

# Jeremiah's Peers 8am

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[ 0 : 00 ] A very different world speaking a very different language to a very different people living in very different circumstances. How can that possibly become relevant to us?

Well, to try and help you see how it becomes relevant, I just want to record some of the events of the past week to sort of help you see what the issues are that we have to face.

Yes. The third premier is forced to resign because of the abuse of power. The T. Eaton Company is forced to go into liquidation.

Now, the T. Eaton Company is a major tradition in my life, and I'm sure in many of yours. It's distant. I mean, when I was a youth with enormous feet, the only place I could buy shoes big enough was at the T. Eaton Company.

So, the bank, one of the big banks, declared this week a profit in terms of billions of dollars.

[ 1 : 09 ] Now, I didn't think that banks were in that business, but they announced it with some pride. It makes you wonder. And the chief justice of Canada resigned.

And he resigned because he says he has lost the fire, the fire that's required to try the cases that come before him.

And that fire belongs to younger judges, and so he hopes they will have the fire that he has lost. There has been proposed in this past week a great Canadian airline, which will be run as a subsidiary of Shoppers Drug Mart, as far as I can see.

And the announcement was made that people are becoming addicted to the Internet, so we have another source of addiction to confront us.

Well, all of us, I guess, are at least dimly aware of these happenings as, in a sense, major public events, major indicators of what's happening in our world.

[ 2 : 25 ] But we know about the events. But I don't think very many people know what these events mean. I don't know that we know the significance of them or where they're leading us or where we're going as a country.

The function of a prophet like Jeremiah in his time was to make people aware, to find the meaning of what was happening.

And that was his ministry, was to do that. And he was among a great honored company of prophets, whose job it was not to keep the life of the nation in order, but to tell the nation what was happening.

The crisis in which we live, I've tried to outline in a sort of way, the crisis in which Jeremiah lived was he lived under a weak puppet king called Zedekiah.

And many of his countrymen, like Daniel and Ezekiel, were in exile in Babylon. And Jeremiah was at home in Jerusalem.

[ 3 : 50 ] And what he does in this chapter is outline all the things that were going on there. And if you look at chapter 23, you'll see that what was going on there was that there was positions of power in government were being abused.

He described it as, he described these ministers as the shepherds of the people. And they were leading the sheep astray, fragmenting them, so they wandered all over the place and not caring for them.

Jeremiah, when he sees this happening, does not, in a sense, read his newspaper, order another cup of coffee.

But as he reads what's happening, as he reads what's happening in his world, his heart breaks, his bones tremble, and he is drunk with grief.

Now, his grief is basically with what you would call, not the political leaders in this instance, because he's already dealt with them, but it's those who have the stewardship of truth in the community of Jerusalem and Judah.

[ 5 : 27 ] and Israel as a whole. And these people are the prophets, and they are responsible in the course of events of history to say, this is what's happening.

And the prophets are supposed to speak from the wisdom that is imparted to them by the holy word of God, which proceeds, as you will find, from the mouth of God, with the authority of God for the benefit of the people of God.

That was their responsibility. And all those people in Jeremiah's time, instead of doing that, had become what we would call spin doctors.

That's a new term which is very helpful in Jeremiah, chapter 23, to describe what's going on. The spin doctors have taken over. They are the false prophets.

They are meant to speak the truth into their world. Instead, they fantasize on the illusions of their minds and basically tell people what they know people want to hear.

[ 6 : 52 ] The result is that Jeremiah describes very clearly for us the old and familiar story of how society breaks down when the spin doctors take over from the word of God.

There's this shift, you see, to the false prophets. They are now the dominant voice. They are declaring what it's all about. And you see what happens to society under the impact of what they are saying.

You see, Jeremiah, one commentator says, he says that when the political leaders fail, injustice takes over.

But people can tolerate that. But when the prophets who were considered the leaders in the community fail in their function, then the whole community becomes sick under death.

So, this failure is important. And Jeremiah describes very clearly for us how it happens. I hate to, in a sense, bore you with this because evil is very boring.

