

Jeremiah 30-33

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[0:00] To sit and open your Bibles to Jeremiah chapter 30. Jeremiah 30, if you can get a church Bible! From the back it'll help you. You'll struggle to follow without a church Bible. Next week is chapter! 34 to 39. All right? And so I'll pray for you as you read it and you pray for me as I prepare. All right?

34 to 39 next week. But welcome. Welcome to Jeremiah 30 to 33. We have had a harrowing and exhausting first half of Jeremiah. The blast of judgment, the angst of staring at the end of the covenant, the pain of watching Jeremiah crumple as his word crumbles before our very eyes. And today we bask in the cool, refreshing flow of gospel-saturated air that is chapter 30 to 33. Jeremiah, do you remember, he recovered his mojo. He comes out punching in chapter 25 to 29. He robustly preaches salvation and judgment to all comers, including a succession of kings. He writes a letter in 29 to the exiles, to those who've embraced the pain and have gone into Babylon. And in chapter 30 to 33, Jeremiah writes a booklet. 30 verse 1, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, write a book, all the words that I've spoken to you. For behold, the days are coming, declares 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 fathers, and they shall take possession of it. It's usually called, these chapters, the book of consolation. I think that's a little bit lame, because it's a book of optimism, delight and joy, and tenderness. And we tonight are going to soak in the strong hope and deep comfort of this publication. And I think it's more than enough to rehabilitate Jeremiah's reputation as that kind of curmudgeonly grumpy, depressive, depressive to what is really the greatest theologian of hope in the Old Testament.

[2:10] And basically, in these chapters, Jeremiah does two things. The first thing he does is he tells us to meet the God who turns us around. Meet the God who turns us around in these first couple of chapters. There's a single thread together, and it's the fact that God is turning us around, restoring us. Verse 3, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will restore the fortunes of my people. Verse 18, thus says the Lord, behold, I will restore the fortunes of the tents of Jacob, have compassion on their dwellings, and the city will be rebuilt on its mound, and the palace will stand where it used to. 31 verse 18, I've heard Ephraim grieving. You've disciplined me, and I was disciplined like an untrained calf. Bring me back that I might be restored, for you are the Lord my God. Verse 23, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, once more they shall use these words of the land of Judah and its city, when I restore their fortunes.

The Lord bless you, O habitation of righteousness, O holy hill. 32, 44, I will restore their fortunes. 33 verse 7, I will restore the fortunes of Judah. Verse 11, the voice of mirth, the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, the voice of the bride, the voice of those who sing, as they bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord. Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, and his steadfast love endures forever. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first. Again, verse 25 and 26, I will restore their fortunes. Jeremiah has spent years convincing people of the impending reality of judgment, and of getting his head around that himself, and finally, he starts to celebrate, to contemplate the glorious reality that God is going to turn everything around. God will give and bring about repentance in return. And Jeremiah brings this out in the most striking way, is he depicts God in action. For those of us who've been looking at Jeremiah these last six weeks, we will know, won't we, that Jeremiah is a relentless book. If it's worth saying once, it's worth saying 11 times. He's relentless. And now Jeremiah uses that relentlessness to talk about the beauty of God and his kind actions on our behalf. These chapters really are a hidden gem in the Old Testament that often people don't get to because they've been so depressed by the first 30 chapters. But Jeremiah builds up picture after picture of God's rescuing grace. So first of all, God deals with our enemies.

Verses 5 to 11. Not only is God sovereign, but he is for them. He will deal with the enemies of God's people in particular. The Babylonians are not going to get away with their excesses. Chapter 30, verse 5.

We've heard a cry of panic, of terror, no peace. Ask now and see, can a man bear a child? Why then do I see every man with his hands on his stomach like a woman in labor? Why is every face turned pale because they've got man flu? No. Alas, that day is so great there's none like it. It's a time of distress. Yet he should be saved out of it. And it shall come to pass in that day that I will break his yoke from off their neck and I'll burst their bonds. And foreigners shall no more make a servant of him, but they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king whom I will raise up for them. Then fear not, O Jacob, my servant, declares the Lord, nor be dismayed, O Israel. For behold, I will save you from far away and your offspring from the land of captivity. God will deal with their enemies. He will also heal our self-inflicted incurable wounds. Verses 12 to 17. Look at verse 12.

