

**Jeremiah: Prophet to God's  
People in Crisis  
"The Forsaken Spouse"  
Jeremiah 2-3**



February 12, 2017  
Kevin Haah

**Start Timer!**

**[Slide 1]** The last Sunday, we kicked off a new series on Jeremiah: Prophet to God's People in Crisis. Jeremiah was a prophet to God's people during Israel's greatest crisis. I believe what God said through him is relevant to the church now. If you read Jeremiah, it is easy to apply what God is saying to God's people in Israel and Judah to the United States. You have to remember that Israel and Judah were God's people because God rescued them, and made a covenant with them. This is not a message to the United States. The United States is a secular nation. It is a nation of people from all kinds of religions and backgrounds. It is a nation of immigrants. God's people now are the people of the Kingdom of God, as manifested in the visible community called the church. God's Kingdom is manifested through the church, not the state. That's important to keep in mind as you read the book. So, this is a message to the church during a time of crisis.

Before we read today's passage today, let me give you some context.

God's people, the Israelites, were enslaved in Egypt. Moses leads them out of Egypt and God gives them the Law and they enter into a covenant, that they would obey his laws and God would bless the world through them. God leads them to the land of Canaan, which is the present day Palestine.

Initially, judges led the country. They didn't have a king because God was their king. But, the people of Israel asks for a king like all the other nations. God reluctantly agrees, and anoints Saul, then David, then, his son Solomon.

After King Solomon dies, Israel divides into two countries: Israel and Judah. A few hundred years later, Assyria, the superpower at the time, destroys Israel, the Northern Kingdom. And Israel is pretty much wiped off the map. Judah, the Southern Kingdom, survives for a few more decades by agreeing to become a vassal state of Assyria. The king who agreed to do so was king Manasseh; he was very evil and worshipped Pagan gods. He turned the temple into a shrine for human sacrifice, and he even sacrificed his own son. He built idols and shrines, and instituted cultic proposition to the worship of the fertility goddess, Baal. He killed so many innocent people that the blood covered the entire city of Jerusalem. Judah turned away from God.

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This is when Jeremiah was born, during the last decade of Manasseh's rule.

A few years later, Josiah, a godly young man becomes the king of Judah. And, Babylonia defeats Assyria but leaves Judah alone. So, Judah, which was a vassal state of Assyria, becomes independent. This enables King Josiah to start a major reform, and he gets rid of the Pagan gods and idols and all the detestable practices from the temple. But, there is a looming threat in the North. Babylonia, led by King Nebuchadnezzar is threatening Judah. It is in this context that God calls Jeremiah to be a prophet. That's what we talked about last week. And it is in this context that Jeremiah prophesized in today's passage.

**[Slide 2]** Today's sermon is entitled, "**The Forsaken Spouse.**"

**[Slide 3]** Let's go to Jeremiah 2-3. It's pretty long; so, we are going to read a few excerpts from the passage.

The word of the LORD came to me: <sup>2</sup> "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem:

"This is what the LORD says:

" 'I remember the devotion of your youth,  
how as a bride you loved me  
and followed me through the wilderness,  
through a land not sown.

<sup>3</sup> Israel was holy to the LORD,  
the firstfruits of his harvest;  
all who devoured her were held guilty,  
and disaster overtook them, ' "

declares the LORD.

**[Slide 4]** <sup>13</sup> "My people have committed two sins:  
They have forsaken me,  
the spring of living water,  
and have dug their own cisterns,  
broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

**[Slide 5]** <sup>20</sup> "Long ago you broke off your yoke  
and tore off your bonds;  
you said, 'I will not serve you!'  
Indeed, on every high hill  
and under every spreading tree  
you lay down as a prostitute.

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**[Slide 6]** <sup>12</sup> Go, proclaim this message toward the north:

“ ‘Return, faithless Israel,’ declares the LORD,  
‘I will frown on you no longer,  
for I am faithful,’ declares the LORD,  
‘I will not be angry forever.  
<sup>13</sup> Only acknowledge your guilt—  
you have rebelled against the LORD your God,  
you have scattered your favors to foreign gods  
under every spreading tree,  
and have not obeyed me,’ ”  
declares the LORD.

