



*For if you are careful to carry out these commands... (v.4)*

Rudyard Kipling wrote a piece called ‘Recessional’ in 1897 when Queen Victoria’s diamond jubilee was celebrated. He has a line that says “The tumult and the shouting dies – the captains and the kings depart”. The poem was a quiet warning to the British people to beware of overconfidence in their hour of imperial glory. Here we find Jeremiah writing a ‘recessional’ for the kingdom of Judah as he describes one king after another leaving the scene and marching off to shameful judgement. In the great days of David, Hezekiah, and Josiah, the nation had honoured the Lord, but now Judah was rapidly moving toward defeat and disgrace.

Jeremiah is not only to send a word to the king but this time he is to go to the palace in person and deliver the message. He speaks of the four kings and tells the truth of their reign and their actions. He starts with Zedekiah the most recent king and says how callous he has been in actions and the way he has dealt with the poor among them. Shallum or Jehoahaz is addressed next and there is a message of the hopelessness of looking back when instead they should be dealing with issues and looking to the Lord for help. Jeremiah then speaks of Jehoiakim and his desire to keep building himself a spacious palace when there was an international crisis going on around him. And lastly Jehoiachin who failed to listen to the Lord and was treated as if he was childless.

It could have been so different though. The Lord continued to offer his mercy but they kept rejecting. Verse 4 is the reminder that if they just obeyed the Lord’s commands and looked after the poor among them all would be well. We would do well to heed the Lord’s warnings in Scripture and keep following his commands and walk in his ways. Do we truly love the Lord our God with all our heart? And do we love our neighbours as ourselves?

**Pray:** asking for God’s help in looking after the poor and needy among us.

**Reflect:** do I love my neighbour as myself? How can I show that love today?

*“Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?” declares the Lord. “Do not I fill the heaven and earth?” declares the Lord. (v.24)*

A young man went into the corner store and told the shopkeeper he wanted to buy 3 boxes of sweets: a one pound box, a 3 pound box, and a 5 pound box. The shopkeeper brought the sweets then asked, “I’m curious why you’re getting 3 different boxes.” The young man replied, “I have a date tonight with a girl I’ve been wanting to date for months. I’m going to her house for dinner and, afterwards, if she goes out to sit with me on the swing, I’ll give her the 1 pound box; if she lets me put my arm around her, I’ll give her the 3 pound box, and if she lets me kiss her, I’ll give her the 5 pound box.” The shopkeeper agreed that the plan was ingenious. That night the boy arrived for dinner and when they sat down to eat, the father asked the boy to say the blessing. Well, the boy prayed and prayed and prayed until the girl had to elbow him to stop. Afterwards as they sat on the porch swing, the girl said, “I didn’t know you were so religious.” To which the young man replied, “And I didn’t know your Daddy was the shopkeeper.”

We can get uncomfortable when we realise that God knows all of our tricky, sneaky plans. On the plus side, it can be comforting to know he is watching over us always when we are going through difficulty and feel all alone.

Here in Jeremiah 23 a word has come concerning the lying prophets. They are exposed in these verses for their disgraceful conduct, their dishonest message and their disrespectful attitude. Jeremiah’s reminder to them is that God sees everything. Nothing is hidden from him. He is the creator and sustainer of the world. The Psalmist spoke of God’s omnipresence in Psalm 139.

Let’s not try and hide anything from God but rather let’s live our lives his way.

**Pray:** thanking God for watching over you always.

**Reflect:** do I try and hide my sin from God? Confess it now.

*I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They will be my people and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart. (v.7)*

We often think parables are limited to the New Testament and to Jesus' teaching but here in Jeremiah 24 we come across a parable God shared with Jeremiah. The parable involves 2 baskets of figs. God knew that his servant needed some encouragement after having had to deliver some hard messages so he gives him a vision of 2 baskets of figs sitting before the temple of the Lord.

One basket contains very high-quality figs and represents those first exiles who would find God's favour. God's promises to them are summarised in our key verse today, which concludes: *'They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.'* They might experience the pain of God's discipline, but God would not forget His covenant relationship, and He would give them a heart to return to God and to know Him.

The poor figs, so rotten they cannot be eaten, represent (somewhat ironically) those who were not taken into exile in that first wave. They might have been tempted to think they were safe because they were spared exile, but Jeremiah's vision explained otherwise. They were the bad figs. They would be *'a reproach and a byword, an object of ridicule and cursing, wherever I banish them'* (v.9).

Here is an important lesson about God's discipline. On the one hand, just because we don't experience any immediate consequences because of our sin does not mean that God takes no notice or that we have gotten away with something. On the other hand, even when God does discipline us, His discipline does not mean abandonment. Even in discipline, He has in mind our good and our restoration.

**Pray:** thanking God for his love, care and discipline in your life.

**Reflect:** is God disciplining me just now? If he is, remember it is for your good and restoration. Allow him to work in your life.

*I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened. (v.3)*

A pastor waited in line to have his car filled with petrol just before a long holiday weekend. The attendant worked quickly, but there were many cars ahead of him in front of the service station. Finally, the attendant motioned him toward a vacant pump. “Preacher,” said the young man, “I’m sorry about the delay. It seems as if everyone waits until the last minute to get ready for a long trip.” The minister chuckled, “I know what you mean. It’s the same in my business.”

We are not always good at listening. And this is the theme at the start of Jeremiah 25. Jeremiah had been serving for twenty three years when he delivered the messages recorded in this chapter and the next. He is now at the midpoint of his career. When you consider the unsympathetic response of the people both to him and to his messages, you marvel that Jeremiah wasn’t discouraged and ready to quit, but he continued to be faithful to his calling.

