

WAYPOINTS
MONDAY, 12/16

Read Jeremiah 33:1-5.

While Jeremiah was still confined in the courtyard of the guard, the word of the LORD came to him a second time: ²“This is what the LORD says, he who made the earth, the LORD who formed it and established it—the LORD is his name: ³‘Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know.’ ⁴For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says about the houses in this city and the royal palaces of Judah that have been torn down to be used against the siege ramps and the sword ⁵in the fight with the Babylonians: ‘They will be filled with the dead bodies of the people I will slay in my anger and wrath. I will hide my face from this city because of all its wickedness.

Jeremiah speaks into what were dark times for Israel. Another enemy has broken through its borders and conquered their land. In Isaiah's day, it was the Assyrians. This time, it was the Babylonians.

God “hides His face” from His people when the Babylonians came. This is in response to decades of His people's worshipping other gods and rebelling against Him. God leaves them to their own devices to suffer the consequences of their actions.

There are two things I want to highlight from this passage. The first is that God's judgment is real. It is becoming increasingly common in the church for people to believe that God won't actually judge creation; that in the end, everyone will be saved. This is not a Biblical idea. It is wishful thinking and actually short-sided. God's judgment is necessary for things to be restored. Sin and everything under sin have brought havoc upon God's good world. In order for God to bring to fruition the promise to dwell with us again, creation must be cleansed and renewed. God promises that everything and everyone that wants to be a part of the glorious new order can. They need only come under His leadership. Everything and everyone that reject this vision have chosen to belong to the order that is passing away. Through judgment, God will make what is wrong with the world right again. That's a good thing, even if it is heavy.

The second is that God desires to save. God doesn't want to condemn. He wants to redeem. 2 Peter 3:9 tells us that God isn't in a hurry to judge the world, not because He is slow to keep His promise, but because He doesn't want anyone to perish. He wants “everyone to come to repentance.” This is God's heart toward His creation. We must be able to hold to both of these truths.

Sending prayer

"God of glory, I know and trust that You are good. You despise that which harms and destroys Your creation. You have come to make the wrong things right again. Thank You for having the desire to redeem that which is broken. You provided the way back to You at a terrible cost to You. Thank You for this amazing gift. Amen."

WAYPOINTS

TUESDAY, 12/17

Read Jeremiah 33:6-9.

⁶ "Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security. ⁷ I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before. ⁸ I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me. ⁹ Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it."

Just as there is a time for judgment, so there is a time for healing. While Israel would reel from the onslaught of the Babylonians, that would not always be a part of their story.

God has in mind a new day for His people--a day marked by renewal and refreshment. His people and the land would experience His healing power and mercy. Those who were taken away to exile would return home. What was torn down would be rebuilt. The sins that caused God to turn His face away would be forgiven and forgotten. The sounds of joy and praise would flow from His people. Peace and prosperity would replace despair.

This is a welcome promise for a people who have been battered and beaten once again. Their persistent spiritual stubbornness had gotten them into trouble once again. Their hard hearts needed to be broken so that they might be mended. The purpose for this action is to bring peace. In their rebellion against God, peace was not a possibility. Through God's redemptive action, peace could now take place.

It's interesting to consider what kind of abundant prosperity and peace could make the other nations be in "awe and tremble" before God's people. I struggle to imagine it, and yet that is what God promises. From desolation comes the outpouring of His blessing.

Isaiah 61 says that God brings beauty from ashes. This is certainly the case for Israel here, and such is the promise to which we hold as well. We know what it is like to

experience harm. We know what it is like for our dreams to die and what once looked so promising to be reduced to ashes. Our hope is in the One who can bring beauty from those ashes. Our hope is in the One who restores. Our hope is in the God who will restore this broken world, including us. Our hope is that one day we will dwell in God's glorious presence and peace. May this be your hope.

Sending prayer:

"Lord, You are the One who heals, restores, mends, and rebuilds. You are the One who can bring peace to the turmoil and prosperity to devastation. You bring beauty from ashes. Whatever our circumstances today, we lay them before You. For the places of peace, we give You thanks. For the things that hurt and are hard, we ask You to pour out Your mercies. Amen."

WAYPOINTS

WEDNESDAY, 12/18

Read Jeremiah 33:10-11.

¹⁰ "This is what the LORD says: 'You say about this place, "It is a desolate waste, without people or animals." Yet in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are deserted, inhabited by neither people nor animals, there will be heard once more ¹¹ the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, and the voices of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the LORD, saying,

"Give thanks to the LORD Almighty,

for the LORD is good;

his love endures forever."

For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were before,' says the LORD.

