

THEME: Jeremiah: Faith for Tough Times

“Cracked Cisterns that Hold No Water”

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

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Jeremiah 2:4-5, 11, 13, 20b, 27-28, 32b-34; 10:22

4 Listen to the word of the Lord, people of Jacob—all you families of Israel! 5 This is what the Lord says: “What did your ancestors find wrong with me that led them to stray so far from me? They worshiped worthless idols, only to become worthless themselves.

11 Has any nation ever traded its gods for new ones, even though they are not gods at all? Yet my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols!

13 “For my people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me— the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!

20b “On every hill and under every green tree, you have prostituted yourselves by bowing down to idols.”

27 To an image carved from a piece of wood they say, ‘You are my father.’ To an idol chiseled from a block of stone they say, ‘You are my mother.’ They turn their backs on me, but in times of trouble they cry out to me, ‘Come and save us!’

28 But why not call on these gods you have made? When trouble comes, let them save you if they can! For you have as many gods as there are towns in Judah.

32b Yet for years on end my people have forgotten me. 33 “How you plot and scheme to win your lovers. Even an experienced prostitute could learn from you!

34 Your clothing is stained with the blood of the innocent and the poor, though you didn’t catch them breaking into your houses!”

10: 22 Listen! Hear the terrifying roar of great armies as they roll down from the north. The towns of Judah will be destroyed and become a haunt for jackals.

VIDEO **Jeremiah Week 2 Sermon Starter**

SLIDE **Cracked Cisterns That Hold No Water (Use Jeremiah background)**

Today we continue our series of sermons on the prophet Jeremiah who animatic, confusing, disturbing and profound of the biblical prophets. Jeremiah prophesied from around 627 BC until about 584 BC which is about 45 years. During that period of time he had one consistent message which is, "If you don't turn back to God then terrible things are coming."

Jeremiah would go to bed at night and he would have nightmares of the city of Jerusalem being destroyed by a kingdom from the North, which we would come to know as the Babylonian Empire. He could see them invading and destroying the Temple in Jerusalem, bringing down the king's palace and killing and pillaging and raping the citizens of the city. He knew this was going to happen because God was going to withdraw his protection from the Jewish people because they didn't really want God around and God promises that he would never force himself on anyone. Jeremiah preached this message relentlessly for 40 years to anyone who would listen, and yet they refuse to listen.

He said to them, "If you will just turn to God and God will take you back and you can be saved!" But they wouldn't listen and they wouldn't turn to God and they kept doing their own thing and worshiping the gods of the empires around them. Towards the end of Jeremiah's ministry the message became even simpler. "Destruction is coming, so just prepare yourself."

Our aim is to try and understand the message of the prophet Jeremiah in its historical context because the truth is that if you try to read Jeremiah by yourself, without any historical information, then it is just confusing. It doesn't all make sense because it is not in chronological order and you wonder why Jeremiah is saying things when he is saying them because they seem pretty dark and disturbing. In order to understand Jeremiah, part of what we need to do is understand some history and so each week in this sermon series we are learning a bit of history. We have to ask, "What did that mean in the day in which the text was written?"

Then we can answer the question, "What is the message from Jeremiah for us today, especially as we deal with tough times and challenges in our own lives?"

Please take out of your bulletin your Meditation Moments and your Message Notes. You will find the passage of Scripture that we heard listed at the top and then below that are some blank line for you to write something down. I hope you will take notes of anything you want to remember from today's

message. I promise that you will learn something you didn't know today that will help you in the weeks ahead so please use that space. You then will find an opportunity for you to read the book of Jeremiah on your own. We are not going to read straight through it because the book of Jeremiah was not written chronologically. It doesn't start at the beginning of Jeremiah's life and then go to the end, though the end of the book is the end of Jeremiah's life. You actually go back and forth in the book to various events and so we are going to read the book a bit differently than you normally would read a book in the Bible. If you are watching online you can download this on your own and print it off at home.

The other thing I would like you to have out is this insert the genealogy of the Kings of Israel on one side. I invited you to put this insert in your Bible and bring your Bible with you this week. How many of you brought your Bible today? I want to encourage the rest of you to bring your Bible with you in the next few weeks if you would. I realize that many of you depend on the video screen and on our Bibles in the pews each week, but if you have a Bible please bring it and I think you'll find it helpful as we go through this study together. If you don't have a Bible then we would be happy to give you one. You can take one of these Bibles that are in the pews or we can recommend a study Bible for you that we have in our bookstore which will have better notes to help you read books like Jeremiah. I think there is something to being in the book they can be very helpful to us as we read the text of Jeremiah over the next few weeks.

