

God's Heart For Restoration (Pre-Communion Service)

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Date: 13 November 2021

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[0 : 00] And that's the beautiful castle that we see today. It was completely restored, completely new. And you can see that in so many things, you know, paintings or, if you're like me, classic cars being restored, made into something that it was supposed to be, something new, something beautiful, something great.

And of course, people love these TV shows with the houses and making them all nice again and all these things. And we know the idea of restoration and they're all types. But the Bible has some sort of restoration, which is far more important, that is far better even than any other type.

And it's what we start to see here in Jeremiah. It's really what we see in so much of the Bible. But the book of Jeremiah is really quite a bleak book in many ways.

It's kind of hinted at in verse 29. All these things God is going to do. It's quite bleak, really.

And what that's about is the exile of God's people. They're going to be put to a foreign land. They're going to be invaded. They're going to be taken into exile against their will.

[1 : 16] They're going to have to live in another place under the control of other people. Their nation, their livelihood, everything they've known is going to be taken away from them.

And what they will want is restoration, renewal, for everything to be made right again, to be as it was, or even to be better. Unfortunately, Jeremiah does not only have that message of breaking down, of overthrowing, of destroying, because as that verse says, so I watch over them to build and to plant.

God will do the work. And what we have really in this passage is a beautiful message of restoration, of renewal. We live in a difficult world.

And sometimes we wonder what God is doing. Sometimes we wonder why things are the way that they are. And the reality is that we know ourselves, that we have a problem, that we need restoration, that we are not invincible, that we are not here forever, that we decay, that we even, some of us, realise that we do things that are wrong, that we are turned against God.

But what we see is that God cares about us, that God, as verse 20 says, even yearns for people. Even in all our sin, what he offers us and what he promises to all who come to him is restoration.

[2 : 49] It's something new, something, as we know from the New Testament, that's even better. He promises that we will live forever, that we will be in a place of no tears or pain or suffering.

All suffering will end. And that is true restoration. That is what we see in this passage.

Hopelessness. Hopelessness. Dismay replaced by restoration, by something better.

Darkness replaced by light. And growth that God brings. Building and planting that he brings. Even in the infertile ground of this life.

And we always have this help, this consolation, that God will restore everything and he will even restore us. That he will make everything new and that he cares about this world.

And he cares, most importantly, about the people of this world. We are not abandoned by him. He is here for us.

[3 : 51] So there's three things, briefly, that I want us to see tonight. First of all, there's the hope of restoration, verses 15 to 19. And then verse 20, God's heart for restoration.

And finally, there's the peace of restoration. So first of all, the hope of restoration. And hope comes when things are going badly, usually.

If things are going well, we don't really think about hope, do we? We don't really have a reason to because we're just enjoying the here and now. And we don't have to look ahead and think, what could be better? What might happen that will improve my situation?

But certainly the Israelites, they needed hope. They could not see a way out of their situation, out of their circumstances. That's the place they've come to. A time of grief, a time of mourning, of great weeping.

As verse 15 says, lamentation and bitter weeping. And we're told that Rachel is like a mother, weeping for the whole nation.

[4 : 52] That's the image that's given. The mother of Israel weeping for them all. A time of exile. And yet even in that, because we've got the New Testament, we're kind of pointed to hope, aren't we?

Even in that bitter wailing of lamentation, we're pointed to hope. Because if we were to go to Matthew's Gospel and to chapter 2 and verse 18, we'd see this verse quoted.

And of course, in Matthew's Gospel, it's just after the birth of Jesus. And Herod has decided that to remove Jesus, what he'll do is he'll murder all the children. He wanted to remove anyone who could challenge his power.

Obviously a time of lamentation, a time of weeping, a time of seeming hopelessness. But of course, what we know from the Gospel of Matthew is that this was the time of hope.

Because Jesus had been born. The Saviour was here, the one who can restore each one of us. Everyone who believes in him. Even in that, even in that verse, we are pointed to the hope of restoration.

[5 : 59] The hope that only Jesus can bring. But if we go back to Jeremiah, God speaks from verse 16. And he gives hope of them returning to their own land, to their home country.

Keep your voice from weeping and your eyes from tears, for there is a reward for your work, declares the Lord. And they shall come back from the land of the enemy. There is hope for your future, declares the Lord.

And your children shall come back to their own lands. I think that's a very relatable idea, the hope of home. We love our homes. We love being in a comfortable place.

We love being with people that we love and who love us. And of course, as the Wizard of Oz says, there's no place like home. And even in that film, isn't there? There's just that desire to be home, to be back.