[ 8 : 13 ] It's always the same. You've heard it a thousand times. And you'll hear it a thousand times again. But, it's worth hearing because Jeremiah is very eloquent in describing it.

and this is what he says happens. The spin doctors advocate the divorce of sexuality and morality.

Isn't that new and exciting? But, that's what they were advocating. And, the divorce of sexuality and morality.

adultery becomes, for them, first, the betrayal of God with whom they have a covenant and the betrayal of the family with whom they have a covenant.

So, adultery becomes normative through the whole of the nation. the religious leaders profane the temple of God.

[ 9 : 20 ] They, you remember that they were doing that in Jesus' day. And, and, you know, there's a, there's an abuse of power which belongs both, I mean, it belongs to the, to the politicians.

They abuse power. It belongs to the prophets when they are put in a position of power. It belongs to the priests when they are put in a position of power in the land.

And that was what was happening. The religious leaders were profaning the temple of God. The political and prophetic leaders of the community find themselves on a very slippery slope.

That is, they're not standing on a sure foundation. Jeremiah says they are on a very slippery ground. The northern prophets, and he distinguishes between the prophets in the north that were prophesying to Israel and the prophets in Jerusalem.

He says the northern prophets abuse religion by introducing what they feel are more congenial forms of religion, a sort of flavor of the weak fashion in religion, so that people are utterly lost.

[ 10 : 34 ] And Jeremiah finds this totally repulsive. It's a, he's just because they are, you see, the effect of this is, Jeremiah says, that these false prophets produce amnesia among the people.

They forget. History is forgotten. Every generation lives as though there was no other generation in the whole of time. He says they forget, they forget, they forget.

It may be reassuring you, you know, that the function that you are required to undergo while you're here this morning is remembrance, remember, remember, remember.

Well, this religion, which was more congenial to the people of the north and the prophets took it up, was forget, forget, forget, everything's going to be gone. So, then the Jerusalem prophets, what they are doing is that they are taken in by the underworld power brokers of their society, the people, and they manufacture a lie, which people find much more congenial.

You know, people get elected in terms of, we will stand for the truth in this country, and once they get elected, we could make some exceptions.

[ 12 : 13 ] So, that's what was happening in Judah. And the Jeremiah, who was repulsed by what was happening in Israel, finds himself horrified by what's happening.

And that Jerusalem, which is to be the city of God, he says, is becoming a Gomorrah. You know, the Sodom and Gomorrah. And Sodom and Gomorrah were marked by luxury, opulence, complacency, and trampling the idea of justice into the mud.

That's what was happening. And Jeremiah was horrified by that. So that if you look, for instance, in verse 15, you'll see that ungodliness becomes totally contagious.

And there is, peculiarly here, a sacrament of ungodliness, which these false prophets are taking.

The sacrament is bitter fruit and poisoned water. Forget it, partake in a different sacrament than that.

[ 13 : 32 ] But that was the sacrament which they provided. Bitter fruit and poisoned water. The prophets become infatuated with their own creative imagination.

They propagate false hope. They say, peace, peace, where there is no peace. And they tell the people who are under the most terrible political situation, under the tyranny of foreign powers, and the false prophets say, no harm will come.

self. The prophets run without a message and they shout without a mission. Verse 18, they become dreamers, sorcerers, mediums, and religious spooks, marketing the delusions of their own lives.

Well, that's, like I told you, that's sin and it's happened before and it happens again and it goes on happening in our world, as the powers of evil become dominant in our society.

But there is running through this chapter, there are some brilliant insights into the faith of Jeremiah as he anticipates the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 15 : 11 ] And our Lord Jesus Christ, just remember this, I think this is helpful for you to know. The difference between you and Jeremiah is Jeremiah is one of those prophets who spoke as they were moved by God.

And they spoke in older times. prophets, but the chief prophet that speaks to us is Jesus Christ himself.

He is our Father. God who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake unto our fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by the Son, by our Lord Jesus Christ.

prophets. So he is a prophet. Now, so sort of woven in and out of this story of the breakdown of Jerusalem and Israel as a nation, Jeremiah has some brilliant nuggets of shining jewels, so to speak, that he puts before us.