We are going to learn a bit about the genealogy of the Kings of Israel and I think that will help us understand the prophet Jeremiah a bit better. Let me remind you of what we learned last week.

SLIDE Map of the Assyrian Empire in 650 BC

The Assyrian Empire was in power in the ancient near East during this time and we learned that this region is the most valuable piece of real estate because it is what connects Europe and Asia to the continent of Africa and so all of the trade routes and economic activity connect in this place where Jerusalem sits on the map. The great empires were all interested in controlling the land of Judah which is the southern portion of the nation of Israel.

VIDEO Changing Empires Map for Jeremiah

Watch what happens on the video screen as we see 45 years of history and empires come and go in 30 seconds. Jeremiah is prophesying during a time of

great upheaval between these vast empires. The Assyrians were in control until he was about 16 years old and then when he began to preach the Babylonians were revolting against the Assyrians and so Judah had 17 years of independence. At the end of those 17 years Egypt began to once more flex its muscle. The Egyptians marched through the land of Judah and took control of Jerusalem, putting their own puppet King on the throne, and not stopping until they reached the modern-day country of Syria.

The Babylonians then defeated the Egyptians at the battle of Carchemish on the banks of the Euphrates River and then marched down through the countries of modern-day Syria and Lebanon, eventually conquering Jerusalem and then continuing all the way down to Egypt.

SLIDE Map of Babylonian Empire 597 BC (picture)

The Jewish people rebelled three times against the Babylonians and in the very end the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar would surround the city and lay siege to the city of Jerusalem for 18 months. The people began to starve to death in the city until the Army of Babylon breached the city walls, tore down the Temple, burned the city to the ground and took the King of Israel as a slave. Before they enslaved him he was forced to watch his two sons be executed in front of him and then his eyes were gouged out so it was the last thing he saw. They then forced that King and all of the leaders of Israel to March to Babylon where they serve as slaves in exile. The kingdom of Judah which is what was left of Israel ceased to exist for the next 50 years, just as Jeremiah had seen in his nightmares for 40 years before that.

SLIDE The Last Seven Kings of Judah (picture)

Let's retell the history using Josiah's family genealogy tree. Please take out of your bulletin once again that genealogy chart that we made a bit bigger this week so that you could read better! I want to tell you a little bit about each one of these that you see in the genealogy chart.

The first one is Manasseh and Jeremiah had just been born when Manasseh died. Manasseh has an impact on everything else that is going to happen until the downfall of the kingdom of Judah. Here is the main thing we read about Manasseh in the Scriptures in 2 Kings and also in 2 Chronicles.

SLIDE *6 Manasseh also sacrificed his own son in the fire. He practiced sorcery and divination, and he consulted with mediums and*

psychics. He did much that was evil in the Lord's sight, arousing his anger. 7 Manasseh even made a carved image of Asherah (the female goddess of fertility) and set it up in the Temple...

16 Manasseh also murdered many innocent people until Jerusalem was filled from one end to the other with innocent blood. This was in addition to the sin that he caused the people of Judah to commit, leading them to do evil in the Lord's sight.

I want you to imagine that Manasseh went into the Temple and he moved the altar aside and he put altars to other deities in their place. Do you get a sense of Manasseh and what he was about in this passage? He reigned for 55 years over Judah and the man who was anointed, or set aside by God to lead God's people, lead people away from God and adopts the gods and goddesses of the ancient near East which entail sacrificing children, including his own son.

Manasseh's son Ammon reigned for two years before he was assassinated by his court and he also did what was evil in the sight of God. The next King however was Josiah and he turned back to the God of Israel and was more in line with King David and his rule several hundred years earlier. When he was 16 he rededicated his life to God and he committed the people to a process of reform. He tore down the altars to the other gods and he cleansed the Temple.

King Josiah died in 609 BC, killed by the Egyptians in battle, his son Jehoahaz was installed on the throne and he went back to the practices of Manasseh. The Egyptians came and arrested him and took them back to Egypt and they installed Jehoiakim on the throne as their puppet King. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord as well. Not only did he worship the gods of Manasseh but he also built himself a fabulous Palace by making the Jewish people his slaves to do his bidding.

When he died then his son Jehoiachin became ruler for three months. He led the people in a rebellion against the Babylonians and he was captured in battle and taken as a slave, along with a number of other Jewish leaders.

