

Will all be well?

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[0 : 00] Well, a few months ago we were thinking about signs, weren't we? A bit more about signs. Some signs are scary, aren't they?

! They're a warning, don't put your hand through the cage bars of the cage. Beware of the dog, don't go near the edge. Radiation hazard.

I'll tell you there's a sign that gives me a shiver every time I see it in Brighton. And I see it every time I go into town on the bus.

And this sign I don't think is meant to be a warning. It's actually on the One Church building in Gloucester Place, the old Gloucester Place Baptist Church now, called One Church.

And there's a sign on the wall there. Anybody know what it says? All will be well. All will be well. All will be well.

[1 : 01] Creepy, isn't it? Isn't that scary? It's like, you know, when the government says, keep calm and carry on, you know that it's time to panic. And anyway, why put that up on the church?

What's wrong with repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. All will be well. And what possible authority have you got for saying all will be well? None whatsoever.

Have you been following the news recently? Both of the archbishops recently seem to have more or less admitted that the Church of England is dying.

Some of the things they've said. It seems that the best thing they can offer is to go out in a blaze of glory.

It's rather like the charge of the light brigade, isn't it? But we know what the French commander said about the charge when the light cavalry charged the Russian guns.

[2 : 07] And the commander of the French forces at the battle, it's in Crimea, said, it's magnificent, but it isn't the war. It isn't war. It's folly.

It's madness. Isn't it madness some of the things that the Church of England has been saying recently? It's crazy. Surely if the Church of England is dying, you need to administer the remedy, not to blow the trumpet for the funeral, as it were.

Of course, all this is a bit West-centric, isn't it? I mean, I think the African Church in Africa is doing fine, thank you. It just shows how Eurocentric we are sometimes.

But the Church is blinkered by so-called progressive liberal thinking. And apparently if you disagree with that, you're a bigot.

Actually, here's a tip. Never call anybody a bigot. Why do I say that? Because if that's the strongest argument you've got, and I would suggest by ipso facto, by the same token, you're being a bigot yourself.

[3 : 24] You only say, call people bigot when you can't think of a rational argument. And of course, there's one other thing we learned from the news.

We've seen all the news this week. And that's if anything at all, whatever it is goes wrong, it must be someone else's fault. Anybody mention Boris Johnson?

I'm not the only one. I can equally talk about Nicola Sturgeon if you're Scottish. If anything goes wrong, it's always someone else's fault. Well, as I say, all will be well.

Well, I'm sorry. No, it won't. Stuart Tallinn's hymn that we've been singing is about remembering. It reminds us that communion is firstly about remembering.

So Phil did a little quiz this morning. Let me, perhaps for the kids, let me try a little quiz for the adults. Think major prophets.

[4 : 35] What do you know about the major prophets? Think Isaiah. Anybody would just like to shout anything that you know about Isaiah? What's in Isaiah? What are the high points of Isaiah?

Revelation of Christ. Revelation of Christ, yes. In particular, in what sense is it? He would be marred throughout his presence.

Yeah, okay. Yeah, that's certainly true. It wasn't the one I was thinking. I was thinking of the servant song. But yeah. But yeah. We know Isaiah, don't we? How about Daniel?

What happens in Daniel? Daniel is persecuted for his faith. But in the lion's den. Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah. The lion's den we remember.

[5 : 35] Maybe the time and time and half a times. Maybe the writing on the wall. You could probably even manage Ezekiel. Sorry? The dry bones.

The dry bones is perhaps the obvious one. And the wheels within wheels. And the serpent hiding the people. Yeah. Yeah. Well, yes.

And the God's chariot. Yes. Okay. So we know those. Now, what about Jeremiah? Anybody think of a highlight of Jeremiah? Jeremiah? Jeremiah. Jeremiah.

About what? Sorry? Eating. God asked one of his prophets to put some pieces on the grill.

I don't think so. Or is that Ezekiel? Yeah. No. I don't think so. Yeah. Jeremiah. Sorry?

[6 : 35] Weeping. Exactly. Nobody wants to be a Jeremiah, do they? You might just remember the Jeremiah 31, 31, which of course is about the new covenant.

But we always rip it out of context, don't we? Don't quite the rest of the passage. I've done that myself. Sorry?

Jeremiah 31, 31. I'll read it later on. It's about the new covenant. The covenant written on the hearts. Yeah. Yeah.

I mean, honestly, I have been reading Jeremiah, as you'll gather. But I ask myself the question, Jeremiah is the only prophet of the major prophets who gets two books. When did I last open the book of Lamentations?

It could literally be decades. We don't read Jeremiah, do we? Because it's so gloomy. But Jeremiah is the one who reminds us that not all will be well.

[7 : 42] Jeremiah, even in chapter 35, talks about the branch of David and the promise to David that there will always be a king on the line of David.

