

Independence? - No!

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Date: 24 August 2015

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn briefly now to Jeremiah chapter 33, and we'll read some verses from the beginning. We're going to look mainly at verse 3, but let's just read from the beginning.

Jeremiah 33. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still shut up in the court of the guard. Thus says the Lord, who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it, the Lord is his name.

Call to me and I will answer you. And will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. This was a desperate situation for Jeremiah and for the people of Jerusalem.

We read here that he was still enclosed, shut up in the court of the guard. Not only that, but the same situation back in the previous chapter is mentioned again at the beginning of the chapter there.

At that time, the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem. And Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah.

[1 : 07] Most of the people, including the king, were against Jeremiah as a man of God who told them the truth. So that was a difficult situation for Jeremiah. But now the things that he had been given by God to prophesy of, this enemy surrounding the city of Jerusalem, that had actually come into being.

Yet the people still didn't turn to God. The city was besieged. Things were desperate. They were running out of food. And like as you know, in that type of siege in the past, things go from bad to worse.

Unless they either capitulate to the enemy or else the enemy just manages to overrun them. That's how they were. What do you do in that sort of situation?

Where do you look to for help? What was Jeremiah in need of? Well, that's answered, isn't it, in the way in which God came to him.

He needed more than his own wisdom. He needed more than his own strength and his own resources. And God came to remind him really of what he needed to do and where his help was to come from.

[2 : 13] Call upon me and I will answer you and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. And I want to just draw from this passage one or two points for ourselves today.

Because obviously you yourselves can see already that that situation answers to some of the things that happen in our lives. Even if they're not absolutely as critical and as desperate as that.

Nevertheless, we are at times closed in. Life gets closed in. Life sometimes comes to be restricted. Life comes in the providence of God to carry hard things to us.

Decisions that are really difficult to make. And God is assuring us that when we call to him, he will answer. Not only will he answer, but he will answer in a way that will show us what he calls here great and hidden things that you have not known.

In other words, it's God's opportunity to reveal to Jeremiah things about God himself. That even a man like Jeremiah, godly as he was, had not actually come to understand the way he would understand them from now on.

[3 : 33] Two things especially. First of all, let's just think about how our circumstances teach us to depend upon God. Now that doesn't mean that we will always listen to our circumstances.

None of us can say as we look back over our schooling. Some of us are still in school, of course. But none of us can say as we look back over our school, we always listen to our teacher. None of us can say we always listen to parents when they tell us things that we know are for our good.

It goes in one ear or the other. But our circumstances do teach us. And if we're listening to our circumstances and are dealing with our circumstances daily in the way we should, then they teach

us to depend upon God.

Even at the easiest of times, we need God to direct our lives to his glory. Now you cast your mind back to the first temptation that human beings faced.

Way back in the time of the creation in the Garden of Eden, the first temptation that came to Adam and to Eve, to Eve particularly firstly, was the temptation to act independently of God.

[4 : 44] That's the title of our study, just to give it a title. Independence? No. Nothing to do with politics, by the way. It's just simply that this passage we're looking at as a passage that really does say to us, this is about dependence on God.

Life is about dependence on God. Life is about having God, as we said to the children, as the director of your life. And that means you put your life in his hands. You depend upon him.

You actually look to him as the one who's going to direct you through all the passages of providence that come into your life. And here is the first temptation.

You remember the devil, the serpent said, Has God said? Firstly, beginning with trying to inject a doubt, not only in what God had said, but in the truthfulness of God.

Was God really right in saying this to you? That you could eat all the trees of the garden except this one? In the day that you eat of it, God had said, You shall die.

[5 : 50] But the serpent said, Well, if you do this, your eyes will be opened. And you shall be as God. Or as God's, as some translations have. Now that really is just arguing or setting out in the temptation to the first human beings.

You know, if you act independently of God, you'll become autonomous. You'll be in charge of your own lives. And that will be a lot better for you than having to depend on God. Why should you look to someone else to control your life?

