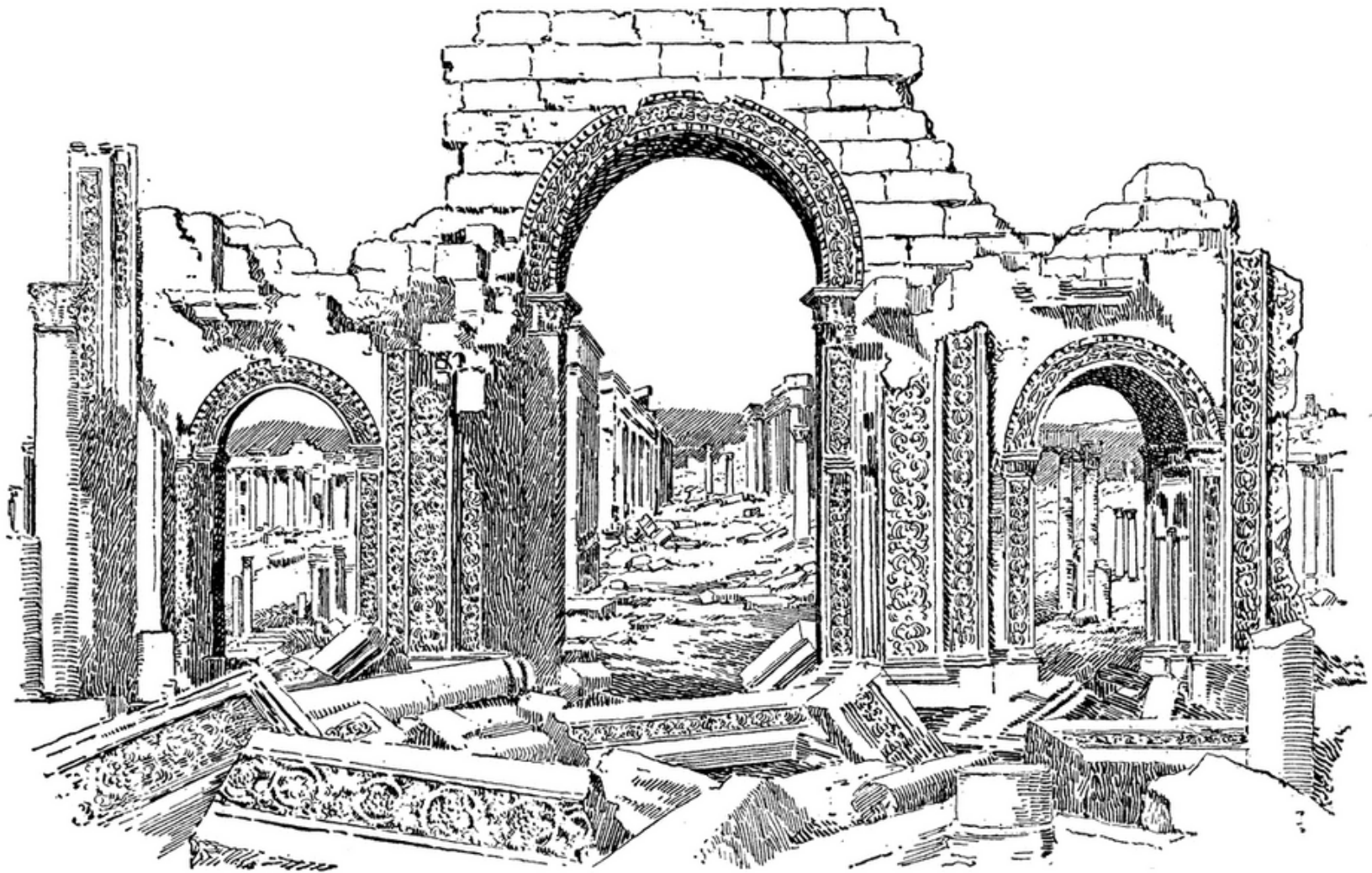


AGATHOS



LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE
Book of Jeremiah

SPRING 2020

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agathos

(n.) whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy;

about us **whatever is good.**

The Agathos Journal is an annual publication of the Joseph and Alice McKeen Study Center by the Christian Fellowship at Bowdoin. The publication is a member of the Augustine Collective, a national network of undergraduate Christian journals. After a year of scripture study, our community of believing college students, mentors, and families works to write on the truth that the Bible has for our academic, social, and cultural campus context. We invite you to read here the ways we hear God speaking into our lives at Bowdoin College and this world at large.

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Letter from the Editor

Dear Reader,

The Book of Jeremiah is a testimony to Judah's transition into Babylonian captivity and the urgent words from God spoken through Jeremiah to God's people. Delivering this message was by no means a trivial task, but it was Jeremiah's burden to bear.

