

Augusta First Baptist Church  
**Jeremiah 2:9-13**  
***Dead Men Talking: Can Your Faith Hold Water?***  
**May 20, 2007**  
**Jeremiah**

NRS Jeremiah 2:9 *Therefore once more I accuse you, says the LORD, and I accuse your children's children. 10 Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to Kedar and examine with care; see if there has ever been such a thing. 11 Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit. 12 Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the LORD, 13 for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.*

Today begins a new series of messages entitled, *Dead Men Talking*. Each Sunday, we will be looking at one prophet from the Bible and hear his message. All of these prophets – with one notable exception – are dead and gone. As far as anyone knows, there are no more earthly remains left. But their message to the ancient people of God is still alive. Even though most of them spoke more than twenty-five hundred years ago, their words still apply to the people of God today. In the truest sense of the phrase, they are ***dead men talking***.

Before we look at the prophet of whom we will focus on today, let me say a few words about prophecy. It is far too common to think of prophecy as a means to predict the future - crystal ball gazers, if you will. I suspect that today prophets are understood as mediums, that have some special access to the unknown future – from Cleo on Cable Networks to a state legislator from Savannah, who a few years ago, claimed she could speak with the dead. But prophets in the Bible were not so much concerned with the things of the future as they were with helping people understand the present. They were *forth-telling* as much as they were *foretelling*.

And so, we come to Jeremiah, a prophet that speaks of both **judgement and deliverance**. Jeremiah speaks God's word to the people of Israel, saying that the old is being dismantled. Biblical theologian Louis Stulman observes quite correctly, "More than any other prophet in the Hebrew Bible, Jeremiah bears witness to the haunting reality of a crumbling world."

How about it? Do you think Jeremiah, this man now long dead, has something to say about our world, our crumbling world? Do we *really* need examples that our world is falling apart?

Prior to World War I, at least in Western culture, there was the pervasive biasness that no problems existed that human culture could not solve. Humanity was bettering itself. Now that we can reflect back one hundred years, we look with dismay and acknowledge that the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was the most violent in human history. Even today, there is much talk and fear that we could very well annihilate ourselves at the push of a nuclear button.

Jeremiah's world is crumbling. Israel was on the verge of being decimated as a people. Jeremiah not only proclaimed, or prophesied the judgment and deliverance of God, he lived it. He felt it down in his bones. His was not a confident preacher, but had a seemingly vacillating voice, that both feared his world that was dismantling, and yet invested his life in the hope that God alone was it's deliverance.

NRS Jeremiah 20:9 *If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name," then within me there is something like a burning fire shut up in **my bones**; I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.*

Jeremiah has some difficult things to say to people who claim faith. It is a book of both judgment and deliverance. The role of a prophet is to **afflict the comfortable**.

One scholar gave Jeremiah the moniker of "God's Messenger of Doom" (R.E. Clements, *Interpretation*). How would you like your pastor to have such a nickname?

2:13 - *for my people have committed two evils: they have **forsaken me**, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, **cracked cisterns** that can hold no water.*

**The Judgment** Jeremiah is speaking of means two things:

**1) You Have "Forsaken Me" and 2) Sought to Your Own Way**

This is a biblical way of saying you have changed dance partners. The imagery is infidelity.

A foreign empire, Babylon, will conquer Israel and Judah, and Jeremiah points out that it is because the people of God have forsaken Him. They have sought their own salvation, their own god and have dug a cistern that won't hold water.

I openly admit to you that I am not at all familiar with a cistern. I grew up with wells. We had several "dry" wells scattered about in the woods – the remains of tenant farmers. The well that supplied water to the dairy barn dried up when I was a teenager. It was hand-dug by my grandfather and a helper many years ago. I recall the excitement I felt when the new well was dug. This one was dug not by shovels and buckets, but by a massive machine that turned a drill bit hundreds of feet into the ground.

In Jeremiah's day, a cistern was nothing more than a pit or hole carved into limestone. It then had to be sealed with plaster, so the water would not leak out. The cistern was an object of comfort; during the dry days of summer, a cistern was a symbol of security and life.

When Jeremiah spoke of cisterns, the people knew exactly what he meant. His words, however, were not of comfort. He said that you have carved out cisterns that do not hold water. The prophet spoke around the sixth century B.C. to the children of God, who felt all was well. But all was not well. The people were depending more and more on the establishment, the politics, and their own status rather than that of God. Simply put, they trusted in their own security. In time, this turned out to be not only misplaced trust, but empty as well. The children of God were pursuing all the wrong things and coming up empty.