To look after your life. Even in this perfect environment, it's fitting and proper that you should manage your own life. That you should look after your own life. That you shouldn't be dependent on this God who created you.

That's the thrust of the first temptation. And they yielded to it. And what happened? Well, it became, as you know, as God said. But you see, what happened then is just, as they became, in their own way of thinking, autonomous or independent of God.

Acting not in dependence on God, but independently of God. Well, pride kicks in straight away, doesn't it? And self-management takes over.

[7 : 03] And they try and cover their nakedness and embarrassment and guilt with their own methods. And they try and hide from God in the trees of the garden.

Adam sought to find refuge in the hiding place there till God called him out. Self-management took over. Independence from God.

That's now how we are naturally. None of us can blame Adam for the way our heart is.

Our heart is willingly biased towards self-management of life. Biased willingly towards looking to ourselves and not acting in dependence on someone else.

Don't you know that voice in your mind, just as I know that voice in my mind that says at times, Well, no, I really can't ask below my dignity to ask for help.

[8 : 01] Surely it's better that I manage this myself. That's the kind of attitude we have as fallen human beings. I'm sure there's a sense in which on the human level, there's an element of good thinking in that.

We want to be able to do things for ourselves, even when we're ill, even when we're facing the limitations of old age or whatever. It's right, it's good, it's proper that we should say to people, Well, you know, you'll have to try and do this yourself as far as possible.

And then if you can't, I'll help you. We do have that emphasis and that's good. But that's not what we're talking about, really. What we're talking about is the essence of that human spirit, of that sinful human bias towards independence and self-management that says, I'd much rather look after my own life, thank you very much.

It's below my dignity to ask God for help. But you know, we don't realize until God shows us that in our relationship with God as fallen human beings, we actually don't have any dignity.

We think to ourselves, it's below my dignity to come to God. And God all the time is saying to us in the world, what dignity are you talking about? The dignity of a fallen sinner?

[9 : 26] The dignity of somebody who's in a desperate need and doesn't realize it? The dignity of somebody who needs to be saved out of their predicament of guilt, of being hemmed in and closed

in by the clutches of sin?

That's the fault, isn't it, in our human thinking. Until God puts it right, we have no actual dignity in terms of righteousness, in terms of acceptance with God until he puts it right.

Then, of course, things change. It's turned around. But the fact that that's the case, that we don't have the dignity we think we have spiritually or morally, it does not mean that we are insignificant to God.

It does not mean that God doesn't want to know about us. It doesn't mean that we don't have a place that matters to God. After all, just look at what's happening in this passage.

Here are people who have just gone on time after time, day after day, year after year, rebelling against God, refusing God's word, putting God's prophet into isolation or house arrest or confinement, whatever it is.

[10:40] You would think, wouldn't you, that God would say, well, I'm just going to wash my hands of these people. I'm not going to bother with them anymore. Why should I? But no, God says, I actually have a very glowing future for these people.

And Jeremiah, I'm coming to you to tell you about this. It's the Lord who came to him. The word of the Lord came to him a second time.

Thus says the Lord. Aren't you thankful for that today? That God does not leave it to your inclination, to your initiative, to your best desires, to seek him, to look to him, to call upon him.

Aren't you thankful today that he's the sovereign Lord? Not only is he in charge of all the circumstances of your life, not only has he purposed everything that comes to pass in your life, but he's the God that's concerned about your life in these circumstances.

Concerned enough to speak to you. Concerned enough to come to you and say, look, I'm here for you to call upon me. I'm not a God who's distant, a God who's just removed myself from your life, removed myself from all that's going on in your life.

[12:02] Call upon me. Call to me. I'm available. Call to me. Call to me. I'm available. Pick up the phone of prayer and give me a call.

We mean so much to God. And God is really saying to Jeremiah, just reminding him here, I think. He's saying effectively what God is saying to Jeremiah is, Jeremiah, trust me.