In the same way, we are in the business of asking today, what is God's burden for us and what words is he asking us to share? These are not easy questions to answer, but we have found that they are not ones to run from either. For as great as Jeremiah's personal burden was, his reliance and trust in a God more powerful than his burdens to faithfully work for the good of both him and His people was greater still. Shall it be any less with us?

In seeking to better understand Jeremiah's burden, we looked for answers to the questions of his time. "Why the exile?" Struck by famine and drought, broken up by war, and separated in foreign lands, the nation of Judah stood, struck in upheaval, distress, and maybe even awe, by the destruction of their inheritance, wondering— "Why? Why the exile?" Surely, God had designed for Jerusalem to be "the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD." [Jeremiah 7:4]

So we inquired and we studied: What was God's reason for banishing his beloved people, Judah, to the outskirts of the land? What warnings had he sent prior and how did the people respond? As we read through the book of Jeremiah, we found that things weren't always as we expected. The depths of human sin contrasted with God's nature of righteousness was a frequent theme, revealing oftentimes our shallow understanding of human nature. But still, with all we learned, ultimately the words God spoke through stayed consistent to character, showing His deep deep love for us, abundant even in the presence of sin and anguish.

As we take a look at our lives mid-pandemic, we might be moved to consider questions of our time as well. Students have been taken away from the comfort and liveliness of college life. For some, loved ones have been lost without even a chance to say goodbye in person. And for many, a city in lockdown has become the norm. In short, with our normal lives and plans for the future interrupted, we have been given a chance to reflect on the things we carry and the things we care for.

Throughout our studies, each of us found different passages of Jeremiah to be particularly touching. Thus, this journal is a collection of our reflections on those passages through which we respectively felt God speaking. By the time you make your way to the end of this journal, our hope is that you would witness the goodness of God, find peace in the midst of uncertainty, and feel the conviction to press in and meet God where you are.

With Love,
Juliette Min & the Team

Context: the Book of Jeremiah

JEREMIAH

Jeremiah was a 6th century BC prophet from Judah who was called at a young age to preach against the idolatry of the people of Judah. That preaching was directed both at the people and at those who had their hands on the instruments of power, both religious power and the secular monarchs, who failed in their respective ways to advise the people about the ways of God for the people of God.

HUMAN AGENCY & JUSTICE

The study of Jeremiah, in many ways, is really a study about our human agency. God is in complete control of the collapse of Judah and the exile of the people to Babylon. But that does not mean that those in authority were free to do what they wanted to do, or that those under authority were free to do what they wanted to do. The term that we give to our human agency as it relates to the power to control others is Justice. All Justice belongs to God, and we are accountable for every exercise of authority.

TURNING & RETURNING

The most important word in Jeremiah is the Hebrew word *sub* which can either mean to turn, return, recover, change or some variant of those ideas. We are Christians who believe in the possibility of restoring those who have been judged and found wanting. The Gospel of Jesus Christ invites all of us to enter into a kingdom that we don't see and the only way to enter that kingdom is to go through that "turn" which is a matter of the heart and the mind which is ultimately reflected in the way we live our lives.



BETWEEN THE POLAR BEAR AND THE CHAPEL

THE LOAD BEARING INDIVIDUAL AND A CREATIVE MINORITY

The Bowdoin Polar Bear and the Bowdoin College Chapel share the sentimental and the geographic center of the Bowdoin College campus. I think the Christian student lives somewhere between that Polar Bear and the Chapel; the Polar Bear representing the current cultural life of the College, and the Chapel representing commitments to the teachings and practices of the Christian faith which were the principle reasons for the founding of the College in 1794.

The foundation stone for this Gothic chapel building was set in 1844 during the tenure of Bowdoin College's fourth President Leonard Woods. The building was completed and dedicated in 1855. The murals which line the interior walls depict Old and New Testament themes of biblical theology. Adam and Eve, Moses Giving the Law, David and Goliath, The Baptism of Christ, Peter Healing the Lame Man at the Beautiful Gate, and St. Paul Preaching on Mars Hill in Athens are among the larger than life pieces that remind the visitor that the chapel's purpose was to provide a place for Christian worship on the campus of Bowdoin College.

The Polar Bear sculpture dates to 1937 when the graduating class of 1912 presented the granite bear as a gift to the College in memory of the April 6, 1909 successful expedition to the North Pole by Admiral Robert E. Peary (Bowdoin Class of 1877). Standing guard at the rear doors of the Chapel, the Bowdoin Polar Bear is a strong and imposing mascot to the cultural values of the College, appearing on sweatshirts, knapsacks and baseball caps across the campus.

Enter the Prophet Jeremiah

The Bowdoin College students who have been studying the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah at the Joseph and Alice McKeen Study Center examined early in the semester God's call to *this reluctant prophet* to stand critically between the corrupted *cultural and political rulers* of Judah six centuries before the birth of Christ, and the *priest, prophets, and elders* who failed to serve as the barriers to false religious teachings about Solomon's Temple and the corporate life of Judah as a worshipping people.