**[Slide 7]** <sup>14</sup> “Return, faithless people,” declares the LORD, “for I am your husband. I will choose you—one from a town and two from a clan—and bring you to Zion. <sup>15</sup> Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding. <sup>16</sup> In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land,” declares the LORD, “people will no longer say, ‘The ark of the covenant of the LORD.’ It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made.

In this passage Jeremiah tells us that (1) God is our loving spouse, (2) we have forsaken him; and (3) the his redemption.

**[Slide 8] I. God is our loving spouse.**

In verse 2, God calls his people his bride. In verse 14, he says, you are my bride. In chapter 3, verse 32, he says, “... I am your husband.” You know, this is not the only place where God calls us himself husband, and us his bride. This relational theme of wedding and marriage is actually all over the Bible.

At the end of the creation narrative in Genesis 1 and 2, there is essentially a wedding of Adam and Eve. God creates the universe, all the galaxies, the world, ocean, animals, and at the end of this amazing narrative, there is a story of Adam and Eve. In a way, the Bible starts out with a story of a wedding.

It’s interesting that as you read the Bible, you see God entering into a covenant with the people of Israel sort of like that of a marriage vow: a covenant to love one another. And you see this acutely when people of God do not keep the covenant. God doesn’t just say,

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you're breaking my rules, he says, "you're cheating on me. He uses the language of sexual misconduct. You're committing adultery against me."

That's what we see here. It's all over the place. He calls his people the faithless bride, adulterers, and he talks about the relationship between him and his people as between a husband and a faithless wife.

It's not just in Jeremiah. It's in Hosea. God speaks of his people: "... I am now going to allure her ... and speak tenderly to her.' [...] 'In that day,' declares the LORD, 'you will call me "my husband"; you will no longer call me "my master." [...] I will betroth you to me forever ...' "

Isaiah 54 says, "Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. [...] For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name ..." In Isaiah 62, it says, "... as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you."

This is pretty amazing! When you get to the New Testament, Jesus says that he is the bridegroom. **[Slide 9]** In Ephesians 5:31-32, in the middle of Apostle Paul's teaching on human marriage, he breaks out into this:

**"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." <sup>32</sup>This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church.**

Then, when we get to the end of the Bible, the end of the history, what do we have? Another wedding. The history of the world begins with a wedding, and it ends with a wedding. It is a spectacular wedding. The city of the people of God, the church, is dressed as a bride, beautifully for her husband, coming down the aisle, for Jesus her husband.

So, what is God saying to us through this major biblical theme? What is God saying to us through this passage in Jeremiah?

In marriage, in the relationship between husband and wife, we find what the meaning of universe. I am not saying that marriage is the meaning of universe. The Bible never says that. It tells us that's how God sees us. He doesn't see us as subjects to rule. He doesn't see us as servants to control. He doesn't see us as pawns in a spiritual war. He sees us as his

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bride. God is saying, I don't just want to be your king, or whatever your mean by God. I want to be your spouse. I don't just want your dutiful service. I want your most intimate love. God is saying, I want to be your lover, your spouse, your husband!

Now, why is this the meaning of the universe?

The universe is a cold place. It's a dark place. It's a lonely place. But, at the bottom of the universe, at the heart of the universe, is God pursuing love with us. The universe is about love. Maybe that's why most of us yearn for love, romantic love or whatever kind of love. Unless we have it, we don't seem to be satisfied with anything. We can have all the riches of the world, and we know in our hearts that if we don't have love, if we don't have anyone to love and be loved by, we feel a sense of emptiness. That's because we are created to be married to God. We are created for an intimate relationship with God.

This is not only the meaning of the universe, it is the meaning of history. Do you know how God frames history? The reason that history starts with a marriage and ends with a marriage is because you can summarize all the history like this: "I love you, but I lost you. You gave your heart to other lovers, and that's destroying you. But I love you too much to just let you destroy yourself, so I'm going to move heaven and earth to bring you back, to get you back, whatever the cost." That's the story of humanity from God's perspective.

One author (Ray Ortlun) said it like this: "Marriage is not just another mutation of human social evolution ... It is a divine creation, intended to reveal the ultimate romance guiding all of time and eternity."

If that's true, I want to go over two implications.

