



## Hazelbank Presbyterian Church



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Today we are looking at Jeremiah chapter 2 and verses 1 – 37. As I mentioned a few weeks ago we will be looking at the main themes of the book of Jeremiah instead of each chapter broken down into minute detail. The reason for doing so can be found in this reading today. Chapter two is seen by scholars as a collection of some of the sayings of Jeremiah instead of a single one off proclamation. It might even be looked at like a sampler of all Jeremiah's messages, an opportunity to see what lies ahead and in many ways to get the main gist of the book itself.

Although we have only read excerpts of this chapter this morning if you took time and really we are only talking about 10mins you could read it through for yourself. In doing that you get a general feel for the chapter and indeed for the whole of the message of the book. One commentator writes with regards to this section: *“One discerns the pain of rejection and anger over infidelity in the divine voice infusing the text. Such is the intensity of the emotion where God has lost an intimate partner to the seductions of alien suitors, who will be able to support her.”*

Here lies the crux of this message. Not that God loves us and we don't love him back. Not that God loves us and we don't really love him back but that God really loves us and we almost couldn't care less. Through today's reading we hear God saying to the children of Israel some fairly strong things. Remember this is not really Jeremiah saying this but rather it is God through Jeremiah since last week we noted that God touched Jeremiah's lips in chapter 1:

<sup>9</sup>Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, “Now, I have put my words in your mouth.

Let me just pull out some of the things we read God saying:

*“I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the desert, through a land not sown.*

*“Long ago you broke off your yoke and tore off your bonds; you said, ‘I will not serve you!’ Indeed, on every high hill and under every spreading tree you lay down as a prostitute.*

*Although you wash yourself with soda and use an abundance of soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me,” declares the Sovereign LORD.*

*“How can you say, ‘I am not defiled; I have not run after the Baals’? See how you behaved in the valley; consider what you have done. Yet in spite of all this you say, ‘I am innocent; he is not angry with me.’ But I will pass judgment on you because you say, ‘I have not sinned.’*

So what is actually going on here? Let me try and explain. Jeremiah starts what he has to say by recalling Israel's former faithfulness. (1-3) He goes back to the Exodus - when God brought them out of slavery in Egypt – away from Pharaoh. He first speaks of the “devotion of their youth” He is referring to that natural devotion that a child has to his parents. When your parents were hero's in your sight. They could do no wrong - they had your unquestioned devotion. Israel started off with this kind of devotion for God. Jeremiah next says they loved God like a bride loves her husband!

“your love as a bride”

If you are married - do you remember your wedding day? How much you loved your husband – your wife? One of the great things about being the minister at a wedding is I get to see the look in the eyes of the bride and groom. Often I find myself having to look away from them because the emotion of love and devotion is so strong. At the rehearsal I often have to remind them that they are to look at each other when exchanging their vows because the vows they are making are to their husband or wife. This is often so hard for them not because they don't want to look at each other but because it really brings home to them what is being vowed one to the other.

Jeremiah reminds Israel that they loved God like this in the early years. Israel followed God— the pillar of cloud during the day and the pillar of fire at night. Next, Jeremiah tells them that they were special to God in those days. Of all the nations of the world they were His special treasure. They were the firstfruits of the nations – his chosen people. Just like the firstfruits of the harvest was to be given to the Lord, they were His firstfruits. Any nation that tried to take them over incurred God's anger and punishment. But things went sour. They began to turn away from God. The intimacy began to die. It was not because they found any fault in God (4-7) It is so important that we note that God did not abandon them in the wilderness. He brought them into the land of plenty and they enjoyed its good fruits. But things went from bad to worse. Not only had the intimacy left this marriage but the Priests did not know God—they didn't stay in the Word. The rulers disobeyed God. The prophets gave false messages. He tells them that they, as a people, have prostituted themselves to all the gods that the surrounding nations worshipped.

They have left their first love and have shared that intimacy with others. You can, if you listen carefully hear the hurt in God's voice. Not only do they come before God after trying to wash themselves of their guilt, God says to make matters worse, they are recorded saying,

*'I am not defiled; I have not run after the Baals'? See how you behaved in the valley; consider what you have done. Yet in spite of all this you say, 'I am innocent; he is not angry with me.'...But I will pass judgment on you because you say, 'I have not sinned.'*

As always we need to pause to understand the implication there is in this for us today. In George Barna's new volume, as in the Barna research institute, he flatly states that moral anarchy has arrived and rules our culture today. The argument hinges on a substantial amount of attitudinal and behavioral evidence: record bankruptcy levels, frivolous lawsuits, the rapid growth of the pornography industry, highway speeding as the norm, income tax cheating, computer hacking and viruses, rising levels of white collar crime, rampant copyright violations (movies, books, recordings), terrorism and intimidation tactics, Net-based plagiarism, emotional comfort with lying and cheating, increasing rates of co-habitation and adultery, and so forth.