The setting Jeremiah speaks into here is bleak. Israel has been devastated by the Babylonians. Many of the people have been dragged off to Babylon. Homes that were once occupied are left vacant. Streets once bustling with activity are now quiet. The activity that took place in towns came from the occupation of their enemies.

Jeremiah uses these images to capture the emotional space of the Israelites. It's unlikely, if not impossible, that all activity in Israel ceased. Excavations show the presence of Babylonians during this time. The land was occupied, but not by God's people. Their silence and lack of presence were what was felt and what drives Jeremiah to these images.

However, this will not always be the case. The desolation of the land will be replaced with the sights and sounds of life once again. Sounds of joy and laughter, sounds of

weddings and celebrations will resume in the towns. Worship will become a part of their life once more.

All of these activities are signs of hope. No one laughs during a siege. People don't marry when their futures are uncertain. It's hard to worship during war. That time has passed. Now is the time for celebrating and moving into a new future.

The people know this is God's doing. He will restore. He will put His goodness on full display. The people will sing His praises as they experience His steadfast love again.

We know in this world we will be prone to circumstances that leave us feeling devastated. There will be times when our future feels uncertain; and our outlook, grim. It's important to know in such times that God is still faithful. His love continues to carry us; our present-day circumstances are not the end of our stories. This future hope, along with an ever-present God, gives us hope today.

Sending prayer:

"Father, we praise You for Your steadfast, covenant love. You are always with us. We give thanks to You for You are indeed good. We know that You are moving this world to a glorious new beginning. Be with us in our present-day struggles and help us never lose sight of the hope that is ours. Amen."

WAYPOINTS

THURSDAY, 12/19

Read Jeremiah 33:12-13.

¹² "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In this place, desolate and without people or animals—in all its towns there will again be pastures for shepherds to rest their flocks. ¹³ In the towns of the hill country, of the western foothills and of the Negev, in the territory of Benjamin, in the villages around Jerusalem and in the towns of Judah, flocks will again pass under the hand of the one who counts them,' says the LORD.

Here, Jeremiah expands the promise of restoration. Not only will people laugh, marry, and worship again, but the animals that once marked the land will also return.

The reason Jeremiah goes to such lengths to draw out the animals is that they were a sign of prosperity. Animals were used in agriculture, making clothing, and food. They represented the livelihood of the people in those regions.

What's interesting about Jeremiah's description of the flocks here is that he implies a greater hand at work than simply that of the shepherds. He suggests that it is God who is shepherding the people to abundant living. Listen to this with that in mind: "Flocks will again pass under the hand of the one who counts them." This is a statement about loving, intentional care. Shepherds would often touch their flock to count them, expressing care through touch while building trust. You can sense that Jeremiah is not just talking about the shepherds, but also about a Great Shepherd.

The image of God as a shepherd carries throughout the Bible. It is a fitting image in that we think of God's guiding, loving, protecting, and caring for us. We know human beings are as stubborn as sheep and just as prone to wandering away. Even when we do, we remain under God's watchful eye. Jesus likens Himself to a Good Shepherd who seeks lost sheep and leads His flock to abundant life.

What joy it is for us to recognize the ways in which God cares for us. It is a gift to know that we are under His leadership and that He is the One who guides us, comforts us, and tends to us in life. May you walk in the peace that comes from being "under the hand of the one who counts them". May you trust His faithful and good care for you today.

Sending prayer:

"Jesus, You are not only the Good Shepherd, but You are also *my* Good Shepherd. You love me and care for me beyond what I can ever comprehend. I feel safe under Your loving leadership. Guide me as I go through this day. Help me walk in Your peace and joy. Amen."

WAYPOINT
FRIDAY, 12/20

Read Jeremiah 33:14-16.

¹⁴ *"The days are coming," declares the LORD, 'when I will fulfill the good promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah.*

¹⁵ *"In those days and at that time*

*I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line;
he will do what is just and right in the land.*

¹⁶ *In those days Judah will be saved
and Jerusalem will live in safety.*

This is the name by which it will be called:

The LORD Our Righteous Savior.'

"The days are coming," says the Lord. What joy it brought the people to hear that better days were on the way. When you've been walking in darkness, those words inspire hope.

God declares that He will fulfill His promise to His people. It is important for us to remember that God is a God who keeps His promises. This is important to highlight because we all walk through seasons when we wonder not only when but if God's promises will come to fruition. And yet, God tells us He is who He says He is, and He will do what He says He will do. It is our place to trust Him.

God will fulfill His promise to restore the land and His people through a descendant of David. This descendant will rise to prominence as their king and lead them to prosperity. His rule will be righteous and just.