The prophet Jeremiah wrote oracles of prose and poetry to warn the political and religious leaders of Judah of the coming seventy-year exile to Babylon that awaited the priests, prophets and religious elite who controlled the temple precincts, as well as the family of the ruling monarchy who controlled secular spaces. Jeremiah's awareness of these cross pressures is evident in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel depiction of Jeremiah as the brooding prophet.

This essay will examine how the burdens of Jeremiah are similar to the responsibilities of a Christian student on a secular college campus. The normative stance of the Old Testament prophet was simultaneously critical of religious officials and secular rulers. This sounds like *"church and state"* to the modern ear, and it should. That legal doctrine however, whatever it means to American constitutional law, has become mischievous to Christian college students learning the practices of a Christian life and worship on a deeply secular college campus. Old Testament prophets like Jeremiah spoke with *one voice* to the religious and secular leaders, to the priests and monarchs, to the Chapel and the Polar Bear.

I propose to combine the insights of former Oxford professor of moral philosophy Oliver O'Donovan regarding the loneliness of the individual who becomes *"load bearing"* when the structures of a collective memory erode, with the observations of Rabbi (and member of Parliament!) Jonathan Sacks, that 70 years of exile offered to the remnant of Judah the ideal conditions for the formation of a new *"creative minority."*

Michelangelo Sistine Ceiling



The Secular and the Sacred

"The priests did not say, 'Where is the Lord?' Those who handle the law did not know me; the shepherds transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit. Therefore I still contend with you, declares the Lord, and with your children's children I will contend." (Jeremiah 2:8-9 ESV)

The prophet's denunciation of the secular monarchy and of the religious priests and prophets, brought together under a series of oracles the failures of those charged to govern both *secular and sacred space*. Christian theologians remind us that the alternative to the secular is not the sacred or spiritual, but the eternal. The saeculum refers to the passing age where institutions which have essential meaning for our time will be displaced and rendered either unnecessary or redundant when the Kingdom of God has fully come. The task of the monarch is important, but all Kings will surrender their thrones to the King of Kings when the time for secular rule has passed and their provisional authority is displaced.

Prophets, priests and kings, called to set boundaries and to correct wrong thinking about God and the ordering of a common life, had themselves become culpable agents of evil within their respective jurisdiction. Priests failed to do priestly things, prophets failed to do prophet things, and the monarchs failed to do the princely things of just governance with their coercive powers of the sword. This decline in Judah was an inside job, and Jeremiah experienced the individual pressures of a lonely prophet carrying alone the burden to speak against collapsing institutions of religion and government:

"the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but what will you do when the end comes?" (Jeremiah 5:31 ESV)

The Lord provided Jeremiah with an intelligence report that even those closest to him would betray him:

"If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you are so trusting, what will you do in the thicket of the Jordan? For even your brothers and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you; they are in full cry after you; do not believe them, though they speak friendly words to you." (Jeremiah 12:5-6 ESV)

As the venerated commentator Matthew Henry writes, "[t]hose who desert religion, commonly oppose it more than those who never knew it." The Chapel and the Polar Bear, like the priesthood and the monarchy, are geographic markers of this tension between the transcendent and the immanent, which for the present moment occupy common space in the architectural landscape of the College and in the awareness of the Bowdoin College Christian student that I belong here - but in a certain sense - only as an exile in a *foreign land*. (Psalm 137.4 ESV)



The Deconstruction of Religious Life – The Polar Bear & The Chapel

We learn from the Bowdoin College website that 150 years of Maine winters compromised the mortar that cemented together the granite stones of the Bowdoin Chapel. Between the spring of 2003 and the fall of 2004, the chapel was dismantled "stone by stone," with each stone numbered for reassembly using more modern architectural technologies. Those who are familiar with the words of Jesus about the destruction of the Second Temple walls "stone by stone" will recognize that Jesus was meditating on the prophecies from Jeremiah regarding the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in the 6th century BC.

"Flee for safety, O people of Benjamin, from the midst of Jerusalem! Blow the trumpet in Tekoa, and raise a signal on Beth-haccherem, for disaster looms out of the north, and great destruction. The lovely and delicately bred I will destroy, the daughter of Zion. Shepherds with their flocks shall come against her; they shall pitch their tents around her; they shall pasture, each in his place. Prepare war against her; arise, and let us attack at noon! Woe to us, for the day declines, for the shadows of evening lengthen! Arise, and let us attack by night and destroy her palaces!" (Jeremiah 6:1-5 ESV)

"And now, because you have done all these things, declares the Lord, and when I spoke to you persistently you did not listen, and when I called you, you did not answer, therefore I will do to the house that is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. And I will cast you out of my sight, as I cast out all your kinsmen, all the offspring of Ephraim." (Jeremiah 7:13-15 ESV)

