



## DISCIPLINE LEADING TO SALVATION

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Jeremiah 30:4-17

21st Message

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In life we want to do certain things or try to become something that we are not, but we don't care much for the process involved. We would like to go to medical school, say, but we don't like the prospect of spending years studying to be a doctor. We would like to play the piano but we don't like the idea of practicing scales every day. We would like to be like Jesus Christ but we don't like the process of developing a Christ-like character.

Every one of us longs for something more glorious and splendid. We long for fruitfulness, peace and joy. It was Tennyson who wrote,

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust;  
Thou madest man, he knows not why;  
He thinks he was not made to die;  
And thou hast made him: thou art just.

We long for heaven. For believers, this longing is realized in the person of Jesus Christ. Through him we hope for the glory of God.

In our last study in the book of Jeremiah we began to talk about this hope as it is set out in the beautiful text from chapter 30, where God said:

**"For behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will restore the fortunes of My people Israel and Judah."** (Jer 30:3)

God spoke these words for the benefit of the people of Judah. Exiled in Babylon in the year 587 B.C., they were in a place they didn't want to be, living a life they didn't want to live. These words would provide comfort and hope for a future day when their longings for home would be satisfied.

These words are written for us, too, when we find ourselves living far from home, in a place we don't want to be. They are meant to give us hope in the grand and glorious day when all of our longings and desires will be satisfied with God's goodness.

Part of this word from God was fulfilled when Jesus Christ ushered in the New Covenant. We have a taste of glory and fruitfulness. And yet, there is something much greater awaiting the people of God.

Just as that coming day referred to in Jeremiah is past, present and future, so also salvation for the believer is past, present and future. In the past we were justified; presently we are being sanctified; and in the future we will be glorified. This process of sanctification prepares us for glory, but the journey can be long and pain-

ful. We want the end result, but we don't like the process. Our hope in the future day of glory means that some days are not quite as pleasant as others. So we live with the tension of future hope and present experience.

Returning to our text, we see two aspects of the coming day announced in verse 30:3.

**Now these are the words which the LORD spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah: "For thus says the LORD,**

**'I have heard a sound of terror,  
Of dread, and there is no peace.**

**Ask now, and see**

**If a male can give birth.**

**Why do I see every man**

**With his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth?**

**And why have all faces turned pale?**

**Alas! for that day is great,**

**There is none like it;**

**And it is the time of Jacob's distress,**

**But he will be saved from it."** (Jer 30:4-7, NASB)

Immediately following God's proclamation of a coming day when fortunes will be restored comes a word of judgment. That is because the day of the LORD, the coming day, is a day of both salvation and judgment. It will be a day of great salvation and glory for some but one of dire judgment for others.

This day was previewed with the exile of Judah, the captivity of God's people in Babylon. The final destiny for all mankind will be one of two cities -- either Jerusalem or Babylon. This text describes the horror of Babylon. There will be great anguish: "a voice of terror." There will be great unrest: "no peace." There will be intense pain, pictured here by a strong man buckled over like a woman in childbirth. The judgment to come cannot be compared to any other day: "there is none like it." However, in Judah's case (verse 7) this ends with a great reversal: God's people will be saved. Babylon will not be their final end. For God's people, judgment precedes salvation.

For Judah, this day was a preview of that great and terrible day of the Lord, the day of final judgment. But this text describes what we experience now when we face God's judgment in this life because of our sin and idolatry. It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of a just and righteous God and taste the consequences of our sin. Hardly a week goes by that I don't talk to people in turmoil and despair. They followed their own

path, sought to fulfill their desires and did what seemed right in their own eyes. But the road they chose led to anguish, unrest and pain.

Lest some of you are getting a little nervous at this point, the text continues with a word of hope. For the people of God, the coming day is a day of salvation.

**“It shall come about on that day,” declares the LORD of hosts, ‘that I will break his yoke from off their neck and will tear off their bonds; and strangers will no longer make them their slaves. But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.**

**‘Fear not, O Jacob My servant,’ declares the LORD, ‘And do not be dismayed, O Israel; For behold, I will save you from afar And your offspring from the land of their captivity. And Jacob will return and will be quiet and at ease, And no one will make him afraid. For I am with you,’ declares the LORD, ‘to save you; For I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you, Only I will not destroy you completely. But I will chasten you justly And will by no means leave you unpunished.’ (Jer 30:8-11)**

Obviously the key word in these verses is “save,” the same word used in verse 7. Judah will be saved in spite of her rebellion.

Several images describe this salvation for Judah. There will be a new freedom from captivity and slavery. The God who put the yoke of Babylon on Judah’s neck will remove it. There will be a new obedience. Instead of worshipping Baal, Judah will serve the LORD her God. Notice that she will serve David her king, too. Clearly, this is a reference to Jesus and his eternal kingdom. Instead of the unrest described in verse 5 there will be a new peace: “quiet and at ease.” A new security will replace the fear and dread of verse 5. And finally, Judah will have a new, a cleansed heart. God chastens his people, but he does not destroy them.