Trust me. I know what I'm doing. I know what the outcome of this is going to be. I know all about these people. I know what their future is. I know what lies down the road centuries from now.

I'm going to bring someone up the branch, the righteous branch for David's house. By that he meant Jesus Christ. Such a long, long way into the future.

And yet God is bringing to Jeremiah these very great truths and facts there and then in the circumstances. Just to assure him, Jeremiah, you trust me.

[13:06] I know exactly what's going on. I know what to do. I know how to direct your life. Just call unto me and I will show you.

And that's really the heart of dependence upon God. When our circumstances teach us to depend upon God and speak to our hearts saying, you need to trust in God for this.

You need to trust in God for everything in your life. God himself is really coming through his word and saying, you call to me. You put your life in my hands and I will answer you.

I will look after you. You recall Jesus and the disciples coming to him in Matthew chapter 18. And when the disciples came to him with some little children, in fact, there were infants on the scene. You remember how Jesus answered their query as to who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And calling to him a child. This is really a very small child, dependent child.

[14:16] He put him in the midst and said, truly I say to you, unless you turn and become like little children, or unless you repent and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And there they were looking at things and saying, who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

And he's saying, what are you talking about in the kingdom of heaven for? Make sure, first of all, that you are in the kingdom of heaven. How do you get into the kingdom of heaven? By becoming like a little child.

What does that mean? Innocent? No. It does mean dependent. You look at an infant. A baby really is what he's talking about.

A baby of just a few days old. What is it that really marks that child more than anything else?

Well, it's dependence. Everything needs to be done for it. It needs to depend upon its mother and its parents. Or on others as well. But it needs to depend particularly upon mother and father and mother for looking after its daily needs.

[15 : 20] For feeding it. It is absolutely dependent. It can do nothing for itself. For himself or herself. And that's the picture that Jesus gives us.

It's really the best illustration of how we enter the kingdom of God. We become dependent on God. It's not climbing over high fences of your own achievement.

It's just getting as low as you possibly can. And casting out all self-management from your life. And on your knees.

You come to God. And you say, Lord. If you don't look after me. If you can. That's what it's saying to us.

Our circumstances teach us. Dependence on God. And dependence on God. God is illustrated by this little baby. In the arms of its mother.

[16 : 25] And that's how we come to enter the kingdom of God. And that's how we remain in the kingdom of God. That's how we go on in the kingdom of God. Who's the greatest in the kingdom of God?

Well, Jesus' answer basically was. The one who's most dependent. That's who. The one who has humbled themselves most to depend upon God. Second thing is that we express our dependence on God through prayer.

And that's what God himself is bringing to Jeremiah. But first of all, notice the God we pray to. Thus says the Lord who made the earth. The Lord who formed it to establish it.

The Lord is his name called to me. And notice the introduction that God gave to himself. He didn't just say immediately. Jeremiah called to me. He reminded Jeremiah of who he was.

Who this God was. Who it is he's going to call to and to pray to. And he describes himself as the Lord who made the earth. This covenant Lord. This sovereign Lord. The Lord who formed the earth to establish it.

[17 : 29] To actually set it as it is. As part of the vast creation. The Lord is his name. Call to me. In other words, God is, in effect, what God is doing is something like this.

He's saying to Jeremiah. Jeremiah, here are your circumstances. You've got a big situation to cope with. Here you are. You're closed up in the court of the guard.

And the court of the guard is in the city of Jerusalem. And the city of Jerusalem is besieged by Babylonians. Who are your enemies. They're out to destroy you. To take you captive. You've got a big problem.

The people have a big problem. This is a big situation. Let's put it on one side. And I will go and I'll stand on the other side.

And Jeremiah. Your big situation looks very small. Compared to me. Thus says the Lord.

[18 : 35] Who formed the earth. To establish it. Who created it. Who made it out of nothing. Who set it where it is. Who looks daily to its inhabitants.