In the hours and days before his passion, trial, and execution by crucifixion, Jesus confronted his disciples with his own prophetic predictions of the coming destruction of the Second Temple that had been rebuilt in Jerusalem when the exiles returned to Jerusalem in 539. BC. Under the new leadership of priests and the prophets like Ezra and Nehemiah, returning exiles were instructed to restore the sacred and the public spaces in Jerusalem. As Jesus walked among that second temple, Matthew records:

"Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another that will not be thrown down.'" (Matthew 24:1-2 ESV)

The Gospel of John suggests that this predicted destruction of the Second Temple fulfilled in 70 AD *stone by stone* may have been a frequent subject of conversation between Jesus and his disciples. Shortly after Jesus called his disciples to follow him in the early days of ministry, John records how Jesus instructed the disciples that the catastrophic destruction of the Temple was a sign-act pointing to his own death and resurrection:

"So the Jews said to him, 'What sign do you show us for doing these things?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews then said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking about the temple of his body. When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken." (John 2:18-22 ESV)

For the errant people of Judah in Jeremiah's day, it would require an experience like the destruction of Jerusalem, its Temple, and 70 years of exile to cure them of their superstitious reliance on the presence of the Temple of Solomon at the sentimental center of Jerusalem. In his famous Temple Sermon recorded in Jeremiah 7, the prophet chided them, "do not trust these deceptive words - this is the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord, the Temple of the Lord." (Jeremiah 7:4 ESV)



Worship and the SJW (Social Justice Warrior)

The more deeply one reads into the history of the life of Israel, and the criticism by the Old Testament prophets about the departures from the covenant privilege offered to them, the more aware one becomes a nexus between ethical, moral and social justice failures on the one hand, and religious apostasy and idolatry on the other. Prophesying a hundred years before Jeremiah about the fall of the northern tribes of Israel at the hands of Assyrian invaders, Micah answers the most important question that any person can answer. *What does the Lord require?* What is required in religious worship? What is required of the moral agent? Micah's answers both questions in a single oracle:

"With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:6-8 ESV)

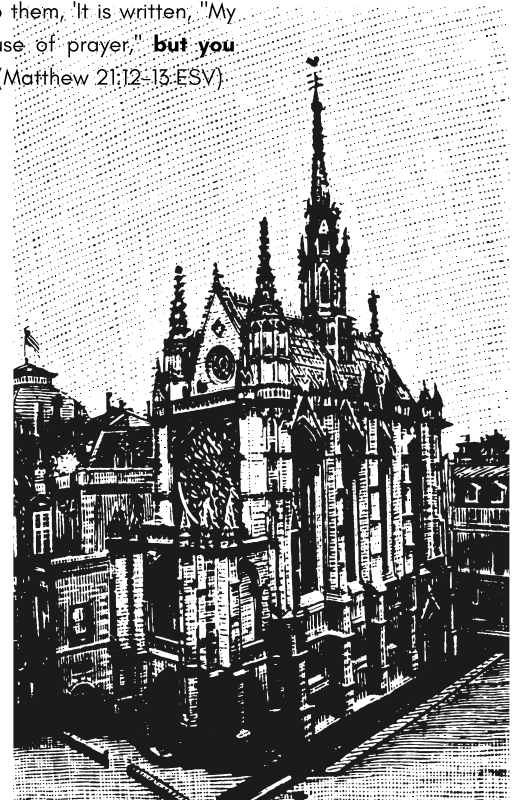
On college campuses across America, chapel buildings were constructed in the 18th and 19th century in recognition of the religious mission of that college. College architects reserved the high points and central locations of the campus as spaces for worship. "Stones on stones" chapels were meant to be a visible reminder that there was no uncontested secular space in the life of the college that did not owe public obedience to the God who created those spaces. As in the days of Jeremiah, the chapel, like the Temple of Solomon, was a visible reminder that God would dwell with his people. I understand that message to be: *I am here in this public space!*

More than any other contemporary scholar of Christian ethics, Oliver O'Donovan grasps how the vocabulary of *salvation* in both the Old and New Testament has a *political* prehistory in the deterioration of the moral and social life of Israel. That is why Jeremiah brings in his Temple Sermon (Jeremiah 7) a unified critique against the erroneous thinking about the sacred space of a temple and about the decline of socio-political justice in the public spaces in Judah:

"For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute **justice** one with another, if you do not **oppress** the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not **go after other gods** to your own harm, then I will let you **dwell** in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever. Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you **steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known**, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, 'We are **delivered!**'— only to go on doing all these abominations? **Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers** in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 7:5-11 ESV)

Jesus reflected on this passage from Jeremiah's Temple Sermon when he cleansed the Second Temple of money changers during the days before his crucifixion:

"And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. He said to them, 'It is written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer," **but you make it a den of robbers.**'" (Matthew 21:12-13:ESV)