And when we're far, we want to be home. Recently, my family home was sold. And in a way, it's a house. It's bricks and mortar. The people aren't there.

[7 : 05] But at the same time, you know, there's that sense of loss of a place that was so important. And we feel that we want to be home. And maybe you're beginning to wonder, what does all this have to do with us and with God?

We're not in exile. We're not refugees. We're not really far from where we want to be, most of us at least. But what it points us to is something more like Augustine said, our hearts are restless until they can find rest in you, rest in God.

Our hearts are restless. We are not at home. We are not at peace. We are not at rest until we come to God and still our hearts are with him.

And true rest and restoration comes from finding God and trusting in Christ alone. He's the one who promises to give us rest, to cleanse us from all our sin, to make us into new people with new hearts. We have this missing from our lives without Jesus. We're not in exile, but we are in exile because we sin and we're without God. And unless we've got faith in Jesus, that problem of sin keeps us away from God.

[8 : 21] It keeps us far from God. It brings hostility even between us and God and no peace, no rest, no hope of restoration. And the people know it because they grieve from verse 18.

They're being disciplined. And they even say in verse 19 that God seems to be turned away from them. Their sin has made them far from God as if his back was to them.

And that reminds us that sin isn't simply the things that we do. Of course it is. But it's the attitude that we have. Sorry, the people are turned away from God, I should say.

The people are turned away. They've turned their backs on God. We turn our back on God. Our attitude to God stinks.

We don't want him. If we don't have faith in Jesus, we're rejecting him. And we have things that we love more than God, things that we want more than God. And we're distracted by these things.

[9 : 21] So distracted so easily away from him. You know, I sit down and work. And it's so easy just to pick up the phone. Not to phone anyone, but just to browse around.

Or to end up on YouTube watching a video. I know I'm not the only one who ends up doing these things. We're easily distracted people. And even more so when it comes to God. We turn away from him. We want to go our own way. We want our own things. We don't want him. We turn away. And that's a shameful thing in verse 19.

That's what the people of Israel come to realize. And this is where the hope comes. I know there's not been much hope yet. But this is where the hope comes. Because they realize their sin. They realize that they've done wrong.

They realize that they have a problem. I was ashamed and I was confounded. They say that they needed discipline. They needed restored.

[10:21] That's what the people say in verses 18 and 19. And what they do is, it's really important. Because they're not just sorry for the consequences of their sin.

Of course they are. But what they realize is they have turned away from God. That they have sinned against God. As David says in Psalm 51, against you. You only have I sinned.

That's their problem. And they realize it. They know it. They have come to that point. It may be rock bottom. But they have come to that point. Or at least they will come to that point.

Where they see, I have turned away from God. I have gone my own way. I have done wrong. And that is the point that every one of us needs to reach.

Where we realize that we have gone against God. We have turned away from him. We have done what we want. And yet there is hope. And it is the place of hope.

[11:19] The place of complete devastation at our own sin is the place of hope. No one wants to feel bad about themselves. No one wants to realize that they've got a problem. Please see that that is where we are closest to the hope.

Because we can turn to God. We can go to him. We call it repentance. It's changing direction. It's going back to God. Turning back to him. Being restored by him.

And that is where the hope comes in. Hope comes when we know that we need help. Hope comes when we know that we have gone away from him. And that we need help.

More than help. We need complete heart change. We need a transplant. We need complete restoration and renewal. That's where hope comes. When we see that about ourselves.

And see our needs. And yet there's nothing that we can do about it personally. There's nothing that we do. What we need is a God who cares about us.

[12:19] A God who loves us. A God who wants to give us these things. And that is exactly what we see in verse 20. Our second point is God's heart for restoration. And I think this is one of the most beautiful verses in the whole Bible.

My heart yearns for him. That's what God says. I will surely have mercy on him. On Israel. On his own people. We see a God who is love.

Who is compassionate. Who is merciful. And good. Who forgives us all our sins. We see what God is truly like. We see what his heart is like.

It's the heart of a father who loves his son so deeply. That's what he's saying in verse 20. Is Ephraim. That's another way of saying Israel. My dear son. My darling child.

That's the language he uses for these people who have gone against him. Who have turned away. Who are about to go into exile because they've done so much wrong. And still he can say.

[13:21] Still he can say. My darling child. My heart yearns for these people. My heart yearns for Israel. That's what he says. It's not a complete rejection.

There's still hope. God's heart is to restore them. And we know a bit of what that's like. With family and friends. And sometimes we have fallouts. Don't we? But with the people that we love.

There's that desire to fix things. To make things right. To not be fighting. To not be arguing. To start speaking again. And hopefully with people that we love.