This is both an affirmation and contrast to King David's rule. Early in his leadership, David proved to be trustworthy and just. He served the Lord well and valued God's will above any other. However, as the years passed, David began seeking his own will rather than the Lord's will. He no longer prioritized righteousness but became a slave to his own desires and ways. His once hopeful rule soon began to crumble underneath him.

This king, however, won't follow in David's footsteps. His rule will continue in righteousness. He will seek after God's agenda. The nation won't suffer from his failures as a leader, but instead, will thrive under this king's faithfulness. He will be the vessel through which God rescues and saves His people.

From our vantage point, it is clear to us who fulfills this prophecy. Jesus is the "righteous branch" from David's line. His rule is righteous and just. He empowers us to live in safety because He bore our punishment. He saved us from our sins and invites us to enjoy new, abundant life in and with Him.

Jesus is the One to whom Jeremiah is pointing. While the people in Jeremiah's day would have settled for a good king to lead them, God had in mind something and someone much greater. It is Jesus who fulfills our greatest needs, satisfies our deepest longings, and frees us for eternal life.

Sending prayer:

"Jesus, You are worthy of our praise. You have come to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. We love You and trust Your good rule over our lives and the Kingdom. Amen."

WAYPOINT
SATURDAY, 12/21

Read Luke 2:22-35.

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord"), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: "a pair of doves or two young pigeons."

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel."

³³ The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too."

In this passage we have two pictures of Jesus' ministry. The first is when Joseph and Mary bring Jesus to present Him at the Temple. The Law indicated that all firstborn sons were consecrated to God. The offering, just days after their birth, was symbolic of their son being a sacrifice to God, only they weren't killed but redeemed. The offering was a giving back of the son's life to the parents. While this practice was demanded of all Jewish firstborn males, it has new meaning in Jesus' life.

The second picture is at the Temple, where Simeon speaks to Jesus' ministry. His words would have stirred a mixed reaction from Joseph and Mary. Jesus would be a light to those far from God and the glory of those who were near, yet He would also cause many to stumble. He ends with words that would have haunted them, "And a sword

will pierce your own soul too." Jesus will lay the hearts of Israel's leaders bare, and they will strike back at Him with the sword. Any parent knows that when the sword hits your child, it hits you too. While we can speak so often about Jesus' death that it doesn't cause much of a reaction in our hearts, think about it from Joseph and Mary's perspective here. They were told this child, a baby, their baby, would suffer and they with Him. There is a costliness to Jesus' suffering to Him and to those who loved Him. We cannot lose sight of that.

We see here even at the very beginning of His earthly life, Jesus' purpose is clear. He was born to die. Jesus was presented to God, and while His life was bought back from God for a time, soon the "sword" would find Him. There on the cross, He would become our offering and bring redemption to all of God's children.

I wonder how Joseph and Mary felt when Simeon warned of the sword's piercing their son and their own hearts.

Sending prayer

"Jesus, You came to give Your life for us so that we could live through You. You did not consider Yourself too good to face the sword, even though it was meant for us. You took our punishment so that we might be freed. I am thankful for Your love and courage which compelled You toward the cross. Amen."

WAYPOINT

SUNDAY, 12/22

Read Luke 2:36-38.

³⁶There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

At the Temple, Joseph and Mary encounter another figure who recognizes the significance of this child Jesus. Her name was Anna, and she was a prophetess.

We're given a little background to Anna. She was older and had been widowed for quite some time. While most widows faced continual hardships that wore on their spirit, Anna appears to rise above her situation. She spends her days worshiping, fasting, and praying. She possessed a deep love and commitment to the Lord. She sought the Lord

and waited for Him. When Jesus came to the Temple, she recognizes Him. In this wonderful scene, she is found praising the Christ child to all who would listen.

While looking at Anna, it is fitting to examine our own commitment to the Lord. Are we eagerly waiting for God? Do we devote time to pray and seek God's face? Are we ready when the opportunity arises to share the Good News of Jesus?

I wonder what compelled Anna to seek the Lord as diligently as she did.
I wonder what taking a step into deeper commitment to the Lord would look like in your life.

Sending prayer:

"God of grace, thank You for examples like Anna who give me such a clear picture of the faithful life. I know that, at times, I fall short of faithful living. I ask for Your forgiveness. I also know that You do not want me to fester in guilt for You desire to free me to love You more faithfully. I ask that You show me through the Holy Spirit the steps I can take to grow. Show me what I need to do, then show me what You will do in my life. I know that growth requires cooperation with You. May Your grace carry this work to completion. Amen."