Zedekiah was then placed on the throne by the Babylonians and he also went back to the practices of Manasseh and did what was evil in the sight of Lord. Most of the prophetic utterances of Jeremiah happened during the time of Zedekiah, which was the last 10 years of the kingdom of Judah. Zedekiah is mentioned 45 times in the book of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah starts his ministry with Josiah the good King, and as a matter of fact his ministry started as a support and encouragement for Josiah and he came alongside of him when both of them were very young. Jeremiah helps the reform that Josiah put into place as he prophesied about returning to God. But after that, every single King, the last four Kings of Judah, all went back to the practices of Manasseh.

In the very end we find Jeremiah pleading with Zedekiah to listen to him and to return to God. Jeremiah can see what is happening and he begs him, "Please, if you will just listen to my words then you will be spared and the people will be spared." Zedekiah would not listen in the kingdom of Judah was destroyed, the city of Jerusalem burn, the king's sons were killed and the King was carried away to slavery in Babylon for 50 years.

This 40 year period is the most important time in the entire Old Testament because it was during this period that the Old Testament had its final revisions. The children of Israel were saved out of slavery in Egypt between 1200 and 1300 BC which is when the first books of Scripture began to be written. From that time until 586 BC, when the city of Jerusalem and the temple are destroyed, the Scriptures had been written and rewritten but all of the books had their final revisions done in light of this event and during this 40 year time frame. Everything that was written after that was shaped by when the city of Jerusalem was destroyed and Judah fell to the Babylonians.

King Manasseh took the people of Israel into a time of worshiping the gods of the ancient near East and there were two main gods that were worshiped even though they had a lot of different names depending on the local area involved. The first was the goddess Asherah.

SLIDE Asherah (picture one side with name on the other of slide)

You will see on the video screen the goddess Asherah who was the goddess of fertility. She is almost always portrayed like this, air breasted in almost every representation. This is a terra-cotta figurine which would be placed in the house somewhere. Some were carved out of wood and some were carved out of stone. She was kept in people's homes and they would pray to her. Altars were made for Asherah and kept up on the high places so that most hills had a place of worship for Asherah.

Manasseh and the kings that followed in his path all were worshipers of Asherah. Why would they worship Asherah in the goddess of fertility? They believed that if they worshiped her appropriately she would bless the wombs of their wives and they would have children. They believed that Asherah could bless the wombs of their livestock and they would have more lambs and goats and whatever else they were raising. They believed that Asherah would bless the fields and so they would have abundant crops.

Worship of Asherah involved sacrifices and burn offerings, believing the smoke would rise up to her and she would find it pleasing. It also involved a very strange but common practice in the ancient near East which was Temple prostitutes. We read in the Scriptures that two of the courts in the Temple of Solomon were set aside for prostitutes. If you wanted to worship the goddess of fertility then it involved sexual rites and sexual acts in order to receive her blessings.

The god who was the chief of God's among most people and who was often Asherah's consort was the god Baal which means "master." Baal was the god of the storms and rain. This is an arid area where there is not much rain so in order for crops produce you needed rain and so people began to adopt the practice of worshipping Baal. You often seem portrayed like this on the video screen.

SLIDE Baal (picture on one side with word on the other of slide)

Whenever you see a figurine of a god or goddess from the ancient near East with his arm raised up then you are looking at Baal because Baal was throwing lightning bolts down to the earth. He was the god of the storms and he would ride on the clouds and bring rain when people needed it. They would worship Baal in much the same way they worship Asherah in the temples as they would burn offerings and the smoke would rise up to the clouds where Baal lived, and then he would bless them with rain.

SLIDE Moloch (picture on one side with word on the other)

There was another god that was similar to Baal and that was Moloch. He was also one that you offered sacrifice and burned incense so it would rise up and he would bring rain. If you had offered him everything that you had in the way of the sacrifice and you still had not received the blessing that you wanted then you would offer Moloch the thing that was most valuable to you, and that was your

first born child. You see that fire depicted in the belly of Moloch in the image on the video screen.

There was actually an altar built for Moloch outside of the city of Jerusalem in the Valley of Henna or "Gehenna." In the New Testament "Gehenna" is synonymous with hell because hellish things happen there. When we go to Jerusalem you will be taken to this place that is just outside of the city and is now the garbage dump where fires burned all day and all night.

Moloch was often depicted as half man and half bull and they would stoke the fire in his belly until his hands became hot. Then they would bring their children. Manasseh brought his firstborn. The drums would be beating and they would they and plead with Moloch to give them rain. As a sign of their devotion to this god they would take their child in place them in the arms of Moloch, with the drums beating louder and louder so people could hear the cries and screams of the child as he or she died. This is what happened at the altar of Moloch.

