserts and pits,  
Through a land of drought and the shadow of death,  
Through a land that no one crossed  
And where no one dwelt?

**What about the past?**

The Lord gives a brief but vivid picture of the wilderness wanderings. When we think of a wilderness we think of the place absent life; but here it probably means absent human settlement. Other translations have “deep darkness” but it literally reads “the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4).
Jeremiah’s Proclamation
Jeremiah 2:1-19

Jeremiah 2:7 (NKJV)  I brought you into a bountiful country,  To eat its fruit and its
goodness.  But when you entered, you defiled My land  And made My heritage an
abomination.

The Hebrew reads I brought you into a land of the Carmel.  The word Carmel means garden or
orchard.  How did the people “defile” the land?  By introducing idolatry.

The Lord created the whole earth but set aside this land for a specific task and a specific
function.  In this land the Lord God prepared a place for a special revelation of Himself.
Human beings and human nature have a way of cheapening, debasing, degrading, defiling the
very goodness of God.  Why is that important?  Because God’s purposes are good and decent and
right.

Jeremiah 2:8 (NKJV)  The priests did not say, Where is the Lord?
And those who handle the law did not know Me;
The rulers also transgressed against Me;
The prophets prophesied by Baal,
And walked after things that do not profit.

One of the tragic reasons the people forsook the Lord was a massive failure of spiritual
leadership.  The priests were God’s temporal but spiritual leaders who were sent to instruct and
guide the people.  The duty of the priests included offering sacrifices and instructing the people
in the way of the Lord (see Mal. 2:7).  Those who handle the law were probably the scribes (8:8);
y they studied the law and interpreted it to the people.  The scribes were tasked with handling the
Holy Scriptures but they did not seem to have any desire to Know God.  Here is one of the
strange ironies; handling holy things does not make one holy.   The rulers are literally the
shepherds, or pastors (KJV here only); but almost certainly this a reference to the temporary
leaders or rulers (see also Ezek.34:2 and 1 Kings 22:17).

The prophets were probably the professional Temple employees; as much a part of the cult as the
priests and scribes.  Judging from Ezekiel’s writings there was no shortage of self-proclaimed
prophets who pretended to speak for God but were in fact mouthpieces for Baal.  This is
important.  These so called prophets were pretenders, they pretended to speak for God,
they were false messengers who presented themselves as true messengers.  Yet they
frequently challenged the true prophet, and the true prophets message, and the true
prophets authority.

Desperate shadows fall on the family, the church, the land, where spiritual leadership has
been separated from God.
The word Baal has multiple meanings depending on context.  In the ancient Canaanite belief
system it was believed that Baal inseminated the ground and the earth corresponded to ba
‘alath.  The Old Testament writers go into great detail about the abominations of Baal worship
(see Numbers 25:1-3 and Hosea 2:5).
They walk after worthless things (v.5) and that which does not profit (v.8).

The prophet Jeremiah calls the people to remember their redemption, how they were purchased out of slavery. The prophet Jeremiah calls the people to remember the past provision of God in desperate circumstances. Surely that will stir their conscience. Surely that will lead them to repentance! The prophet reminds them of the emptiness and futility of idolatry.

**Broken Cisterns (vv. 9-13)**

*Jeremiah 2:9 (NKJV)*  
Therefore I will yet bring charges against you, says the Lord,  
And against your children's children I will bring charges.

The Lord God Himself brings the charges. These charges have the full force of legal charges, a kind of heavenly indictment. The pleading is less emotional and more legal; and hence has the full weight and authority of a trial. When Jeremiah says “yet I will bring charges against you” seems to indicate precious appeals have been made. All previous appeals seem to have been neglected or ignored. The consequences will not only effect Jeremiah’s generation but the generation that follows.

*Jeremiah 2:10 (NKJV)*  
For pass beyond the coasts of Cyprus and see,  
Send to Kedar and consider diligently,  
And see if there has been such a thing.

The children of Israel were called on to search the world to see if any people had committed the same sins; more sins, worse sins. Jeremiah uses an idiom that means go as far as you can west; go as far as you can east; and see if you can find a nation embracing the same of evil and wickedness. Here the coasts of Cyprus refer to the island of Cypress and its adjacent islands and part of the mainland. Kedar was the region occupied by an Arab tribe in the desert East of Jerusalem and Judea (Ps.120:5). Again it probably means from west to east.

*Jeremiah 2:11 (NKJV)*  
Has a nation changed its gods, Which are not gods?  
But My people have changed their Glory  
For what does not profit.

Other nations remain loyal to their worthless gods. The people of Israel have something special, real, beautiful, true--and they are willing to give it up!? Here the word nation (goy) may mean people group or language group. The expression “which are not gods” means they are not real; the same as verses 5,8 and here. If ever there was a reason for a people to change their loyalty and affection--it is the fact that there is a real God, a true God. What a vivid picture of idolatry;  
*Jeremiah 2:12 (NKJV)*  
Be astonished, O heavens, at this,  
And be horribly afraid;  
Be very desolate, says the Lord.
Jeremiah’s Proclamation  
Jeremiah 2:1-19

Jeremiah calls on nature to look with surprise at such a thing. Be horribly afraid, be utterly desolate; literally “be exceedingly dried up” hence desolate; no water, no life. In the history of humanity there has been some pretty raw deals.