Your hurt is incurable. Your wound is grievous. There's none to uphold your cause. No medicine for your wound. No healing for you. All your lovers have forgotten you. They care nothing for you. For I've dealt you the blow of an enemy, the punishment of a merciless foe, because your guilt is great, because your sins are flagrant. Why do you cry out over your hurt? Your pain is incurable.

[6:16] Your guilt is great because your sins are flagrant. I've done these things to you. You've got this incurable sickness, and it's your own fault. There's a word therefore in the ESV in verse 16, but it's not there. God just says, all who devour you should be devoured. All your foes, every one of them, shall go into captivity. Those who plunder you should be plundered. All who pray on you, I will make a prey, for I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, declares the Lord. Because they've called you an outcast. It is Zion for whom no one cares.

And so we are sinful people who have made sinful choices and done sinful things. We have self-inflicted incurable wounds on ourselves and on other people. And what does God do?

He graciously, spontaneously, voluntarily, unilaterally heals our wounds. That was experienced in part, wasn't it, when God got his people back home.

And it would be experienced in part when Christ stepped into history, dramatically, bringing healing to a few, making it possible for many. But ultimately, this will be realized only when all creation is straightened out. Revelation, the Bible finishes with this, Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, brightest crystal flowing from the throne of God, and of the Lamb, and through the middle of the street of the city, also on either side of the river, the tree of life, with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month.

The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. One day, the people of God will be healed, straightened out, fixed.

[8:04] Does that prospect relieve you? It really should. I, for one, am looking forward to being healed of my incurable wounds. For my propensity to start things and not finish them, of slipping into arrogance, of getting preoccupied with work, of speaking unlovingly and ungraciously in ungodly ways. I want to be cured of losing sight of the beauty of Jesus. I can't wait to be healed of all that, and I will be as you. That is what God has promised. And he will also restore community among us.

Verse 18. I'll restore the fortunes of the tent of Jacob, and have compassion on his dwellings. The city should be rebuilt, and out of them shall come the songs of thanksgiving, and the voices of those who celebrate, and I'll multiply them, and they shall not be few. I'll make them honored, and they shall not be small. Their children should be as they were of old, and their congregation should be established before me, and I will punish all who oppress them. In an immensely rich little passage, Jeremiah confirms that all of God's promises will be fulfilled as he restores and establishes new community.

He will multiply the people whom he told to go forth and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it. He'll bring a ruler like that one described in Deuteronomy 17, who has access to God's presence.

Verse 21. Verse 21. The prince shall be one of themselves. Their ruler shall come out from their midst. I will draw him near, and he shall approach me. For who would dare of himself to approach me, declares the Lord.

More of that later. But the results of this ministry is simple. Verse 22. You shall be my people, and I will be their God. Jeremiah says, God will deal with our enemies. He'll heal our incurable wounds.

He will restore his people, and then God will pour out his love. One of the intriguing things of these chapters that you might have picked up if you read them in this book of Constellation is the way that the gender pronoun that's used to describe Judah shifts. Did you see that? So, quickly look with me. [10:17] 30 verses 5 to 11. Judah is masculine. Then he's feminine. Then she is feminine. In 30, 12, 17. Verse 18, it switches back to masculine. Verse 31, it's feminine. 31, 7 to 14, it's masculine. 31, 15 to 22, feminine, masculine, feminine.

What is going on? Did Jeremiah get confused? The point is this, I think. The rebellious son is now the beloved child. The adulterous wife is now the virgin bride.

The one who becomes the mother of many children. And the point is this, God loves us as a son, as a wife. And it's backed up, isn't it, by two of the most moving statements in the whole of the Bible. Chapter 31, verse 2, look at it. Thus says the Lord, the people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness when Israel sought for rest. The Lord appeared to him far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love.

Therefore, I have continued my faithfulness to you. That's what our God does. He shows us grace in the wilderness. He lavishes a love on us. The extent of which, the scope of which, the power of which you will never fully fathom.

[11:36] Loved with everlasting love. Led by grace, that love to know. Spirit breathing from above. Thou hast taught me, it is so. O this full and perfect peace. O this transport all divine in a love which cannot cease.