Two principles that arise from this text are extremely relevant to our lives today.

*1. God is ruthless to cleanse and purify his people from idolatry.*

More than once in this text God says, “You shall be My people, and I will be your God.” This is the same promise that God made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He said to Abraham, in Genesis 17:7: “I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.”

God is preparing a people for himself. He began with Israel and extended the blessing to all nations. He delights in choosing people who are torn, tattered and tarnished. He goes to work on them: cleansing, mend-

ing, creating, to make them beautiful and delightful. At times the process is painful, but in the end we will be delighted as well. We will be all that we were designed to be.

“Chasten” means to discipline or correct, instilling values and norms of conduct by verbal means or, after the fact, by rebuke or even physical chastisement. This is what God did with Judah in Babylon. And this is what he continues to do with us today. He is smoothing out the rough edges, the things that are not consistent with his character and will. Resentment is replaced with forgiveness. Anger is replaced with grace. Lust is replaced with contentment. God is ruthless. He leaves no stone unturned. He cares enough to hurt us. He is motivated out of love for our good, even though it may not feel like it. He is a father raising children to be like him.

**My son, do not reject the discipline of the LORD Or loathe His reproof, For whom the LORD loves He reproves, Even as a father corrects the son in whom he delights. (Prov. 3.11-12)**

Parents hate to see their children disappointed, limited or hurt, but discipline is essential for a child’s development. Actually, children want discipline. They want to know their boundaries, and so they push the limits. They want to know if their parents care enough to take the time and effort to discipline them. Some parents think that loving their children means letting them do what they want. But that is not love. True discipline is motivated by love for the child’s future good.

When I was younger I played many sports. I got a great sense of self worth through competition and winning. This continued after I was married, even after my first child was born. One day I separated my shoulder playing rugby. My clavicle came unhinged and was hanging in mid-air. I was angry that God would touch my body in this way. I couldn’t play certain games anymore; my shoulder was deformed. It didn’t heal properly, and several months later I had to have surgery to cut off the end of my clavicle so that the bones didn’t chafe. The ordeal lasted about a year, and most of that time I sat on the bench. But my heart softened and I began to change. My family took priority over my selfishness. At first I was angry, but now every time I look in the mirror and see the bulge on my shoulder, and the scar, I say, “Thank you, God. You cared enough about me to hurt me in order to change me.” My shoulder is a memorial to God’s love.

*2. Judgment and discipline are never the end. After exile is salvation.*

Salvation results in deliverance. Israel was saved from Egypt. Judah was saved from Babylon. The people of God are saved from judgment. We do not have the power or the authority to save ourselves, but God does. Salvation is from the Lord and it comes only by the Lord: “I will save you from afar.” “I am with you to

save you.”

Too many of us live with the misconception that God would rather condemn than save. We imagine that he is always watching us, waiting for us to make a mistake, and then he takes delight in punishing us. But that is not the God of the Bible. God does not judge or punish as an end in itself. He judges to create anew. Exile is not defeat or failure for God, but the arena out of which he works newness. This is always his goal. He is a saving God.

This is why God says, in chapter 31:

**“As I have watched over them to pluck up, to break down, to overthrow, to destroy and to bring disaster, so I will watch over them to build and to plant,” declares the LORD.**

One evening last summer I visited the home of one of the young women in our singles group. Her father and brother love working on cars. In the garage they had an old Toyota truck that was stripped bare, clear down to the chassis. They were looking at the frame that had recently been painted, planning their course of action for rebuilding the vehicle completely from the bottom up. They had taken something old and were in the process of making something new. They had torn down in order to rebuild.

That is what God does. His goal is never to destroy but to restore us. This is how he prepares us for eternity. After judgment comes salvation.

This is a very helpful principle. We travel this confusing journey of life, desiring and longing. Rather than being satisfied, we feel like we will be in exile forever in Babylon. We get discouraged and want to quit. The things we cling to are taken away one by one. But God’s word says, “Behold, days are coming.” He is working slowly, steadily, invisibly at times, to complete what he has begun. He is saving us for glory. Dorothy Sayers said, “If men will not understand the meaning of judgment, they will never come to understand the meaning of grace.”

These truths are amplified in the next verses through the metaphor of sickness and healing.

**“For thus says the LORD,  
Your wound is incurable  
And your injury is serious.  
There is no one to plead your cause;  
No healing for your sore,  
No recovery for you.  
All your lovers have forgotten you,  
They do not seek you;  
For I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy,  
With the punishment of a cruel one,  
Because your iniquity is great  
And your sins are numerous.  
Why do you cry out over your injury?  
Your pain is incurable.**

**Because your iniquity is great  
And your sins are numerous,  
I have done these things to you.  
Therefore all who devour you will be devoured;  
And all your adversaries, every one of them, will go into captivity;  
And those who plunder you will be for plunder,  
And all who prey upon you I will give for prey.  
For I will restore you to health  
And I will heal you of your wounds,’ declares the LORD,  
Because they have called you an outcast, saying:  
“It is Zion; no one cares for her.” ’ ’ (Jer 30:12-17)**

Judah’s condition is portrayed as an incurable wound or injury. The word wound occurs four times; the word injury twice. Incurable is the same word that was used to describe the “desperately sick” heart in chapter 17: “The heart is more deceitful than all else; and is desperately sick” (Jer 17:9).

