

INTRODUCTION

Not too long ago people trust each other's words. But in today's society we need contract, signature and receipts as proofs to back up our claims. You may have encountered frustration over promises from stores or service agencies that failed to deliver. You regretted that you did not ask the representatives to write down their promises. Some twenty years ago a few brothers and sisters and I went to China for sight-seeing. A few tea-growers spotted us as foreigners at the train station. They gladly helped us settle in a hotel and gave us a tour to their tea plantation the next morning. Needless to say, they wanted us to make a purchase. Nowadays, no one would dare to trust anyone whom they have never met. Compare to men, our God is a faithful God. His promises endure forever because He would never betray His only words.

God remains faithful even when we disobey Him. In the book of Jeremiah the prophet lived in an era of chaos. When God called Jeremiah to serve as a prophet the Northern Kingdom of Israel was long defeated by Assyria. During Jeremiah's tenure he witnessed the fall of Assyria, Egypt and finally his own country of Judah. God called him to proclaim a message of judgment and repentance because of Judah's idolatry. But Jeremiah's voice fell into deaf ears of his people. Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet not without reason. He was heart-broken at the rebellion of Judah. God foretold that Judah and the temple would be destroyed and His people would be captured as slaves. However, there was a glimpse of hope that was mixed in the bad news. Seventy years after the Babylonian exile God's people would return to their homeland. God would not forget his people despite their rebellion because He had determined to love them. God would not forfeit the covenant He made with Israel. God also loves you and me with an everlasting love. However, God loves us so much that He would never spare us when we indulge in sins. In this passage we shall see that God is faithful to reprove us when we sin. But that is not the end of the story, because God is also faithful to rebuild us from our brokenness. Moreover, God is faithful to renew His covenant. Because God is faithful we can put our trust in Him.

EXPLANATION

1. 神是信實，祂必管教 God is Faithful to Reprove

First of all, Jeremiah told us that since God is faithful He would reprove us when we sin. **Verses 4-5** say: 4 "For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says about the houses in this city and the royal palaces of Judah that have been torn down to be used against the siege ramps and the sword 5 in the fight with the Babylonians: They will be filled with the dead bodies of the men I will slay in my anger and wrath. I will hide my face from this city because of all its wickedness." Nothing could withstand the attack of Babylon because God retrieved His protection from Judah. What kind of wickedness was Jeremiah referring to? It was the sin of idolatry. Early on in chapter 1 of the book God had prophesied about the attack from Babylon as a means of judgement on His people for idol worship. **1:15-16** read – 15 "I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms," declares the Lord. "Their kings will come and set up their thrones in the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem; they will come against all her surrounding

walls and against all the towns of Judah. 16 I will pronounce my judgments on my people because of their wickedness in forsaking me, in burning incense to other gods and in worshipping what their hands have made.” Was that the first time God warned His people that He would reprove them if they rebelled against God? Of course not! God sent several prophets before Jeremiah to warn His people. In fact, even before the Israelites occupied their homeland God had proclaimed His warning through Moses. **Deuteronomy 31:17** reads: “On that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them, and they will be destroyed. Many disasters and difficulties will come upon them, and on that day they will ask, ‘Have not these disasters come upon us because our God is not with us?’” When God’s judgment finally came the Israelites knew exactly the reason behind it. God made it clear that He would reprove those who disobey Him. It is unlike the Chinese parents back in my generation who warned their little children: “If you keep doing wrong I will spank your behind until it blooms!” For one, the kids did not understand what that means. Also, more than likely the parents failed to execute what they said. Therefore, the warning has no affect in deterring kids from doing wrong. Not so with our God. He is faithful to reprove His children. If He said so then it will be carried out. If we have not received the judgment we deserve it is only because of God’s mercy and patience. He is giving us time to repent.