Here he delivers a message of chastening to the Jews. Four times he issues the solemn indictment that they have not listened. And because of their hearing problem the day of God’s wrath was fast approaching. No matter how many times Jeremiah spoke to them of the need to repent and turn their hearts back to the Lord, they kept ignoring. And now the time was nigh for Nebuchadnezzar and the armies of Babylon to come and take them into captivity. Jeremiah does share the secret with them that this captivity will only last for seventy years – I say only but that is a lifetime for some.

Have you been deaf to God’s word lately? Is it only filtering through your eyes but not down into your soul of understanding? Then get praying that God would open your mind to understand His Word.

**Pray:** asking God to make His Word alive to you.

**Reflect:** have I been deaf to God’s Word lately? Get praying and get reading.

*For in truth the LORD has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing. (v.15)*

Messages of judgment in an age of tolerance are about as welcome as a thunderstorm at a picnic. I don't know how many times I have shared hard words with people and I am met with apathy and rejection. It is always encouraging to see those who ignore at first but later on come back and say thank you for sharing that with me. I received an email recently from someone I had challenged and rebuked about sin in their life apologising for not listening at the time but now acknowledging that they had been living a life of sin. The great news is they acknowledged their sin, confessed it to God and he has forgiven them. People don't like to hear hard words.

That was just as true in Jeremiah's day as it is today. Back then, the Lord told the prophet to stand in the court of the temple and speak boldly to the people about their sin. Jeremiah warned the people of Jerusalem that destruction was headed their way if they didn't follow God's laws. How did they react? The people seized him and said, '*You must die!*' (v.8). Jeremiah's life was in danger because he had dared to speak the truth.

In spite of the threats, Jeremiah repeated his warning. After reconsidering, the officials and people said to the priests and false prophets, '*This man should not be sentenced to death! He has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God.*' (v.16)

Jeremiah's dilemma points out two important truths. First, a message of warning will not be eagerly received by those who need to be warned. Second, we must give the warnings and then trust God to protect us.

See any danger signs on the horizon for people you know? Perhaps you need to do the hard thing: with God's guidance, lovingly give them the warning they need.

**Pray:** asking God to give you courage and grace in speaking with others about their sin.

**Reflect:** do I have a friend who is living in sin and needs challenged?

*Make a yoke out of straps and crossbars and put it on your neck. Then send word... (v.2)*

At the Baptist Assembly in October the president of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, Chris Duffett, took some young people out onto the streets of Dundee to show them how to do to street evangelism. He had them offering free fruit and sweets to people, and when they asked why they were able to share about the free gift God gave us in Jesus. Having props and illustrations can help to open up conversations.

Here in Jeremiah 27 we have an “action sermon”. Jeremiah is told to make a yoke and wear it. When he was asked why he was wearing the yoke, Jeremiah gave them the message from God: Judah and the other nations must submit to Nebuchadnezzar or else be destroyed. The message was given not just to Judah but to the surrounding nations as well. Those who resisted Babylonian rule would face disaster, but those who yielded to Nebuchadnezzar’s reign would be blessed to remain in their lands. Why would God give such a message about a brutal enemy of God’s people?

The answer lies in understanding the sovereignty of God presented in today’s passage. Nothing is beyond God’s knowledge or control. God created all things, and He will ‘*give it to anyone I please*’ (v.5). Even Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, was not a freelance ruler moving about on his own, but is described as ‘*my servant*’ (v.6). At God’s bidding Babylon would retain power for generations, but then it too would be subjugated to other powers. Everything that was happening to Judah, no matter how difficult, was still within the control of God.

Submitting to Babylon was also submitting to God who had orchestrated Babylon’s rise, its conquering of Judah, and its eventual demise. The message through Jeremiah encouraged a deep trust in God’s plan and control, even in the face of great difficulty. The challenge for us today is to keep trusting that God has a plan and is working it out in our midst...even when we have difficulty seeing it and understanding it.

**Pray:** asking God to help you trust him more.

**Reflect:** do I trust God is working out his plan and purposes?

*At this the prophet Jeremiah went on his way. (v.11)*

I wonder how many times, like me, you respond quickly to something that is said without thinking about what you are saying? And all that happens is you make matters worse, or you say something that is silly and irrelevant, or you say something that is not helpful. I think we've all done it. And we do it because it is hard to be silent and it is hard not to respond. We fear that the other person will think they have us stumped or they have one up on us. There is nothing wrong with remaining silent until we have something useful and helpful to say, and there is nothing wrong with going away to think about things.

Here in Jeremiah 28 a false prophet comes and gives false hopes, and Jeremiah leaves quietly...only to return later. Hananiah confronts Jeremiah in the temple and says that God has revealed to him that the yoke of the king of Babylon has been broken and that the temple treasures would be returned to Jerusalem within two years. More than that, King Jeconiah and all the exiles would be returned with them.

These messages contradicted what Jeremiah had spoken in the name of the Lord. Jeremiah simply smiles at him and says let it be so then. This doesn't mean he believed that Hananiah was right...he was simply saying let's see then shall we. Hananiah didn't like this and took the yoke from Jeremiah's neck and broke it. He uses the yoke now for his own "action sermon".

Look at Jeremiah's response: he quietly left and went on his way. He had nothing to say. He was willing to go and wait on the Lord to speak to him so that he had the right message and the right time to deliver it. It is hard to go and wait, but always the right thing to do. When people goad us and look for a response, there is merit in waiting for the right words from the Lord.

Jeremiah got the right message and came back and warned of an even worse yoke – a yoke of iron. And still the people did not listen.

**Pray:** asking God to help you wait on him and his word.

**Reflect:** do I rush in or am I patient in waiting on the Lord?



*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. (v.13)*

Edith Schaeffer tells of a man in China who longed to know, worship, and serve the true God. The Lord honoured that desire by leading him to find a torn page from a catechism that had been prepared by a missionary. On it was the question, “Are there more gods than one?” with the answer, “No, there is only one God.” Another question was, “Should we worship idols?” There was only the word “No,” and the rest was torn off. But on the basis of those words he went home and destroyed his demon altars.