Lessons about Life

B E T W E E N

the Polar Bear and the Chapel

It is a Contested Space

College chapels and statues of college mascots share common spaces on American colleges and universities. But that space is more contested than it was when this Polar Bear was constructed in 1937 at the north entrance to this Bowdoin Chapel dedicated as a house of Christian worship for students in 1855. The history of the chapel and its biblical artwork testifies to those sacred purposes. So too do the catalog of sermons preached by Bowdoin College's first president Joseph McKeen between 1802 and 1806. See **Sober Consent of the Heart**, The Bowdoin College Chapel Message of First President, Joseph McKeen DD Delivered 1802-1806, Robert B. Gregory, Editor (2011); **Joseph McKeen and the Soul of Bowdoin College: An Analysis of the Chapel Sermons of Rev. Joseph McKeen, First President of Bowdoin College, as they relate to his call to serve the Common Good** (2016)

Christian students standing between the Polar Bear and the Chapel are tempted to believe that the historic religious foundation for the College has nothing to do with contemporary views of ethics and social justice. First Amendment constitutional doctrines of separation have taught them this. But the Christian students face a second temptation which is greater. That is to privatize the Christian faith and leave to the Polar Bear alone the privilege of forming public values for the shared life on a college campus. As Stanley Hauerwas argues:

Christians in modernity thought their task was to make the Gospel intelligible to the world rather than to help the world understand why it could not be intelligible without the Gospel. Desiring to become part of the modernist project, preachers and theologians accepted the presumption that Christianity is a set of beliefs, a worldview, designed to give meaning to our lives. In the name of being politically responsible in, to, and for liberal social orders, the politics of Christian discourse was relegated to the private realm. We accepted the politics of translation believing that neither we nor our non-Christian and half-Christian neighbors could be expected to submit to the discipline of Christian speech. Stanley Hauerwas, *Preaching as Though we had Enemies*, First Things Magazine, (1995)

Shepherds of the Secular are Not Free Agents

Prophets and priests were never to surrender to the monarchs and tyrants of public spaces an unchallenged vision of morality, justice and a properly ordered public square. While monarchs, and not prophets and priests, govern that public space, neither the Kings of Judah nor the despotic rulers of Assyria and Babylon could govern free from the claims of God. Even the despot of Babylon Nebuchadnezzar was a "servant of God." (Jeremiah 27.6) It was the task of the prophet to sound in a single oracle the criticism of their religious leaders and secular rulers. The resurrected Jesus makes the stunning assertion in Matthew 28 that all authority on heaven and earth was given to him. He then dismissed his disciples to the task of evangelizing all the nations, simultaneously summoning them to religious belief and ethical obedience.

"...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

There was a pattern in Jeremiah's day to the failure of the religious and secular leaders and that pattern is repeated in every generation. Jeremiah 2:8 quoted earlier in this essay is the prototype of that double failure. "The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' Those who handle the law did not know me; the shepherds transgressed against me; the prophets prophesied by Baal and went after things that do not profit." Nothing is more harmful to the life of the Christian student between the Polar Bear and the Chapel than the insidious argument that principles of social justice and personal ethics can be underwritten in the shadow of the Polar Bear without the predicates of religious instruction once taught in the College Chapel.

Neither Translators nor Interpreters

This is the lesson that I hope that the student leaders participating at the Joseph and Alice McKeen Study Center have learned this semester. Life between the Polar Bear and the Chapel is the life of a student who has become more load-bearing precisely because of his faith commitments. The yoke of Jeremiah resting on the shoulders of Christian student leaders is not one of soft translation of the Christian gospel to a campus community. That community believes that the Christian must be lived entirely in a private realm, and that there are no claims that require submission by Christians and rulers of secular spaces alike. Life in the shadow of the Polar Bear cannot be intelligible without the Gospel at one time preached in the Bowdoin College Chapel, even and especially when the chapel occupied Massachusetts Hall which was the only building on campus when Bowdoin's first President Joseph McKeen and his wife Alice arrived in Brunswick from Beverley, Massachusetts with their five children in 1802.

The Load-Bearing Individual when Collective Identities Collapse

In his most important book, **The Desire of Nations**, *rediscovering the roots of political theology* (1996) Oliver O'Donovan reads in the prophet Jeremiah a trend from *community* to the *individual* in the history of Israel. "To be a human being at all" he writes, "is to participate in one or more collective identities. But there is no collective identity so overarching and all-encompassing that no human beings are left outside it . . . We do not meet it in any community, however great, of which we could assume the leadership. We meet it only in the face of Christ, who presents himself as our leader and commander." (Page 73)

O'Donovan's understanding of the teachings of Jeremiah are helping us at the Joseph and Alice McKean Study Center learn that when these collective identities collapse, as they surely have in this first quarter of the 21st century, "individuals become, as it were, **load-bearing** so that at the exile the future of the nation has come to depend on individual faithfulness." (Page 73, *emphasis added*) This single insight more than anything I have read this semester helps me to understand the mission and the ministry of Jeremiah and its relevance to our day. This is how O'Donovan articulates the implications of this trend:

"The community is the aboriginal fact from beginning to end, shaping the conscience of each of its members to greater or lesser effect. But when the mediating institutions of government collapse, then the memory and hope which single members faithfully conserve provide a span of continuity which can reach out toward the prospect of restructuring. The fractured community which fashioned the individual's conscience is sustained within it and renewed out of it. And from having been preserved through single members' memory and hope, Jeremiah anticipates, it will be the stronger, for it will incorporate the direct knowledge of Yhwh's ways which each has won by his, or her, faithfulness * * * **the conscience of the individual members of a community is a repository of the moral understanding which shaped it, and may serve to perpetuate it in a crisis of collapsing morale or institution. . .** The conscientious individual speaks with society's own forgotten voice. (Page 80, *emphasis added*)

Creative Minority

Is there hope for a restructured community when the doors of a College Chapel are closed to Christian worship? Jeremiah 30 contains what Derek Kidner says is "one of the boldest but least known Messianic prophecies...a ruler who will be what no King had ever been allowed to be: their mediator and priest." Jeremiah, Kidner Classic Commentaries, (IVP, 1987):

"Their prince shall be one of themselves; their ruler shall come out from their midst; I will make him draw near, and he shall approach me, for who would dare of himself to approach me? declares the LORD." (Jeremiah 30:21 ESV)

Jesus and his New Testament disciples recognized Jeremiah's New Covenant as fulfilled in the death, burial, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Jesus pointed to the communion cup as the "new covenant in my blood." This church, under the rule of Christ, would become, to borrow a phrase from Rabbi Sacks, a new **creative minority**. The following extended excerpt from his insightful essay is worth our deepest reflection about the teachings of Jeremiah:

What if they saw religion time and again enlisted to give heavenly sanction to purely human hierarchies? What if they knew that truth and power have nothing to do with one another and that you do not need to rule the world to bring truth into the world? What if they had realized that once you seek to create a universal state you have already begun down a road from which there is no escape, a process that ends in disintegration and decline? What if they were convinced that in the long run, the real battle is spiritual, not political or military, and that in this battle influence matters more than power? What if they believed they had heard God calling on them to be a creative minority that never sought to become a dominant minority, that never sought to become a universal state, nor even in the conventional sense a universal church? What if they believed that God is universal but that love—all love, even God's love—is irreducibly particular? What if these insights led a figure like Jeremiah to reconceptualize the entire phenomenon of defeat and exile? The Israelites had betrayed their mission by becoming obsessed with politics at the cost of moral and spiritual integrity. So taught all the prophets from Moses to Malachi. Every time you try to be like your neighbors, they said, you will be defeated by your neighbors. Every time you worship power, you will be defeated by power. Every time you seek to dominate, you will be dominated. For you, says God, are my witnesses to the world that there is nothing sacred about power or holy about empires and imperialism. On Creative Minorities, 2013 Erasmus Lecture by Jonathan Sacks, January 2014.



TOO
YOUNG
TO SPEAK

Jeremiah 1:4-9

Have you ever felt underprepared for a task? In my experience, the feeling is always an unwelcome one. In these moments, it can feel like the only certain thing about the task is your inadequacy to complete it. That is how Jeremiah felt when God came to speak to him, appointing him as prophet to all the people of Judah. And yet, Jeremiah faithfully went on to deliver many an important message, well-received or not. Let's take a look at how Jeremiah was able to do so, despite his youth and inexperience at the time.

The Lord Speaks to Jeremiah

"Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you [and approved of you as My chosen instrument], and before you were born I consecrated you [to Myself as My own]; I have appointed you as a prophet to the nations." (Jeremiah 1:4-5 AMP)

God starts by proclaiming Jeremiah's life in relation to him. Not only did God approve of Jeremiah before he was even formed in the womb, God, at that time, had already set Jeremiah aside to speak his words. Right after, we see the task before Jeremiah to serve as God's appointed prophet to the people of Judah. Just four verses in, we see that it is God who speaks the first words.

From this, we can extract a core idea present throughout the rest of the book. Though Jeremiah is a human and very much limited in ability, the everlasting and infinite God is the one who will be speaking through him.

But let's see how Jeremiah responds:

"Then I said, 'Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am [only] a young man.'" (Jeremiah 1:6 AMP)

Jeremiah candidly replies that "he does not know how to speak". Jeremiah was probably around the age of a college student at this time. To him, speaking for God likely seemed an impossible task; maybe he thought an elderly, more "spiritually experienced" person would be a better fit.