**The Judgment Jeremiah speaks of means that the status quo cannot be depended on any longer.**

NRS Jeremiah 1:10 *"See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."*

In light of this morning's text, we could simplify the message of Jeremiah to say, "don't be a cracked pot." Faith is not what you make it to be, it is not ours to design according to our own whims and preferences.

What does Jeremiah have to say to God's children today? In part, our known world is ending. That is, the things of life that we are so certain about, can no longer be depended upon. Liberals need to listen and hear that worldly knowledge and trust in human nature and social sciences will not make us better people or solve

our current ills. Conservatives need to listen and understand that we cannot preserve the future by clinging desperately to the past, propping up old ideologies, building arsenals and crouching in fear of everything that threatens the status quo.

V. 13: "...*dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.*"

Part of Jeremiah's call was to *afflict the comfortable*, and he did that by truth speaking, forth-telling, and challenging the status quo.

The other part of Jeremiah's call and role as a prophet was to **comfort the afflicted**.

Throughout the book of Jeremiah, we read of themes in tension: pluck-up – pull down, destroy – build, overthrow – plant, grief - hope. The theme of judgment has as its counter theme, **deliverance**.

God's judgment is not without deliverance. As my Old Testament professor, Walter Brueggemann would phrase it, "Jeremiah is a book of *exile and homecoming*."

There is a great image we are given in Jeremiah Chapter 18. Jeremiah is at a potter's house where clay is being worked over on a wheel. The lump of clay had to be reworked until the potter had what he wanted. Through Jeremiah, God says, "*Can I not do with you...just as this potter has done...just like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand*" (18:6).

God's deliverance comes by way of:

**1) Persistence** – Half of the occurrences of "persistent" in the OT occur in Jeremiah.

25:3-4 *I have spoken persistently to you, ... the LORD persistently sent you all his servants the prophets...*

The word *shakam* [~yKev] (persistently) has a sunrise to it. The image is of rising early. A sunrise evokes surprise and yet soothing regularity, both spontaneous and certain. Jeremiah is up long before dawn to do the Lord's bidding. Everyday there is the anticipation that God will say something again (the word of the LORD has come to me.)

Sacred persistence is living with an expectation that God will speak within our life this day. Something else is persistent for Jeremiah and Israel as well as for us - God is all the while loving.

*Faith for my deliverance is not faith in God. Faith means, whether I am visibly delivered or not, I will stick to my belief that God is love. There are some things only learned in a fiery furnace. (Oswald Chambers in [Run Today's Race](#))*

**2) God Response is Robust, Dynamic**

Because for Jeremiah, God is "on the move" doing new things, deliverance comes in ways we do not expect. Again, verse 13 is informative: "...*the fountain of living water...*"

At the heart of the matter, Jeremiah as prophet is a poet of hope. He calls on the community of faith to see the world differently, to re-vision life in a way that surpasses our imagination. This prophet of God is not saying, go back to the way things were. Rather, he is saying, God is doing a new thing.

One of the most beloved passages in all of Jeremiah is 29:11-12

*11 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. 12 Then when you call upon me and come and pray to me, I will hear you. 13 When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart,*

Paul Ricoeur states, that people are changed, not by ethical urging, but by *transformed imagination*.

Imagine that God has a deeper life for you and me. Imagine that our ways of experiencing God, relating to God, knowing God, could be different.

We fill our wells with what we expect, what established traditions expect. We trust in cisterns that, as Jeremiah puts it, are cracked, broken.

Jeremiah is a prophet who speaks candidly about God. This God who cannot be contained or categorized is a God of newness. Think of the possibilities, if we stopped digging out our own cisterns of faith, and allowed God's living water to fill us with a newness of God in the midst of life in the ruins: from decayed marriages to a diseased society. God is about doing something new.

John Claypool tells the story of a young man visiting a saintly old monk on Mt. Athos. The young man asked: "Do you still wrestle with the devil, Father?" The old man answered, "Not any longer my child; I have grown old, and he has grown old with me. He no longer has the strength...now I wrestle with God." "With God!" exclaimed the young man. "Do you hope to win?" "Oh, no, my son," came the answer, "I hope to lose." (*Glad Reunion*, p. 169)

God is about doing something new. When we stop trying to win for ourselves holy possibilities await.

Lamentations 3:22-23 - *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; [23] they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*