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This morning we are taking a quick look at chapter three of Jeremiah chapter 3. This chapter is a continuation of chapter 2 and the same theme runs through this chapter as the last but is developed further. Nowadays regardless of what newspaper you pick up you tend to read stories of abuse. This week the BBC reported: **Reports of domestic abuse in Scotland are on the rise, figures have revealed.** Incidents recorded by police increased from 43,631 in 2004/05 to 45,796 in 2005/06, the Scottish Executive statistics showed. The vast majority of domestic abuse was perpetrated in the home by men against women and more than half of cases last year involved repeated victimisation.

The German Football Federation (DFB) has fined two Bundesliga clubs for the racist abuse suffered by Zambian defender Moses Sichone. The 29-year-old was taunted along with Brazilian striker Kahe during the Bundesliga match between two teams on 16 September.

A retired detective from Grimsby has appeared before magistrates in Hull charged with child sex abuse.

A mother is found dead days after an inquest into the death of her daughter killed by cocaine **abuse**.

Domestic abuse, racist abuse, sex abuse, drug abuse to name but a few of the abuse headlines that hit the news this week alone! And yes in all honesty I have really only scratched the surface of the abuse headlines in the news in this last week. Were we to add the years abuse headlines together in one file it would be colossal. Standing here looking down on this congregation I want to convince myself that I am looking at a morally upstanding congregation that has never got involved in any of these forms of abuse...but then you never know – do you? Perhaps you are lilly white, perhaps you have never got involved in any of this sort of thing but I wonder what would happen if I was to add another, I believe very real for of abuse to this list? Yes we have all heard of drug and alcohol and solvent abuse. We are all very are or sexual and racist abuse and I am sure you could add perhaps a few more to the list if we had the time but what about “God abuse”? Now perhaps you have never heard of it before, and that is very possible because I dreamt this phrase up in my study this week. To the best of my knowledge there is no such officially recognized term and we will look at the reason for this in a few moments. So you wonder – how could someone possibly abuse God?

Here in chapter 3 we read:

¹ “If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and marries another man, should he return to her again? Would not the land be completely defiled? But you have lived as a prostitute with many lovers—would you now return to me?” declares the LORD.

In chapter two we read about God's hurt at the way in which his chosen people, the people he loved, the people he likened to a lover, a wife had turned away from him and how all that he had desired from them was intimacy. This theme is picked up once again and expanded on but this time there is both the idea of judgment and yet grace. This reference to Marriage and divorce comes from Deuteronomy 24 where we read: ¹If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, ²and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, ³and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, ⁴then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the LORD. Do not bring sin upon the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance. As Kidner writes, "This law which was aimed against what would amount to virtual lending one's partner to another – for if an authoritarian husband could dismiss his wife and have her back when the next man had finished with her, it would degrade not only her but marriage itself and the society that accepted such a practice."

But let's not get too caught up in the human aspect of marriage here because let's be honest – this is not the question. This is simply an analogy to help us understand God's love for us and his sense of rejection because of the way in which the people of Judah have turned away from him. Please don't be mistaken – just because God is a great big God and is all-powerful doesn't mean that he is without emotion. God hurts – not in the same way as we hurt but he hurts and most especially when we reject his love. If God can show love for us to a far greater extent than we could ever show to another human being then is it not somehow conceivable that God could feel hurt to a far greater extent too? These people in Jeremiah chapter 3 were hurting God because they were if you like practicing God Abuse. This is a sermon about God's free forgiveness and our often cheap repentance.

In a nutshell – These people had behaved towards God in the same way as a unfaithful wife might behave towards her loving husband. In Deuteronomy Jeremiah reminds those who would listen that they were encouraged not to take such a wife back again but because of God's superabundant love for his people he is prepared to have them back. For those who do not accept this invitation there is punishment that cannot be escaped.

How do we know about this forgiveness?

God speaks through Jeremiah talking about the forgiveness that was offered to Israel for doing the same:

¹¹The LORD said to me, "Faithless Israel is more righteous than unfaithful Judah. ¹²Go, proclaim this message toward the north: "'Return, faithless Israel,' declares the LORD, 'I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful,' declares the LORD, 'I will not be angry forever."

We can make forgiveness so difficult can't we. We can make God into an unforgiving god so easily too can't we? We like to excuse our sin by saying that not even God would want to forgive me for what I have done. That is the voice of someone who really doesn't want God to forgive them because before forgiveness there has to be repentance – a turning away from what we were doing and a retuning to God.

C.S Lewis said: "A great deal of our anxiety to make excuses comes from not really believing in the forgiveness of sins, from thinking that God will not take us to Himself again unless He is satisfied that some sort of case can be made out in our favour.

But that would not be forgiveness at all. Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin, the sin that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances have been made, and seeing it in all its horror, dirt, meanness, and malice, and nevertheless being wholly reconciled to the man who has done it. That, and only that, is forgiveness, and that we can always have from God if we ask for it.?"

Where the abuse angle comes in is reflected in the reading when we hear God saying:
Verse ⁴

Have you not just called to me:

'My Father, my friend from my youth, will you always be angry? Will your wrath continue forever?' This is how you talk, but you do all the evil you can."

This is just like that silly forgiveness pack isn't it? We confess to God that he is our God and our best friend and then we turn around and continue to do the things we know hurt him! What sort of people are we? God's forgives because it is free seems cheap. But it is not. It cost God more than we could ever quantify. It cost him his only son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

During World War II, a young American paratrooper, David Webster of E Company, 101st Airborne wrote his mother, "Stop worrying about me. I joined the parachutists to fight. I intend to fight. If necessary, I shall die fighting, but don't worry about this because no war can be won without young men dying. Those things which are precious are saved only by sacrifice."

What a profound statement! How much more true that is when it comes to our salvation. If we are going to experience eternal joy and peace with the holy God, then somebody has to sacrifice. And that someone is Jesus. Jesus didn't ignore our sin, brush it off or hide in a cosmic footlocker. The holy God never would have settled for that. Instead, Jesus assumed your sin and let God crush him. It was on his cross that the kindness of God and the justice of God came together. And the fusion of the two has taken on the wondrous name of "forgiveness." And how have we treated it? We have abused God by counting his free forgiveness as something that we can use willy-nilly as we choose. Sure its free – it doesn't matter that much, ask God to forgive your sins and then get on with your life. In comparing Judah to Israel, God refers to the reaction of Israel to the punishment that God dealt to them for their apostasy and says:

¹⁰In spite of all this, her unfaithful sister Judah did not return to me with all her heart, but only in pretense," declares the LORD.

If you want to know how to hurt God, if you want to know how to abuse God and his forgiveness this is how you do it, you come to him in pretense only - not with all your heart. Isaiah reaffirms this when God speaks through him about the same issue:

"These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

You and I would never be guilty of doing that – would we.

We don't live a life far from God during the week, worshipping what the world worships, hiding our faith like a wedding ring incase anyone notices and then think that we can come close to him on Sunday's, tell him we love him, call him our Heavenly father and somehow think to ourselves that God will not know any better?

My friends – spiritually speaking we are simply a church full of prostitutes happily practicing God Abuse and God in his superabundant mercy and grace is calling us back to himself – even though it makes no sense to our human hearts and minds.

Why does he do this – perhaps so that we can through parties for prostitutes at 3.30am.

³⁴Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’

³⁸This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’