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Preaching Through Change by Ben M.
Jeremiah 1:1-19

Through the Prophets God Expresses His Care is for his People. The word of God comes to us in a changing world. Exile, banishment, eviction from the land of milk and honey is the constant theme of the ministry of the prophets. The people of Israel broke the covenant that guaranteed them freedom and enjoyment of the Land of Promise. Their breach of contract meant they eventually had to leave the land. As one who rents a house and breaks the terms of the contract they were evicted. Like all the prophets, Moses warned the children of Israel to remain faithful to God. But because they didn't listen to him or the prophets that came after him, the terribly fierce Syrians swept down on them destroying their cities and taking the northern kingdom of Israel into exile (722BC). The Babylonians defeated the Syrians and in 586BC they took the remaining Israelites (Juda) into captivity. The whole nation of Israel was in exile. They lost the free enjoyment and possession of the land, its opportunities and blessings. God was gracious and they were brought back seventy years later when they were told to wait for the promised king who would restore their sovereignty. That king appeared. His name is Jesus: the King of kings, the Lord of lords! And he was crucified! So, the final enactment of the exile was brought into effect. Jesus and the apostles warned the nation but they did not repent and in 70AD the temple was razed to the ground by the Romans. There is still no temple, there is still no throne on which a son of David sits. They have been in exile for 2,000 years.

These cataclysmic events were not impulsive acts. God warned the people time and again through the prophets. 'Live as God calls you to live and the blessings are yours. Depart from his ways and all these things will come upon you.' Jeramiah saw in the almond branch (v11) as a symbol of the process of change: first the bud, then the fruit. That is what happens. If we carry on the path of human wickedness there will be a huge cataclysmic human and environmental disaster. Noah warned the people of the flood for one hundred years. The Egyptians endured more and more serious warnings and hardships during the plagues until they lost their first-born and the entire Egyptian army in a day. God is very patient and slow to anger. But the day of reckoning will come.

Through the prophets God guides us. The exile was never designed to be the end, "...and when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you." (Deut. 30:2-3) While there is life we have hope. There is still time. If at any time we will return to the Lord he will gather us in. He's a loving God and Father just like the story of the Prodigal Son. The moment the boy returns his father runs to him and gathers him in, clothes him and celebrates with a kingdom feast. In New Testament terms there is no one here who is born a Christian. You are told that salvation has been paid for you through Christ. All you have to do is believe and you will be saved. You have come into the good of the land through his promises. We know sometimes a man's heart grows cold, people drift away from trusting his word. One of the saddest times in an elders' meeting is when we have to say that we have to take that person's name off the list. But the moment that person turns we are running down the road to welcome them back. God expresses his care and love for his people through the prophets so

that they might enjoy the good that he has for them.

Through the Prophets God Helps us to Change. When the children of Israel were in Egypt they were a nation of driven slaves. Moses was taking them out of that situation to the Land of Promise where they would be free. However, you can take the people out of Egypt but then you have to take Egypt out of the people. Everything had changed so they needed to be guided and reminded of who they had become. They needed to keep changing until they became the people that God meant them to be. Jeremiah's ministry was the opposite because the breaches of covenant had made it inevitable they will be thrown out of the Promised Land. Jeremiah's message was 'It's too late. It doesn't matter what you do now, you are out. You will lose everything and the only thing that will remain is God.'

Each group of prophets had a different type of ministry to help change the minds and hearts of people as they moved into exile, were in exile or as they came out of exile. Just think of how the world has changed since the exile. The word of God has had to go out to all the different changing cultures around the world from the superstitions of medieval times to the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the cynicism of our day. On a personal level good changes happen that we embrace and rejoice in. But bad things happen too. All the time God's word is coming to us as we cope with a changing world. There are timeless biblical truths that we can apply all the time everywhere. And there are specific counsels that are applied to specific people at specific times. Sometimes you need a specific word just for you in your specific and changing situation. The Spirit of God takes the word of God and applies it to you in a fresh way for your changing situation here and now. In Acts six they appointed deacons so the apostles could give themselves to the word and prayer. Deacons simplify church life so the pastors can get on with preaching, praying and pastoring.

Through the Prophets God awakens us to the Eternal Kingdom. Exile is God's ultimate sanction. It comes by the law. In church excommunication is the ultimate sanction. It comes when we relinquish our faith and God ordains it all. There is something far more serious than being put out of the land or the church. Just as the land has boundaries and the church has boundaries so God has boundaries. It is important to be inside the boundaries, not outside. God's inner boundary is the safe sheepfold. It is Heaven. This is hard to say; to be outside of that boundary is to be in Hell. The difference is you can be put out of the land or church and come back but you can't change places once you are in Heaven or Hell. The changeable times on earth are places where we can make our mistakes and work things out so that when we make the final decision we are either in or out, in Heaven or out in Hell. We are with God or without God. Grace gives us time to change, time to come to God, time to come back. In eternity there is no time so no opportunity to change. We are in the immediate presence of almighty God. We are in his house or not.

The prophets waken us to the realities of the truths of where we are going. What is our direction of travel? The prophets prepare us for the inevitability of change from this temporal world to the place where everything is eternal and fixed forever. We need to be aware that this world will all end and there will only be eternity and God. "For the wages of sin is death, [exile/excommunication], but the gift of God is eternal life [inhabitation of the land/enjoyment of fellowship] in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23) Eternal Life is what's at stake. If you have rejected Christ the King, turn and accept him for where the king is there is the kingdom.