In the book of Jeremiah God speaks out through his prophet and says, ***"How in the world could you think any God could wish this? It was never even thought of in my mind that I would want you to bring your children alive as an offering so you could have rain. How could you do such terrible things?"***

These were the practices happening in the time of Jeremiah and you can see why God was so angry and wounded by what the people were doing. This is why Jeremiah kept saying, "You have got to stop doing this, because the God who created all things will deliver you if you will trust in him and turn away from Moloch and Asherah and Baal, who are false gods."

Not only did they commit this sin of idolatry in Judah but they also oppressed the poor. This was a huge issue that the biblical prophets railed against in their prophecies.

All of these practices were ways of turning away from the God who would deliver them and save them. God, who redeemed them from slavery in Egypt and gave them the land to live upon, sent the prophets to warn people to turn towards God and away from all of these idolatrous activities.

In the Old Testament you find that God's relationship to Israel was usually described in one of two ways. The first was a metaphor of parent to child, that God was the father and Israel was his children. God loved his child with a relentless love. Some of you didn't have parents like that, but God loves his

children wildly and passionately. He cared for them deeply and would've given them anything and yet they were like we can be as older children and teenagers, rebelling against their parents. Israel was constantly turning away from God and turning in other directions, worshiping things that weren't real or lasting. That is one way of talking about the relationship between God and his people and the trauma that happened in that relationship.

But in Jeremiah the primary way of talking about the nation of Israel and its relationship to God was to talk about God as the husband and Israel as his bride. This made particular sense because Jeremiah was living in a time where the people worshiped Baal as the husband and Asherah as the wife. Jeremiah is saying that it is not like that but that God is the husband and we are his bride. God entered into a marriage covenant with us through the law, which is the covenant made with Moses. We were set apart as God's unique people and his bride. This is what we read in Jeremiah 2:2-3.

SLIDE ***This is what the Lord says: "I remember how eager you were to please me as a young bride long ago, how you loved me and followed me even through the barren wilderness. 3 In those days Israel was holy to the Lord, the first of his children.***

Israel belongs only to God, but then people began to turn to the other gods. The imagery that is used in Jeremiah and also in Ezekiel and Isaiah and Hosea is the imagery of adultery. The image is that God's bride began to sleep with the other gods. It gets very graphic.

SLIDE ***"On every hill and under every green tree, you have prostituted yourselves by bowing down to idols."***

The translation from the NRSV says that, "She spread her legs," on the hilltop where the altars to Asherah and Baal were. She wasn't just adulterous but she took on the role of prostitute, not because she needed anything because God would've given her anything, but instead, somehow in her twisted mind, she was selling herself for rain or crops or children or flocks. She would do these things not realizing that the customers could pay because they weren't really gods. God goes on to speak to the prophet Jeremiah these words in verse 27 of chapter 2.

SLIDE ***27 To an image carved from a piece of wood they say, 'You are my father.' To an idol chiseled from a block of stone they say, 'You are my mother.' They turn their backs on me...***

Can you feel the agony of God because his bride has forgotten him? She has turned away and is sleeping around with other gods and he grieves God's heart. "My people don't even remember me and I would've love them tenderly. I would've given them anything. I would've stood by them and saved them and redeemed them, even now after all of this, if they would just turn to me. I will take them back and cleanse them and make them whole again." But the people would listen to Jeremiah.

We hear this again in verses 5 and 11 that we heard from today.

SLIDE ***5 This is what the Lord says: "What did your ancestors find wrong with me that led them to stray so far from me? They worshiped worthless idols, only to become worthless themselves... 11 Has any nation ever traded its gods for new ones, even though they are not gods at all? Yet my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols!***

They gave away the status of being the children of the God who created the universe and who sustains all things—in whom we live and move and have our very being. They gave up that glory in exchange for worthless idols. This is the accusation in his book of Jeremiah.

This leads us to the question of what it has to do with us today some 2600 years later. We don't worship Asherah and Baal or Moloch. We don't have Temple prostitutes or offer our children as sacrifices for our gods. Do we?

We will learn in a couple of weeks about how the children of Israel eventually came back from exile in Babylon and returned to Jerusalem 50 years later when the Persian Empire comes in the power. When they return they never again go back to worshiping Asherah or Baal or any of the other gods of the ancient near East. A few people might have, but not many of them because they realized that these gods are false gods. They didn't save the people nor bring prosperity or rain or anything else they were hoping for. They did not answer the prayers of the people of Israel and they were destroyed. They came to realize they were just pieces of wood and stone and they were worthless.

