



4. 'Preparing the way for Jesus'

Jeremiah 2.²⁰⁻³⁷

Background

This chapter of the book of Jeremiah may seem on first sight a million miles away from the festivities in which we engage at this time of year: but in fact our studies in this chapter are extremely apposite for the season of Advent.

Advent, of course, celebrates the 'coming' of the Lord, but as well affording us a backward look, basking in the joy that is ours because the Lord *has* come, it is also the season when believers are reminded that the King who came is coming again: and it becomes as such a season for *preparation* – a time when we carefully "prepare the way for the Lord and make straight paths for Him" ([Lk.3.4-6](#)).

It's in that context that this passage in Jeremiah 2 has significance. In a way and to a degree not dissimilar to what has marked out our society's life here in Scotland – and, indeed, the life of Christ's church in many places – the people of God in his day had drifted far from all that they had been called to be. This whole chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of where things had gone so badly wrong, and of what the root causes of that departure from the Lord had been.

These closing verses of the chapter are highly instructive. They pinpoint what the fundamental issue was (vv.20-21), identify the complete inadequacy of the ways in which the people sought (then as now) to excuse themselves (vv.22-25), and then throw the spotlight on the major 'symptoms' of the deep spiritual malaise among God's people (vv.26-37).

It can be easy to read all this from a distance and reflect on how dreadful it was that God's people back then had failed the Lord so badly and drifted so defiantly from His ways. Not least in this season of Advent, however, we do well to take this passage to heart, and have it inform our perspective on what the Lord now looks for in His people today. In each of *our* lives.

What will it mean to 'prepare the way for the Lord,' to 'make straight paths for Him'? To what extent are our lives marked by these 'symptoms' of spiritual malaise? And what action might we take, as we reflect on the Christmas message, to address or to avoid that terrible drift to which the people in Jeremiah's day had succumbed?

Start with '**days**' (1), (3) and (5).

1) Monday 11th December – the restful life

Read [Jeremiah 2.20](#)

“.. you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds ..” (Jer.2.20)

Jesus bids us His yoke upon us and find our true rest in living under His lordship: yoked to Him, He takes the lead, but He also takes the load, and daily carries our burdens for us ([Ps.68.19](#)). The government is on His shoulders ([Is.9.6](#)): be glad to serve Him!

Is the *Lordship* of Jesus sufficiently stressed in the proclamation of the gospel?

In what ways is it true that to serve the Lord is indeed ‘perfect freedom’?

Painful experience at the hands of ‘authority figures’ in their past can often make it difficult for individuals to embrace the lordship of Jesus: how can such individuals be helped to open their lives to Jesus as Lord and serve Him?

How might you respond to those who refuse to serve the Lord and have Him call the shots in their lives?

What does the Lord mean by using this graphic picture of the prostitute?

Prayer: Help me so to know You, Lord Jesus, that I may truly love You; so to love You that I may fully serve You, and to prove each day that to serve You is perfect freedom.

2) Tuesday 12th December – no cheap grace

Read [Jeremiah 2.21-22](#)

“.. the stain of your guilt is still before me ..” (Jer.2.22)

It’s harder than perhaps you realise to know His restoring and cleansing grace when you defy the Lord in the face of His great goodness towards you. Forgiveness is a costly business: it wasn’t secured cheaply for us – and it isn’t recovered cheaply by us.

God’s work in the life of a believer is likened to His planting ‘a choice vine’: what encouragement should this give you?

V.22 could read like a counsel of despair for someone struggling with a sense of guilt: how does it square with the gospel of God’s forgiveness?

Prayer: Lord, keep me from complacency and presumption in my walk with You: make me always conscious of the costliness of grace and mindful of the wretchedness of sin.

