



Week Nine Devotions

Provided by the Ministry and Program Staff of
The Presbyterian Church of Stanley

Day 57

Scripture: Jeremiah 33:23-Jeremiah 47:7

The prophet Jeremiah lived a rough life. Being a prophet is never all rainbows and lollipops, but it seems that he had a more difficult time than most, probably because he was an uncompromising voice for God during a difficult time. Yet through it all God provided. When God called him as a prophet, He charged him and promised: "...to all whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you." (Jeremiah 1:7)

And we certainly see this played out in Jeremiah's life in our Scripture reading for today. Jeremiah spoke a very difficult truth to King Zedekiah—the kind of thing for which prophets were killed. He was thrown in jail. Yet, in a city ravaged by the most powerful army of the world, he was still fed. He received a loaf of bread every day, until all the bread of the city was gone. While in prison, Jeremiah, accused of weakening the morale of the soldiers and the people, fell into further disfavor. The government officials had him cast into the palace cistern to drown. However, the cistern was empty and Jeremiah had a nice soft place to land in the mud. When Jerusalem finally fell to the Chaldeans army, King Zedekiah's sons and all the palace nobles were killed and then the king himself had his eyes gouged out so that the last thing he would see was his son's death. The people were hauled off into exile in Babylon. Yet Jeremiah, who was also captured but remained behind, was well taken care of. "Do him no harm, but deal with him as he tells you," said Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon.

Sometimes the call God places on our life is difficult, burdensome. Sometimes God commands us to do difficult, even dangerous things. Yet when we live faithfully, God watches over and protects us. Years later Paul would write to the Thessalonians, "He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it." Do not fear God's call, for He is faithful. Fear the fear that would stop you from living it out.

~Eric Laverentz, Senior Pastor

Day 59

Scripture: Lamentations 2:1-Ezekiel 12:20

Ezekiel 2:1-5, "And he said to me, 'Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you.'² And as he spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet, and I heard him speaking to me. ³ And he said to me, 'Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. ⁴ The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them 'Thus says the Lord GOD.' ⁵ And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them.'"

Ezekiel's call took place at a turning point in the history of Israel. The Jews were in exile in Babylon because they had proved unfaithful to the Mosaic Covenant that their God had made with them. That covenant had warned the Israelites that if they proved unfaithful they could expect the divine discipline of their sovereign Lord who might even drive them from the land He had given them (Lev. 26; Deut. 28). The covenant also promised restoration to the land eventually. God would not cast His people off permanently no matter how far they departed from Him and His will. "... his aim is to convince the people of their utter unworthiness of any consideration from God, in order to shame them into true repentance."

Ezekiel reminded the exiles of their covenant unfaithfulness and of the faithfulness, holiness, and glory of Yahweh, their God. The Lord would judge, cleanse, and ultimately bless His people so that they and all people might come to appreciate His uniqueness and greatness. The purpose of the Exile was to turn God's people away from their sins and back to their Sovereign. The discipline they experienced was an evidence of God's love.

When it was over, a glorious future lay in store for them. A righteous ruler would eventually lead them back to a radically renovated land where they would enjoy peace, prosperity, and renewed worship.

"Ezekiel, as a watchman for Israel, warned her of the judgment that was imminent and stressed the need for individual responsibility as well as national accountability before God. Each Israelite was personally to turn to the Lord. Likewise, the whole nation must ultimately return to him."

We all face turning points in life and God calls us to be faithful to him in those moments. Our assurance is that He remains with us as our support and friend whatever the events and circumstances we encounter. He always walks with us just as he remained with Israel throughout the exile.

~Molly Jones, Associate Pastor for Discipleship

Day 60

Scripture: Ezekiel 12:21-Ezekiel 23:39

Ezekiel 15:2-3 "Son of Man, how is the wood of a vine better than that of a branch on any of the trees in the forest?" Is wood ever taken from it to make anything useful?"