While they never went back to those gods they continue to struggle with idolatry, with things that were made by their own hands that they began to think were more valuable than anything else. They began to obsess over the things they were accumulating and they began to put that stuff first, sometimes even

sacrificing their children to those things. The gods and goddesses that they began to worship after that time looked a lot like our American idols, and I'm not talking about the television program. I'm talking about the things we put first in our lives in our thinking, our priorities and the things we spend most of our time on. There are things that we put most of our time into and that we think will save us. There are things we think will bring us meaning in peace and hope and we spend much of our time trying to acquire them, and in the end, like the ancient Israelites, we find that these things can't save us and they are worthless. They only take life away from us as we obsess over it.

This past week I have been meeting with our confirmation youth, our young people who will be claiming the Christian faith as their own next weekend. One of the things that we talk about is one of the valid that we all take when we become a part of the church. "I believe that Jesus Christ is my Lord and Savior and I put my trust in his grace and promise to serve him all of my days." We talk about the idea of Jesus as Lord and how the word Lord means literally "first thing." I asked each one of them if there are things that they sometimes end up putting first, which ends up being an idol of some sort. We are always able to name a number of things as we have that conversation.

So let me ask you this question. Do you struggle with any idols? Are there things in your life that you allowed to become more important than God? I know that I do and I suspect most of us have things that tempt us to put them first our lives. We would never say it because with our lips we continue to worship God, but inside we find that our hearts and our minds and our time and our energy goes somewhere else.

Some of them can even seem like good things that eventually turn into idols. One woman talked about getting her post graduate degree and said that knowledge had become her idol. She went to a very prestigious school and she loves to learn and she puts so much focus on the stuff she sticks inside of her head that she forgets about the God who gave her a brain and created everything that she was studying about.

One of the students said that living for the approval of others was her god. She so desperately wanted people to like her and approve of her that she was sometimes willing to lay aside the values that were important to her, as well as her faith, just so she could be liked by other people. Several of the students talked about self-image and how we appear to other people. For some it was about

appearing beautiful or handsome, but for others it was about working out and having killer abs! We are desperately trying to make sure that what people see on the outside appears a certain way so that we will be liked.

One student said that their god can become always needing to be connected on Facebook or through their telephone and texting. They even made the observation that this idol not only is worthless but can lead to death if you are texting while driving, like the student that we talked about in last week's sermon. I read an article this last week by an OB/GYN doctor we talked about delivering babies while the women in the delivery process were Facebooking and texting during delivery. He said that one woman actually was using her phone to send a message to others about her newborn while the nurse patiently waited with the child. It seemed more important for the parents to let the world know about this event than actually holding their child. I know that being connected can be a good thing but that somehow seems a little bit over the top!

Maybe your Merrill Lynch or Charles Schwab or Morgan Stanley statement that comes every month has become your idol. Or maybe you end up checking the portfolio every day on the Internet just to see how your funds are doing that day. Maybe that is your idol.

The traditional American idols are money, sex and power but I have also had others talk about how their political party has become their idol. I had one person in our congregation talk about how talk radio had become an idol. They were so focused on it in their mind spent so much time going over everything they heard on the radio that they worried and obsessed over what they heard each day on the airwaves.

I had one member of our congregation tell me last year during the election cycle that they worried that if Jesus actually came and directly told them that something was against his will that was part of their political parties platform and was part of their political convictions, they would choose their political party over Jesus. Would you write this question on your Message Notes section at the top of your handout?

SLIDE What are my idols?

What are the things that I am tempted to give my heart to and to trust in for my security and safety? What am I trusting in to bring meaning and happiness to my life that will not be able to satisfy?

One of the idols that some people mentioned to me sometimes is their religion. Our religion can become our idol. Sometimes we worship the church and not the God who formed the church. Sometimes we worship the Bible and not the God who inspired the text. Sometimes we look at religious leaders or our pastors and we begin to follow them and not the God that they are pointing to. It's all about listening to what they have to say. When the main preaching pastor is gone from a larger church and the attendance drops by 20 or 30 or 40% then that can make us wonder who people are really worshipping.

I don't think this happens to very many of you here at this church, but if you are ever tempted to idolize any of us pastors or staff, please don't, because I promise you that we will disappoint you and let you down at some point. We don't want to be your Asherah or Baal or Moloch. We want you to find the living God, not to worship worthless idols.

When it comes to all of these things that we have just mentioned, let's be honest and recognize that sometimes we do sacrifice our children to the gods. One of my idols is you and this congregation. It's being your senior pastor and thinking about all the cool things that we do for the kingdom of God. I get a perverse high by meeting with you and caring for you in your time of need or when you're struggling with how God and your faith can help you through a tough time. Some weeks I find myself at church every night for some reason or another and the reality is that when I do that I sacrifice my children in my family, not for God, but for the church and sometimes for my own selfish need to be of value and think that is how I can get meaning in my life.

