

JEREMIAH – ON THE WHEEL

Faithful Endurance!

Jeremiah 25 3-5

I wonder if you have ever uttered the words, 'I told you so', or 'If only you had paid a bit more attention, that would never have happened!' Or the words I have often heard, 'Why did you not follow the instruction manual?'

Even if we have not said them or thought them, I expect our parents may have said them to us, but did we really listen and did it stop our parents saying them to us time and time again? Trying to give us their pearls of wisdom.

Life was no different in Jeremiah's day, Jeremiah was appointed as a prophet to the people of Judah and Jerusalem, but would the people really listen to him, and to God?

Was Jeremiah just living in the vain hope that one day they would change their hearts and renew their minds? Was it hope that kept him going? Is hope that keeps us going with difficult relationships, hope that people will change one day? But if there is no hope, no light in the darkness why carry on?

You may have felt like this in the past - why carry on - but something deep within gives us strength to keep going, Gods love and the love of those around us give us the strength to face another day.

Today we will be looking at the importance of perseverance in our lives, what keeps us going day by day. What kept Jeremiah going.

Perseverance literally means to do something despite difficulty and delay.

This passage highlights 3 examples of perseverance.

Jeremiahs perseverance

The people's perseverance.

And Gods perseverance

Jeremiah 25 3-5

For twenty-three years—from the thirteenth year of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah until this very day—the word of the LORD has

come to me and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened.

⁴ And though the LORD has sent all his servants the prophets to you again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention. ⁵ They said, “Turn now, each of you, from your evil ways and your evil practices, and you can stay in the land the LORD gave to you and your ancestors for ever and ever.

Or the message puts it like this...

From the thirteenth year of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah right up to the present day—twenty-three years it’s been! GOD’s Word has come to me, and from early each morning to late every night I’ve passed it on to you. And you haven’t listened to a word of it!

⁴⁻⁶ Not only that but GOD also sent a steady stream of prophets to you who were just as persistent as me, and you never listened. They told you, “Turn back—right now, each one of you! from your evil way of life and bad behaviour, and live in the land GOD gave you and your ancestors, the land he intended to give you forever. Don’t follow the god-fads of the day, taking up and worshiping these no-gods. Don’t make me angry with your god-businesses, making and selling gods—a dangerous business!

I wonder what kept Jeramiah going for all those years?

I have wondered in the past, have you really listened to me; have I been wasting my time here for the past 23 years? That’s a rhetorical question before I get any comments! We can all have those thoughts, am I valued - do people appreciate me. But what does being valued really look like?

I hold onto the fact, that I believe God has spoken to me and I am sharing what I believe God has imparted to me, through the Holy Spirit. That’s not to say I am perfect and I do get things wrong, but I am hoping what I have shared over the years, has been God’s truth.

However, I am realising through life struggles, how much God loves me, for who I am, not for what I think I should be, what I achieve, or other people’s expectations. I am learning to accept the fathers love/ Gods love for me, right here right now and for the rest of eternity. Whether you value what I am sharing or not.

If like Jeremiah, we are to persevere in life, the first step is to admit to ourselves we can't do life in our own strength, we can't beat that nagging habit, that pattern of thought we can't get out of our minds that leads to sin. We have to come back to God and put our hands up and say help, I can't do it, but for God.

Jeremiah says in chapter 1 v 6

Ah sovereign Lord I said I do not know how to speak I am only a child

God gently rebukes Jeremiah reaches out and touches his lips, I have put my words in your mouth. In Jeremiah's quest for perseverance Jeremiah is honest with God he could not do life in his own strength, he needs God's intervention. When we face trials in life we need to lean into God by faith, and cry out to God for his help.

Jeremiah could have given up being a prophet, and gone on in his own strength, there were opportunities for teachers, but they encouraged the people to follow idols and other detestable things, the passage says evil ways. Jeremiah might have even made a good living at it. But it would not have been God's Word, God's truth, the question is: would he have walked in God's ways and trusted God on daily basis?

When Jeremiah was called by God, I believe God imparted the gifts of peace and strength, chapter one uses the metaphor of a wall. When we are in the centre of God's will for our lives, God grants us the gift of peace and strength, to help us persevere. Jesus gave the gift of peace to his disciples in order to persevere, then they also received the gift of power through the Holy Spirit.

We need God's peace in our lives, in the midst of the battles and the storms of life, to persevere. God's peace and strength will sustain us as we rest in God's love.

We then get to the people's perseverance, or stubbornness, despite the difficulties they faced living outside of God's love, they persisted in their own rebellious ways. There would have been a few faithful people, but they would have been the minority, those on the edges of society with little influence. Why do I say this, well God never abandons his people completely, but perseveres with them despite their rebellion.

