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Jeremiah

The Weeping Prophet

Jeremiah 8

~ Brent Russell ~

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- Today we are going to **share the story** of Jeremiah
 - I am sure that very few of you have read all of the book of Jeremiah
 - It is a **long book** – one of the longest in the scriptures
 - It details **40 years** of Jeremiahs ministry from the reign of **Mannaseh** in the kingdom of **Judah**
 - In this time remember the nations has split into Judah and Isreal
 - **And so Jeremiah is prophet for 40 years until the Babylonians invade and take Judah into exile**
 - Jeremiah is also one of the most **difficult books to read**
 - Firstly it is not put in place **chronologically** – in time order
 - The prophecies from various parts of Jeremiahs ministry are put together a little **randomly** making it hard to follow a historical story
 - Secondly it is a **tough book** to read because it is often about **God's anger** against his people as they forsake him
 - **But it is a wonderful book with a message of hope and salvation**
 - **And a message of the coming fullness of God's grace in Jesus**
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- There are many great passages and verses in the book that bear committing to memory
 - One of the best known is **Jeremiah 6:16** *This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.*
 - You are standing at a crossroads and some will need to make some decisions about how they walk
 - And where they will walk to, today

- The word of God comes to Jeremiah at a **teenager** probably not more than 17 or 18
- We know that he **ministered for 40 years**
- Lifespans were short, any of you over 60 are well past your **sell-by date** in ancient times
- So Jeremiah must have been a young teenager when God speaks to him and the way God calls him has really struck me this week:

Jeremiah 1:4-10 *The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." "Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD. Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."*

GOD TOUCHES... A PERSONAL AND INTIMATE GOD

- I like my **body space**
- I like **personal space** and any one coming too close to me can make me a little nervous
- I come from a reasonably **unaffectionate family**
- And I don't much like people coming too close to me
- When I stand in queues I don't like feeling people **breathing down my neck**
- Somehow some people manage to step across this invisible barrier that makes me say "woooah buddy"
- And I only like people to come into my personal space when they've **been invited**
- This line in vs 9 for me is a **powerful sentence** of God's interaction with Jeremiah
- **Jeremiah 1:9** *Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "Now, I have put my words in your mouth."*
- **In this vision or dream God reaches out his hand to Jeremiah**
- An act of **holy affection** from God to this young, inexperienced and nervous teenager
- God literally in this vision **invades Jeremiah's personal space**
- He **steps across the boundaries** that we so easily put up
- He gets **close** to Jeremiah reaching out to Him
- This no vision of a **distant angel** surrounded in Holy light
- Or of the **holiness of God from distance** as Moses saw in the mountain cleft
- It is not **voice from far off** calling "Jeremiah, Jeremiah" as God called Samuel

- **No this is the promise of a new time in the way God works with us**
- **This is God showing to Jeremiah that he wants to reach out and touch his people**
- **He wants to be close to us**
- **This is a deeply affectionate act of God**
- This is a **personal God** literally reaching into the life of Jeremiah in a wonderfully invasive way
- **Now let me tell no-one touches my mouth except my wife**
- This is an of very deep love almost like that of a **lovers touch**
- Can you **imagine at dinner** if a friend or business colleague reached over and touched your mouth
- It would certainly make more than little nervous should Rod do that at dinner...
- **This is a very affectionate act reserved for intimate relationships**
- **God speaks often of his church as his lover, his bride pure and spotless**
- **Revelation 19:7-8** *"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."*
- God often uses the **metaphor of human sexual affection** and intimacy to speak of our relationship with Him
- **Song of Songs** is an illustration of how married intimate life should be
- But also has been understood as God's affection for his people the relationship between the **church and Jesus**
- **Perhaps this act of affection to Jeremiah is to remind him that he shall have no other affections than those of His eternal and heavenly Father**
- **He is called by God to be celibate and remain unmarried (chapter 16)**
- **But even more so in the midst of the idolatry in which Jeremiah finds himself surrounded - it is a reminder that it God and God alone whom we must love**

HAVE YOU BEEN TOUCHED BY GOD?