But God isn't satisfied with Jeremiah's answer. He doesn't shrug his shoulders and say "oh, maybe I'll come back in a few years", much less go off to find someone else to be his prophet. Rather, God reinforces the statements he made earlier (v.5):

"But the Lord said to me, 'Do not say, "I am [only] a young man," Because everywhere I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them [or their hostile faces], for I am with you [always] to protect you and deliver you,'" says the Lord." (Jeremiah 1:8-9 AMP)

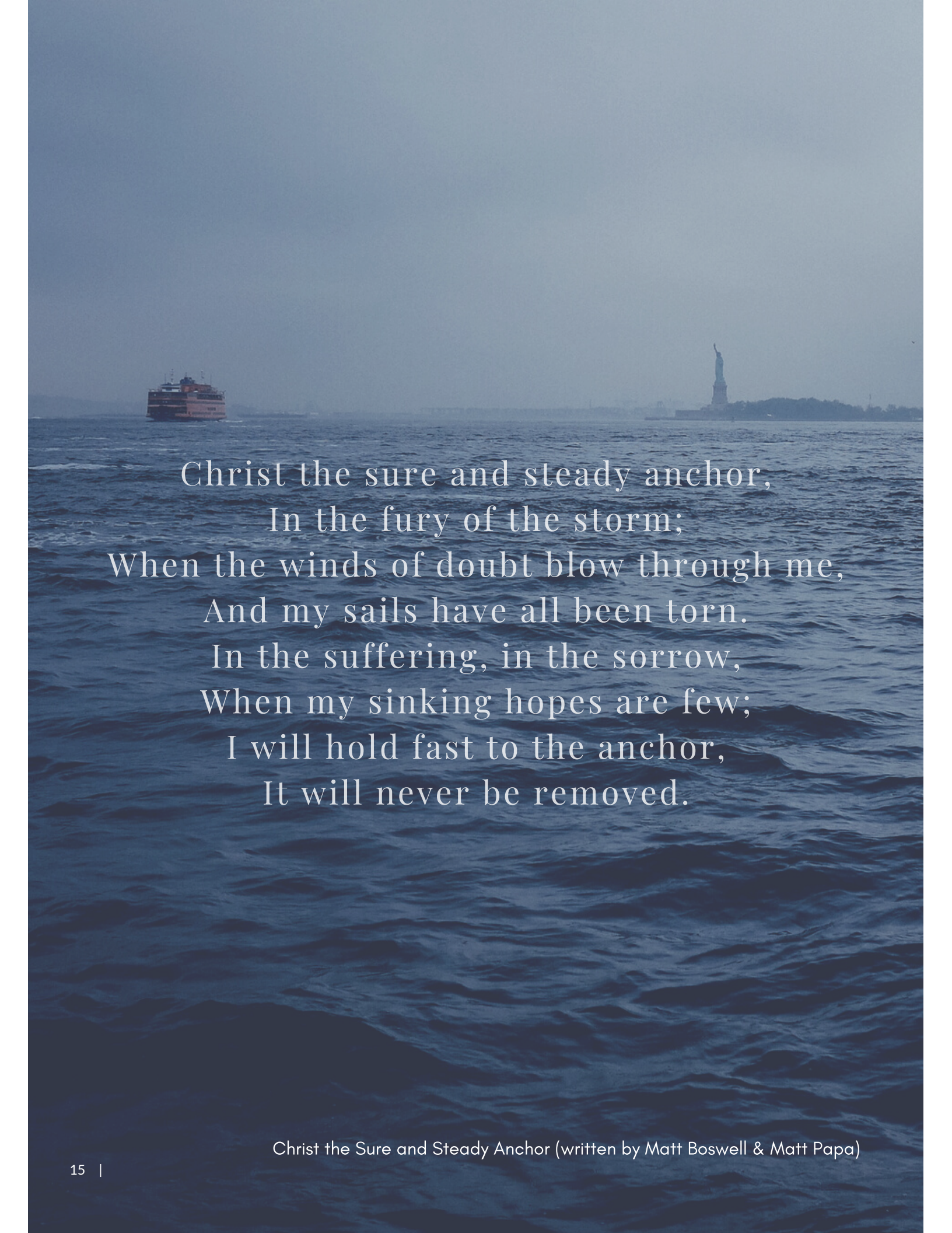
God dismisses Jeremiah's assessment of his own youth, telling him how Jeremiah shall be speaking to the nations, and he assures Jeremiah that he will be with him to protect him (v.8). In these two verses, we glean something amazing about the nature of a relationship with God. Jeremiah sees himself as unqualified to speak for God, and he is. Nonetheless, the Lord assures him that words will be given for Jeremiah to speak; his ability to speak as a prophet is not rooted in his own ability, rather it is wholly rooted in God. In these few verses, we see what the book of Jeremiah is and is not. It is not the self-made story of a guy training his whole life for the prophet life. It is the story of a thoughtful God

speaking to his people through a chosen servant who, by any other means, would be unable to speak for God. It is good and important for all of us to reflect on what we rely on to do what we do. Who or what is it? What are its strengths and what are its limits?