Then his daughter became ill. “You’ve angered the demons,” chided his neighbours. Hoping to get nearer to God, the man climbed to a 14,000-foot mountain peak and asked God to heal his daughter. Returning home, he learned that her fever had left at the exact time he had prayed. Later in a marketplace he found a copy of Mark’s gospel. After reading it and learning about Jesus, he became a Christian.

God will make Himself known to anyone who sincerely desires to know the truth. Do you really want to know God? Search for Him “with all your heart” (v.13). Look in His Word and be quick to do what He says. Put your trust in His Son. Then you’ll truly know God.

Jeremiah 29 is a letter of instruction and encouragement to those living in exile. This letter encouraged the people to settle into Babylon, continuing family traditions and contributing to the prosperity of their conqueror (v.4-7). The people should not listen to false prophets who would urge them to resist their captivity or rebel against Babylon (v.8-9).

v.11-14 contain one of the beautiful promises of God. His people were suffering the consequences of their rebellion, but He still loved them. He was still faithful. He still had plans to prosper them and give them hope and a future. And if they sought him with all their heart, they would find him.

**Pray:** thanking God for his continued love for you.

**Reflect:** do I seek God with all my heart?

*“But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds,” declares the LORD. (v.17)*

A man dies and goes to heaven. Of course, St. Peter meets him at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter says, “Here’s how it works. You need 100 points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you’ve done, and I give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in. “Okay,” the man says, “I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, even in my heart.” “That’s wonderful,” says St. Peter, “that’s worth three points!” “Three points?” he says. “Well, I attended church all my life and supported its ministry with my tithe and service.” “Terrific!” says St. Peter. “That’s certainly worth a point.” “One point!?!?” “I started a soup kitchen in my city and worked in a shelter for homeless veterans.” “Fantastic, that’s good for two more points,” he says. “Two points!?!?” Exasperated, the man cries. “At this rate the only way I’ll get into heaven is by the grace of God.” “Bingo, 100 points! Come on in!”

The healing came at the cross. Jesus died for our sins. He paid a debt He didn’t owe because we owed a debt we couldn’t pay. The Lord has promised to heal us and restore us. And through Jesus’ death on the cross we are restored in our standing before a Holy and Just God.

Restoration is the theme of Jeremiah 30 & 31. What would this time of restoration be like? All of the numerous themes involve both reversal and renewal. First, the yoke of their oppression would be broken. Judah would no longer be enslaved, and the oppressors themselves would be punished by God. Naturally, there would also be a return to the land first promised to Abraham. With that return, God promised to replace pain and fear with peace and security. The people would rebuild their land and restore their cities. What seemed like an incurable wound would in fact be healed by God Himself. In turn, there would be ‘*songs of thanksgiving and the sound of rejoicing*’ (v.19). Their dark situation of exile, loss, defeat, and devastation would be reversed in dramatic ways.

**Pray:** thanking God for restoring you through the blood of Jesus.

**Reflect:** am I thankful for God’s redeeming love?

*For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.  
(v.34)*

A 10-year-old boy wanted to be a pastor when he grew up. One day, when the family's black cat died, he had an opportunity to do some "practice preaching" by conducting a funeral.

The boy found a shoebox and put the kitten inside it. When he placed the cover on the box, however, the tail wouldn't fit in. So he cut a hole in the lid so that the long furry tail could stick out. Then he rounded up his friends, preached a short sermon he had carefully prepared, and buried the cat in a shallow grave.

When the service was over, he noticed that the tip of the pet's tail was still sticking out of the ground. Every 2 or 3 days curiosity would get the better of him, and he would secretly pull up the cat by the tail and then rebury it. Eventually the tail came off, and the body finally remained buried!

I wonder how many of us do this with our forgiven sins. We confess our sin before God and receive the forgiveness he offers through Christ's death on the cross, but a few days later we drag those same sins back up again and weep over them and confess them all over again. And we repeat this cycle, just like the boy with his cat's tail. God though has forgiven our ugly sin and forgotten it. It is buried and remembered no more. When God buries our sins in the deepest sea, He posts a sign which reads: No Fishing!

Jeremiah 31 is the continuation of the words of restoration for those who are in exile. God promises '*I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts.*' And then he promises that he will forgive their wickedness and sin, and remember it no more. Although they have suffered for seventy years in exile, a day is coming when they will return to their land and God will be with them. And the sins of their past will be forgotten by God.

**Pray:** thanking God that he remembers our sins no more.

**Reflect:** do I keep dragging up forgiven sin? Confess it and then leave it at the foot of the cross.

*Nothing is too hard for you. (v.17)*

I remember when our kids were younger them walking down our stairs and when they got near the bottom they looked at me and I'd encourage them to jump into my arms. They trusted me...but this was a risky jump. Eventually they would and I would catch them and all would be well. It is one thing for a child to say they trust their father, but another to jump into his arms from a couple of steps up! Likewise, Jeremiah previously had been declaring a message of hope, but now he was told to perform an action illustrating trust in God's word.

The chapter begins on the brink of Jerusalem's fall. The Babylonian armies had arrived, Jerusalem was surrounded, and the siege had begun. Defeat was imminent and inevitable, just as the Lord had predicted. And yet, God instructed Jeremiah to buy a field back in his hometown. Jeremiah fully obeyed, but everything about the circumstances would suggest that this was a preposterous idea - a complete waste of money. We see something of that sentiment in Jeremiah's prayer to God. He confessed everything he knew about God - His power, His character, His knowledge, His faithfulness - yet the end of the prayer indicates Jeremiah's own doubt. Why would the Lord ask him to buy a field in a nation soon to be overtaken and destroyed by the enemy?