Forgiveness comes quickly. And we don't forget each other. We don't reject each other. And how much more amazing is it. When we go against God so much. And yet still he sees us as his children.

He doesn't forget about us. Or reject us. And to not remind you of the prodigal son. The story that Jesus told. The prodigal runs away from his father. He takes his inheritance.

[14:18] He spends it all. What people would say was probably living a good life. But what he realizes it was worthless. And so he goes back to his father. And what he finds.

He's terrified. But what he finds when he sees his father. Is a man waiting with open arms. Ready to embrace him. And to welcome him. Because he's his son. His darling child. That is how God is with Israel.

And that is how God is with everyone who comes to him. Knowing they're sinners. Knowing they need him. He welcomes with open arms.

That's his heart. That's who he is. Welcoming because he loves us. This is the very center of who God is. And when the Bible talks about the heart.

It's not just the emotions. As we might think of it. It's the thing that drives everything that someone does. The center of who we are as people. So when God says something about his heart.

[15:18] We know we're seeing something amazing. We're being given insight into who the creator of all things is. The one who knows everything. The one who is perfect in every way.

And he opens his heart to us. He shows us who he is. And what does he do? He yearns for us. And again we know what that's like. Last two years we've known what that's like.

How many people have struggled so much being away from family and friends. Yearning to be with them. Desperate to see them. To be with them. And waiting so long.

We know what it is to yearn. And just think. God yearns. For his people have turned away. God yearns for us. He loves us.

He wants us. He knows our sin. He knows our hearts. He knows everything about us. Even the things that we would rather no one knew. He knows them. And still.

[16:15] He yearns for us. We've gone against him. We've hated him. And still. He yearns for us. He will welcome us. He cares deeply for us.

What Israel will do at least. Is they'll confess their sin. They'll say. I relented. I was ashamed. I was confounded. They go back to God.

And what they find. Is a God who loves them. Who yearns for him. For them. And when we see. How God yearns for us. For our restoration.

Then we need to maybe ask ourselves. How do I see God? Is this how I see God? Do I really see him as this. This figure? Or. Do we maybe sometimes see God as.

An angry figure. One who is only angry with us. And if we just. Are really good. Maybe. Maybe we'll be good enough for heaven. Is that how we see him? Do we see him as someone.

[17:10] As we just need to try and keep on the good side of. Or maybe. He's accepted us. Yes. But maybe. He'll get fed up of us. Do we think that he'll forget us? No.

The reality is. The wonderful thing is. Is that he yearns for us. And that is why he restores us. The likes of me. And you.

No offense. He yearns for us. He wants us. He longs for us. It's staggering. And when we think about God.

That is the sort of thing we can think about. One who yearns for us. Despite our sin. He will restore us. It is never too late. We're never too far gone. He will welcome.

With open arms. In all the. Suffering of this world. In everything that goes wrong. He yearns for us. And he doesn't. Abandon us. And if you need proof of that. If you think.

[18:06] Well that's just words on a page. Just look at the New Testament. Look. At what he does. Look how he sends. His own. Son. And look how that son.

Was so willing to come. To live. To die. On the cross for us. That is yearning for us. That is love for us. That is.

Great compassion. He was willing to come. And die for us. The son. Because he wants to save us. Because he wants us. How can we doubt. How much God loves us. How can we doubt the salvation.

How can we say. That God. Is only angry with us. Because he yearns for us. And he will surely have mercy. On everyone. Who comes to him.

This is his heart. This is who he is. He wants to restore us. He wants. To forgive. He wills. That all. Be saved. And what we must do.

[19:00] Is come to him. In repentance. And faith. And he will never reject. He will never cast anyone out. As Christ says. He will restore. That's who God is.

In his heart. The centre of who he is. The one who wants to restore. Who yearns. For us. But third and finally. There's the. The peace. Of restoration.

Really just the. The last verses. Of our passage. From verse 24. We're restored. Yes. And the people are going to experience that. He'll restore their fortunes. Verse 23.

A habitation of righteousness. A place that is blessed. A holy hill. And Judah and all its cities. Shall dwell there together. The farmer and those who wander. With their flocks.

This restoration. What it does. Is it brings us peace. It brings us peace. It brings us contentment. It brings us happiness. It brings us rest. And what it looks like. Well it looks like community.

[19 : 57] Actually. Or at least that's what we'd call it nowadays. Community. Unity. It's peace. With each other. As God restores our fortunes. That cities dwell there together. Farmers.

And those who wander with their flocks. There's peace. There's prosperity. There's happiness. Everyone's living together in the towns. The farmers and the shepherds. In harmony. It's people. It's God's people together. And let's face it. We live in a divided world. And we won't get into all that. But it's definitely a divided world. And maybe there's a danger. These things could seep into a church.

