

Man Scatters And God Gathers

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Date: 27 October 1985

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[0 : 00] O Lord, Heavenly Father, in whom is the fullness of light and wisdom, enlighten our minds by thy Holy Spirit, and give us grace to receive thy word with reverence and humility, without which no man can understand thy truth.

For Christ's sake, amen. Those of you who are following the Bible study series will no doubt have enjoyed this and been somewhat frustrated by it.

That is the passage that you studied this week, which is taken from the seventh verse of the 31st chapter of the book of the prophet Jeremiah, found in your few Bible on page 695.

Jeremiah chapter 31, verse 7, which in typical Jeremiah fashion starts, For thus says the Lord.

And that was something he repeats over and over again. Jeremiah is a very frustrating person to read because it looks as though all the things he wrote were put into a pail and spun around and then brought out and put down, and it's very hard to keep the sequence.

[1 : 35] But the only thing you can do with Jeremiah is see that chapter after chapter and verse after verse, the same themes come hammering through. Thus says the Lord.

Now, there is a word in the English language which is derived from Jeremiah's name, and that is a Jeremiah ad.

And you are all used to Jeremiah ads. They are generally covered by the headline in the province every morning, a tale of mournful complaint, a tale of woe.

And that's a Jeremiah. And examples that you're familiar with are all the trees will be stripped from all the mountains in this province if we don't do something.

All the fish will be poisoned in the sea. When Expo is over, the Great Depression will come.

[2 : 44] Japan will take over all our industries. The U.S. will reduce us to the 51st state. Now, those are examples of Jeremiah ads which you are used to all the time.

And they're probably appropriately named because Jeremiah had the sort of function in his society in Jerusalem of telling them the bad news.

And so he told them what was going to happen. He told them that the armies of Babylon were going to come down from the north and were going to come into their city and were going to take them all away into captivity.

And it would probably be preferable if they surrendered right now rather than go through the inevitable bloodbath if they didn't surrender.

And having that call from the Lord to go to Jerusalem and tell them that that their disobedience, their immorality, their pride, their arrogance had all compounded together that there was no way out for them except the captivity by the armies of Babylon.

[4 : 07] And so Jeremiah had that job. He didn't like the job. He complained to the Lord about the job, but he had to go on doing it.

Well, if you were to turn to verse 6 of Jeremiah chapter 32, you would see what happened to Jeremiah as the result of his constant mournful complaining about the arrogance of Jerusalem.

But they went around saying, Peace, peace. And Jeremiah said, There isn't going to be any peace.

And they went around saying, The temple of God is in Jerusalem.

Therefore, God will never give up this city. And Jeremiah said, Oh, yes, he will. And so what happened to him, if you look in verse 6 of chapter 32, you'll find out that he was in the guardhouse, in the precincts of the palace of King Zedekiah.

His message hadn't changed, only it had been largely fulfilled because by the time he is arrested and in the guardhouse in chapter 32, the Babylonian armies are almost at the gate of the city.

[5 : 36] And so he is caught there in a captivity from which he can't escape. The king, I think, is afraid to put him to death, but he can't do anything with him, so he keeps him in a kind of house

arrest.

And he can't go around preaching, and all the guards and all the people were probably so nervous and so anxious that if he opened his mouth, they would, well, they would have treated him very badly, I'm sure.

And so what could he do? And so the Lord showed him what he could do in verse 6. Now this is a lovely little, thus saith the Lord from Jeremiah.

Verse 6. The word of the Lord came to me. Behold, Hannibal, the son of Shalom, your uncle, will come to you and say, Buy my field, which is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours.

Now that was what the Lord said to him. Now in the next verse, you get what happened after the Lord had said that to him. Then Hannibal, my cousin, came to me in the court of the guard, and in accordance with the word of the Lord, said to me, Buy my field, which is at Anathoth, in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours.

[7 : 07] Buy it for yourself. And then this lovely line. Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord. He didn't take the Lord at his word when he spoke to him until there was some evidence that in fact it was true.

It's a lovely thing to think that Jeremiah did that too. And you think you're being such a hero by insisting on doing that. The Lord said it would happen, and then it happened, and then I knew. And that's a good way to proceed. Well, you see, what it meant was that outside the city gates where the armies of Babylon had already taken captive of the land, there was a piece of property that belonged to Jeremiah's family.

And of course, it was no good to them anymore, and they had given up. You might say that with the armies of Babylon in the land, the real estate market wasn't too good.