*Jeremiah 2:13 (NKJV) For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, And hewn themselves cisterns broken cisterns that can hold no water.*

Don’t miss “for My people”; the words are personal, warm, revealing. The children of Israel are ungrateful, unkind, sinful, selfish, and God still thinks of them as “My people”.

The Lord accuses Judea of having forsaken Him. The Lord is the source of true love, true peace, true joy.

When a person forsakes God they cut themselves off from the true source of hope, life, forgiveness.

People who live in a desert understand the value of a fountain of living water. When you visit Israel you begin to see how important water is—and in the ancient world you cannot not visit a single place without seeing how the inhabitants carved giant cisterns everywhere. Cistern water is flat, tasteless—at best and is easily contaminated. Growth, mold, scum; and when cisterns become cracked, even the stale, lifeless, disgusting water disappears.

The indictment—the people of Judea have abandoned the true and living God for something not real, god-substitutes; and Jeremiah uses the metaphor of a broken cistern; a cistern that can hold no water. People still abandon the source of life and the source of hope for things that cannot bring life and cannot bring hope. The verse continues the previous thought; you become like what you pursue, if what you pursue is empty, meaningless, valueless, worthless, you become empty and meaningless and worthless. What a picture. A thirsty person turns to an empty cistern; but it is worse, it is a broken cistern, it holds the promise of water but is no different than pouring water on the dirt.

A person who turns to an empty cistern does not simply remain thirsty; but I am going to suggest that they become more thirsty.

A person who turns to an empty cistern does not simply remain thirsty, but will experience greater thirst; and their lives become marked by one great big word; that word is disappointment.

The religious forms of idolatry may look massive, impressive, technologically clever, but they lack the living Spirit of God.

And what pray tell are the bitter results of forsaking the Lord?
The Runaway Slave (vv.14-19)

*Jeremiah 2:14 (NKJV)*       Is Israel a servant?
Is he a homeborn slave?
Why is he plundered?

Bond slaves produce slaves. A slave born to a bond-woman would be treated better by virtue of blood--than the slave who is purchased. The question invites a negative answer. Is Israel a slave? No. Israel is a son. Israel is God’s darling child (Jeremiah 31:20). Israel had become slaves in Egypt. God redeemed them from their slavery. Just like God has redeemed each Christian and purchased us out of the market place of sin by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why is he plundered? Hosea and Jeremiah both place a special emphasis on the fact that embracing sin is a kind of self-destruction!

*Jeremiah 2:15 (NKJV)*       The young lions roared at him, and growled;
They made his land waste;
His cities are burned, without inhabitant.

The young lions may be illustrations of the Assyrians to the north. The Assyrians overwhelmed and overran the Northern Kingdom in 722 B.C and made the land a waste. Lions don’t care if you are free or slave. The child has wandered into unspeakable danger.

*Jeremiah 2:16 (NKJV)* 16       Also the people of Noph and Tahpanhes
Have broken the crown of your head.

The people of Noph are the people who lived near modern Cairo Egypt (see 44:1; 46:14,19). Tahpanhes; the Greek Daphnae Pelusi; modern Tell Defenneh a fort on the eastern branch of the Nile, commanding the approach to Palestine.

“they graze” or “they lay bare”

*Jeremiah 2:17 (NKJV)*       Have you not brought this on yourself,       In that you have forsaken
the Lord your God       When He led you in the way?

The children of Israel have brought this on themselves by forsaking the Lord. Possibly the way of the wilderness, more likely the way of righteousness.

*Jeremiah 2:18 (NKJV)*       And now why take the road to Egypt,       To drink the waters of Sihor?
Or why take the road to Assyria,       To drink the waters of the River?
Help cannot be found by trusting Egypt or Assyria. The word “Sihor” means dark and is probably a reference to the muddy waters of the Nile river. “the river” is a reference to the Euphrates river.

Jeremiah 2:19 (NKJV) Your own wickedness will correct you, And your backslidings will rebuke you. Know therefore and see that it is an evil and bitter thing That you have forsaken the Lord your God, And the fear of Me is not in you, Says the Lord GOD of hosts.

The way of the transgressor is hard. The very act of forsaking the Lord will bring its own calamity, will bring its own retribution. Your wickedness will discipline you. What a person sows they reap. Evil brings evil. God punishes evil. The word backslidings (KJV) reflects the word apostasy; the evil takes two forms forsaking God and indifference to God. In fact--one of the ideas here is that our own sin carries within it the seeds of our own judgment and results in discipline or chastisement which is supposed to motivate us to abandon our sin and return to God.

One of the great tragedies in a person’s life is to lose God’s love and God’s presence and God’s forgiveness and not even miss Him!

Conclusion

Why would anyone draw on the resources of Egypt or Assyria when God has proven Himself to be faithful and sufficient?

If I have Jesus only I’m safe for eternity. If I have everything else Without Him I am lost.

How is it possible for a thief on a cross to be justified by a single word from Jesus? And how is it possible that an apostle, who was numbered as one of Jesus’ closest companions in one single night could sink from Heaven to Hell; from companionship to betrayal? We are not saved by ministry or proximity to Jesus; but rather we are saved because Jesus saves us.