



Live as Christ

THE NEW SHOFAR

Called to be as Christ to others

It is only in Christ can we ever be as one

Better to live under Babylon than continue to sin under Yahweh

To understand the message of Jeremiah we need to read the dire warnings given by the prophet to the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the previous chapter – *Bow your neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon; serve him and his people, and you will live.* Repeatedly, throughout the chapter comes this same, unequivocal message... *Serve the king of Babylon, and you will live!* How could that be? God commanding His Chosen People to place themselves under the rule of a pagan, foreign king, under pagan gods?

What is happening here is a recalibration of Israel's understanding of what it means to be a covenanted people, to live under divine Rule and to take responsibility for living in a way that makes God known to all peoples. They had become comfortable in their religion. They practiced circumcision, offered sacrifices, said their prayers and observed all 613 commandments of the Law. As children of Abraham, surely that is all God demands of us?

Christian living is about more than believing – it means living faithfully

The priests, prophets and the king of Israel believed that because God had chosen them, God would never abandon them to Babylon. The land of Canaan belonged to them and would never be taken from them – no matter what they did. God's crushing of this kind of thinking is evident in the destruction of Jerusalem, the exile of its population to servitude in Babylon and in the way God speaks of the king of Babylon as being *my servant*. What Jeremiah says to the people is clear: God has given you this land for a purpose. Failure to collaborate with God in that divine plan means the land can be taken away as easily as it was given.

For too long the Hebrew people had convinced themselves they could obey God's will and at the same time, align themselves to the will and to the ways of the world around them. God says, you cannot be Israel and "Babylon" at the same time. Choose now! Trust God and you will live – even if it is under Nebuchadnezzar. Fight Babylon and trust in your political alliances and military skills and you will be destroyed. Choose.

The reading from Jeremiah is all about our willingness to trust in God; trust in the face of even the fiercest of opposition; trust especially when the odds are against us and the future of faith looks dismal.

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The perspective from Paul's letter to the Romans:

Paul explains the reason for this destruction of God's people... *Sin is an enslaving power which motivates us to live self-serving, disobedient lives. Sin's final payoff is death.* It was not God who destroyed Jerusalem and dragged the Hebrew people off into exile. The Jewish people condemned themselves by living outside of God's will. They chose other "gods" to shape their lives – politics, power, prestige, status, force of arms and the most self-destructive sin of all – hubris...I am right no matter what I do!

Paul goes on to hammer this point home with great spiritual accuracy...*for the wages of sin is death.* God does not need to pour out divine punishment onto sinners. Their sins are what destroy them. A commitment to faithfulness cannot survive unfaithful living and in the end, it is the sin of the believers that tear apart God's people.

Whoever welcomes you welcomes me – But only if you and I are one

When Jesus sends his disciples out as missionaries, he warns them of the persecution and hardships they will face. But one thing here is important to note. It is only when they go out as missionaries the world will reject them and persecute them. That is, when they live in the world as Christ himself lived in the world. It is the Christ part that antagonizes the world, just as it antagonized the leaders of Judaism and the Roman authorities when Jesus himself roamed the streets and town proclaiming the Rule of God. They hated him because he modelled a different way of living with others, an alternative vision of what it means to be humans in a world created by God. Perhaps most important of all, he called them to repent, to change their lives and to live under divine rule.

What is it God wants of us? Are we destined for "Babylon"?

Jesus was on a mission from God. This divine mission goes back to the call of Abraham and sits behind the very reason for the call of Israel (and the Church) in the first place: *do what you need to be doing and live in the way you need to be living that God may be known and served by the whole of humankind.* To fail in our striving towards fulfilling this goal is what leads the Church into what is a contemporary Babylon.

This then is what must become the starting point in assessing all we do and plan to do as individual believers and faith communities. Is this helping others come to know God in Christ? How can we make this into an acceptable sacrifice of praise to God?

Jesus showed us who we are as sons and daughters of God and how we are to live. It is only by modelling Him can the world be transformed into a new creation. Only by living under the one God of heaven and earth can divisions be overcome, bigots defeated, and bloody divisions between peoples and nations obliterated. For God, all lives matter because He created them and because *in Jesus there is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

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