The first implication is that you are that valuable to God. You are that loved by God. I know that the world sometimes tells you that you don't matter. They sometimes tell you that you are not worth it. They sometimes tell you that you are too ugly, too poor, too dumb, too this or that. But God, but God, wants you to know that he loves you! He wants you! You are the object of his love! He finds you worthy! He loves you so much that he hurts. That is our God. That is you.

The second implication is that he wants a real relationship with us. He doesn't just want a ritual. He doesn't just want lip service. He doesn't just want to be someone you turn

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to when you are in trouble. He wants to be married to you. He wants to be in the center of your life. He wants to be the reason you wake up in the morning. He wants you to be consumed by his love for you and he wants us to be consumed by his love for us. He wants to be intimate with us. He doesn't just want us to ask him for stuff. Give me, help me. He will if you call on him. But, he is after something more. He wants us to receive his love, be ravished by his love, be astonished by his love, and be transformed by his love.

Do you want this kind of love? Do you know your husband who loves you like this?  
But, there is a problem.

**[Slide 10] II. We have forsaken him.**

**[Slide 11]** Jeremiah 2:13 says:

They have forsaken me,  
the spring of living water,  
and have dug their own cisterns,  
broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

God is the lover that we yearn for. He is the spring of living water but we have forsaken and dug our own cisterns that cannot hold water. Instead of looking for love him who can give us the life we need, we are looking for love in all the wrong places. Let me give you an example: romantic love.

Ernest Becker, who wrote *The Denial of Death*, a Pulitzer Prize-winning book some years ago, talks about this. He says, "... we can see how modern man edged himself into an impossible situation. He still needed to feel heroic, to know his life mattered in the scheme of things ... Also, he still had to merge himself some higher meaning ... If he no longer had God, how was he to do this? One of the first ways that occurred to him ... was the 'romantic solution.' "

The thing that we are created to experience is this intimate love relationship with God. Now, we look for that in a love partner. And that lover becomes the way to find meaning in life. We seek our worth, meaning, life from our lover. We want nothing less than redemption of our lives from our lover. We want to get rid of our feeling of emptiness.

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We want to be validated. We want them to fill us with love. We put him or her in the place where God wants to be. Becker says that human lovers can't do that. And Jeremiah is saying the same thing: it's a broken cistern. We can't get true life from it.

I am not saying that marriage is not a beautiful thing. Or that romantic love is not a beautiful thing. But, if you look *at* human love, romance, instead of *through* it to the One it points to, to the One it's designed to lead you to, you're going to be disappointed. Do you do this? Does this explain a few things about your life up to this point? If you dethrone your lover or the lover you wish you had from that place, then, you will actually be in a healthier place to give and receive love from your lover.

The passage actually goes deeper than this. Jeremiah's indictment of our sins is portrayed as a sexual misconduct in context of a relationship. Have you ever experienced unfaithfulness of someone you love? Let's look at the passage in more detail. It's pretty vivid. **[Slide 12]** In 2:20, God says:

**Indeed, on every high hill  
and under every spreading tree  
you lay down as a prostitute.**

What is he saying? On every high hill: Ancient Near East cultures set up shrines at high places, in mountain top, and under every spreading tree, because spreading trees (this means trees that are flourishing and green) were seen as a symbol of fertility. As you can see, pagan shrines were everywhere. Not just in the temple in Jerusalem. And God's people lay down, actually this word translated as lay down is the common word for spread. So, this is a little rated R now: it says, you spread like a prostitute. I don't think I have to describe this more. But, it is a very sexual image of cheating on God. Idolatry is adultery. It's not just breaking God's commandment. It is breaking God's heart.

I think we often make idols of high places and flourishing things. You know what? They look good. Have you been to a mountain top? It's beautiful. Have you seen a spreading tree? A tree that is green, leafy and flourishing? It's beautiful. Idols are often beautiful things that we make into ultimate things. It's things like romance. It's beautiful but it's not the ultimate. It's family, children. It's beautiful but it's not the ultimate. It's

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country. It could be good or bad, but it is not the ultimate. It's power. We often want to do good things with power. And often, it can be used for good. But, that's not the ultimate. It's having a house or car or stuff. It's good to have them, but it's not the ultimate. If we make any good things into ultimate things, we are spreading like prostitute. It's not just us personally.