What happened to Israel also happens to us. Any time we disobey God and hold on to our sins after repeated warning God would not withhold His means to reprove us. The book of Hebrews says it clearly about why God reproves His children. **Hebrews 12:10-11** read: 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. It says clearly that God reproves us for our good so that we can share in His holiness and grow in His righteousness. No one likes to be reproved by God, but God loves us so much that He does not want us to remain in sins either. The people of Judah were stubborn sinners. You do not need to go that far to find another vivid example. Just pull out a mirror and look at the person inside it. Yes, that you and I! God reproves us because we are His legitimate children. We may think that the opposite of love is hate. In fact the opposite of hate is indifferent. It is like when a boy-friend and girl-friend have a fight, the lady may say: “I don’t care if he is choked to death by a chicken bone or slammed by a car when crossing the road.” My friend: you have to be very worried if God tells you that He does not care when you sin. When God reproves us it is a good opportunity for us to reflect on our relationship with Him. It is a humbling experience to help us realize that without God we can achieve nothing.

2. 神是信實，祂必重建 God is Faithful to Restore

Because God is faithful we can put our trust in Him. He is faithful to reprove us when we sin. However, even when God’s judgment is imminent He is still faithful to restore us from our brokenness. Immediately after God pronounced His judgment on Judah He prophesied His future restoration in **verse 6**: “Nevertheless, I will bring health and healing to it; I will heal my people and will let them enjoy abundant peace and security.” God used three words that are related to illness – health, healing and heal – to describe His restoration work. The people of Judah had a stubborn sin like a malignant tumor, such that it required drastic means to cut away the rebellion before His people could be restored. After this major surgery of destroying the country and

sending His people into exile God promised peace and security. The word “security” actually means “truth.” These people who violated truth by idolatry would one day come to embrace God’s truth. God continued to elaborate His restoration in the following verses. He said in **verse 7**: “I will bring Judah and Israel back from captivity and will rebuild them as they were before.” God promised that His people would come back to their homeland. God clearly told Jeremiah in **25:11** that the Israelites would be in Babylon for 70 years: “This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.” Besides bringing His people back God also promised to forgive their sins. **Verse 8** reads: “I will cleanse them from all the sin they have committed against me and will forgive all their sins of rebellion against me.” God’s purpose to restore His people was to bring glory to Himself, as He said in **verse 9**: “Then this city will bring me renown, joy, praise and honor before all nations on earth that hear of all the good things I do for it; and they will be in awe and will tremble at the abundant prosperity and peace I provide for it.” By directing history to achieve His will God proved that He was sovereign. People of other nations would be dumbfounded that God would resume His blessing to His people. God would also restore the land that was laid deserted by previous destruction. **Verses 10-11** foretell: 10 “...Yet in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are deserted, inhabited by neither men nor animals, there will be heard once more 11 the sounds of joy and gladness, the voices of bride and bridegroom, and the voices of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord, saying, ‘Give thanks to the Lord Almighty, for the Lord is good; his love endures forever.’ For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were before,” says the Lord. People would be restored back to their normal life. There would be marriage and worship of Jehovah would be restored. Then **verse 12** tells us that God would also restore the land by replenishing sheep: “...In this place, desolate and without men or animals - in all its towns there will again be pastures for shepherds to rest their flocks.” In essence, if God reproved His people by taking away His blessings, then He would restore them by resuming His blessings. As a result, God’s blessings of abundant people, bountiful material possessions, homeland, and most importantly, relationship with His people, would continue. God is in the business of restoration work. He restores us from the destruction of sins when we turn back to Him. **Psalms 51** was a confession King David wrote to God after he committed adultery and murder. He asked God for His restoration in **verse 10**: Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. He continued his prayer in **verse 12**: Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. A person whose sins have been forgiven by God is characterized by joy. Sin may bring us fun for a season. That is why sin is so appealing. However, when we indulge in sin we cannot experience true joy from God. Our hearts are inflicted by guilt, and fear of God’s discipline. But God’s forgiving grace is always there if we are willing confess our sins and ask for His forgiveness. Someone said our God is the God of second chance. Our broken relationship with God marred by sins can be restored if we would come to Him. God has never changed. He is willing to restore us if we turn back from our sins.