And these are to be the things that we are to take hold of from this passage, I'm sure. He says there will be a king, and he will be called the Lord our just.

[ 16 : 32 ] And he will replace the weak puppet king whose name is very similar in Hebrew, Zedekiah. This is the king whom Isaiah speaks about as the child who is born, the government will be upon his shoulder.

He shall be called wonderful counselor, the everlasting God, the prince of peace. This is the king that is to come.

And in the midst of Jeremiah's melancholy, he has a clear, unmistakable vision of the coming of the king.

Jeremiah says to the people, God has done a great thing for you in bringing you out of Egypt and out of slavery, but God is going to do an even greater thing. He's going to bring you out of exile, bring this nation back to their home.

And so it's true that our faith is God has done a great thing and God is going to do an even greater thing. We live in the faith and anticipation of that, even though we can't imagine what it might be and how it might be.

[ 17 : 56 ] The men who speak for God will be men who stand in the counsel of God. They listen and see and hear and they will know and tell what's going on.

The God whom some claim to know in great intimacy will be known for his transcendence and the God who is known for his transcendence will be known with great intimacy.

God sort of complains about people who, like these people who says, I have a dream. God and me were talking the other day and this is what he said to me and I want to test on view. And Jeremiah considers them enormously presumptuous because they're talking of the transcendent God in whose hands the whole order of the universe is held together.

They have forgotten that transcendent reality of God. Just as people who, remembering the transcendent reality of God, have never encountered the personal intimacy of God.

And so, God complains to Isaiah. Don't they know that I am a God who is far off and I am a God who is near. So, Jeremiah goes on to say, the great delight is that there will be no place to hide before this God.

[ 19 : 25 ] There will be no place. You know what I mean? one of the functions of religious people like me is that we go around and people want us to tell them where they can do things so that God won't look or God won't see.

And the prophets, the false prophets took that up. There ain't no such place. God is, as he is, intimately concerned with balancing the whole of the universe, he's infinitely concerned with every single reality within your life.

There isn't anything left there. There ain't no place to hide anything. And that's great. I mean, that's how we began the service this morning as we do every Sunday.

Almighty God unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, from whom no secrets are here. That's the God before whom we come as we begin the service.

Then it says, the word of God will be like a fire. I told you about the chief justice in the sense that he had lost the fire.

[ 20 : 42 ] And so a nation, in a sense, loses the crucible of the word of God, by which the purifying of that which has essential worth must go on.

and the fire must destroy all that is artificial and meaningless in our lives. And that's the word that's here.

Is not my word like fire, says the Lord. That's what's written in front of me. That this word of God will come in and purify by the crucible-like function, the reality of our lives, show us what has true value, burn everything else.

And not only is he like fire, but the word of God smashes all resistance like a great hammer that can take any rock and gradually reduce it to dust.

And so, the word of God breaks into our hard hearts and lives and reduces us to dust before him.

[ 21 : 57 ] It's a heavy thing, but it happens. And it's why people, I think, avoid the word of God. So, what Jeremiah is doing in all his sort of lament, if you like, what he's doing is he's pointing to the coming reality of a king who will reign, of a word which will be fulfilled, of an authority which can't be denied, of a reality which is to be experienced.

All those things are ours, in faith, through Jesus Christ our Lord. So, what I'm trying to say to you today, as you come to the communion this morning, you know, as Jeremiah knew, the result of poor leadership, inadequate leadership.

You know, the result of false prophets. You know, the absence of justice in a world and in so many situations that are crying out for justice.

and yet Jeremiah's faith in the midst of that, centuries before Christ had come, he spoke of the reality which we know and understand because of Jesus Christ coming among us and encountering us.

I'm not saying, forget it, but saying, remember, remember, remember, this is the reality that our Lord Jesus Christ brings to us.

[ 23 : 44 ] And we come, we come this morning recognizing the process of evil that is rampant in our world as it was in the world of Jeremiah.

life. But we also are given moment faith and recognizing the reality of the ultimately triumphant purpose of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

And we're told, hold on to that. May God grant us grace even to do that. Amen.