

Message: *“A Request Refused?”*

Jeremiah 15:15-21 The Deceptive Brook

P: O LORD, You know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In Your forbearance take me not away; know that for Your sake I bear reproach. Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by Your name, O LORD, God of hosts. I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because Your hand was upon me, for You had filled me with indignation. Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will You be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail?

Therefore thus says the LORD: “If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before Me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as My mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, declares the LORD. I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless.”

Throughout the Old Testament, the people of Israel go through what is sometimes called the cycle of apostasy. They stray away from God, so God sends judgement on them. They cry out to God for rescue, and God rescues them. Then the cycle repeats.

When the people went astray, prophets were called to call the people back to God. Unfortunately, it was often a thankless job. Prophets speaking for God often said things that made people uncomfortable. Prophets speaking for God were unafraid to point out where the people were failing in their devotion, how they were straying from worshiping God alone, how they failed to care for their neighbors as God had commanded them to do. Prophets said what needed to be said, but not what their hearers always wanted to hear. The people persecuted the prophets. They didn't want to hear what God was telling them. They wanted to hear good news, that they were doing fine, that they would be prosperous and live in peace. When they heard messages warning them of bad things to come, they went after the messenger.

In Jeremiah 15, we hear Jeremiah complaining to God. He tells God of all he did, how the words of God were a joy and a delight. He tells God how he remained apart from those who would lead him astray or keep him from completing his mission.

Yet he is facing challenges. His pain is unceasing. Jeremiah accuses God of being like a deceitful brook. He thought, he assumed he'd have God's living waters flowing by him all the time, yet it seems dried up, just like the stream beds in the desert, that fill with water in the spring but dry up in the summer, when the heat is the strongest and the need for water is the greatest.

God's word comes to Jeremiah. First, it calls him to repentance. As focused as Jeremiah has been on other's sins, he needs to repent from his own sins. After that, Jeremiah will be a fortified wall of bronze. It recalls when Jeremiah was called, when God made the same promise that Jeremiah would be able to stand up to the rich and powerful who didn't want to hear what he had to say.

Jeremiah's request is seemingly refused. Jeremiah doesn't get what he wants, but he gets what is needed. He is recharged and reinvigorated to do God's will and be God's prophet, whatever trouble may come.

Jeremiah 18:1-6 The Potter's House

P: The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear My words." So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do.

Then the word of the Lord came to me: "O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done?" declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel.

Pottery was a major industry in the ancient Near East. Archeologists comb through shards of pottery looking for clues about how people lived, what they did, and how they used their pottery.

Jeremiah had probably walked past this potter's house many times, and seen this same process happen many times. He sees the potter at work. He sees the potter need to rework the clay, and fix it. Yet God pointed Jeremiah to what this meant for him, and for the people of Israel.

With pottery, as long as the clay is still wet, you can fix it. You can repair it. Once it's been fired, once it's been hardened, it can't be changed. It is stuck in one shape, with one purpose. It's fragile. Once broken, it usually can't be fixed.

When we hear the detailed account of how God created people, we hear how God shaped them out of dirt with his hands.

It's a call to personal repentance, and it's a call to national repentance.

But the call wouldn't be answered. The request would be refused. And so Jeremiah would return to the potter's house, but not just to observe. He'd buy a pot and use it in an object lesson.

God told Jeremiah that Israel was like a worthless pot. Their sin stank to high heaven, and because they refused to repent and ask for God's forgiveness, he was through with them! So the LORD told Jeremiah to gather the elders of Israel. And after listing all their sins, he was supposed to break the pot and say, "Thus says the Lord of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended" (Jer. 19:11). In the Law of Moses, if a dead mouse or lizard fell into a dish or piece of pottery, it was made "unclean," and the pot had to be broken and tossed out (Lev. 11:29-33). The nation of Israel was full of filth, and so like a contaminated piece of pottery, it had to be destroyed.

Even with the judgment came the hope of repair and restoration. Many Japanese traditions practice the art of Kintsugi to fix a broken or damaged piece of pottery by filling the cracks in with gold or silver. The broken pieces are believed to be part of the pottery's history and, rather than hiding the damage, the repair is illuminated.

God repairs that brokenness, puts the pieces back together, in a way that doesn't hide the brokenness, but instead the repair makes things better than before. And that leads us into the next reading.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 The New Covenant

P: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put My law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."

The first covenant, that came down in thunder and lightning to Moses on Mt Sinai, which included the Ten Commandments among other provisions. A contract that the people of Israel would be the people of God, and that God would lead them, and guide them. But God had to write all of this out for Moses, taking up ten chapters of Exodus. And the details of the contract were further fleshed out, further clarified and complicated throughout the books of Leviticus and Numbers and Deuteronomy.

But that was the old covenant. The old contract. The old deal. The one that had been broken by the people of Israel before the tablets stopped smoking, before the ink was dry on the contract, When God gave the 10 Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai, Moses didn't even have time to get down the mountain before the Israelites waiting for him had broken the first commandment by making a golden calf and worshipping it. That frustrated Moses so much that he smashed the tablets, breaking them as the Israelites had broken the covenant. Replacements were made, but they never were as good as the originals that God had made himself.

The fact that the covenant was broken that quickly wasn't a good sign, but it was an accurate sign, of how they would keep that covenant. The people would refuse to keep the covenant, no matter how many times God called them back. it reached a point where the old covenant, the old contract, the old deal had been broken so many times, in so many ways, that it wasn't working anymore. The people of Israel had been conquered by the Babylonians, and soon they would be taken away into exile.

Now, God promises a new covenant. A covenant that would not be written on tablets of stone that could be broken, or on pieces of paper that could be lost or destroyed. This would be a covenant, a contract, that would be written on the hearts of the people of God.

Jeremiah would only know of the promise of the new covenant. He wouldn't get to see it. But we do. We see the new covenant announced by Jesus. We see it marked with his blood as he eats with his disciples and as he dies on the cross. The iniquity of the world, the sins of the

world, the brokenness of the world, is on him on the cross. Jesus takes on the cross all of the punishment deserved by the breaking of the old covenant, and establishes the new covenant.

This same new covenant was written on our hearts in our baptism. When the pastor says, “Receive the sign of the holy cross both upon your forehead and upon your heart to mark you as one redeemed by Christ crucified,” the new covenant has been written on your heart.

The knowledge that God loves us, sent his Son to die for us, and for his sake forgives us all of our sins. God may deny our requests for a time, but gives us what we need. Forgiveness through the new covenant because of Jesus.