There have been people who have worshiped being connected through texting or checking their e-mail on their smart phone and they had sacrificed their children, or other people's children because of an accident. They had to stay connected and something tragic happens and we discover how worthless those idols really are and how they can lead to death and not life.

While it might seem like the sins and the idols mentioned in Jeremiah are old and far removed from us, they really aren't are they?

Here's the truth about idolatry. None of these things will save you. I met with an older woman in our congregation recently who is struggling with getting older. She has gotten cosmetic surgery on several occasions and worshiped at the idol of the cosmetic counter. Those are her words not mine. She said to me,

"Pastor Jeff, I have done all these things and I'm still getting old." No matter how hard you try things are going to sag and wrinkles are going to come. You can do whatever you want to do to try and change that but in the end what you will find is that you look like a caricature of yourself. She said to me, "I've done all these things and now I just looked bizarre and I don't even recognize myself when I look in the mirror! What have I done? This didn't save me."

In the end these things don't bring the joy that we think they will bring and we discover their worthlessness. We find ourselves as Americans often worshipping the idol of money. We worship that idol and we count on it for our safety and for our happiness and then all of a sudden, just a few days, half of our retirement and our savings were gone. Is this what we are counting on? Is this what is going to save us? These are all false gods and none of them save.

It might be sex or a person in your life, or even your children. What are your idols? Are they really worthy of being the defining thing in your life?

Jeremiah takes these great images and God speaks through them in powerful ways. Here these powerful words from verse 13.

SLIDE 13 *"For my people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me— the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!"*

Let me remind you that in the Bible "living water" is spring water. Living water is bubbling up from the ground and it is clean and pure. It is safe to drink and it is life-giving.

Cisterns weren't wells. Where you didn't have a spring you would dig a hole in the ground. You then would create a channel so that when it rained the runoff would flow through the channel and into your cistern. It collected the water so you could have water for your family to use. If you had access to a spring then you would never want to drink the dirty water that you collected in a cistern. But if you didn't have a spring then at least you would have water this way, as long as you created a cistern which would hold water.

In this passage God says, "I offer you living water that is clean and life-giving and you choose to reject it. You want cistern water instead of spring water and then you build cisterns (which are the idols) they can even hold water because they are cracked."

I wanted you to have a graphic image of this. The water in this class is actually from Sortais spring which feeds our subdivision and from which we get water at our house. Supposedly is some of the best water in the county and I can tell you from drinking it the past eight years that it's pretty good. It is fresh and clean and is essential to life that is healthy and full. *(I'll pour water into a glass and drink it.)*

This water is runoff from the snow melt that collected in puddles the lower area of our subdivision. As you can tell it is murky and dirty and who knows what is growing in it! God says to us through Jeremiah, "Is this what you want to choose? You want this water which could make you sick? Do you want this water which tastes terrible? You go and build cisterns that can even hold the water and so really you end up scraping the muck off the bottom. Is that what you want?" *(I'll pour water into a cup and the cup will have holes in it so the water leaks out of the cup and into a bowl.)* Even the dirty, scummy water is not there when you need it because the cisterns we build can't even hold water.

The question that God is asking through the prophet Jeremiah for the people of his day, and the people of our day, is a simple one.

SLIDE Which water do you want to drink?

Will you take for yourself that which gives life or that which destroys?

Let's end today by remembering that Jesus was well aware of this passage of Scripture. Remember that Jeremiah and the rest of the Old Testament is the Hebrew Bible and was the Bible for Jesus and all the disciples. Jesus draws from this passage twice in his ministry.

The first time it happens is in John chapter 4. Jesus is with his disciples near the town of Sychar in Samaria. We learned about this in our last sermon series during the season of Lent, just before Easter. He tells his disciples, "Go on into town fellas, I will meet you there later. I have someone to meet here at this well."

This well is Jacob's Well and it still exists today. In the first century people would come to that well either in the morning or in the night and it would be covered the rest of the day. It was the women's job to collect the water and they would bring large jars with them so they could bring water back to their homes. While they were there it was like meeting at the coffee shop today. They would talk and chat and connect and catch up on the news. They would do it in the

morning because it was cooler and they would do it again in the evening if they needed more water for the night.

Jesus is there in the middle of the day. What woman comes to the well in the middle of the day when no other women are there? It's the women who have been treated with scorn and contempt by the other women and who were not welcome to fellowship with them. A woman shows up and Jesus is waiting for her around noon. He knows she is coming and he waits for her at the well.

