

**Jeremiah 31:7-14**

<sup>7</sup> For thus says the LORD:

*Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,  
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;  
proclaim, give praise, and say,  
“Save, O LORD, your people,  
the remnant of Israel.”*

<sup>8</sup> See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,  
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,  
among them the blind and the lame,  
those with child and those in labour, together;  
a great company, they shall return here.

<sup>9</sup> With weeping they shall come,  
and with consolations I will lead them back,  
I will let them walk by brooks of water,  
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;  
for I have become a father to Israel,  
and Ephraim is my firstborn.

<sup>10</sup> Hear the word of the LORD, O nations,  
and declare it in the coastlands far away;  
say, “He who scattered Israel will gather him,  
and will keep him as a shepherd a flock.”

<sup>11</sup> For the LORD has ransomed Jacob,  
and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

<sup>12</sup> They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,  
and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD,  
over the grain, the wine, and the oil,  
and over the young of the flock and the herd;  
their life shall become like a watered garden,  
and they shall never languish again.

<sup>13</sup> Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,  
and the young men and the old shall be merry.  
I will turn their mourning into joy,  
I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

<sup>14</sup> I will give the priests their fill of fatness,  
and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty,  
says the LORD.

**John 1: 10-18**

*10 The Word was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup> He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. <sup>12</sup> But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, <sup>13</sup> who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.*

*<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. <sup>15</sup> (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") <sup>16</sup> From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. <sup>17</sup> The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. <sup>18</sup> No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.*

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Prayer: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer."

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This chapter from Jeremiah is full of prophecies of hope and promise. The northern tribes have been in exile in Assyria for many years, and Jeremiah who was exiled as well, is prophesying about the return of the people.

In the verses we heard:

The divisions between the tribes of Israel will be healed, and he gives this wonderful picture of joyousness and prosperity. As in some other parts of the Old Testament, there is much intermingling between restoration with God and material well-being which will automatically be theirs just because they are Gods chosen people. (We know in practise that does not always work out that way.)

The chapter goes on to say there has been, and will be, sadness; children have died both naturally but also with violence.

*"A voice is heard in Ramah, Rachel (the archetypal Jewish mother) weeping for her children, because they are no more."*

You may remember this is the verse Matthew quotes to recall the slaughter of the innocent children by Herod within two years of Jesus' birth.

But Jeremiah also goes on in the chapter - which I think is worth looking at - to prophesy at a different level when he speaks of the new covenant that God will establish with his people.

Sunday 3 January 2021

From verse 31:

*"It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers in Egypt."*

That is the one where Moses took the message that God would be their God, and they would be His people, a community relationship.

This one would be different

*"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts."*

God will be a relationship with each one, and sins and forgiveness will be less corporate but for each individual.

*"They will all know me from the greatest to the least."*

In a religious society such as the children of Israel, where the words of God had to be passed from generation to generation to be valid for anyone, this was a new concept. Individual faith, individual responsibility before God.

You may remember John the Baptist realised this. He said to the Jewish crowds, *"produce fruit in keeping with repentance, and do not say (as a justification) we have Abraham for our father"*.

Jeremiah does not prophesy as to how this would be achieved, but we know that it only came about when God's word became flesh and dwelt among us. In other words, when Jesus came to show us and be, in life, word, and death the love of God, how personal our response to God can and needs to be, and he left his Spirit to help us do that.

It is John the evangelist who tries to open this up to us in the first chapter of his gospel.

The prologue to John's Gospel has many layers, basic and deeply theological. We'll touch on the basic because that's what I can grasp best.

1. Though Jesus was born into an old and long-established faith community, he was rejected by them. He was also rejected by "the world", the rest of the all the other faith and social and political communities too.

All the grace and truth he brought came to those who believed in his name. That has been continuously true. It's not because your parents believed, you live in a Christian country, you go to church even, but because you believe in your heart that Jesus is the son of God, your personal Saviour from sin and death.

That's what Jeremiah longed for - but did not know how it would come about...

2. God's word became flesh and dwelt among us. An unthinkable thing happened - the creator became the created. God became human, first as a tiny vulnerable baby, then a questioning teenager, and then a man displaying both the characteristics of humanity:

Joy, grief, pain fear, anger at God's name being abused, but also the love, and power of God to love, heal, and forgive people.

3. Jesus did not bring something out of the blue. He was in the tradition of the Jewish faith, One God, who created a community with a lawful agreement on both sides to live in with.

John says – *“the law indeed was given through Moses.”*

Jesus later said, *“I have come to fulfil the law”*. Grace and truth, which is the best way to live out those laws, came through Jesus Christ.

Keeping to any rules is best done because we know they are the best for all. The rules of the road, “hands face space”, can also be done with grace and truth, despite being a flipping nuisance or heart breaking at times.

Jesus is recorded in Matthew saying *“love God and love your neighbour. All the Law and the prophets hang on these two commandments”*.

4. Finally, John says, *“No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known”*.

John is telling us Jesus is our human model for life for a relationship with God that will transcend human understanding. That will give us eternal life now - and through death. That is a new covenant agreement with God, which Jeremiah saw so many years ago.

John says, *“But to all who received him (Jesus), who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God”*.

Thanks be to God.