And its events. That's what we need to do as well. With all our circumstances. Circumstances that teach us to depend upon God.

Sometimes they loom so large. Don't they? And we sometimes compare ourselves. With other people in the world. And there's nothing wrong in itself. In doing that. And of course we'll always find people.

Or usually people. Who are not as well off as we are. Who have bigger problems. Than we actually have. But what we really need to be doing. Is not comparing ourselves. With other people.

And their problems. And what's happening in other parts of the world. Where so much of the world is in turmoil. We need to take out problems. And even however big they are. In relation to ourselves.

[19 : 32] And to our progress. Put them on one side. Let God stand on the other. And look at your problem. And measure it against him. Is it big now?

Is it as big as you thought? It was. Not if you're trusting in him. Not if he's taking care of it for you. You see that's.

That's really one of the essential things. When we come to pray to God. When we come in prayer. Our view of God. And the significance of God. Affects prayer.

Has very much to do with how we pray. And what we pray for. And when we come to pray. We are privileged to pour out our heart to God. To tell him of our problems.

Even though he knows all about them already. Describe them in all the detail you want. He doesn't mind that. But the important thing is. Not being able to really assess your problem.

[20 : 31] And see the size of it. What you need to do first and foremost. Is see the significance of God. The size of God. The bigness.

Of your God. Psalm 18. Is one of the Psalms. Where this sort of thing. As is often in the Psalms. Is brought to us. If you. Look through the Psalms. You'll often find this. Same sort of arguing. On the part of the Psalmist. He's got his problem. He brings his problem out to God.

And as he's dealing with his problem. Before God. He realizes that actually. Dealing with it in the presence of this God. Means that. This God is so big. He begins.

I love you. Oh Lord. My strength. He's reflecting upon. What happened in his life. Then he says. The cords of death. Encompassed me. The torrents. Of destruction. Assailed me.

[21 : 27] The snares of death. Confronted me. In my distress. I called upon the Lord. To my God. I cried for help. Now he talks about God's answer.

He doesn't say in so many words. Well God answered him. But what he does say is. The earth then reeled. And rocked. The foundations also of the mountains. Trembled.

And quaked. Because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils. He bowed the heavens. And came down. All the way through. The Lord thundered in the heavens.

The most high uttered his voice. He's talking about all of that. This great God. This God who is sovereign over the creation. Who moves the creation. What's it all about? It's an answer to his call out of distress.

This is the God he's praying to. This is the God who answers. This is how he answers. He answers powerfully. That's why he's saying here.

[22 : 23] Call to me. And I will answer you. That's what we ourselves. Constantly.

Need to set before our minds. Who is my God? What's my God like? What's he assuring me of today?

The God we pray to. But look at God's promise of help. Call to me. And I will answer you. And will tell you great and hidden things. That you have not known.

I will answer you. One of the things we learn. Not just as ministers. But all of us learn as life goes on.

Is how important it is to be a good listener. We're all good talkers. Most of us are good talkers when it needs to be done. But it's much more difficult to be a good listener.

[23 : 22] And sometimes when you've got to go to see people in their need. The most important thing is not knowing what to say. But how to listen. To sit beside them and just let them speak.

Let them tell you of their woes. Their troubles. Their anxieties. Their questions. And listen carefully. Not just be there.

Matter of factly. And just being there for the sake of it. When you want to make a difference in people's lives. We have to be listeners.

And you know what? There's only one perfect listener. And that's God. He's the only perfect listener there is.

His listening is never anything short of what it should be. You never find with God that when you call to him. It goes in with one ear and out the other. You never find with God saying well I'm actually busy at the moment.

[24 : 30] But I'll file it. I'll shelve it. I'll come back to you. Just like you do with an email. And more often than not you forget it. Or just pick it up days afterwards. Sometimes perhaps when it's too late.

God is your ultimate listener. And he assures Jeremiah. I will answer. In other words.