But Jeremiah actually goes on to say that even that could be abrogated if Judah rejects it. It's so gloomy. It says, Then my covenant with David, my servant, and my covenant with the Levites, who are priests ministering unto me, before me, can be broken.

And David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne. If we remember anything about Jeremiah, it's just a few positives.

What is actually a book of almost pure, unadulterated gloom. So turn with me, if you will, to Jeremiah chapter 9. Now just before I read this, here's a few cultural notes just before I need it, read it.

You'll notice in verse 17 that the Lord says, You may be wondering who these wailing women are.

[9 : 19] They're professional mourners. At that time, if you were having a funeral, you could hire some women to walk along with the body and to wail and to get people in the right mood for the funeral, as it were, by crying and wailing.

And of course, if you're going to hire professionals, you want the best team, don't you? What do you do? You read the reviews and ask for recommendations for your friends. And that's what it says in verse 17.

Find the most skillful of them. We need them now. And then when they're there, he actually goes on and says, Look, you wailing women, make sure you pass the craft on to your daughters, because they're going to be needed as well.

So let me read. I'm going to read Jeremiah 9 and then part of Jeremiah 23. So brace yourself, brothers and sisters, for some pure gloom.

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.

[10 : 27] Oh, that I had in the desert a lodging place for travelers, that I might leave my people and go away from them.

For they are all adulterers, a crowd of unfaithful people. They make ready their tongue like a bow to shoot lies. It is not by truth that they triumph in the land.

They go from one sin to another. They do not acknowledge me, declares the Lord. Beware of your friends. Do not trust anyone in your clan.

Every one of them is a deceiver. Every friend a slanderer. Friend deceives friend and no one speaks the truth. They have taught their tongues to lie.

They weary themselves with sinning. You live in the midst of deception. In their deceit they refuse to acknowledge me, declares the Lord. Therefore, this is what the Lord Almighty says.

[11:30] See, I will refine and test them. What else can I do because of the sin of my people? Their tongue is a deadly arrow. It speaks deceitfully. With their mouths they all speak cordially to their neighbors.

But in their hearts they set traps for them. Should I not punish them for this, declares the Lord? Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?

I will weep and wail for the mountains. Take up a lament concerning the wilderness grasslands. They are desolate and untraveled.

The lowing of cattle is not heard. The birds have all fled and the animals are gone. Where have they gone? They've gone to Jerusalem. I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals.

I will lay waste the towns of Judah so that no one can live there. Who is wise enough to understand this? Who has been instructed by the Lord and can explain it?

[12:30] Why has the land been ruined and laid waste like a desert that no one can cross? The Lord said, It is because they have forsaken my law which I set before them.

They have not obeyed me or followed my law. Instead, they have followed the stubbornness of their hearts. They have followed the bowels as their ancestors taught them. Therefore, this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says.

See, I will make this people eat bitter food and drink poisoned water. I will scatter them among nations that neither they nor their ancestors have known. And I will pursue them with a sword until I have made an end of them.

This is what the Lord Almighty says. Consider now. Call for the wailing women to come. Send for the most skillful of them.

Let them come quickly and wail over us till our eyes overflow with tears and water streams for our eyelids. The sound of wailing is heard from Zion.

[13:34] How ruined we are! How great is our shame! We must leave our land because our houses are in ruins. Now you women hear the word of the Lord.

Open your ears to the words of his mouth. Teach your daughters how to wail. Teach one another a lament. Death has climbed in through our windows and entered our fortresses.

It has removed the children from the streets and the young men from the public squares. This is what the Lord declares. Dead bodies will lie like dung on the open field, like cut corn behind the reaper, with no one to gather them.

This is what the Lord says. Let not the wise boast of their wisdom, or the strong boast of their strength, or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this, for they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth.

For in these I delight, declares the Lord. The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will punish all those who are circumcised only in the flesh, Egypt, Judah, Edom, Ammon, Moab, all who live in the wilderness in distant places.

[14:53] For all these nations are really uncircumcised, and even the whole house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart. Jeremiah say, it will be all right, folks.

Not at all. Let's go turn to what he says particularly about the priests, and we find that in Jeremiah chapter 23. So I think at verse 16.

This is what the Lord Almighty says. Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you. They fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord. They keep saying to those who despise me, the Lord says you will have peace.

And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts, they say no harm will come to you. But which of them has stood in the counsel of the Lord to see or hear his word?

[16:07] Who has listened and heard his word? See, the storm of the Lord will burst out in wrath, a whirlwind swirling down on the heads of the wicked. The anger of the Lord will not turn back until he fully accomplishes the purposes of his heart.

In days to come you will understand it clearly. I did not send these prophets, yet they run with their message. I did not speak to them, and yet they have prophesied.

But if they had stood in my counsel, they would have proclaimed my words to the people, and I would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds. Am I only a God nearby, declares the Lord, not a God far away?