God's response to Jeremiah gives the answer (v.36-44). It may have appeared that the end was near and all was lost, but God had additional plans - to return the people, restore their prosperity, and renew an "everlasting covenant" with them (v.40). On the surface, things may have looked bleak, but as Jeremiah confessed earlier (and God repeated later), nothing was too hard for the Lord (v.17, 27). Sometimes God's word may appear like an impossibility in the face of external circumstances, but for our God nothing is impossible - and we can trust His word, and live in accordance with His promises. Jeremiah's real estate actions, as absurd as they may have seemed at the time, demonstrate this important truth.

**Pray:** asking God to work a miracle in that situation you face which to you is impossible. Thank him that nothing is too hard for him.

**Reflect:** do I trust God's Word?

*Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know. (v.3)*

During World War II, a bomber pilot was flying on a mission when his plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire, causing it to spin out of control toward the ocean below. He later said, "I began to pray, but that was the last I knew until I came to in the water. I was in bad shape. My leg was gone below the knee and I knew that I would bleed to death in a few minutes. Then something nudged me. It was a piece of plywood with the plane's first-aid kit on it. I got the tourniquet out of it, and my co-pilot helped me to get the thing on and stop the bleeding. Another plane came along and dropped a life raft, and 4 hours later we were picked up by a rescue boat. If you don't call that a miracle, I would like to know what is. God answered my prayer."

God wants to speak to us but we have to ask him to. And this is what v.3 speaks of. Unfortunately so often our sin blocks us from calling out to God. That is why God allowed Israel to be carried off into exile. Yet his great love for his people compelled him to bring them back and heal their land. Rather than waiting for trouble to overtake us, we would be better to call on God for help while we can. And he has promised to answer us.

This is the fourth chapter in a row now where the Lord has come to Jeremiah with words of hope about the restoration to come. The people have ignored God and gone their own way and the punishment is their exile and captivity in Babylon. God has spoken that the exile will only be for seventy years and then he will bring restoration. The devastated nation would be healed. There would be abundance, peace, and security. A once-desolate land would someday echo with sounds of joy and gladness, marriages, and godly worship. Central to these promises, however, was God's declaration that He would deal with the underlying problem in His people: *'I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me'* (v. 8). Without cleansing from sin, there can be no true restoration.

**Pray:** asking God to hear your cry for help.

**Reflect:** do I cry out to God or try and resolve things myself?

*Recently you repented and did what was right in my sight...but now you have turned around and profaned my name. (v.15-16)*

Jeremiah 34 goes back to the time of the second invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, after Jehoiachin had been taken captive to Babylon, and Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, was made a vassal king under Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian army is approaching the city of Jerusalem once again, and Jeremiah is sent to the king with a message - yet another prediction of defeat at the hands of Babylon. Apparently Zedekiah was frightened at the approach of the Babylonian army, so he began seeking ways to placate God, so that God would feel more kindly toward him and perhaps spare him.

This is a common phenomenon. I have often observed this in people, and have been guilty of it myself. When trouble strikes, people will often start going to church for the first time in years, thinking that is what God wants. Or they will start tithing, or paying their debts, or doing something else they hope will somehow make God feel a little more favourable toward them, as this king sought to do. He issued a royal edict that all the household slaves of Judah should be released from bondage.

But then there was a lull in the siege of Jerusalem as Nebuchadnezzar and his men to face the oncoming Egyptians. When King Zedekiah saw that the Babylonian army had withdrawn, he immediately rescinded his orders to release the slaves. Jeremiah is then sent with a new message to Zedekiah in which he is charged with profaning the name of the Lord. Zedekiah had promised one thing to God and then did another.

There are times when we do the same: trouble is upon us and we promise God if he helps us out then we will be in church and follow him more closely. And as soon as he has helped us, we forget all about our end of the deal. Let's not make promises and commitments we have no intention of keeping.

**Pray:** asking God to help you be a person of your word.

**Reflect:** do I make commitments I then forget about and break?

*Will you not learn a lesson and obey my words? (v.13)*

Have you ever met someone who had traits you thought should mark a Christian but then found that the person had never met the Saviour? It's not all that unusual. I always remember a dear friend's father who was one of the kindest and most moral and good people I have ever met. Everything about him marked him out as a believer. But then I discovered he wasn't. He didn't go to church for he saw the place as being full of hypocrites. Sometimes people who do not know Jesus keep their own moral standards more consistently than some Christians keep God's standards.

The prophet Jeremiah ran into a group like that - and he passed along to us a valuable lesson from observing them. They were a nomadic people called the Recabites, and Jeremiah used them as an example of obedience. Although they were not among God's chosen people, God commended them for their obedience.

For example, their forefathers had taught them that they should not drink wine. So when Jeremiah offered it to them, they refused it (v.5-6). They explained the various instructions and commands they had been given by their forefathers and how they had obeyed them always. God wanted to show the people of Judah what obedience looked like. God wanted the Jews to be as obedient to Him as the Recabites were to their leaders.

Even today we see unsaved people follow the morals they've set, while some Christians are not being obedient to their Lord's commands. God hates our disobedience. Let it not be said of us that the "Recabites" of our day are more obedient than we are. May we read and learn from God's Word and then put it into practice.

**Pray:** asking God to help you to follow his commands as you trust and obey him.

**Reflect:** do I obey God's commands?

*Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you... (v.2)*

In 2000, Li Guangqiang, a Hong Kong businessman, was arrested and sentenced to two years in prison for smuggling Bibles into China for underground Christians. Such attempts to stop the spread of God's Word are not unusual, yet Christian churches in places like China continue to grow by millions.