The people of Israel were in captivity in Babylon. After being taken from their homeland, they lived a fairly easy life in Babylon. They were allowed to live in their own homes and have their own businesses. They became comfortable with their existence. Israel was often referred to as "the vine." A vine is only useful if it is producing fruit. The people of Israel had ceased to produce fruit. They had cut themselves off from God, not by reason of their captivity but by their own choice. We, too, can become so comfortable in our lives that we cease to be useful and nothing worthwhile can come from us. When we cut ourselves off from God, we can become a useless vine that you can't even make a peg from. John Wesley once prayed this prayer, "Lord, let me not live to be useless."

~Jan Zimmerman, Children's Ministries Director

Day 61

Scripture: Ezekiel 23:40-Ezekiel 35:15

Verse after verse God speaks through the prophet about how the people have turned away from God and are only concerned about their way. God wants the people to understand that He loves them and wants to protect them. God wants the same for us in 2009. We lose our way, become distracted, value things, focus on the "I" of our life, and forget to invite God into every action. God simply says these things to us: "I will search for my lost ones who have strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bandage the injured and strengthen the weak.", "When I have broken their chains of slavery and rescued them from those who enslaved them, then they will know that I am Lord.", and finally "You are my flock, the sheep of my pasture. You are my people, and I am your God." Encouraging to the people within this scripture, and still providing encouragement to you and I in 2009.

~Harlan Harper, Youth Ministries Director

Day 62

Scripture: Ezekiel 36:1-Ezekiel 47:12

Ezekiel 36:26-27 "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. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

While Ezekiel did not hold back from delivering God's message of judgment, he also delivered God's message of hope. God had a plan for his people. It is never God's plan to leave us with our hearts of stone. Chapter 37 tells of a vision Ezekiel was given. God shows him a valley full of dry bones. He then tells Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones telling them that the Lord commands them to rise, make tendons, flesh and breathe. Then before his very eyes a whole army appeared. Sometimes, all we feel is a heart of stone and all we see are dry bones. But we serve a God who promises to give us a new heart and to give us His Spirit within us. Why does He do it? Ezekiel 37:23 "They will be my people and I will be their God." This is God's plan for his people.

~Jan Zimmerman, Children's Ministries Director

Day 63

Scripture: Ezekiel 47:13-Daniel 8:27

Daniel 6:23, *When Daniel was lifted from the den, no wound was found on him, because he had trusted in His God.*

The book of Daniel is one of my favorites not only because of the great miracles it tells of Daniel being delivered from the lion's den, and his friends being delivered from the fiery furnace; but most importantly the prophecies of what is yet to come. Daniel, whose name means "God is (my) Judge" has been given divine wisdom to interpret dreams. He was exiled to Babylon and lived there during the whole period of the Babylonian exile. Daniel being adviser to King Nebuchadnezzar who ruled 44 yrs. of its 70 year existence, had a great influence over him as well as Darius later on. Three times Nebuchadnezzar called the God of Daniel "God". (2:47;3:29;4:34) as did King Darius (6:26). Throughout this book God reveals Himself through miracles and prophetic dreams. For 1000 years God had been nurturing the Hebrew nation for the purpose of establishing to the world the "one true God" in a world of idol-worshiping nations. At this point in time, God's nation had been destroyed by a nation that worshiped idols. The Jews, from the very beginning had always been falling into idolatry, and now at last, during the Babylonian exile, they are convinced their own God is the one true God.

Daniel was used by God at a time and place when the heathen court literally ruled the world in order to reveal to the world the one true God. He was unswerving in his religious convictions, yet at the same time loyal to the idolatrous kings he served under. When put to the test, Daniel refused to fall into the trap of idolatry and trusted God would deliver him. In today's world we face the same temptations, yet it is so difficult to not fall victim. Have there been times in your life when your faith has been tested?

As the famous spiritual goes; "Didn't my Lord, deliver Daniel, then why not every man"?

~Robyn Hartfield, Music Director