3. 神是信實，祂必更新 God is Faithful to Renew

Because God is faithful we can put our trust in Him. In this passage we see that God is faithful to reprove us when we sin, and He is faithful to restore us from our brokenness. Ultimately, God is faithful to renew His covenant with us. In this passage God told Jeremiah that He would renew His covenant through a coming leader. God said in **verse 15**: “In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line; he will do what is just and right in the

land.” This descendant of King David will rule His people with justice and righteousness. This was not the first time God prophesied in the book about a righteous Branch, for He spoke about the same figure in **23:5** – “The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.” This righteous Branch would be a king. But ever since the southern kingdom of Judah was defeated there was no human king sitting on the throne. Also, the kings from David’s dynasty were far from being just and righteous. Therefore, Bible commentators generally agree that this righteous Branch was none other than Messiah, the Savior whom God had promised in the Old Testament. From Jeremiah, we jump to the Luke gospel and see how this promise was fulfilled in Jesus. In **Luke 1:31-33** the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary and told her that she would give birth to the Savior. He said: 31 “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.” While the earthly kingdom of David had ceased to exist the spiritual Kingdom of Jesus Christ will last forever. In **Jeremiah 31:33** God also foretold that He would renew His covenant with His people: “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.” God’s people failed to abide by the covenant God made through Moses. What they needed were not rules and regulations written in tablets and scrolls. They needed a changed heart where God put His words.

In Christ, God had renewed His covenant with His people. At the Last Supper Jesus told His disciples that with His blood on the cross He established a new covenant with all who believe in Him. Jesus used grape wine to represent His blood as He shared with His disciples in **Luke 22:20** - In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.” This new covenant was not only for Jesus’ disciples and the Jewish people. It is for everyone who accepted Christ as their Savior and Lord. As a result, we receive the blessings in this renewed covenant and share in God’s holiness and righteousness.

If we go back to Jeremiah 33 God continued to tell us His blessings in this renewed covenant in **verses 17-18**: 17 “For this is what the Lord says: ‘David will never fail to have a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, 18 nor will the priests, who are Levites, ever fail to have a man to stand before me continually to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to present sacrifices.’” We explained earlier about Jesus succeeding David’s throne as the righteous King. But what about the priests mentioned in verse 18? It is true that after the Israelites returned from exile they rebuilt the temple and animal sacrifice was resumed. However, when the temple was eventually destroyed by the Romans in AD 70 the whole sacrificial system had vanished. Therefore, there is a broader meaning in the priests Jeremiah mentioned. **1 Peter 2:9** tells us that as Christ’s believers we have become priests: But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. By saying that believers are priests it does not mean that we inherit the duty of animal sacrifice. It means that every believer can approach God directly through Jesus Christ. Jesus has become the mediator between us and God, and there is no need for the priests to serve that role. We are thankful that Messiah had come. Jesus had accomplished the salvation work on the cross. He did so while we are still disobedient and wicked in sins. But Jesus Christ willingly initiated this new covenant. He invites us into a covenantal relationship

with God. Jesus asked us to love Him and follow His Word, not as a requirement to remain in the covenant, but as an intentional response to His love for us.

CONCLUSION

In the Jeremiah passage we studied today we understand that because God is faithful we can put out trust in Him. God is faithful to reprove us when we sin. He is faithful to restore us from our brokenness. He is also faithful to renew His covenant with us. God would never betray His own words. All that is written in the Bible will be fulfilled, if not already did. We believe in a sovereign God who rule over the universe and steer the course of human history to accomplish His plan. Our lives are also in the hands of God. Put your trust in Him and He will continue to prove that He is faithful to the end.