3) Wednesday 13th December – addicted to sin

Read [Jeremiah 2.23-25](#)

“.. but you said ‘It’s no use! I love foreign gods ..’” (Jer.2.25)

Our attempts to find some 'wriggle-room' would be laughable if they were not so pitiable: the people tried to plead their innocence and in the same breath protested their ineptitude. Sin is addictive: but while 'addiction' may explain, it doesn't excuse.

What has been your experience of the 'addictive' character of sin – either in your own life or as you've observed it in others?

Are there areas of your life where you're living in denial of sin?

How would you counsel someone who pleads, in regard to patterns of conduct that are sinful, that they simply can't help it?

"He breaks the power of cancelled sin.." runs the hymn: think of the 'besetting' sins in your own life – how is that compelling power of sin broken by Jesus?

Prayer: *How exceedingly corrupt is my sinful heart, O Lord, deceitful above all things and beyond cure ([Jer.17.9](#)): I confess my sin, acknowledge my need, and seek Your help.*

4) Thursday 14th December – wholly His

Read [Jeremiah 2.26-28](#)

".. when they are in trouble they say, 'Come and save us!' .." (Jer.2.27)

As creatures we belong to the Lord. To invest our energies anywhere else is theft: and then to resort to the Lord when all else fails is insulting. The gospel is not an insurance policy, nor the Lord an emergency service. Jesus is only our saviour as He's truly Lord.

Why does the Lord liken the people of Israel to a thief?

The season of Advent prompts us to prepare our hearts for the Lord: have you been turning your back on the Lord, and looking to Him only in your crises?

Prayer: *Father, what I know not, teach me. What I have not, give me. What I are not, kindly me. For the sake of Your Son, and for the glory of Your own great Name.*

5) Friday 15th December – today when you hear His voice

Read [Jeremiah 2.29-30](#)

".. they did not respond to correction .." (Jer.2.30)

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. What will you do with the Word as He continues to speak: for the Scriptures are given and preached as part of His corrective arsenal ([2 Tim.3.16](#)). Submit to the Word – don't try to stifle His word or scorn Him.

The idea of God punishing people sits uncomfortably with many today: why is it ultimately good news that God does punish?

Correction is an important part of punishment: how does that play out in our legal and judicial system? In the home? In the life of the church?

Is criticism the same as correction – and how do you respond to each when directed to yourself?

In what ways do you see our society today seeking to ‘silence’ or ‘stifle’ the message God would speak into our life?

Prayer: *Take Your truth, plant it deep in us; shape and fashion us in Your likeness: that the light of Christ might be seen today in our acts of love and our deeds of faith*.*

6) Saturday 16th December – remember, remember

Read [Jeremiah 2.31-33](#)

“.. have I been a desert to Israel or a land of great darkness ..” (Jer.2.31)

How quick we can be to forget the Lord’s goodness! Remember today the *abundance* of God’s grace towards you, and how precious has been the *light* of the knowledge of the glory of God which He has given you in the face of Jesus Christ ([2 Cor.4.6](#)).

What strategies might you adopt to ensure you did not forget the Lord?

It is for *freedom* that Christ has set us free: how would you describe that freedom to a friend?

Prayer: *Light of the world, You stepped down into darkness, opened my eyes let me see beauty that made this heart adore You, hope of a life spent with You!*

7) Sunday 17th December – a people prepared for the Lord

Read [Jeremiah 2.34-37](#)

“.. why do you go about so much changing your ways ..” (Jer.2.36)

Renewal always starts with repentance. Denying the reality of sin won’t wash ([1 Jn.1.10](#)) and looking anywhere else other than to the Lord will only end in abject disappointment. The Christmas story starts with a call to prepare the way for the Lord.

In what ways might you ‘prepare the way for the Lord’ in your own life at this time?

All sorts of things can prove a distraction to us: how can you cultivate a true ‘stability’ in your life which keeps you focussed on the Lord.

Prayer: *Lord, be my vision, supreme in my heart: bid every rival give way & depart: You my best thought in the day and the night, waking or sleeping, Your presence my light.*