I will listen carefully and bring my answer to you. I will respond to your cry. Just imagine if you are down by the rocks there.

Just past the manse for example. Where there are so many rocky outcrops that jut out from the sea. And sometimes are covered by the sea. And yet when the tide goes out you can walk out to them. You can stand on top of them. Just imagine that you are actually sunbathing or whatever out in one of these rocky outcrops. You fell asleep. When you woke the tide had come in.

[25 : 26] And it was fast rising on the outcrop of rock. And you started crying for help. Nobody's listening. Nobody's hearing you. There's no one there to take your call.

What a panic. What a distress. What would you do? How much more with the issues of sin and of death and of guilt and of real need morally and spiritually and of losses and of pains and of longings and of longings and of longings.

How much more when we're on these outcrops of providence. We need the assurance. We need the assurance that there's one who listens.

That our voice is not just an echo in the dark. Call to me and I will answer you. God. The ultimate listener.

There to actually receive our cry. Apparently. Apparently. In the days of Elizabeth the first. Sir Walter Raleigh was one of her favorites for a while at least.

[26 : 45] And Raleigh often had an audience with the Queen. And on one occasion apparently. He came up to ask the Queen for another favor. And she turned to him and she said Raleigh. Raleigh. And she said Raleigh.

When will you leave off begging? And he turned to her and said. Your Majesty. When your Majesty leaves off giving. In other words.

She was asking him. When are you going to stop asking me for these favors? And he said. Well. I'll stop asking when you stop giving. That's how it is with your God.

With this God. With this great God. With this great God. Who takes such a personal interest in our lives. He never says to us.

When are you going to stop begging? But we have to say to him Lord. As long as you keep giving. I'm going to keep asking.

[27 : 49] I'm going to keep calling unto you. I'm going to keep praying to you. And then he goes on to say. I will answer you. And will tell you great and hidden things.

That you have not known. Now that's interesting. Here's Jeremiah. In this prison if you like. That he's confined in. Effectively that's what it is. Here's the city that he lives in.

And it's really imprisoned. By the surrounding Babylonians. And here is God saying to him. You call to me. And I will answer you. And then you expect him to say. And I will set you free. Doesn't say that does he?

There's no word about Jeremiah being set free. But what he does say is. I will answer you. And tell you great and hidden things.

That you have not known. And the thing is. The things that God is going to speak about.

[28 : 48] Are not going to happen in Jeremiah's own lifetime. He's taking them right up into the days. Of what we know as the New Testament. He's talking about the restoration of the people.

They will go to Babylon as slaves. Or as exiles. They'll be there for 70 years. They'll come back to the land. God is going to cause the land again.

To be inhabited. The voice of shepherds. And the management of sheep and flocks. That's going to happen yet again. And this place that's going to be desolate. For such a while.

I'm going to show you Jeremiah. Great and hidden things. That you have not known. That you could not see into yourself. But Jeremiah will be dead. Before any of that happens.

Why is God then saying this to him? Well because. It is an important principle for ourselves. That knowing what God has in store for his people.

[29 : 48] Makes all the difference to you now. Even if you yourself will die. Before that happens. In other words.

It's for Jeremiah's present comfort. That God opens up to. These vistas. This panorama. Of what's going to happen in the future.

And isn't that how God. Counsels us as well. Doesn't he give us. Even in the midst of our circumstances. That sometimes are trying. Even when we are closed in.

As it were. In the things of life. Doesn't God so often. Through his word. Come and bring this panorama. Before us. Of eternal things. Doesn't God say. Ah but remember. Your life is far more. Than just. The things that happen. In the present. Or the things that happen. During your entire lifetime. Your life's about eternal things. Your life's about things beyond.

[30 : 45] The resurrection. In the state of glory. In the land of the redeemed. That's what life's about. We need to look beyond.

The immediate. And so often. The Bible. Let me just pick one example. We often. Refer to these words. But. They are so. Significant. In relation to. The point we're making here.