I am his and he is mine. We'll sing that at the end. It's a him we desperately need to keep. Jeremiah insists that God woos us.

And when he says, I have loved you with an everlasting love, he says, you're going to be like newlyweds at the reception. Look at chapter 31, verse 4. It's one of the most remarkable pieces of translation by the ESV.

Again, you shall adorn yourself with tambourines. And here it is. And you shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. The ESV was translated in 2000.

Not 1740. What a line. You shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers. Israel will settle down in their newly built home.

[12:35] As the pain and judgment of exile is rolled back. Judgment of vineyards will be planted. Grapes will be eaten. Zion is restored to the center of God's purposes. He woos us. He cares for us.

And then in verse 7 to 9. And behold, I'll bring them from the north country and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth. Among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman, and she's in labour. Together a great company. They shall return here.

And with weeping they shall come. And with pleas for mercy I will lead them back. I will make them walk by brooks of water in a straight path in which they shall not stumble. For I am a father to Israel. God protects us and comforts us.

And from verse 10 to 22, there's such richness here. Verse 20 is, Ephraim, my dear son. Is he my darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do remember him still.

Therefore my heart yearns for him. I will surely have mercy on him, declares the Lord. And I will bring him home. Verse 23, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel. Once more, they shall use these words in the land of Judah and its cities when I restore their fortunes.

[13:36] The Lord bless you, O habitation of righteousness, O holy hill. For I will satisfy the weary soul and every languishing soul I will replenish. And then there's chapter 31, verse 26, which is a little bit unexpected, isn't it?

At this I awoke and looked and my sleep was pleasant to me. Not only had Jeremiah revelatory dreams, but he woke up feeling great.

At almost every level, the book of Jeremiah is overwhelming. Its size, its intensity, Jeremiah's relentless preaching of judgment, and now the sheer extravagance of his declaration of God's immense goodness.

It is almost too much. And Jeremiah puts this book together to create that effect in us. The God who had driven them out is now the God who turns them around and brings them home.

In chapter 31, verse 28, it shall come to pass, that as I've watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy and bring harm, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, declares the Lord. And how is this going to happen?

[14:41] Well, 31, 29 is the clue. In those days, they shall no longer say, the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge, but everyone shall die for his own iniquity.

Each man who eats sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge. And initially, that doesn't sound very positive, but the point is this. Everyone had suffered together in exile. But from now on, it will be each man for himself, which would be very small comfort, were it not for the fact that there would be one who would come who would choose to die.

Not for his own iniquity, but for the sins of many. One whose birth would be marked by a fresh outburst of grief in Ramah, as the children of Bethlehem suffer. One who would both come and call and enable people to return to God as the King of God spectacularly breaks into this world in a new way.

This is the God who turns us around. The God who leads us to repentance and faith, turning us back to God. It's the most basic element of living in and for Christ.

And part of the reason that you and I need to be reminded of the gospel is that we need to take hold again of who we are in Christ and all that he's done for us in him and run back to him.

[16:01] And that is, more often than not, the greatest need of believers. Jeremiah calls us to return to the God who turns us around, who holds out grace to you in Jesus Christ.

But he's not finished yet. Because in the rest of the passage, Jeremiah invites us to the God who makes things new. The God who makes things new. The new exodus that Jeremiah has been describing, issues in a new covenant.

Jeremiah 31, verse 31, Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It's not identical to the previous one.

Verse 32, It's not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hands to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. But it is not completely different either.

Because embedded at the heart of the new covenant is the promise of the old covenant. Verse 33, this glorious little statement, I will be their God and they will be my people.

[17:09] Those words are first spoken to Abraham, Genesis 17, repeated to Moses, Exodus 6, and the Hebrews in Exodus 19, and then to the Israelites on the plain of Moab, overlooking the land of Israel, Deuteronomy 26.

And now Jeremiah says, a new covenant is coming that's built on those words, which is then repeated in 2 Corinthians 6, 16. And then finally spoken by God himself, as the new creation takes shape at the end of time in Revelation 21, verse 3.

I will be your God and you will be my people. That is the theme of the Bible, the summary of the Bible. This new covenant fits snugly into the grand plan of God to draw people like us into an everlasting relationship with himself.

You see, on the far side of exile, it turns out that God's covenant promise has both elasticity and longevity.