- So my question to you today as we look at Jeremiah's life is this: **"Have you allowed God to touch you?"**
- For some Christians their relationship with Jesus is more like one of a **business partnership** than one of deep affection
- Of a **distant acquaintance** rather than a deep romance
- OK Jesus, I've read the bible. If I believe in you, you'll save me – sounds like a good deal - **where do I sign?**
- **Our faith does not work like that**

- There are lots people who have allowed Jesus **near to them** but have not let him **touch them**
- They have **sat at his feet** and listened to his message but have not allowed him to **touch their mouths** to give them His word
- They have **heard his correction** and rebuke in their lives but have **not run to his arms** to receive his forgiveness
- They have **spoken with** Him often but not allowed themselves to **rest against his shoulders - Deuteronomy 33:12** *About Benjamin he said: "Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long, and the one the LORD loves rests between his shoulders."*
- **Marisa and I eat out once in a while and we often find ourselves watching other diners**
- And often I will see a couple who are well on in years and have obviously been **married for some time**
- They sit in an almost **uncomfortable silence**, little to say to each other
- **Very little affection or passion for each other**
- Isn't it sad?
- Whilst some other long married couples talk animatedly
- Or if they don't talk there is a **comfortable silence** and affection for each other
- A deep sense of **love and companionship**
- **That is what God desires for his relationship with us in Jesus**
- **Not a distant relationship, staid and conservative**
- **But a passionate, intimate, warm and comfortable relationship with Him**
- **Have you been touched by Jesus?**
- Have you allowed God to **step into your personal space**
- Have you allowed him to get into your life to be **intimate with you?**
- **It is this act that marks the beginning of an extraordinary journey for the prophet Jeremiah**
- An extraordinary and surprising journey with God
- It is only **when you let God** touch you – when you allow him to get near to you that you will find yourselves changed by Him
- **Loving God is not like loving an intellectual subject like math or science**
- **Loving God is like reading poetry it's a heart thing**
- **Loving God is like loving a husband or wife**

WHEN GOD TOUCHES YOU, IT IS WITH HIS WORD

- God touches Jeremiah in a **powerful and personal** way
- And we see that **when we allow God** to step into our lives He always does so with a **message**
- Part of this intimacy with Jeremiah - as with us - is to give us **his word**

- **With the touch of God comes great responsibility**
- **For Jeremiah the word of God was his prophecy to the nations**
- He was man of powerful words and of deep faith
- Some of the prophecies are **severely worded** but he stood unafraid because he knew that this was God's message
- **I would not easily tell the government that they are allowing this country to be slept with like a prostitute**
- As God touches us he gives us His **WORD**
- **John's gospel starts with these brilliant words: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning***
- **This is a new era which we see in Jeremiah**
- God is beginning to speak of the **coming covenant** that he will make with his people **and he is starting with Jeremiah by touching him**
- It is the era in which God wants to touch his people in a powerful and intimate way
- Listen to the word of God in **Jeremiah 31:31-34** *"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.*
"This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."
- **This is a promise of us knowing God in a very different way as His spirit puts his word in our hearts and mouths**
- **In fact the word they will KNOW me is the same one of a man KNOWING a woman intimately**
- God desires to know YOU not from a distance - but **intimately**
- **Not knowing in mind but in the very core of who you are**
- **When God touches you it is with his Word – This is how he blesses Jeremiah**
- And you will know if you have been **touched by his Word**
- Because his word will want to **spread the good news** to everyone around
- Jeremiah even in **moments of great despair** cannot keep silent about the word of God planted within him
- Listen to his lament in **Jeremiah 20:7-9** *O LORD, you deceived me, and I was deceived; you overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction. So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long.*
But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.

- And so it is with us when we have been touched by Jesus that His word becomes like a **fire in our bones**
- A message of **righteousness and judgement** – of **God's anger** against evil
- But very importantly a message of **Hope and restoration** that must come out
- God has put His word in you - And you must speak it to those around you
- **A friend tells you their loved one is ill – God's word within you compels you to ask "could I pray for you and your loved one?"**
- **A friend is trapped in sin that is eating them and their family – God's word in you compels you to speak lovingly the truth of Jesus stand against evil and his desire for holy living**
- **Someone shares with you some of their pain – God's word within you compels you to listen and tell them of the compassion of Jesus for them**
- **Someone close to you is in trouble because of mistakes they made – God's word in you compels you to share with them Gods forgiveness and mercy in Christ Jesus**
- This is a wonderful truth You have been touched by God and have been given a **message for the nations**

But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I can't.