It's the end of. Chapter four. Of second Corinthians. You remember there. That. The apostle is speaking to the Corinthians. Writing to them about. These sort of things. That. All the troubles. That he's been through himself. All the troubles. They've been through. He says. But. We do not lose heart. Though our outer self. Is wasting away. Our inner self. Is being renewed. Day by day. For this light. Momentary affliction. You see what he's saying. He's saying. Here's the whole of my life. Here's all of these things. That have happened in my life. As a Christian.

[31 : 42] I can put them all together. I can take the entire span. Of my life. He's saying. And I can call it. A light. Momentary. Or temporary. Affliction. How can he do that?

When you look at the list. That he's given. Of the things that he's suffered. And been through. How can he possibly call. These things. A light. And temporary. Affliction. Well because. He's looking beyond it. To the eternal things. Our light. Momentary. Affliction. Is preparing for us. An eternal weight of glory. Beyond all comparison. As we look. Not to the things that are seen. But to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen. Are transient. But the things that are unseen.

Are eternal. That's one of life's great problems. Isn't it? It's embedded in our own hearts as well.

[32 : 40] And sometimes even as Christians. We're prone to it. What is it? Living for the things. That are seen. The things that are temporary.

The things that are non-eternal. And God is constantly. Readjusting. Especially when we come to have our trials. And our difficulties. God is reminding us.

As he's reminding. Jeremiah here. Jeremiah. It's not all about. The guard. The court of the guard. It's not all about. The siege of Jerusalem. It's not all about.

These present times. I've got a bigger plan. And my bigger plan. Takes you into eternity. Takes you into things beyond the present.

That's where you've got to really fix. Your thoughts. And you know he's saying. Something remarkable here too. Let me just finish with this. He's saying. I will show you.

[33 : 39] Great and hidden things. That you have not known. And that phrase. Great and hidden things. Or great. And the word really literally means. To be fortified.

To be impregnable. Unassailable. Fortified. Like the great cities of Canaan. In fact. This exact phrase. Is used interestingly. In the Old Testament.

Of the description of the cities. Like Jericho. That the people faced. As they came into the land of Canaan. They were great. And fortified cities. And it's almost as if.

And in fact. God seems deliberately. Just to be. Using Jeremiah's situation. And saying. Here you are Jeremiah. You are in a fortified city. It's being battered. By the Babylonians.

They're outside. They're laying siege to it. It is going to collapse. They are going to. Take away the people captive. But my truth.

[34 : 34] And my plan. My promise to my people. Is impregnable. I am going to show you great. And fortified things.

One of the devil's. Constant attempts. Is that you and I. Would actually attribute. Some measure of failure to God. That's how he began.

With the first temptation. That's how it goes on still. But if God is running your life. If your life is willingly. In the hand of God.

If you come to trust in him. If you're calling to him. And waiting for his answer. Be assured of this. You are in an impregnable position.

Your enemy. Sin. The world. The devil. Whatever. They can do their utmost. They can do some damage.

[35 : 30] They can leave deep wounds. They can batter the doors of your life. But remember.

You have. In God. And you being in God. And God's truth. An impregnable. Position.

I will show you. Great. And fortified things. Things which no enemy can break into. Or destroy. Or pull down. These are the things.

That we live for. The very truth. Of God himself. Let's pray. Lord our God.

We confess in your presence. That you are a great God. That you are greatly to be praised. To be feared. To be admired. That we sing your praises. Because we know.

[36 : 30] That this is true of you. We pray today Lord. That you would help us in our weakness. In our circumstances. In life. Whatever they may be. Enable us to carry them.

Before your greatness. Enable us to see ourselves. Frequently and daily. In the light of your greatness. And sovereignty. And power. And majesty. And love.
And help us Lord. To take comfort. That this is. In the fact that this is our God. Hear us now we pray. For your glory's sake. Amen.