The importance and power of God's Word is seen in today's reading as well. Before the Babylonian invasion had even begun, God instructed Jeremiah to '*Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you*' (v.2). Jeremiah then dictated those words to his scribe Baruch, who recorded them in a scroll. Baruch took that scroll, went to the temple, and read aloud the words. The goal of all of this was clear: to give the people a chance to hear their sin, to be warned about their coming judgment, and to repent. It was both God's hope and Jeremiah's (v.3, 7).

Those in the temple listened carefully to Baruch as he read the scroll and they were filled with fear on account of what they heard. They realised the king should hear this warning too so they took the scroll and went to him. However, they were wise enough to recognise that not everyone who heard the words would respond the same. They knew that Jeremiah's message would be unpopular in some places so they told Baruch to go and find Jeremiah and get into hiding.

As the document was read aloud, the king took offence, and with a small knife he cut out a portion of the scroll and threw it into the fire. Eventually the entire text was thrown into the flames. He called for Jeremiah and Baruch to be arrested. The end of chapter 36 is important. God once again commanded Jeremiah to copy His words onto a scroll a second time. Despite its rejection, God's word would remain; human opinion could not change it. Let's trust in his word and seek to share it despite the fact that some will reject it.

**Pray:** thanking God for the Bible and all it has to teach you.

**Reflect:** how can I share God's Word with others?



*Is there any word from the LORD? (v.17)*

“There’s no problem so big or complicated that it can’t be run away from.” So read a piece of graffiti found on a London wall in 1979, probably adapted from the “Peanuts” comic strip drawn by Charles Schulz. Whatever the source, the statement certainly represents King Zedekiah’s approach to the terrible problems in Judah when the enemy was at the gates. Jeremiah has already explained to the people over and over that they are to repent and turn back to the Lord but they keep ignoring. Jeremiah has recently told them to surrender and go quietly with the Babylonians but this doesn’t seem a favoured option for king or people either. Zedekiah has word sent to Jeremiah asking him to pray for them.

When the Babylonians then turn their attention from Judah to the advancing Egyptians, the people think God has answered all will be well. Jeremiah warns them that the Babylonians will be back and they will be taken into captivity.

Taking advantage of the Babylonian lull, Jeremiah set out for his home in Benjamin. Before making it out of Jerusalem, however, he met an accusation of treason: *‘You are deserting to the Babylonians!’* (v.13). Despite Jeremiah’s protest, he was arrested, beaten, and imprisoned in a vaulted cell in a dungeon. He remained there for a long time until King Zedekiah called for him, perhaps hoping for a favourable word from God. He asks if there is any word from the Lord. Instead, Jeremiah reasserted his earlier message against Zedekiah and Judah. In other words, the Babylonian withdrawal was only temporary. This was not what the king wanted to hear, so he threw Jeremiah back into prison with a meagre ration of bread.

We cannot run from God’s Word as Zedekiah will find out. When God’s Word challenges us the best we can do is learn from it and follow it to the letter.

**Pray:** asking God to help you follow His Word fully.

**Reflect:** do I try and run from God’s Word for my life?

*Do not let anyone know about this conversation or you may die. (v.24)*

An American is in London for the first time. He's in a taxi on his way to an appointment for which he is afraid he may be late, given the slow speed at which the driver is proceeding. In order to ask the driver about their progress, he leans forward and taps the older gentleman on the shoulder. The driver simultaneously emits a blood curdling scream and jumps straight up in the air, yanking the wheel to one side. The taxi veers sharply, jumps the curb, demolishing a beautiful old cast iron lamppost and comes to a stop mere inches from a shop window. The startled but uninjured passenger asks, "Are you all right? I didn't mean to frighten you. I just wanted to ask a question." "Not your fault, gov'nor," said the driver in a Cockney lilt, "I'm new to this taxi driving, and I'm not used to having company owing to my previous trade." "I see," said the passenger. "And what did you do previously?" The driver said, "Why for the past 25 years I was the best hearse driver in London, sir."

Fear of people can cause us to do strange things. When I read these accounts of Zedekiah, I get this feeling like something inside of him wanted to do what was right. Why else would he keep sending messengers to Jeremiah to find out what God had to say? Here in Jeremiah 38 he has Jeremiah brought secretly to him so he can ask him again what the Lord has to say. And Jeremiah repeats the same message again.

Yet it seems that Zedekiah was derailed in his life because of his fear of people. His fear of the leaders made him give in and allow Jeremiah to be thrown into a pit. His fear of the people in captivity kept him from surrendering to Nebuchadnezzar and sparing the city. He knew the right thing, but was too afraid to do it.

Fear of people sometimes causes us to ignore God's leading and to go with the crowd. Let's take courage and follow God above all else.

**Pray:** asking God for strength to stand out from the crowd and to follow him regardless of the cost.

**Reflect:** do I fear people more than God?

*I will save you; you will not fall by the sword but will escape with your life, because you trust in me, declares the LORD. (v.18)*

In the ancient near east, warring parties frequently used siege tactics. Armies would surround the city, cutting off all supplies of food and water while simultaneously working to breach the wall. Over time, the inhabitants were starved, weakened, and easily overcome. The Babylonians did this to Jerusalem over a period of eighteen months, when they finally breached the wall and took the city. The end had come.

Scripture also describes the fate of three individuals: Zedekiah, Jeremiah, and Ebed-Melech. Their fates, good and bad, reflect their obedience or disobedience to God's word. Zedekiah tried to flee into the wilderness. He was caught, however, and suffered a truly horrific fate. Taken to Nebuchadnezzar, Zedekiah witnessed the execution of his sons and then had his eyes put out. He was shackled and then taken to Babylon. We never hear about Zedekiah again.

