

Jeremiah 31:31-34
The Politically Incorrect Prophet Jeremiah
Part 6: The Days are Surely Coming
WRCoB 7.18.21

Today, we end our sermon series on Jeremiah
With one of his bright and hopeful messages.

It is found within the chapters of 30-33
In what is known as the Book of Consolation.

Jeremiah's words are filled with hope for the future
When God will create a new covenant.

It will not be like the old covenant, he writes
Written on stone tablets that were breakable.

This new covenant will not be etched in stone
But engraved on the hearts of people.

There will no longer be a need
For priests, scribes, or prophets
For the knowledge of God
Will be found within each person.

From the least to the greatest
Everyone will know God.

For, Jeremiah writes, God will forgive their iniquities
And remember their sins no more.

In this new covenant
God will forget the sins of the past.

It reminds me of the wife
Who complained about her husband.

She told a friend that when he got angry with her
He grew “historical.”

Her friend corrected her, “No, you mean hysterical.”

“No,” she said, “I mean historical.”
“He always brings up past mistakes.”
“He never forgets them.”

Forgiveness becomes the cornerstone of this new covenant.

This distinction between the old and new covenants
Is emphasized by Christians.

The author of Hebrews fleshes this out
By quoting today’s passage in its entirety.

He introduces Jeremiah’s prophecy like this.

Hebrews 8:6 NRSV

⁶ But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises.

The author then quotes chapter 31:31-34
And ends with this summation

Hebrews 8:13 NIV

13 By calling this covenant “new,” he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.

The author of Hebrews

Looks to Jeremiah’s words as fulfilled
In the life, ministry, death and resurrection
Of Jesus Christ.

In fact, the division of our Bible
Between the Old and New Testaments
Is a clear indication of this distinction.

And so, are we to assume
The Lord’s declaration through Jeremiah
Looks beyond the current context
To the arrival of Jesus?

When Jeremiah says the days are surely coming
Does he look forward to the time of Jesus?

Most Christians think so.

But let’s consider this further.

Back in 30:3 Jeremiah says this.

Jeremiah 30:3 NRSV

³ For the days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will restore the fortunes of my people, Israel and Judah, says the Lord, and I will bring them back to the land that I gave to their ancestors and they shall take possession of it.

Seems to me, the prophecy explicitly relates
To the restoration of the nation of Israel

When the exile would be over
And God's people would return to their homeland.

The days are surely coming is a bit vague
But to the people who lived in Jeremiah's time
The words were rather precise.

But were the words of his prophecy fulfilled?
Was the law written onto their hearts?
Did they all know the Lord?

No, sadly, much of Jeremiah's prophecy was left unfulfilled.

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And so, when Jeremiah declares the days are surely coming

Which days does Jeremiah point to?

To those who were alive and in captivity
The words addressed their situation
And gave them hope.

When they were released from captivity
And returned to Jerusalem and Judah

They rejoiced, remembering Jeremiah's prophecy.

But they still were prone to wander
As the great hymn suggests.
Prone to leave the God they loved

Jeremiah wrote this some 2500 years ago.

And it leaves us pondering

Have those days arrived which he speaks of?
Or are we to still wait for them?

As we have seen in in the Book of Hebrews

The New Testament teaches that the new covenant
Jeremiah prophesied about
Was fulfilled in Christ.

Yet, it seems pretty obvious to me

That not everything about it has been fulfilled.

For instance, if in fact, the law was written on our hearts

None of us are perfectly living it out.

We also know that not everyone knows the Lord

From the least to the greatest.

The New Testament teaches us to seek the Lord

And his grace daily for forgiveness.

We wouldn't need to do that

If we were conformed to God's will and way.

The way I see this prophecy is like this.

This new covenant does relate to the coming of the Messiah

That is Jesus Christ.

The new covenant begins with the advent of Christ

But it is not completed.

Christ fulfilled much of Jeremiah's prophecy.

His life heralded in a new order

A different way of living.

A non-conforming, nonviolent lifestyle

He exemplified what it meant

To live together as brothers and sisters

And established a new community of followers.

In his death, Christ stood in our place

As an atonement for all the wrongs

That had ever taken place

And that would ever take place.

And for those who trust in Jesus as Savior

The doors of eternal life opens to the heavenly courts.

That is the wondrous truth Jesus spoke to his disciples

When he said

Luke 22:20 This is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

What still remains to be fulfilled

Is the knowledge of God for all people

The covenant stamped on everyone's hearts.

And the full reign of God's kingdom on earth.

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Secondly, we can see the continuation of the new covenant

In the community of believers who follow Jesu

This is what we know as the church.

In all of its mistakes past and present
The church is still called upon
To be the hands and feet of Christ

And to share the love of Christ
And his saving gospel in word and deed.

We are empowered through God's Holy Spirit
To continue the work of Jesus
Peacefully, simply and together.

Finally, the New Testament teaches that the new covenant
Reaches its consummation or completion
With the return of Jesus Christ.

At that time, I believe
All the promises set forth in Jeremiah's prophecy
Will be fulfilled.

All people will be perfected
In faithful living and service to God.

There will be no more sin
The reign of God will be firmly established on earth
For all eternity.

Love, truth, justice, and peace will prevail
In the kingdom of God
The fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy.

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The days are surely coming.

Well, it's been a long time coming.

And sometimes we cry out in despair
For God's intervention
When the injustices of this world
Become unbearable.

But be assured, in God's promises
Found here in Jeremiah
That they are coming.

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Martin Luther King, Jr. preached these words in 1967.

“When our days become dreary with low-hovering clouds of despair, and when our nights become darker than a thousand midnights, let us remember that there is a creative force in this universe, working to pull down the gigantic mountains of evil, a power that is able to make a way out of no way and transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows. Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice.”

In reading an article in Huffpost 2018
I realized King had paraphrased
A quote from someone else.

It was a part of a sermon in 1853
By an abolitionist minister, Theodore Parker.

What Parker actually said was

“I do not pretend to understand the moral universe. The arc is a long one. My eye reaches but little ways. I cannot

calculate the curve and complete the figure by experience of sight. I can divine it by conscience. And from what I see I am sure it bends toward justice.”

Surely the days are coming says the Lord.

Ever since the beginning
When humanity upset the apple cart
In the Garden of Eden
God's redemption has been at work.

Through the presence of the Holy Spirit
We who work for justice
For peace
For reconciliation

For the love of God and for the love of neighbor.

Filled with the strength of the knowledge of God
Stamped upon their hearts

We work together to build God's kingdom
On earth as it is in heaven.

We look toward the horizon for the signs
Of God's coming kingdom reign

But as Parker says
We cannot understand the moral universe
We cannot see beyond our own horizons

But we can be assured that it bends towards justice.

Jesus said that even he didn't know when the day will come

Mark 13:32 NRSV

But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

The days are surely coming, say the Lord.

Words first spoken 2500 years ago.

Sometimes it seems an intolerable wait.

But as MLK reminds us

There is a creative force out there and within us
That is able to make a way

And transform our dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows.

Let us adhere to Apostle Paul's advice.

Galatians 6:9 NRSV

So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.

May it be so. Amen

And may it be so.