Jeremiah's message was to the whole community, but I would suggest it was aimed at the leaders of the day, primarily to these with influence over

Jerusalem and the people. But why did the people resist God and act this way, persist in their rebellion? Before we are too hard on these people, we have to remember they have had no true spiritual input for decades, until the Word of the law was discovered and read in Josiah's reign. Their minds had been exposed only to evil and ungodly practices, so it is little wonder they persistently failed to listen. The bible refers to areas of our lives where we are in rebellion to God as strongholds, a stronghold can be described as a 'habit - structure of thought' or a 'fortress of thought.'

We think and act out of habit in situations without any real thought or choice in trying to do some things differently, based on past experiences. I wonder what strongholds we have in our lives that keep us from knowing and accepting Gods love, persevering in the wrong direction?

The people might have thought - God has not been around for years so why should I trust him? And seek other idols. My dad was always pushing me to achieve in life, to beat him at sports, to get a better job. Do I believe that is what my heavenly father is like because of the patterns laid down in my early years? I will only be loved by what I do and achieve for God?

Perhaps Jeremiah was free to persevere as he knew the people would not listen to him so he had only God to please. I don't have time to go into strongholds fully today, but be aware of how your thoughts and strongholds affect your walk with God. The people in Jeremiah's day persistently did not listen, because their hearts and minds weren't open to the possibility of God's love and reconciliation.

In Jeremiah 4 v 14 we read:

Jerusalem, wash the evil from your heart and be saved. How long will you harbour wicked thoughts?

Or Jeremiah 17 9-10

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure - who can understand it?

I, the Lord, search hearts and examine the mind to reward a man according to his conduct according to what his deeds deserve.

NKJV Proverbs 23 v 7

For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

It helped me understand we have two sides to us - the spirit person would walk in step with God's ways, and our souls, mind, will and emotions where our struggles occur.

Hebrews 4 v 12

“Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides **soul** from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart”

We can be born again, spirit filled Christian and yet struggle with strongholds in our minds, of bitterness, envy, unforgiveness and criticism to name a few that separate us from God's love.

I read this the other day:

I didn't have many friends when I was growing up there were lots of reasons. I lived in a rural community without transportation, there were economic differences between our family and those around us, I was poor. My church emphasised separation; my family masked its fear of outsiders by intentionally closing itself off. My bookish nature in a culture that valued action and practicality. (students with A's were not welcomed in my high school except for a few teachers, who weren't welcomed either).

But least I attached all blame for my friendlessness to outside influences. I now know that my own arrogance was insufferable to those few who might have been willing to climb the barrier toward friendship

There were advantages to this early deprivation of friendship. I learned to enjoy solitude. I learned to find personal projects that brought me satisfaction. (I have never been bored for more than an hour or two in my life.) I learned independence. It mystified me at college that other students ran around trying to find someone to go to meals with them; I just went to the dining hall and ate. I also learned to think and act without being overly concerned about what other people thought of me.

But friendless people can become selfish people. If I had remained on the fringes of friendship I think I may have become a rather rigid, self-pleasing person who rarely entered the painful grit of someone else's life, and experienced little support in my own painful grit. God in his kindness, did not allow that to happen. College years brought people able to scramble over the

barriers; I tasted the comradery of like-minded people and went out looking for more.

One by one God has broken down my barriers with an appropriate friend at just the right spot.

We can learn to survive in life, to persevere in our own ways. But it's not what God wants for us, Gods message throughout the book of Jeremiah is - Come back to me, life is better with me, know my blessings.

But we are in a battle and we have to hold onto God and be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

2 Corinthians 10 v 3 -5

Indeed, we live as human beings, but we do not wage war according to human standards; for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ.

If we trust only our minds, what we think, how we feel, our own stubborn free will, we can live life outside of God's love. We can persevere down the wrong path.

But for God... and his Word.

Does God abandon us? No, he is like the Father in the parable of the prodigal son, God's is always scanning the horizon for us to return to him.

Ultimately if we don't know Gods unfailing love; that he loves us because he loves us, because he loves us, we will try and find other ways to meet our unmet need for love, in sinful and ungodly ways.

We can either chose to persevere in our own ways or seek to let God hold us in his love and care.

Jeremiah spelt out Gods love for the people for 23 years.

He reminded them that the LORD had sent previous servants, the prophets to them again and again but that they had not listened or paid any attention.

Jesus draws parallels with this passage, in the parable to the wicked tenants:

There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way. Finally, he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.' So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

Gods perseverance, Gods covenant love always cries out to us. God sent his son as a final act of Love.

In Jeremiah's day they did not listen, in Jesus day many did not listen and crucified Christ.

But Jeremiah did not give up he persevered, he was faithful in delivering Gods message; God never gives up on us, God perseveres minute by minute, only wanting the best for us.

The question is: Will we persevere in our own stubborn ways or yield to Gods call on our lives, will we persevere with God and allow God to renew and reshape our minds, to be shaped on his potter wheel or chose not to listen?

Sermon for Sunday, 22nd March 2020, prepared by Ian Larkham.....