Jeremiah and Ebed-Melech received different treatment. Through Nebuchadnezzar's command, Jeremiah was released from his imprisonment and given his freedom to remain in the land. Unlike the fate of so many in Judah, no harm was done to Jeremiah. Likewise, our reading ends with a declaration of the safety and protection of Ebed-Melech (the supporter of Jeremiah in the previous chapter). God had a specific word for this man: he would be rescued and spared the fate of the rest of Judah; he would escape with his life, specifically because he trusted in the Lord.

And so this devastating fall of Jerusalem underscores both the blessing of obedience and trust in God, and the curse of refusing to listen to His word. There is no surprise here. God had done just what He promised.

**Pray:** asking God to help you obey him and trust in him always.

**Reflect:** do I trust and obey God?

*Don't do such a thing! What you are saying about Ishmael is not true.  
(v.16)*

As a fellow was driving down the motorway, his mobile phone rang. Answering, he heard his wife's voice urgently warning him, "Herman, I just heard on the news that there's a car going the wrong way on the 280. Please be careful!" Herman said, "It's not just one car, honey, it's hundreds of them!"

Sometimes it's simply hard to know what to do with warnings. Should I pay attention to it or not? Gedaliah has that problem here in Jeremiah 40. He has been appointed as the new governor in Judah. Initially, Gedaliah rallied together those in the land and began the process of rebuilding. Army officers and soldiers who had escaped the Babylonians came to Gedaliah and received assurances about the Babylonian officials. His advice echoed Jeremiah's earlier words – *"Do not be afraid to serve the Babylonians," he said. "Settle down in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it will go well with you"* (v.9). Likewise, other Jews who had been scattered during the Babylonian invasion also came to Gedaliah and began settling in the land. All appeared to be going well. The remnant in the land had a godly leader, familiar with Jeremiah's earlier message, ready to rebuild lives.

Johanan has heard news of Ishmael, though, and has come to warn Gedaliah that he is in danger. Johanan is afraid that if something happens to Gedaliah that this will cause more problems with Babylon and what few people are left will all be wiped out. Gedaliah does not heed the warning. Perhaps Gedaliah thinks that Johanan was just jealous for some reason. Perhaps he thought it was just a vicious rumour. Perhaps he thinks that Johanan has some old long-standing grudge against Ishmael. His decision not to heed the warning will be costly. It's often hard to know what to do for the best. It's in those moments that we should remember to take everything to the Lord in prayer.

**Pray:** asking God for discernment in making the right decisions.

**Reflect:** do I turn to the Lord for guidance in decision making?

*While they were eating together there, Ishmael...struck down Gedaliah.  
(v.1, 2)*

We love to have folks round for dinner and to hang out. It's a great way to develop friendships and to grow them. And particularly if it is folks newer to the church then it is a really good way to get to know them better. This type of relationship building over food is nothing new. In the Near East, when people eat together, they're pledging their friendship and loyalty to one another. Ishmael, however, used the meal as a trap for Gedaliah. Whatever his reasons (Scripture does not say), his plan was to kill Gedaliah. Not only did he do that (in a particularly deceptive way), he also killed the other Jews in Mizpah, and the Babylonian soldiers. The slaughter continued when he (again, deceptively) killed a group of mourning men coming to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice over its destruction.

Of course this was all a series of tragedies that could have been avoided had Gedaliah listened to his friends and acted with more caution. It's easy to be taken in by people and to rush into things without thinking or indeed without listening to advice. And the best advice we have is from God. We would do well whenever we have decisions to take or there is doubt in our mind, to seek the Lord's counsel before proceeding.

Johanan, who had warned Gedaliah earlier, now comes to the rescue of the people. He shows great courage but that is then followed by a real lack of faith. When he is in charge he revealed his own lack of faith by taking the remnant to Egypt. He didn't remember Gedaliah's counsel or the messages of Jeremiah, both of whom warned the Jews to stay in the land and not to go to Egypt.

How easy it is for a good person to go astray simply by turning away from the Word of God. Let's make sure we read it regularly and follow it always.

**Pray:** asking God to help you keep following him and not to give in to temptation to try doing things your own way.

**Reflect:** do I follow the Word of God always?

*Please hear our petition and pray to the LORD your God for this entire remnant...pray that the LORD your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do. (v.2, 3)*

According to Mary Poppins, some promises are really “pie crust promises . . . easily made, easily broken.” That’s what we have in today’s reading. The remnant in Judah faced a dilemma. They had to choose whether to remain in the land and face potential Babylonian retribution, or to flee for safety to Egypt. To Johanan and others, Egypt looked like the best option, but on their way, they stopped to ask Jeremiah for God’s direction.

Their request to Jeremiah sounded sincere and spiritual, but there was deception in the hearts of the leaders, including Johanan. They already had their minds made up – they were going to Egypt. They were hoping Jeremiah would agree with them and give them his blessing for going.

Sometimes God’s people take this false approach in discerning the will of God. Instead of honestly seeking God’s will, they go from counsellor to counsellor, asking for advice and hoping they’ll find somebody who will agree with their hidden agenda. May we not be found to be like that.

Of course the other problem we often have is waiting. We live in the instant world: instant coffee, instant families, instant results. We expect things to happen quickly. We send a text or email and we look for the reply straight away. That’s not how God works and that’s not what always happens when we pray. Jeremiah says he will pray and he goes away to do just that. It took ten days for Jeremiah to come back. He waited ten days on God’s reply.

Of course he gives the people the answer from God telling them to stay where they are and not to go into Egypt. Johanan and the people have their minds made up already and we’ll see tomorrow that they ignore God’s word – again!