And if they could find some guy who they could unload this property on, even if he was their cousin, it would be a good thing. So they struck on the idea, and they said, Jeremiah will buy it.

[8 : 26] Let's go and see it. So they went to Jeremiah, and they offered him this piece of land. And Jeremiah, because he knew what was happening, and they didn't, he said, I'll take it.

And he counted out the money in front of all the temple guards and all the people that were there, and he said, here's your money. Draw up my deed, please. And so the real estate agent drew up the deed and had it copied, and Jeremiah said, now take one copy of that and put it in a clay pot, because it's going to have to last a long time.

And another copy, tie to the outside so we can see what the deal is. And so Jeremiah preached to them a very eloquent sermon, that even with the armies of Israel, are the armies of Babylon right outside the gates of Jerusalem.

Nevertheless, the Lord was going to have the last word. And that's the way it happened. He bought this property, and his buying of the property, when every real estate agent in the country had given up, when the stockbrokers would say, never, when the big investors would put their money in a sock, Jeremiah went out and bought some land.

And he bought the land, we're told, in order to demonstrate that houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.

[10 : 05] The people that are going into captivity will come home. Now that's the difference between Jeremiah's Jeremiah ads and the other people.

Jeremiah saw what was going to happen and how the Lord would have the last word. And the last word is the word which, in various forms, breaks through all the somber, tragic events of the time of Jeremiah and comes as a word of hope to the people.

That's the section that you studied this week in the Bible study program. Chapter 31, verse 7 following. Thus says the Lord, sing aloud with gladness for Jacob and raise shouts for the chief of the nations.

Here is this little land already invaded, about to be destroyed, the people about to be taken captive and Jeremiah says, shout aloud and praise the Lord.

Sing gladness. Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob and raise shouts for the chief of the nations. This miserable little country that was being totally overrun.

[11 : 30] This, says Jeremiah, is the chief of the nations. A great sense of humor. And, and then he says why he says this.

He says, he who scattered Israel will gather him and will keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock. Behold, in verse 8, he says, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth.

and that is why they are to be full of confidence and full of praise for the God who is the God of Israel, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

They are to be full of praise for him because he ultimately will vindicate his name and he will demonstrate his love for this people.

How will he do it? Well, there's one word here that I want you to get above every other word in this passage. That was the word that we sang about and it appears here in verse 8.

[12:39] I will gather them from the farthest parts of the earth. If you were to read *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis, he gives a graphic picture of hell if all the newcomers arrive in the downtown area and they say I want to see Uncle Joe and I want to see Napoleon and I want to see Hitler and I want to see all the people that live in this great land.

And they said I'm sorry but you start in that direction if you want to see them. But they've been moving out and out and out for years and years and that the nature of hell is that they're just being scattered.

The suburbs go further and further and further out and people move further and further away from each other. And that's what happens is this process of scattering.

The wolf scatters the sheep. Sin scatters the people of God. The force that is at work with us is driving us apart from one another.

We don't understand each other any longer. We don't like each other anymore. And all the pressure is moving us away from one another. And that's how the world works.

[13:56] And finally we live in splendid isolation not having anything to do with people. And in one of the plays by Jean-Paul Sartre it ends with saying people are hell and you want to get away from them as far away as you can.

And this process goes on and on. Separation divorce family misunderstanding community breakdown all these pressures are pushing people away and away and away from each other.

That's what's happening. But what God is doing is gathering. Gathering people together. When he starts to work he brings people into families.

He brings people into relationship with one another. And I dare say that you whom God in his grace have gathered here this morning for this service probably though you're sitting there with great solemnity your mind already has a terrific outward trust wondering when this will be over and when you can submit to the power of sin at work in your life to drive you away from this congregation of miserable people.

Now all I want to suggest is that that's there and your laughter suggests that maybe you know it's there but that's what happens apart from the grace of God gathering people together bringing them into relationship with one another that's really what our mission is going to be about next month.

