

Jeremiah 8:18-22 – The medicine that is near at hand

Today is a special day for the church – our 1st anniversary.

1. The people's foolishness (v19, 20)

Jeremiah prophesied judgment. Many prophets had done so before him (e.g. Isaiah, Micah, Hosea and others). The northern tribes of Israel had already been judged and taken away out of their land. God told the people now to repent or the same would happen to them. At this time there was a good king – Josiah – but the people were not serious about changing their ways. So Jeremiah showed them what they would say one day when they were taken away (v19). They would be very surprised. Did not they know the God of Israel, the LORD (Jehovah)? Was he not in Jerusalem to protect it? Yes he was – but he is a holy God. He is not there to protect the wicked. He judges. These people relied on their knowledge and on their privileges. But those are not enough. God has no promises for those who do not repent. Verse 20 shows us their surprise – they thought that after some time, God would forget his anger. Perhaps he was not serious! But then they would wait long and nobody would save them. God cannot forget his holiness. If we have sinned we must repent, or we will make his anger worse and it will burn against us forever (Romans 2:4-5). Do not rely on empty hopes. God knows and hears our thoughts. He is not fooled by them – we must not be either!

2. God's holy judgments (v19)

The people were guilty of idolatry (v19) – they had worshipped statues and images. What is idolatry? Idolatry is when something or someone is put in God's place. It is when we give our hearts to something/one that is not God. It need not be statues or images – it can be many things; money, belongings (Colossians 3:5), development, a girl or boy, a job, education. It is when we break the command “seek first the kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:33) or the command to “love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6:5). Idolatry moves God to anger – God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5); jealous for his honour and glory. He will not share it with any other. Idolatry is foolish – it has no value. “Things” cannot save us. God sends idolaters far away. He exiles them (v19). The final exile for those who do not repent is hell (2 Thessalonians 1:9); there will be no escape. God's judgments are righteous, holy and true.

3. The prophet's broken heart (v18, 21-22)

The position of God's people really hurt the prophet. It cut him to the heart. He had preached long. He still loved the people deeply after many years. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 18:23). He felt crushed (v21); he actually said “I am black”, perhaps meaning the clothes of mourning, or perhaps the colour of tender fruit that is crushed. He did not stand far away and say “it's not me!” He had the Spirit of Christ in him (Matthew 9:36-38, Romans 9:1-3). Christ came to be crushed under God's wrath, to save his people. He bore their sins on the cross when he died so that those who believe could be saved. The medicine is near (v22) – we do not need to perish. There is a cure. We can take it, and be saved. We live today in a time when few are serious about God or salvation. God's wrath and anger are very great. But salvation is near – we must simply repent and put our hope in Jesus Christ, and all will be well.