The church can make idols too. In fact, while the language is very personal, we always have to remember that the bride is communal. It is God's people, the church. We as a community can commit idolatry. In many ways, conservative leaning Christians have a tendency to make patriotism, military, consumerism, capitalism, tradition, and family and individual morality into an idol. And liberal leaning Christians have a tendency to make progress, science, systematic morality, tolerance, pluralism, and moral relativism in the name of freedom and inclusion into an idol. They are often good things, and they look good. But, if we make them into ultimate things, we not only make them into idols, we commit adultery against our God. Have we been so much influenced by our culture that we don't even see the idols of the church? In many ways, the church has abandoned the call that God has given us, the call to love him, and love our neighbors, the call to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the call to build the Kingdom of God. There is too much to unpack here today. We will look at it more as we continue the series. For now, we have to ask ourselves, what are we really after? Are we after the Kingdom of God or high places and flourishing places in the Kingdom of this world? Are we cheating on God?

We have to be vigilant because idols are competing lovers of our soul. I think one of the reasons that idolatry is compared to adultery is to show us that idolatry has the kind of power that sex has. It can feel beautiful; it can help us feel less lonely; it can help us feel loved; and it is luring; it is tempting; it is powerful, but it is a broken cistern that does not hold water.

Is there redemption from our adultery?

**[Slide 13] III. His Redemption**

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God has a plan for redemption. This plan is actually what the Bible is about. It is the central theme of both the old and the NT. His redemptive plan is to get us back to be his bride, his spouse. Then, Jeremiah 3:16 says something very interesting.

<sup>16</sup>In those days, when your numbers have increased greatly in the land," declares the LORD, "people will no longer say, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It will never enter their minds or be remembered; it will not be missed, nor will another one be made.

He is saying, "We are going to come back together again. And when that happens, the ark is going to be obsolete. What does that mean? Do you remember raiders of the lost ark? That was a fictional account of people during WWII finding the lost ark. The ark of the covenant was at the heart of the temple, in the holy of holies, beyond the curtain of the temple. Only the high priest entered into the ark only once a year during the Day of Atonement, Yom Kipper. The ark symbolized his holy and intimate presence and glory of God. The high priest entered the ark in the holy of holies with atoning blood of a perfect lamb and sprinkled the blood on the mercy seat, which was the top of the ark.

People knew that the only way to approach God for redemption was through the ark, through the atoning sacrifice in the temple. They knew that that was the only way to redemption and forgiveness of sins for the adultery committed by God's people. But, what does it mean that the ark will become obsolete?

Centuries later, Jesus Christ is sitting at a wedding feast. His mother comes up to him and says, "They're out of wine." What does Jesus say? He says, "Woman, it is not my hour" which means it's not my hour to die yet. Why is the wedding and the wine making him think about his death?

Because Jesus knew that he was the ultimate bridegroom. In fact, he referred to himself as the bridegroom. When someone asked, why don't your disciples fast? Jesus said, "Should the friends of the Bridegroom fast when the Bridegroom is with them?" That was an audacious and breathtaking statement for a human being to refer to himself as a bridegroom for God's people.

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Jesus was sitting at the wedding feast thinking about his own death because he knew that in order to redeem us as his bride, he would have to die for us. If he was ever going to drink the cup of blessing *with* us, he was going to have to drink the cup of eternal justice *for* us.

On the cross when he died, the Bible tells us the veil of the Holy of Holies was torn in two from top to bottom. Why? The veil is obsolete. The ark is obsolete. The temple is obsolete. All temples are obsolete. Why? Jesus made himself the final sacrifice in the heavenly temple. He did it to tell us, "I love you, and I want your love again. On the cross, I have redeemed you to take you back."

This means Jesus is the forsaken spouse who died to redeem the unfaithful spouse.

Jesus is saying, "I love you. I want to be with you. I want us to be in an intimate relationship together. I created you for that. I am the only one who is the spring of living water. Everything else is a broken cistern. I am hurt by your unfaithfulness, but I want you to return to me. And I am going to do everything possible to make that happen. I am going to move heaven and earth to make that happen. I gave myself for you on the cross to redeem you. Would you come back to me?"