Moreover, Barna takes the argument farther and suggests that the United States is now in a state of spiritual anarchy as well. He mentioned that millions of people's faith activity is no longer affected by parameters such as church loyalty, respect for clergy, acceptance of absolutes, tolerance of Christianity, reverence for God, a desire to strive for personal holiness, sensitivity to theological heresy, and appreciation of tradition. The rejection of these elements has created a void that has been filled by the customized spirituality that lacks biblical moorings.

Phew - Aren't we glad we are not living in America! Don't fool yourself you could quite easily substitute the words United States for Northern Ireland, or Coleraine or even in our own lives. Do yourself a favour for just a moment. Remember back to that moment when you gave your life to the Lord. When you realised what he had done for you. When you were forced to admit that you could not do away with your own sin and so you came to him for forgiveness and release. Remember the love you felt for him, remember the responses you made to that love. The promises you made to him. The things you felt and the statements of faith you made that had you on fire with love and devotion...

As I stand here this morning and look at this congregation I want to give you an assurance – I have had to look hard, very hard at my own life this week and I have had to make some well needed changes before I could stand here this morning and speak to you. I have had to re-examine my own quite times – overhaul them in fact. Examine priorities and attitudes. I have had to have a good long look at my Christlike meter to see how far short of any acceptable level I have fallen. And with God's strength and the enabling of the Holy Spirit things are changing in my own personal, intimate walk with the Lord. If I need to be reminded of my first love, the Lord Jesus Christ, I am then hazarding a guess that you perhaps do too. A God who wants intimacy with you. A God who has given all of himself for you. A God who pours out his love to you and for you on a daily basis is this morning calling you back into a relationship with him. One where you can grow in faith and love. One where you can learn to become intimate with the creator of the universe, the lover of your soul.

But perhaps you are here this morning and you are asking, "is it really possible to be in love with God?" Gloria Gather answers this question for us by noting: His Love ... Reaching. Right from the beginning God's love has reached, and from the beginning man has refused to understand. But love went on reaching, offering itself. Love offered the eternal ... we wanted the immediate. Love offered deep joy ... we wanted the thrills. Love offered freedom ...we wanted license. Love offered communion with God Himself ... we wanted to worship at the shrine of our own minds. Love offered peace ... we wanted approval for our wars. Even yet, love went on reaching. And still today, after two thousand years, patiently, lovingly, Christ is reaching out to us today. Right through the chaos of our world, through the confusion of our minds. He is reaching ... longing to share with us ... the very being of God. His love still is longing, His love still is reaching, right past the shackles of my mind. And the Word of the Father became Mary's little Son. And His love reached all the way to where I was!

In Max Lucado's book the "Applause of Heaven" he writes, Even though by the "book" I'm guilty, by God's love I get another chance. Even though by the law I'm indicted, by mercy I'm given a fresh start. "For it is by grace you have been saved ... not by works, so that no one can boast." No other world religion offers such a message. All others demand the right performance, the right sacrifice, the right chant, the right ritual, the right séance or experience. Theirs is a kingdom of trade-offs and barterdom. You do this, and God will give you that. The result? Either arrogance or fear. Arrogance if you think you've achieved

it, fear if you think you haven't. Christ's kingdom is just the opposite. It is a kingdom for the poor. A kingdom where membership is granted, not purchased. You are placed into God's kingdom. You are "adopted." And this occurs not when you do enough, but when you admit you can't do enough. You don't earn it; you simply accept it. As a result, you serve, not out of arrogance or fear, but out of gratitude.

I recently read a story of a woman who for years was married to a harsh husband. Each day he would leave her a list of chores to complete before he returned at the end of the day. "Clean the yard. Stack the firewood. Wash the windows ...." If she didn't complete the tasks, she would be greeted with his explosive anger. But even if she did complete the list, he was never satisfied; he would always find inadequacies in her work. After several years, the husband passed away. Some time later she remarried, this time to a man who lavished her with tenderness and adoration. One day, while going through a box of old papers, the wife discovered one of her first husband's lists. And as she read the sheet, a realization caused a tear of joy to splash on the paper. "I'm still doing all these things, and no one has to tell me. I do it because I love him."

That is the unique characteristic of the new kingdom. Its subjects don't work in order to go to heaven; they work because they are going to heaven. Arrogance and fear are replaced with gratitude and joy.

I want to encourage you today to fall either in love with Jesus, or back in love with him. We love him, because he first loved us.