

Jeremiah 24

Read Jeremiah 24:1-10: This chapter is about two groups of Jews at the time of the Babylonian captivity of Jerusalem. These two groups are compared with two baskets of figs. The LORD showed Jeremiah a basket of fresh and ripe figs and a basket of rotten figs.



One was good for food, and one was inedible. God was comparing the fresh and firm figs to the first captivity group that went away with Nebuchadnezzar voluntarily to Babylon. This

would include Daniel and his friends. God told the Jews, through Jeremiah to relocate and live a good life abroad for 70 years. Then they could return. Judah was closed for maintenance.

The bad figs are compared to those who pushed back and refused this plan. The only way that a piece of fruit typically becomes rotten is because it is overripe. Their time has come and gone. God calls us all. Procrastination ultimately kills. If you stack up enough postponements, you have used up all of your chances.

Seek the LORD while He may be found, Call upon Him while He is near. (Isaiah 55:6)

For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation. (2 Corinthians 6:2)

God picks us like a piece of fruit; but we can reject the picker. People want to hang in there, and not hand over control. When we procrastinate on God's hand in our lives it is like becoming an overripe piece of fruit. Our prime has passed. What we are hanging onto begins to diminish. We are not good to each other, and we are not good to ourselves. We try to hang onto a misunderstood sense of self...and discover it is ultimately empty. We were made to serve and to engage and to follow leadership. There is a context of joy. Having happiness in things does not last. We enjoy the correct usage of our talents. Our favorite things in life will become stale and lifeless and eventually rotten.

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor. (John 12:24-25)

People who move away from God's call have multiple reasons. Some want to sin without reminders. Some do not trust anyone with control over their life. One aspect of faith is to develop an expectation of good. We have to believe that God has a plan; and that he is in control of the outcome. People who trust in themselves never really pull the trigger with God. They just try to keep on like they are naturally. This is a gross misunderstanding of our purpose and what brings joy. God is not a cosmic killjoy. He is gradually bringing us to a more abundant life. God will see to it that whatever we choose over his plan turns to dust and despair.

The unbelievers (overripe figs). stayed behind with King Zedekiah. They revolted against Nebuchadnezzar. That did not go well; and the remaining people turned on each other. They eventually went to Egypt to find a new life. There is no place that will bring peace, if you are running from God's plan for your life. God told them not to look to countries with a strong military or good economies to find happiness. It's not for them.

The bible says that we are like a mist that occurs for a moment in history, within the confines of preplanned sovereign outside factors. That is our lot in life. We cannot change the context or circumstances of our creation and life. **We only have the power to make right decisions...that's it.** We don't control outcomes. That is God's way of using positive reinforcements to guide us and encourage more.

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." (James 4:13-15)

The people who rejected all of God's direction and protections faced disaster after disaster. God would rather use speed bumps to wake us up. Many times, we will not stop unless we get hurt badly enough.

"Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, And wall her in, So that she cannot find her paths. (Hosea 2:6)

Today, there are Jews who are bitter about how God has allowed them to suffer persecution. Perhaps life would be different if they stepped into a true and living relationship and with God.

The Good Figs

Jeremiah predicted how long the Babylonian captivity would last. God wanted to pick his Jews from their places; before living conditions degraded. The early harvest is your best fruit.

And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. (Jeremiah 25:11)

When God's people follow the plan life is better for the whole planet. The Babylonians were commissioned to extract the Jews away from Israel for safe keeping. Their homeland had become toxic. God compares people who insist on keeping everything the same to old wine bottles that are never turned. Hanging on to what you have is an illusion. We graduate from one setting, and a new season of life starts. Otherwise, you become stale.

"Moab has been at ease from his youth; He has settled on his dregs, And has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, Nor has he gone into captivity. Therefore his taste remained in him, And his scent has not changed. "Therefore behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "That I shall send him wine-workers Who will tip him over And empty his vessels And break the bottles. (Jeremiah 48:11-12)

The world empires and the deportation and return are all part of a big plan. The Medo Persians were commissioned to bring the Jews back to Jerusalem after the last vestige of idolatry was destroyed. God raised up Cyrus the Great of the Medo Persian empire to take down Babylon, and release the Jews (70 years after their captivity). Isaiah predicted (150 years in advance) the nation, the king's name, and that the surrounding Euphrates River would dry up at the walls of Babylon (diverted by Cyrus). Cyrus would open the double leaved river gates during the ongoing Babylonian party.

“Thus says the LORD to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held— To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: ‘I will go before you And make the crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze And cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness And hidden riches of secret places, That you may know that I, the LORD, Who call you by your name, Am the God of Israel. For Jacob My servant’s sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; I have named you, though you have not known Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting That there is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.’ (Isaiah 45)

The book of Daniel adds more detail. There was a big party going on in Babylon, when the city was taken.

Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. (Daniel 5:1)

In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. (Daniel 5:30)

The Jews could not fight the clock. They had to go. Then one day a road back home opened. The time had come for the Jews to go back to Jerusalem.

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:1-3)

When you say no to the God, your world falls apart. Jonah wrote about his experience with this same situation. Jonah really brought turmoil into the lives of everyone around him when he

resisted God's direction. We have an application here. What has God been telling me to do for a long time? If I procrastinate, I will start to decay morally.

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. (1 Samuel 15:23)

Misunderstanding Our Place

When you lose track of who God is, you lose track of who you are. Unbelievers have no sense of accountability or purpose beyond pleasure. God is often compared to a farmer who owns land. His expectation and efforts are towards good fruit. Why would God do anything less than any other farmer?

And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. (Matthew 3:10)

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. (John 15:1-6)

A wild plant or tree is like a weed that needs to be cut down; because it competes for space and resources. God gives us the water of the word. He removes our competing interests (weeds). He prunes us (to keep us fruit oriented, instead of showing off leaves). When we are squeezed, our inner juices of sweetness or bitterness flow out. A bitter Christian is not usable or happy.

Now let me sing to my Well-beloved A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard: My Well-beloved has a vineyard On a very fruitful hill. He dug it up and cleared out its stones, And planted it with the choicest vine. He built a tower in its midst, And also made a winepress in it; So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, But it brought forth wild grapes. "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, Judge, please, between Me and My vineyard. What more could have been done to My vineyard That I have not done in it? Why then, when I expected it to bring forth good grapes, Did it bring forth wild grapes? And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste; It shall not be pruned or dug, But there shall come up briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds That they rain no rain on it." For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel, And the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; For righteousness, but behold, a cry for help. (Isaiah 5:1-7)