Who can hide in secret places so that I cannot see them, declares the Lord? Do I not fill heaven and earth, declares the Lord? I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name.

They say, I had a dream, I had a dream. How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets who prophesy the delusions of their own minds?

[17 : 19] They think the dreams they tell one another will make people forget my name, just as their ancestors forgot my name through bar worship. Let the prophet who has a dream, let it recount the dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully.

For what has straw to do with grain, declares the Lord, is not my word like a fire, declares the Lord, like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? I'll stop there.

We need to remember this, brothers and sisters, I think. It's the false prophets who prophesy there will be peace. It's the false prophets who prophesy that...

Well, who discount the word of the Lord. They may not be telling us to worship Baals, but they're certainly not giving attention to what the word of the Lord actually says.

There are too many prophets in the professing church, one way or another, who prophesy a different message, a message that all will be well, there will be peace.

[18 : 36] It's not just the Anglicans, or the Gloucester Place Baptist Church, which is a place where the word was once preached faithfully. I was reading recently that a lecturer at the Methodist College in Cliff College was recently dismissed because he stood up for the traditional Christian view of marriage.

He lost his job because of it. We shouldn't be saying, oh, we should be well. We should be wailing for the state of the church, those who prophesy unfaithfully.

What could be a better description of the state of our land in the West or indeed a prophesying church? A true prophet doesn't preach the message, all will be well.

That's the message of the false prophet. A true prophet does not mimic the ideas of the surrounding culture, dressing them up in religious language. It speaks the true word of the Lord.

Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. And people say, oh, that lacks compassion. But, you know, if you say somebody is behaving wrongly, then, you know, you're lacking in compassion.

[20 : 01] But Jeremiah doesn't see it that way, does he? Look at Jeremiah's view of compassion. Chapter 9, verse 1 that we read. 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. True compassion cries out for the state of God's people.

It cries out for the state of the church. Do we do that? Weep day and night for the lost? We couldn't do it, of course. I mean, it's arguable that it actually drove Jeremiah to near insanity and suggested he's probably suffered from, he was probably bipolar.

We can't weep like that for the day and night or every day and night.

Or we couldn't do it at all, could we? But yet, perhaps that's what we should be doing. Not, you know, declaring the end of the Church of England or whatever it is with a fanfare.

[21 : 09] But weeping for the state of the church. Calling out for God to intervene. And that's the other thing they don't do. They don't call out for God to intervene.

I mean, maybe saying, oh, we'll be well, is kind of saying, oh, God will look after you. But that's not the God of the Bible, is it? They don't call out to God to intervene, which Jeremiah does, even though sometimes it seems that the Lord's reply is, I'm having nothing to do with it.

So stand firm, brothers and sisters. We're going to remember the Last Supper. But remember that the Last Supper is about betrayal.

About the broken trust of Peter. It's a covenant signed in blood, written in blood.

It's a covenant that's ratified by a death. It's the final breaking of the old covenant.

[22 : 17] That's why we need a new covenant. Because the old one was finally broken in spite of God's patience and giving them more than one chance to repent.

In the end, it was broken. It's about the destruction of the temple. It's about the fall of Jerusalem. It's about Judah's final rejection of the house and line of David, isn't it? And I'm saying, we'll not have this king to reign over us. And yet we have to say that even if he no longer lives in

post-Christian Europe, even if he no longer lives in many of our professing churches, there is still a king on David's throne.

And when we come to the crucifixion, we remember his crowning. But there is still a king on David's throne.

So let's let Jeremiah have the final say. Jeremiah 31, 29 to 34. This is the passage about the new covenant.

[24 : 02] I'll give it a bit of context. I really need to read the whole book. But let me give you a bit of context. Starting at verse 29. In those days, people will no longer say, the parents have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge.

Instead, everyone will die for their own sin. Whoever eats sour grapes, their own teeth will be set on edge. The days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

It will not be like the covenant I made with our ancestors, 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 that I will make with the people 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 they teach their neighbors or say to one another, 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.

[25 : 20] There will be a new covenant and yet, as we were thinking of Ezekiel, Ezekiel is told that God can raise up sons of Abraham from dry bones.

None of us, as far as I know, are of Jewish origin. None of us are literally of the house of Judah. And yet, we do claim the benefit of that covenant.

We do claim that those who God raises up truly will provide the covenant written in their hearts.

And this is what we are acknowledging, this is what we're thinking as we turn to the communion.

We're remembering a death that the old covenant with Abraham was ratified by a death, the death of an animal.

Sacrifices of Moses were the death of an animal. There has to be a death. And we remember a death. And there has to be blood because without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

[26 : 26] But let's turn in faith to say, yes, the bread, this is the bread of the covenant. There is a, the covenant is ratified by a death as it should be.

The covenant is, is made by spilt blood as it must be. And so that's why we turn and we remember to the bread and the wine.

Amen.