The prognosis is not good: there is no chance of healing and no recovery; no physician can help. There are no friends or lovers who will care. Judah’s lovers had forgotten them. This is a reference to Egypt, whom Judah sought as an ally rather than God to save them. The source of the sickness is God. It is he who has done these things to Judah. The reason for his judgment, repeated twice, is clear: her iniquity is great; her sins are numerous.

There is a chiasmic structure to the text [see page 4]. In the center is the question, “Why do you cry out? God emphasizes the fact that judgment should be expected. There is no reason for Judah to cry out to God, to complain as if something completely unexpected is taking place. Everything that has happened to them is the result of their own doing. They deserve nothing less; they should hope for nothing more. So why are they crying out to God?

But what actually happens? Just as we saw in the last section, there is a complete reversal. The enemies of God’s people are judged. They will experience the same fate as those they attacked. All who devoured, enslaved, plundered and preyed upon will be devoured, enslaved, plundered and given as prey. God’s people will be miraculously healed and restored.

Sickness and healing are metaphors for what happens to God’s people in exile. The restoration comes. A miracle occurs; a terminal condition is reversed. Why does God do this? He restores and heals because his name is at stake. When God’s people sin, he takes responsibility to purify them. He doesn’t turn his back on them. His commitment brings health and restoration. In the end, God saves.

In many ways, verses 12-17 parallel verses 4-11. The same principles are reiterated. Judgment and discipline are necessary in the sanctifying process. Sickness is not the end; there will be complete healing. God’s goal is salvation, even though it is completely unmerited and

undeserved.

Interestingly, the incurable wound inflicted by God here is the same term used by Jeremiah in his personal lament, in chapter 15, when he cried out to God, "Why has my pain been perpetual and my wound incurable, refusing to be healed?" The same words are used to describe the pain of suffering and the horror of judgment. In other words, it doesn't matter whether we are an unfaithful Judah or an obedient Jeremiah, both the experience and the results of what God does in our lives can be exactly the same.

Of course that does not mean that we should go out and play the harlot, like Judah. It is much better to be an obedient Jeremiah. What it means is that God will use both suffering and judgment to the same end in our lives. He uses our sin or our suffering to draw us to himself, to show us his deep compassion and commitment, to mold and shape us into what he desires us to be. He is preparing us for heaven, saving, perfecting, restoring, healing.

When things are not going the way we would like, we cry out to God, saying, Why is this happening? In his suffering, Jeremiah cried out and God rebuked him. In exile, Judah cried out to God only to be rebuked. Both the sufferer and the sinner think that God owes them an explanation. But the truth is that both the faith-

ful servant and the errant sinner are in need of salvation, healing and restoration. We all need a miracle. Unless God saves, no one can recover.

I always want to know what God is doing with me, but most of the time I can't sort it out. If I feel I am suffering unjustly, I cry out to him, like Job, for an explanation. If I did something wrong I want to correct it so that I can regain God's favor. I want the glory of heaven, but not the pain and suffering that will prepare me for heaven. But God uses it all. He hurts me and breaks me and doesn't always give me the reason behind what he is doing. I rest in the fact that God knows what he is about.

The bottom line is, no matter what I do or don't do, I am dependent on the God of my salvation. And no matter what I do or don't do, God will love me and care for me all the way to heaven. My hope for eternity is absolutely certain, because my hope is in him.

**Let him give his cheek to the smiter,  
Let him be filled with reproach.  
For the LORD will not reject forever,  
For if He causes grief,  
Then He will have compassion  
According to His abundant lovingkindness. (Lam  
3:30-32)**

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12 "For thus says the LORD,  
Your **wound** is **incurable**  
And your **injury** is serious.  
13 There is no one to plead your cause;  
No healing for your sore,  
No recovery for you.  
14 All your lovers have forgotten you,  
They do not seek you;  
For I have **wounded** you with the **wound** of an enemy,  
With the **punishment** of a cruel one,  
Because your iniquity is great  
And your sins are numerous.  
15 Why do you cry out over your **injury**?  
Your pain is **incurable**.  
Because your iniquity is great  
And your sins are numerous,  
I have done these things to you.  
16 Therefore all who devour you will be devoured; And  
all your adversaries, every one of them, will go into captivity;  
those who plunder you will be for plunder, And  
all who prey upon you I will give for prey. And  
17 For I will restore you to health  
And I will heal you of your wounds,' declares the LORD,  
Because they have called you an outcast, saying:  
"It is Zion; no one cares for her." ' ' "

(Jer 30:12-17, NASB)