

Pillar Passages – Jeremiah 24
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The God of Great Reversals

Welcome to another edition of our Pillar Passages. In another video we will return to Jeremiah 23. There are so many central passages—central to the entire Bible—in Jeremiah 23. But today, we will look briefly at Jeremiah 24.

This takes place around 600 BC. Jeconiah, it says here, the son of Jehoiakim, was taken away to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar. During that time, Jeremiah prophesied, and this is one of the prophecies he experienced in this time. It involves King Zedekiah. King Zedekiah was the caretaker king that Nebuchadnezzar installed in Jeconiah's place at that time.

The vision involves two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the Lord. One had very good figs—like first ripe figs. But the other basket had very bad figs—so bad that they could not be eaten. They had to be spit out. They were bitter.

The Lord says to Jeremiah, verse 3, “What do you see, Jeremiah?” Jeremiah says, “Figs, the good figs very good, and the bad figs very bad, so bad that they can't be eaten.”

In verse 4, the Lord explains. “Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles for Judah.” These were people that God was going to send away. They were going to be sent into exile—we will see this in another video—for 70 years in Babylon. Seventy years away from their homes. They are being cast out of their homeland. They will be exiles, in a foreign land, under foreign rule, eating foreign food, surrounded by everything foreign. The land of the Chaldeans.

In their exile, however, verse 6, God will set His eyes on them for good and He will bring them back to this land. In all of it, God will build them up and not tear them down. His goal is to plant them and not to pluck them up. He will give them a new heart. A new heart that will know this God. He says, they will be my people, and I will be their God for they shall return to me with their whole heart. God will grant them repentance. God will grant them repentance through discipline. So, while this new exile sounds horrible, interestingly it is a means by which God is going to do great good. Great good to the select group of people He is putting His hand upon. He is setting His eyes on them for good. He is gracing them—not because they deserve it—all of Israel had fallen into sin. But there are some whom He will set His eyes upon with sovereign grace for good and He will bring them back to their land after the exile. That's the first basket of figs.

But the bad basket of figs. The figs that are so bad they have to be spat out. That's the basket Zedekiah finds himself in. If you've read in previous chapters of Jeremiah, you know that Zedekiah has been offered many chances to repent and he simply is not. He is a caretaker king, who, like previous kings before him, has allowed great injustice and unrighteousness to reign in the land. The more powerful abuse the less powerful and Zedekiah lets it happen. So, he is like

the figs that cannot be eaten—the king of Judah. His whole entourage, his whole court, his officials, the remnants of Jerusalem who remain in the land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt who are aligned with Judah. God says, “I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a reproach, a byword, a taunt, and a curse.” It will become a catch phrase. You don’t want to end up like the people of Jerusalem. They will be like this in all the places that He will drive them. God will do this through sword, famine, and pestilence until they are utterly destroyed. The very same language God used originally as Israel took the Promised Land after the exodus. The very same language that God used of the nations who dwelled there. God is doing the same to them. God is destroying the land He gave to them and their fathers.

So, that is the chapter. We need to note here just how reversed this is. We would be apt to think, well those who stay behind in Jerusalem—the elites—have it good. They got to avoid the really head exile. But it turns out, those that God was sending into exile, God was doing this by His grace. That they would escape God’s wrath. But God’s wrath would be resting upon those who perpetrated injustice and who perpetrated unrighteousness just like all the other nations who God had forced out in the first place. Though they seem secure—the ones who got to stay behind and enjoy all the fruits of Jerusalem—they got to stay home. They were the elites. They were the privileged ones. It turns out that in their pride, they were the destroyed ones. They were the ones who were really vulnerable. They were the ones who remained under the wrath of God. What a powerful reversal this is.

God is on the side of those upon whom His grace rests. This is true even when seems all against them. God loves great reversals.

But why all the drama? Because God wants to display Himself in it all. In all the rescuing, in all the deliverance, in all of the working in surprising ways, God wants to show Himself, His glory, His grace, and all it, so His people would trust Him, glorify Him, and worship Him.

Can you think of other reversals in Scripture? Can you think others? I think here of Mary’s song, in Luke chapter 1. Mary says, “My soul magnifies the Lord. My spirit rejoices.” Why? Because he has looked on my humble estate, and now all generations will call me blessed. Blessed—not a byword, not a cuss word, not a preverbal cautionary tale, but call me blessed. For He who is mighty had done great things for me who is so humble. His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation.

He has shown strength with His arm. How has He don’t that? He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts, He has brought down the might from their thrones and exalted—lifted up—those of humble estate. Those who are hungry, He has filled up with good things. But the rich, He has sent away. He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his offspring forever. Why? By sending this Son—this Son of Mary. Humble—and yet able to exalt those of humble estate, to fill them with good things.

God loves great reversals. Great reversals are the heart of the Bible. On the cross, this Son, at the moment of greatest evil, caused evil to be overthrown. At the moment of the most unjust death in human history, justice was done and life was given.

These days many Christians fret and fear about something called a great reset. Some that is just a conspiracy theory. But some think that it is very real. And while—let's assume, for the sake of argument, that it is real and that it is indeed happening right before our eyes—and let's assume, for the sake of argument, there are many pieces of it that demand our very real concrete resistance today. But whatever we do, we should do it with a jolly humble hope. That whatever the great reset, whatever the elites, whatever the powerful may accomplish in their elite status and in their thinking that God does not see, that God cannot reach us—it so happens that God is very close. God is very close, and God can reach them and everyone. And this is a God who love great reversals. He loves to reverse things. He loves to bring down the strong and exalt and raise up the humble. He loves to send the rich away hungry, and to feed those who are cast out. And why does He do this? He does it all to the glory of His name through the flourishing of His people.

So praise God that we have such a God as this who proved to us His love for us on the cross, and who is still in this business of doing great reversals to the praise of His name.