When she arrives, Jesus says, "Woman, give me a drink."

Jesus is a Jewish teacher and she is a Samaritan woman and so she is surprised because those two don't really talk to each other. It was actually unheard-of of men talking to women in public, let alone a Jewish man talking to a Samaritan woman who was seen as unclean. The woman drops her bucket down into the well where the water comes from an underground spring. This is not a cistern.

She handed the drink and he drinks from it and then Jesus says, "If you knew who you were talking to, you would ask and I would give you living water, and you would never thirst again."

The woman says, "Where would you get such living water?"

Instead of answering her, Jesus gives you another question to get at the point of what she has been drinking and seeing as most important in her life. He says, "Go get your husband and I will tell you."

She said, "Well, I don't really have a husband."

Jesus responds, "You have answered truthfully there, because I know that you have been married and divorced five times and the man you are living with right now refuses to marry you."

He then tells her once more about the Good News and he offers her the living water that he is talking about. It is the life that only Christ can give and what he is saying in this story is this, *"You have been searching for something your whole life but you have been looking in the wrong places. You thought, 'If I could just find the right man, then I would be happy. I would be at peace and I would have security and safety.'*

"Except that you found a man who was filled on the inside with unclean things and your previous marriages were like cracked cisterns which couldn't hold

water or bring you life. The first one didn't work and either did the second or the third or the fourth or the fifth. Now you have come to the place where you just won a warm body next to you then you believe you will have something. All of the time you have been looking for living water in all the wrong places."

"Because the living water comes when you put God as God in your life, when you trust in him alone and you accept his salvation and grace and mercy. Then you will find what your heart has been craving for all along."

Nothing else can save you—not your money, not your looks, not your husband or your wife, not your children—nothing but the God who created you and loves you more than you can imagine or believe. He invites you in this passage today to choose which cup you will drink from. Which cup will it be? He implores in Jeremiah to take the living water and you will never thirst again.

Let's pray.

SLIDE Prayer

While your heads are bowed and your eyes are closed, I like to give you an invitation. You know what the gods and goddesses are in your life, the things that you are tempted to make of ultimate importance. You know those things that you think to yourself, "If I can just have this thing then I'll be happy. If I can just have this thing then I will be safe and secure." None of those things ultimately are gods. They are not worthy of your worship. There simply idols that are worthless in the end. You might say to God something simple like this...

"God, you know I struggle with this. Help me to put you first in my life, and forgive me..."

Then would you simply say in your own words something like this...

"Lord, I want to drink the living water. I want to trust you and worship you and live for you and love you. I want to find in you my strength and my joy and my salvation."

Say what you need to say in your own words and invite God to be God in your life...

Oh God, we thank you for the message of Jeremiah, for being reminded of the ways that our hearts are prone to wander and leave the God we love. We are prone to chase after things which are not gods, those things that are worthless and do not reveal the glory which gave us. Forgive us and help us to seek you, to

know you, to love you, to follow you, to honor you, to live for you and to find in you are straight, our hope and our salvation. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

“Cracked Cisterns That Hold No Water”

Theme: Faith for Tough Times- The Message of the Prophet Jeremiah

Scripture: Jeremiah 2:4-6, 11, 13, 20b, 27-28, 32b-34; 10:22

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon:

Meditation Moments

MONDAY, April 29 – Read Jeremiah 36:1-10 – Jeremiah may give us more “behind the scenes” insight into the writing of Scripture than any other Bible book. At first, he spoke his messages. In today’s passage, we read that at God’s direction Jeremiah put his message in writing (Baruch, a skilled scribe, did the actual pen work). Baruch went beyond “scribing,” and read God’s word publicly in the Temple.

- “A time of fasting was proclaimed” (verse 9). Some responded to Jeremiah’s message by seeking repentance. Most often in the Bible, fasting meant giving up food for a certain time. We can “fast” by giving up anything that draws our focus away from God (not just food) and using that time and energy to pray, read the Bible, worship, meditate, or serve. Choose a time this week to fast from something so as to draw nearer to God.
- When Jeremiah was restricted, he asked Baruch to read God’s message aloud in the Temple for him. It is often hard for us to ask for help, even when we need it. In what areas of your life can you ask for help? What fears make it hard for you to seek help?

TUESDAY, April 30 – Read Jeremiah 36:16-32 – King Jehoiakim did not want to fast or repent. He contemptuously cut up Jeremiah’s prophetic scroll and burned it. Then he sent officers to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch. Notice how verse 19, where temple officials tell Jeremiah to hide, interacts with verse 26—“the LORD had hidden them.” We usually see God work through human instruments.