The further that we go through salvation history, the more that we see that that basic promise is stretched and broadened and fulfilled and it exceeds what it appeared to be.

[18:23] But that is how a covenant promise works. On August the 24th, 2000, nearly 26 years ago, Claire and I stood before a congregation of God's people and in the presence of God, committed to love one another in the strength that God supplies.

I can't speak for Claire, but I have to say, looking back, I don't think I had a clue what that promise involved then. Or the extent that I would need God to work in her by his grace and me.

Or how God would need to work in me to enable me to have any hope of living it out day by day.

That's just the nature of marriage. When you get married, you do not know the extent of the promises to you. Five years down the track, I knew a little bit more.

Fifteen years down the track, a bit more. Today, I'm starting to realize what I promised 26 years ago. And that will grow, won't it, throughout marriage.

But I don't need different promises. That's why it's lunacy to renew your vows. They don't do it.

There's nothing wrong with the promise. You don't need to renew your vows, but they have somehow expanded, haven't they, to have and to hold, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer.

[19:45] And we see, don't we, in married life, what it takes to keep those promises. The genius of vows and the promise is that they direct us to the scope of what we need at every stage of life.

So, of course, in Jeremiah 31 to 33, there are new expressions of God's grace. In verse 33, obedience is more internalized.

I'll put my law within them. I'll write it on their heart. The heart is the decision-making faculty in the Old Testament and the New Testament. God puts obedience in our reach in line with Deuteronomy 30.

We'll be given a real, functional relationship with God. I will be their God. And they will be my people. They will know God. Each one, no longer, shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know me from the least to the greatest.

Actual, real-time forgiveness. Not symbolic, anticipated, sacrificial forgiveness. But we look back to the cross.

[20 : 50] We hear the words of Christ. It is finished. Tatalos died. It's the real thing. I'll forgive their iniquity and I'll remember their sins no more. God will declare us forgiven and that will be that.

That's the real thing. God restores our relationship with him and he restores our confidence. At the end of chapter 31, Jeremiah makes it clear that he actually restores our confidence.

That this covenantal commitment that God makes is absolutely unshakable. Look at the language.

31. Thus says the Lord, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roared.

If this fixed order departs from before me, declares the Lord, then shall the offspring of Israel cease. From being a nation before me forever. If the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will cast off all the offspring of Israel.

The commitment is so rock solid that Jeremiah could even make utterly stupid property deals.

Come with me to an estate agent's office in Jerusalem.

[22 : 02] And Jeremiah goes in, the estate agent says, it's a buyer's market, sir. And you point out, well, everyone's trying to sell because there aren't many properties available as fixer-uppers.

You say to him, the Babylonians are about to knock everything down. That's why it's a buyer's market. They say, you should think about investment potential.

The neighborhood is sure to improve. It's going to be one of those places. It's going to be, I won't tell you where, it's going to be on the up. And you say, well, that is because the Babylonians are camped on it and presumably they're going to go home eventually and everywhere will need to be fixed up.

And yet Jeremiah thinks it's a great time to buy. He's in jail. He's been put there by the king for denial, in denial for prophesying. Chapter 32, verse 3, behold, I'm giving this city into the hand of the king of Babylon and he shall capture it.

You're going to lose. But that does not stop him from buying a field. Jeremiah says, 32, verse 6, Jeremiah, the word of the Lord came to me, behold, Hanamel, the son of Shalom, your cousin, he shall come to you and he'll rip you off.

[23 : 16] Buy my field that's on Anathoth for the right of redemption my purchase is. I got a great offer for you, Jeremiah. And Hanamel, my cousin, came to me in the court of the garden in accordance with the word of the Lord. And he said to me, buy my field, that's Anathoth, in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours.

Buy it for yourself. I don't know what Jeremiah's thinking. He really is an optimist. He must think that Jeremiah hasn't noticed that the Babylonians are outside the gate.

But what happens, verse 8, I knew that this was the word of the Lord. I bought the field of Anathoth from Hanamel, my cousin, weighed out the money to him, 17 shekels of silver. I signed the deed, sealed it, got witnesses, weighed the money on scales.

Verse 13, I charged Baruch, more of him later. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, take these deeds, but the sealed deed of purchase, this open deed, and put them in earthenware vessel that they may last for a long time.