[15:40] If somehow we can get people gathered together I guess having been deeply immersed in Jeremiah and having woken up this morning at three o'clock the Lord said to me I don't know if he did or not but there was this picture I had a picture of Shaughnessy with the church standing right here and all the hedges in Shaughnessy were gone there was nothing separating people anymore and all the fences and gates were gone and all the roadways with tons of metal in sort of two ton units hurtling up and down them to kill anybody who tries to cross over that kind of barrier all the roads had been churned up and turned into lovely grass lawn and all the front doors and back doors of all the houses in Shaughnessy were taken off and you could walk anywhere and you could go anywhere and all the things that separate and divide people and keep them apart from one another were gone and I think

I think that's just a stir your imagination a little bit to think about to see how carefully we're provided we protect ourselves from one another how much we try and keep distance between ourselves how we separate and cut ourselves off but the Lord's purpose is to gather us together not I suppose by making Shaughnessy into one great parkland but spiritually to bring us together so that indeed our hearts are open to one another and we're not surrounded by barriers so we can't approach one another that's what he's talking about and the way it says that he's going to do it is that he's going to do it in such a way that the blind and the lame and the woman with child and her who is in travail together they will all come back he will gather them all together and you see the reason I think Jeremiah points this out to us is we think that this is for the strong and for the aggressive and for the

militant and for the fighters who are going to get out there and are going to make it while all the losers are going to be left behind well humanly speaking Jeremiah says all the losers are going to come and they're going to be a part of this and if the champions among you want to come you come with with the blind and with the lame with the women who are in labor and the women who are pregnant all these people who need to be handled gently who need to be cared for and looked after they will all come and the

Lord will gather them all together he says a great company they shall return here with weeping they shall come and with consolations I will lead them back they have gone out with tears they will come back with joy that lovely psalm 126 which we read this morning I hope it burns itself into the memories of your mind and heart when it talks so eloquently about our mouths were filled with laughter and our tongues with shouts of joy those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy he that goes forth weeping bearing the seed for sowing shall come home with shouts of joy bringing his sheaves with him it's a lovely picture of gathering in we've been scattered and now we are to be gathered in and that's what Jeremiah tells us about that's what he wants to assure us about and that's what Jesus said to his disciples he said he who does not gather with me scattered and I would like you to look at your life right now and see what's happening are you being scattered are you being separated divided and pushed away from one another from people you have a strong desire to go off and be by yourself is that the direction of your life or are you aware of a God who's drawing you in to fellowship with himself and with his people a God who wants to save you and gather you into a community of those who to whom he wants to be a father he wants to be a comforter he wants to be the chief among the nations in demonstrating the mercy of God and I don't think it's impossible for any of you or myself to be able to identify what's happening in your home in your personal life my heart absolutely aches and I tend to think as week after week goes by in the life of a congregation like this you can see people moving away slowly and imperceptibly moving away not that they're not coming to church on

Sunday morning that could be explained by a lot of you but spiritually they're moving away they're going off to be by themselves and the grace of God that is calling them together and making them into a community and restoring and renewing they're denying that in their life they're saying I think I'll go with it alone well that's those are the things that are happening in our world and uh you know I dream of coming to church on Sunday morning sometimes in a low frame of mind myself I wonder if anybody will be there and then it's always a great delight to find that God has gathered together a group of people probably brought you here against your will this morning even but maybe to indicate to you that on a deep level in your life he wants to bring you into fellowship with him he wants to bring you into relationship with him he wants to bring you into the place of healing and forgiveness and reconciliation that's how he wants to save and gather you he said

Jeremiah says this is the word of the Lord that there are tears and there is the agony the heartache as things are torn apart and move apart then there is the great joy that God is going to have the last word that Jeremiah is only the bad news that helps us to become aware of the goodness of God saving and gathering his people together that's what we need to become very aware of that's what our God is doing and that's what he he wants to accomplish remember Jesus at the very sort of pinnacle of his life and ministry comes to Jerusalem he stands on the brow of the hill overlooking the city he says Jerusalem

[24 : 34] Jerusalem you have stoned and you have killed and you have driven people away how often the Lord Jesus said would I have gathered your children together as a hand gathers her children that's what Jesus has to do in our midst is to bring us together into relationship with one another please examine in your hearts this morning where the push to drive us apart is coming from in your life whether the God who says that I will be a father to Israel Ephraim shall be my first born that's a very powerful picture in the midst of the books of the prophets it only comes to fulfillment in Romans chapter 8 when

Paul talks about the spirit at work within us not slavery and bondage but acknowledging slavery and bondage which ties us and separates us but the work of the spirit in our heart acknowledging that God is a father and as a father his purpose in our lives is to gather us together unto him number number

Raphael Bronze■■■, Tara Clark, David, opens the ■■■■ to Satan's honor between them at all.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[29 : 08] Amen. Amen.
Amen.