**Pray:** asking God to help you listen to him and obey his word.

**Reflect:** do I wait for the Lord’s answer or go ahead and do my own thing?

*So Johanan...and all the people disobeyed the LORD's command to stay in the land of Judah. (v.4)*

A TV weather reporter lost her job because her forecasts were never accurate. In an interview for another position she was asked why she left her job. "The climate didn't agree with me," she replied.

Now that may well be true and it may have brought a smile to our face but simply put she was laying the blame on something else. She wasn't good at her job and got sacked. We all have a tendency to blame someone else or to lay the excuse for our decisions or actions at the feet of somebody other than ourselves. And that is what happens here in Jeremiah 43. Remember we said yesterday that Johanan and the people had already made up their minds about going to Egypt before they asked Jeremiah to pray for them. Jeremiah has come back with the answer to stay put, but they quickly say that he must be lying and that God would not have said that. In order to back up their position they lay the blame on Baruch. Their excuse for rejecting Jeremiah's words is that Baruch has incited him against them. However it is simply their own pride that stops them listening.

It's pride that keeps us from bowing our will before God. It's pride in us that says, "I'm not going to let so-and-so tell me what to do!" Sometimes we need something to humble us, to "shut us up" in order for God to get our attention and for us to turn around and do the right thing.

People will give all sorts of reasons for not believing or doing what God wants. Here they are blaming Baruch - using Baruch as their excuse to disobey. In reality it's simply their pride. People will do the same when it comes to following Jesus Christ. Some people will say they have intellectual problems, but for many it comes down to their "will". They don't want to change. They don't want to give up their sin.

**Pray:** asking God to remove your pride and help you to follow his will for your life.

**Reflect:** do I make excuses for not following God's plan for my life?

*But ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine. (v.18)*

Pop singer Sheryl Crow epitomises today's sentiments about right and wrong when she croons: "If it makes you happy, it can't be that bad." Apparently the ancient Judean remnant that fled to Egypt shared those ideas, and today's reading explains their coming fate. Having ignored God's message through Jeremiah to stay, they are now in Egypt. No sooner did they arrive in Egypt than they began to worship the local gods and goddesses, of which there were many, Jeremiah comes to them and reminds them of what they had heard previously...the messages of the prophets God had sent to rebuke them time after time.

But they hadn't learned their lesson and didn't want to listen now either. They were jeopardising their future and inviting the wrath of God by repeating in Egypt sins they had committed in Judah. It would seem like they had forgotten how they had ended up in Egypt, in the predicament they were in.

They may have had new homes, new neighbours, and a new life, but they were the same people as before. They continued to burn incense to the "Queen of Heaven" and worship other gods. Not only did they persist in these practices, they did so willingly and stubbornly, even making vows to continue their idolatry. In their skewed reasoning, they argued that when they worshiped false gods in Judah, they were well off, and that the reason for the fall of Jerusalem was not their idolatry, but their failure to worship the Queen of Heaven.

Just because sin in the past seemed to accompany good times, does not make it right for us to carry on sinning. We have to let go of the old nature and clothe ourselves with the new nature (Colossians 3).

**Pray:** asking God to help you leave sin in the past and to resist temptation to go back to it.

**Reflect:** have I learned from past sin and am I moving forward in Christ?



*Should you then seek great things for yourself? Seek them not. (v.5)*

Pop artist Andy Warhol once said that in the television age everyone would have 15 minutes of fame. Yes, fame may come to us, but we should not seek it.

Selfish ambition is a terrible trait that can show itself in an ugly passion for the “best seats,” and for personal recognition. It can cause us to dominate social situations and insist on telling our stories instead of listening to others. We want to be noticed, to be prominent, to be in the limelight rather than on the sidelines.

God’s way, however, is just the opposite. It means learning to be content when others are elevated above ourselves. We learn to rejoice when someone else is preferred over us, and we give credit to others without insisting on getting it all for ourselves. God’s way enables us to accept humiliation when treated unfairly and to view the experience as a “disguised grace” - an opportunity to learn true humility.

We begin to learn God’s way from Jesus. He was ‘*gentle and humble in heart*’ (Matthew 11:29) and didn’t try to protect His own dignity or position (Philippians 2:5-8). By relying on Him again and again for His help, we become more and more like Him. Only then can we find rest from the posturing and restless striving of selfish ambition.

Baruch was hearing about all the trouble that was coming and somehow, because of his “pride”, because of his desire for “great things”, he was discouraged. Baruch was discouraged because he was looking for “great things” for himself. That shouldn’t have been his concern. God has promised him here that he will protect him no matter how bad things got, he was going to be safe and would escape with his life. Let’s stop trusting in ourselves and looking for our own greatness, but rather trust in God and rely on his promises.

**Pray:** thanking God that he is a faithful God who keeps his promises.

**Reflect:** do I rely on God for his help?

*Do not fear, O Jacob, my servant...I will surely save you. (v.27)*

S.P. Chase who served as US Secretary of the Treasury under Lincoln, wrote to the director of the mint: “Dear Sir, No nation can be strong except in the strength of God or safe except in His defence. The trust of our people in God should be declared on our national coins. You will cause a device to be prepared without unnecessary delay with a motto expressing in the fewest and tersest words possible this national recognition. Yours Truly, S.P. Chase” On March 3, 1865 Congress approved “In God We Trust!”

Jeremiah 46-51 contains messages for the nations surrounding Israel. This is a clear message that God governs the whole world and not just the land of his own people. Chapter 46 starts with Egypt and Jeremiah details the judgement that would fall upon that great nation. God declared Egyptian defeat, retreat, and destruction at the hands of the Babylonians. Despite their great preparations for war, their powerful kings, and their fierce mercenary armies, Egypt would be put to shame.