But the restoration that's promised. Is God's people together. And as we live as believers. We live in that. We are one people. We are his people.

Those who he has placed together. Who he has brought together. Who he has given a community to. The church to. We're not a nation. We're not Israel. We do not have a land. We are the church.

[20 : 53] We are his people. We're the continuation of this. Yes. But we are his people. We're all over the world. We're all over Glasgow. We're all over Scotland. And all over the world.

And we have peace. We live out that community. That. These people. From all walks of life. Those who God yearns for. Glued together by a shared love. For Jesus.

Hard maybe. But it's important. Something that we look forward to. Perfectly. In heaven. In the future. Future. But. We only have this. Because what we have.

Is peace. With God. That's what we need. He's the one who restores. He's the one. Who builds. And plants. And again. It's an image of peace. Not the overthrowing. The destroying.

It's building. And planting. It's that. Image. Of peace. And verse 29. They'll no longer say. The fathers have eaten sour grapes. And the children's teeth are set on edge.

[21 : 48] There's a change. There's no being on edge. There's no feeling sour. There is peace for people. Peace comes with trusting God. The blessing comes from him.

He says. When I restore their fortunes. In verse 23. And in Psalm 126. As we sang. It's him who does it. It's him who gives us rest.

In all life's difficulties. He is there. In everything that we go through. He is there. He gives us forgiveness. And he is with us. In our lives.

He even says. I will satisfy the weary soul. And every languishing soul. I will replenish. That's the peace that he brings.

And of course. That's looking to the future. To heaven. And yet it's true now. As we go through life. We have difficult times. We have times where we feel like. We're languishing. Where life is difficult.

[22 : 43] And we're weary. And yet he says. He will give us. Satisfaction. He will replenish us. He will be with us. And that is what he promises. That is the peace.

That we have with God. The peace. Of restoration. The hope. That it brings. And it's like. What Jesus says. Isn't it? Come to me. All you are. Who are weary. And heavy laden.

And I will give you rest. We may be weary. And burdened. By our sin. By the effects of sin. In our lives. By everything. That we go through. All that's wrong.

With the world. But Jesus says. Come to me. And God promises. Refreshment. And satisfaction. He promises us. Peace. And rest. And is it not beautifully.

Pictured by Jeremiah himself. As he says. And at this. I awoke. And looked. And my sleep. Was pleasant. To me. Isn't that the best feeling. When you wake up. And you actually feel.

[23 : 37] Rested. Sleep was pleasant. Well that's the picture. That we have here. As Jeremiah is given this image. Of restoration. Of peace.

Of something new. Of peace with God. He's refreshed by it. And it seems like a minor thing. But it's huge for us. Jeremiah is living. In the sort of place.

We'd be more likely to see in the news. War. Invasion. Famine. Death. No peace and contentment. And yet. Even amongst all that. Even as he lives through that.

And as he has these visions. He's given. He's given peace. And we have that same thing. Yes we have peace now. But we look ahead. And to where things will be perfect.

Our circumstances. Physically aren't anywhere near as bad. As they were for Jeremiah. But it still applies. As we live in a broken world. As we see. Our own hearts.

[24 : 31] And as we're more and more aware. Of what's wrong with us. And as we see the rest of the world. And what's wrong with it. And yet we look ahead. And I even can rest in that. Knowing that God has something more in store.

That there is the hope of the gospel. That there is hope for those who place their faith in Jesus. That there is renewal. And that there is a place. Where we will be perfect. Where we will be perfect. Where there will be no suffering. I'm not saying. Of course. That this is easy. As we live this life. It's not that we're. Suddenly just feeling. Relaxed and restful. In this world.

And yet God does give us these things. And he does give us hope. In this world. To look ahead to. To comfort us. Through this world. To the place where as Revelation 21. 4 says.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death shall be no more. Neither shall there be mourning. Nor crying. Nor pain anymore. For the former things. Have passed away. And they will pass away.

[25 : 29] It will be a distant memory. And we'll feel that pleasant rest. Every single day. We suffer with sin. We suffer with everything else in this world.

But when I see this passage in Jeremiah. I'm reminded. That with faith in God. With trusting. That he restores. That he forgives. That he loves us. And yes. That he yearns for us.

And that he promises us restoration. We are able to have peace. And comfort. In this life. And in the next. And that is the hope. That the gospel offers.

That is what we have. To comfort us. And to look forward to. And it is what I hope. Everyone here. Has this evening. May God.

Bless these thoughts to us.