For thus says the Lord of hosts, houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land. Now, on one level, it's a great deal. Abraham had paid 400 shekels for a well back in Genesis 23, and if you allow for inflation, well, 17 shekels for an entire field, that's pretty good value.

[24 : 25] But Jeremiah knows that this is about God delivering on his promise. That's the purpose. It's a visual aid. And then he prays, it's a remarkable prayer, but it is a little bit strange.

Ignore the chapter heading. I'm not going to read it from chapter 32, verses 17 to 25, but as you look at that prayer for a moment, just notice, is there anything strange about it?

He doesn't ask for anything. In his prayer, he just goes over God's promises. It's almost as if he is praying to convince himself what God has said.

I can imagine you've just bought a field with Babylonians living on it, and he's saying, am I nuts? No. Because God is faithful. And that is why he goes back to the very beginning, to the promises, to the fathers, to the exodus, when he prays.

And as he rehearses what has happened in the past, he doesn't need to ask for anything, because his confidence is in the God who keeps his promises. His confidence has been restored.

[25 : 29] God will bring his people back to the city. And God commits to establishing a new Jerusalem in chapter 31, verse 38. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord. When the city should be rebuilt for the Lord from the tower of Hananel to the corner gate, and the measuring line shall go out further, and so on.

He returns to the theme in chapter 32, where after justifying the destruction of Jerusalem, yet again we read verse 37. Behold, I'm going to gather them from all the countries. I'm going to bring them back to this place, 33, 6.

I will bring it to health and healing. Verse 9. The cities shall be to me in name of joy, of praise, and of glory before the nations. And so it continues. And so the God of Jeremiah is the God who makes things new, a new covenant, a new confidence in his prophet, a new city.

He's the God who tonight gives us real hope, who brings about real change, who guarantees a real future. And this is the God who makes a real difference tonight. And chapter 32, verses 38 to 41 sums this up in a way that I think exceeds pretty much every other part of the Old Testament.

32, 38. I will give them one heart and one way that they may fear me forever for their own good and the good of their children after them. And I will make with them an everlasting covenant and I will not turn away from doing good to them.

[26 : 50] And I will put the fear of me in their hearts so they may not turn from me. And I will rejoice in doing them good and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness with all my heart and all my soul.

And how is he going to do it? Well, a quick glance at the end of the book of Constellation, chapter 33, verse 14, all this change, all this turning, repentance, this faith, is all because of Jesus Christ. Because, behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel, to the house of Judah. In those days and at that time, I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David and he will execute justice and righteousness in the land.

And in those days, Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called, the Lord is our righteousness, Jehovah said Kenia. For thus says the Lord, David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel.

And the Levitical priest shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grains and to make sacrifices forever. Do you notice anything unusual? The promise of a permanent king and the Levitical priesthood, the king and the priest, are bound together.

[28 : 08] And as we read on, it becomes very clear that there is only one person doing those two roles. Verse 20, if you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night so that day and night will not come at the appointed time, then also my covenant with David, my servant, will be broken.

Verse 22, as the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the offspring of David, my servant, and the Levitical priest who minister before me. And God is committed to working through his king and his priest.

And then verse 25, if I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth, then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David, my servant, and will not choose one of his offspring to rule over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.

And suddenly, the Davidic promise given to David of being a king forever and the need for a priest to intercede for sinful people, the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob converge in one man.

One man who will call us to return to God. One man who will bring us home to God. One man who will ultimately renew all things. Because ultimately, these chapters, repeatedly and relentlessly, with an enormous sense of relief, drive us to Jesus Christ.

[29 : 27] That is what the book of comfort is all about. And I know the book of Jeremiah doesn't get a great press, but I think the apostle John appreciated Jeremiah, maybe more than any other Old Testament prophet.

Because when he came to summarize the staggering richness of both these chapters with the vision which he saw, he used these well-known words. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man and he will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God. And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes and death shall be no more. And neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore for the former things have passed away.

[30 : 38] And he who was seated on the throne said, Behold, I am making all things new. And this is our God.

And this is the Lord Jesus Christ who says to you tonight, Return to me for I have returned to you. He says to you tonight, Come to me for I am making all things new. Let's pray together. Let's pray together.