God was clear about why and how this would come about. The reason for Egypt’s fall was their pride. Verses 6-8 describe their arrogance like a swelling river, desiring to overflow into all the world. That pride would ultimately lead to defeat, but God was also clear about who would bring about Egypt’s destruction. It may appear that the Babylonians were in charge, but God declared that *‘that day belongs to the Lord, the Lord Almighty’* (v.10). Egypt would fall because *‘the Lord will push them down’* (v.15). God would bring about the fall of Egypt.

Finally, this chapter ends with a shift to words of comfort for Judah. Even if the nations to which they had been exiled should suffer defeat and destruction, God promised that His people would not completely be destroyed. Their trust should be in God, not in any nation or its leaders, for protection.

**Pray:** thanking God that watches over you always (Psalm 121).

**Reflect:** do I trust in God alone?

*Ah sword of the LORD you cry, how long till you rest? (v.6)*

A verse in “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” describes this scene in Jeremiah 47 well, “He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat; He is sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment seat.”

Here in Jeremiah 47 the attention of the prophet is turned to the Philistines. We believe the Philistines came across the water from the Isle of Crete (Caphtor in v.4). They built a wealthy nation by building a merchant marine that sailed the Mediterranean and helped them in acquiring goods from many lands. Yet, their destiny was destruction! Tyre and Sidon, Phoenician cities of Philistine origin, would have no power to help. It was the Lord who was about to destroy Philistia.

Now Jeremiah uses the image of the rising river to describe the Babylonian army as it flooded over the land. So terrible was the invasion that parents would flee for their lives, and leave the kids behind! The people would act like mourners at a funeral and ask the Lord when he would put up the terrible sword of his judgement. But this sword would continue to devour the land until God’s work of judgement was finished. What God starts, he finishes.

And for us this can be a hard and difficult thing. As we put our trust and faith in God, so the Spirit begins the work of sanctification in our lives. God, the master craftsman, begins to chip away at our lives in order to make us into the people he longs for us to be. Sin has to be done away. This work is at times unpleasant and we long to cry out that the work be stopped.

And yet would we want God to stop mid-flow? Would we want him to stop whilst there is still some last remains of sin in our lives? Of course we wouldn’t. God loves us and he will not stop until he has perfected us for heaven.

**Pray:** asking God to continue that work of sanctification in your life.

**Reflect:** am I still open for God to keep changing me?

*“I know her insolence but it is futile,” declares the LORD, “and her boasts accomplish nothing.” (v.30)*

A young woman went to her pastor and said, “Pastor, I have a besetting sin, and I want your help. I come to church on Sunday and can’t help thinking I’m the prettiest girl in the congregation. I know I ought not think that, but I can’t help it. I want you to help me with it.” The pastor replied, “Mary, don’t worry about it. In your case it’s not a sin. It’s just a horrible mistake.” Pride. We are all prone to prideful and boastful thoughts. We all tend to think better of ourselves than we are.

And its pride, along with anger and lying, that is at the root of the problem for Moab, the next nation to be addressed by the prophet. Moab was a longstanding enemy of Israel. A review of Israel’s history reveals numerous conflicts with the Moabites who tried to subdue Israel or seduce them into worshiping false gods. This background helps us understand what lies behind God’s word against them.

Moab was a proud nation trusting in their ‘*deeds and riches*’ (v.7). Moab’s pride is referenced eight times in two verses (v.29-30). But pride was not the only problem. Moab was also rebuked for defying the Lord (v.26, 42), likely a reference to Moab’s conflict with Israel, and for her false worship of other gods (v.35). God was concerned about idolatry for other nations, not just Judah.

Despite this scathing, harsh word against a deserving Moab, notice also the glimmers of concern God demonstrated over Moab. In the face of devastation, God wails, cries out, and weeps for them (v.31-32). And then there is the final word of restoration: ‘*Yet I will restore the fortunes of Moab in days to come*’ (v.47). What a glimpse at the wonderfully tender heart of God!

**Pray:** asking God to help you view yourself as you are – a sinner saved by grace.

**Reflect:** do I trust in my own deeds and riches?

*Is there no longer wisdom in Teman? Has counsel perished from the prudent? Has their wisdom decayed? (v.7)*

Bob went to a psychiatrist. “Doc,” he said, “I’ve got trouble. Every time I get into bed, I think there’s somebody under it. I get under the bed; I think there’s somebody on top of it. Top, under, top, under...you gotta help me, I’m going crazy!” “Just put yourself in my hands for one year,” said the shrink. “Come to me three times a week, and I’ll cure your fears.” “How much do you charge?” “A hundred dollars per visit? I’ll sleep on it,” said Bob. Six months later the doctor met Bob on the street. “Why didn’t you ever come to see me again?” asked the psychiatrist. “For a hundred buck’s a visit? A friend cured me for free!” “Is that so! How?” “He told me to cut the legs off the bed!”

Actually, getting your “mind” or your “wisdom” back is a little more complicated than that. Apparently the Edomites had quite a reputation for having men of “wisdom”. And yet at some point, they lost their wisdom. They “lost their mind”. So how do we get our “mind” back when we’ve lost it? Job and Solomon would both tell us that fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and knowledge (Job 28:28, Proverbs 1:7). There’s a connection between wisdom and fearing God. When you stop honouring God, you lose your real perspective in life. Getting your “mind” back involves getting things right with God.

The Edomites were in trouble though here in Jeremiah 49. Their wisdom had deserted them and they wouldn’t be able to devise any plan that would save them from the invasion of the Babylonian army. They had become a proud nation and had ignored the ways of the Lord – they had rebelled against him. In the midst of wrath God remembers mercy and shows compassion for the widows and orphans.

Let’s not forget wisdom. Let’s keep our minds on the Lord and let’s keep looking to him to lead and guide us through life.

**Pray:** asking God to help you keep your eyes on him.

**Reflect:** do I look to God for direction in my life?