



**Lent 5**

## ***THE NEW SHOFAR***

***No one is excused from the call to repent***

***No one is exempt from the call to having a new heart***

***I will make a new covenant...***

Jeremiah is writing during a time of crisis. God's people are in danger of losing the land given to them as an inheritance. They were surrounded by enemies bent on destroying them and replacing Yahweh their God with gods of their own. Their great sin was not abandoning God. They still believed. But it was not true faith for they trusted in a whole array of alternative pathways to a life of peace and blessing. Their future was entrusted to the Egyptians and to other powers in their region. They turned their backs on the prophets sent by Yahweh and chose, instead, to listen to the false prophets who merely repeated the woke solutions of the popularists.

Jeremiah urged them to stop fighting the Babylonians, to open up the gates of the City and trust in God to save them from destruction and so ensure their future in the land. Of course, that is tough, especially as the Babylonians were erecting siege towers ready for their assault on Jerusalem. Open the gates? Really?

***It should not be how we see the challenges but how God sees the solution***

All the people of Jerusalem could see was the enormity of the army threatening them. They were afraid. Quite reasonable given the track record of what the Babylonians had done to other cities and nations while on their quest for world domination. All they could see were the threats to their traditional religious ways. Could God be God if the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem? Could God truly remain as God if the Temple was destroyed and pulled down? Shouldn't God be destroying the godless pagans?

What Jeremiah is doing is reminding the Hebrew people how they are a people only because of their relationship with God and not because they had land, a capital city in Jerusalem and a Temple in which they could worship their God. While that intimate relationship with their God was present, growing and directing the way they were living, they would know heavenly blessings – whether or not they had a Temple! “God first” was the prophet's call. “Return to God-focussed living” was the message the prophet brought from God. Only then would they find a peace and sense of purpose and meaning from which they could get on with building their future.

***It is not what you can do, it is what you will let Me do in you and through you***

Note the focus in Jeremiah's message today. It is God who is acting. The future for Judaism does not rest in the hands of the Hebrew people alone, in what they can plan, achieve and build. The future covenant is one *God* will establish. It will be like no other covenant God

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had made in the past because those earlier covenants were broken by the sins of believers. This new covenant will be written *by God* in the hearts of those who turn to Him, trust Him and follow His ways. God will not be a God found only “out there”, in the Temple, or in acts of worship, or through the established religion. *God will initiate* blessings from within the hearts of believers. *God will build* strong and faithful disciples, *enabling* them to collaborate in His saving works in the world.

***Whoever serves me must follow me... where I am, there will my servant be***

The beautiful and powerful language of the prophet comes to fruition in the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, our Saviour and Messiah. He became our source of life through our faith in Him. Jesus the Christ is what God is doing to transform our hearts. Jesus. If our Church is to have a future here in Australia, that future must begin in a constant re-turning to God asking that He fulfil His promises – *I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more*. Any transformation of our place in the world will come only if we allow God to change our hearts – all of us. The spiritual hearts we have today are not necessarily the spiritual hearts God wants for us tomorrow. The Church, the parish we have today is not necessarily the Church and parish God wants us to have tomorrow. But we do not know the answers to this if they are not presented in prayer to God, when the faith community comes together, not to plan, but to listen prayerfully.

***The death of Jesus is the model for our worship and for serving God***

If we find all of this call to renewal and transformation threatening, then we need to take to heart the Gospel teaching from St John. Our Saviour’s redemption of the world was achieved through his horrific death on the cross. He was God’s Son but only in the handing over of His life in obedience to and in serving of His Father, could we enjoy the peace, joy and hope God alone can offer. Why would we think our collaboration with God’s actions in today’s world can be achieved without our own dying to the self satisfying faith that Jesus condemns? As it was with Jeremiah’s Jerusalemites, no person of faith should be holding ourselves above this call to repentance and renewal. The only way to avoid being overrun by today’s “Babylonians” is by a renewal of our spiritual lives, our lives in God through growing our lives in Christ His Son.

This is an enormous task, especially when we might be tempted to claim we have served God faithfully over many years of life in our church family. But it is not the past that is being called to mind. It is the present, and more importantly, the future. John reminds us of the price Jesus had to pay in bringing life to the world. The price demanded of us here in Australia is not going to be that high, though for many other Christians, faith brings with it the very real threat of martyrdom and suffering.

Jesus reminds us that we are called to *serve* and to *follow* Him. With this kind of life and faith community focus, we are promised that while we remain faithful to this calling, there Jesus will be present. If Jesus is present, He is there will all of the power and majesty of heaven. The “gates of hell” are as nothing before this righteous power.

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