WHEN GOD TOUCHES YOU HE GIVES YOU HIS HEART

- There comes more responsibility - Jeremiah is often called the **weeping prophet**
- **Jeremiah 9:1** *Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people.*
- His second book **Lamentations** is a sad book
- A lament - a book of **grief and of mourning**
- **Lamentations 2:11** *My eyes fail from weeping, I am in torment within, my heart is poured out on the ground because my people are destroyed, because children and infants faint in the streets of the city.*
- **You see when God touches us he gives us his Word**
- **But he also gives us His heart**
- It is **powerful** gift - But a **painful** gift too
- Things that **anger God** begin to make us angry too
- Things that **make God weep** make us weep too
- **As you read some of the prophecies in the book of Jeremiah it is almost hard to see where he stops and God begins**
- This man has become so one with God that he really has God's heart
- God touches and gives you his word his message for the world

- **And also gives you his heart his compassion and mercy**
- Have you noticed that the **longer you are married** to someone the more similar you become
- You mould to each others shape
- **You soon find that things that make your spouse upset, upset you too**
- **As Jeremiah draws close to God he is given God's heart and so he begins to respond to the world as God responds to her**
- **With tears and heartache**
- **With anger and judgement**
- **With mercy and compassion**
- **And it is my prayer for the church that we would have God's heart for the broken world**
- To be **touched by God and to have his Word** in us opens our minds and hearts to see the reality of the world around us
 - And it is **painful** to see the world as God sees it
 - to see the reality of **peoples hurt** around us
 - to see the **depth of evil** in our communities
 - To see the **depth of wrongness in our own lives**
 - to **recognize the injustice** around us
 - to see the **destruction of sin**
- It is a **powerful gift – but a painful gift** as we see the truth of the world around us and we **bring God's word** into the world
- Let Jesus touch you and put his word in your mouth, and his word will change your heart
- **Jeremiah 24:7** *I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD.*
- Ezekiel later echoes the same sentiment
- **Ezekiel 36:26** *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*
- **Once again an act of intimacy as we are touched by the living God and he changes us and gives us His heart for the world**

CONCLUSION - WHEN GOD TOUCHES YOU HE GIVES YOU HIS HOPE

- **God is a personal God who wants to be affectionate with you and there is no fuller expression of this than Jesus within you**
- You cannot hold him at **arms length**
- You have to allow him to get **up close and personal** – he wants to touch you
- But with the touch of God through His Holy Spirit in us there comes to **responsibility and even sometimes pain**
- When God has touched you he puts his **message in you**
- The message is for all people and **cannot be kept quiet**
- When God touches you he **gives you his heart**
- That you **become so one with him** that his feelings and emotions become yours
- And finally when God touches you he **gives you his Hope**
- I said at the beginning that the book of **Jeremiah is hard to read**
- And it is so hard because **God gets so very angry with his people**
- **And sometimes that is the role we called to have: to share God's righteous anger with the world**
- **As we look world with God's heart it hurts us**
- **And we may be left feeling a little like Jeremiah**
- **Weeping for the sin of the world, weeping for God's anger as he burns against those who have chosen to ignore him**
- But it is not a message of **hopelessness**
- **All over this book are elements of hope – that God will not destroy but rebuild**
- Glimpses that God will **not remain angry forever**
- That he will ultimately save those who call unto him
- **Jeremiah 4:1-2** *"If you will return, O Israel, return to me," declares the LORD. "If you put your detestable idols out of my sight and no longer go astray, and if in a truthful, just and righteous way you swear, 'As surely as the LORD lives,' then the nations will be blessed by him and in him they will glory."*
- **Jeremiah 5:18** *"Yet even in those days," declares the LORD, "I will not destroy you completely."*
- **Jeremiah 9:23-24** *This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.*
- **The message of Jeremiah is a powerful one**
- It is a message of **justice and truth**
- It is a message of **Gods anger against those who are disloyal to Him**

- But it is a message that his aim is **not to destroy but to reform**
- **Not to crush but to refine**
- **Not to annihilate but to rebuild**
- **It is a message of hope and mercy**
- **A message of forgiveness and salvation**
- **A message that** *"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*