- Although he trusted that God was with him, surely Jeremiah was a little nervous about confronting the king who had just burned the Lord’s prophecy. He even had an addition, a hard message directed specifically to the king (verses 29-31). How does knowing God is with you give you strength to face challenges in your life?
- The book of Jeremiah as we have it today was likely collected and edited after Jeremiah’s death. “Many similar words were added to them” (verse 32) means we have not just the scroll Baruch wrote but other

messages from Jeremiah. How did God work through faithful editors and copyists, as well as prophets and apostles, to bring us the Bible?

WEDNESDAY, May 1 – Read Jeremiah 5:1-7, 26-31– When Jeremiah delivered stinging messages like this, people did not just say, “He’s a prophet —it must be true.” Verse 31 notes that there were many “prophets” in Jerusalem, and most of them said Jeremiah was wrong. This posed, and poses, an important question: How do we discern God’s authentic voice, and decide how to respond to it?

- Jeremiah sharply rebuked Judah for following other gods, and for failing to defend “the just case of the poor.” Do you see any linkage between the two issues—ways in which your choice of “gods” shapes the values by which you live your life? To what extent did Jesus follow Jeremiah’s path in ministry? In what ways did Jesus do things differently?
- Jeremiah warned that Judah’s turning from God meant they couldn’t depend on God’s protection from the Babylonians. His message was not what they wanted to hear. How open are you to honestly identifying and facing areas in which your values and actions are different from God’s? How do you bring them into closer alignment?

THURSDAY, May 2 – Read Jeremiah 28:1-17 – Hananiah, a rival “prophet,” swore that within two years Judah would be free from Babylon’s power. He mocked Jeremiah’s austere message. In this case, Jeremiah said the false prophet would die—and two months later he did. Jeremiah did not give detail about how he would die, and we don’t know. The stark fact spoke for itself: Jeremiah, not Hananiah, was right.

- In 2013, false prophets seldom bill themselves as “prophets.” Still, few of our choices of which way to live have a neon sign pointing to “God’s path.” A strong relationship with God, though, makes it easier to become attuned to God’s desires for our life. Choose one step you will take this week to make your relationship with God stronger.
- Other people have a great impact on the ways that we think, feel and respond to issues. Over the long term, it became clear that those who let Jeremiah influence them were much wiser than those who followed Hananiah. Who are the people who have the most influence over you? Are their lives and choices in tune with God’s values?

FRIDAY, May 3 – Read Jeremiah 20:1-2, 7-13 – God told Jeremiah he would make him like an iron pillar (1:18). But unlike an iron pillar the prophet was still human and had all the emotions each of us has. He didn’t like being hated and he didn’t like prophesying destruction. But he couldn’t stop preaching God’s message (verse 9) so he trusted God to be with him as he steadfastly carried out his heartbreaking ministry.

- God never promised his followers an easy ride through life. Few of us face the extreme physical threats Jeremiah (and many others, including Jesus) faced. But Jeremiah’s story can lead us all to ask: what is my faith worth? Rejection? Poverty? Physical danger? Have you worked through good answers to this question with God yet?
- Too often we believe we should act as though nothing bothers us when we face tough times. Jeremiah, like the Psalmists, penned several “laments” like this one. In what ways do you express pain or sadness? Are you able to share those concerns honestly with God? Is there someone in your life you can trust to share your feelings with?

SATURDAY, May 4 – Read Jeremiah 23:1-8 – Things were bad in Jeremiah’s Judah. The leaders were letting their people and God down. Jeremiah felt compelled to speak starkly about the wrongs he saw around him.

But his vision did not get stuck solely on the flaws he saw in the present. God had a better future in store. Like all of the Biblical prophets, Jeremiah lived in the hope and trust that God would send a redeemer to set all things right (verse 6).

- It can be hard to hold onto hope in tough times. It's difficult to see the light at the end of the tunnel when you're in exile (or unemployed, have lost someone close or been hurt by a loved one). What is the hardest thing you face right now? How have you learned to draw on God's power, and the caring of others, to help you face fear and loss? In what ways do you build your faith that with God's the future always holds hope?

Family Activity: Ask another family to be prayer partners with your family. Find a time when your families can join together for conversation and a meal. After fun and fellowship, invite each person to share his or her joys and concerns aloud. (Offer pens and paper for those who would rather write their prayer requests.) Discuss how and when your families would like pray. Would each person like to pray for another person? Does one family want to pray for the other family as a whole? How will you keep in touch through the week and when will you meet again? Make sure to celebrate answered requests and be persistent in ongoing requests each time your families are together. Pray for those outside your families as well.