God's goodness goes beyond understanding, and, for me, he is the only one worth speaking for.

For me, this passage was a humbling reminder of what it means to rely on God. There are still tasks which I feel unprepared to tackle whether it is applying for internships or talking about my faith with friends. But in light of Jeremiah's conversation with God, I know that it's not my personal qualities but God's presence with me that matters the most in any endeavor. And, by the grace of God, we can find comfort in knowing that Jesus promises to be with us when we seek him (Matthew 28:20 AMP).

So, like Jeremiah, how can I keep quiet of the joy I've found in having a relationship with God? How can I keep quiet about this fleeting world's attractive but deceiving hopes that lead only to death? And in light of that, quiet of God's still greater mercy and steadfast love to those who lean on him? It is my hope that we can all live every moment of every day for Jesus who provides a better and permanent life through his death and resurrection; I don't believe there could be any greater reason to live. God's goodness goes beyond understanding, and, for me, he is the only one worth speaking for.



Christ the sure and steady anchor,
In the fury of the storm;
When the winds of doubt blow through me,
And my sails have all been torn.
In the suffering, in the sorrow,
When my sinking hopes are few;
I will hold fast to the anchor,
It will never be removed.

Christ the Sure and Steady Anchor (written by Matt Boswell & Matt Papa)

Prayer for Speaking:

Dear Lord God,

Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.

Who am I to speak for you, Lord of All, Creator of the Universe?

Yet, you are changing my life and giving me a purpose to speak

Help me to humbly live for you each day and every day,

Speaking life-giving words to the people in my life -

Repenting for the times I'll fail to rely on you.

May all the praise go to you

In Jesus name,

Amen

if you utter
what is
precious,
and not
what is
worthless. . .

LISTEN TO HIM

BY ESPOIR BYISHIMO

Listen to Him

The phrase “truth hurts” is used in our everyday conversations when a person says something that makes someone else uncomfortable; it is an excuse for saying something that is supposedly true but hurts the other person’s feelings. In fact, saying the truth may backfire, leading to hatred between the two parties. Once that happens, it is natural to think that minding your own business is the best thing to do. Especially for someone like me, taught as a young boy to never create “unnecessary enemies,” I often struggle with three voices: moving on, saying what the other person would like to hear, or saying what I ought to say. The story of Jeremiah demonstrates that in some instances, telling the truth might be the only option to bring happiness and freedom to the other person in the long run and/or eternally.

Truth is rare. I googled the question, “What is the rarest thing in the world?” One answer was, “a good politician with a spine of integrity.” This response appeals to our feeling that politicians can be so corrupt in their daily dealings, despite being public figures whose acts often heavily affect the masses one way or another. Like today, in Judah at Jeremiah’s time, people in high positions misused power: “the prophets prophesy [ied] lies, the priests rule[ed] by their own authority.” (Jeremiah 5:31). Strikingly, even religious leaders, often expected to hold high moral codes, were involved in dirty deeds. However, it is clear that dishonesty was not only of those in higher positions. Rather, falsehood was a common denominator in the society; wrongdoing and dishonesty ruled in every part of the society—everyone lived in the same corrupt way.

“Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem,
 look around and consider,
 search through her squares.
 If you can find but one person
 who deals honestly and seeks the truth,
 I will forgive this city.” (Jeremiah 5:1 NIV)

In this hostile setting, Jeremiah was tasked to speak the truth to the people of Judah.
 “Go down to the palace of the king of Judah and proclaim this message there: Hear the word of the Lord to you, king of Judah, you who sit on David’s throne—you, your officials and your people who come through these gates. This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right.” (Jeremiah 22:1 NIV)

Imagine how difficult it must have been for Jeremiah, a regular citizen, to correct the king. For me, it is even difficult to do so for just a friend or a classmate. We should ask why that was possible for Jeremiah. As we see in the verse above, one crucial thing is different: his message to the King was not his own but God’s. So, he was to speak what is unbiased or uninformed but only what is certain. That makes us wonder, whose authority and words we have when we speak to other people. Ours or Gods? Once we can answer those two questions, we will feel empowered to speak the truth.

Therefore thus says the Lord:
 “If you return, I will restore you,
 and you shall stand before me.
 If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless,
 you shall be as my mouth.
 They shall turn to you,
 but you shall not turn to them.” (Jeremiah 15:19 NIV)

As the verse says, the work to speak what is precious starts from turning our hearts to God, listening carefully to what he has to say. Only then can we find words to speak and the power needed to proclaim those words.

Prayer

Lord, let me fix my eyes on you. My mouth and life desires to be a vessel you speak through. I return to you today. Amen.

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY

BY TAYLOR JORGENSEN



**GOD ASKS, "CAN I NOT
DO WITH YOU AS THIS
POTTER HAS DONE?"**

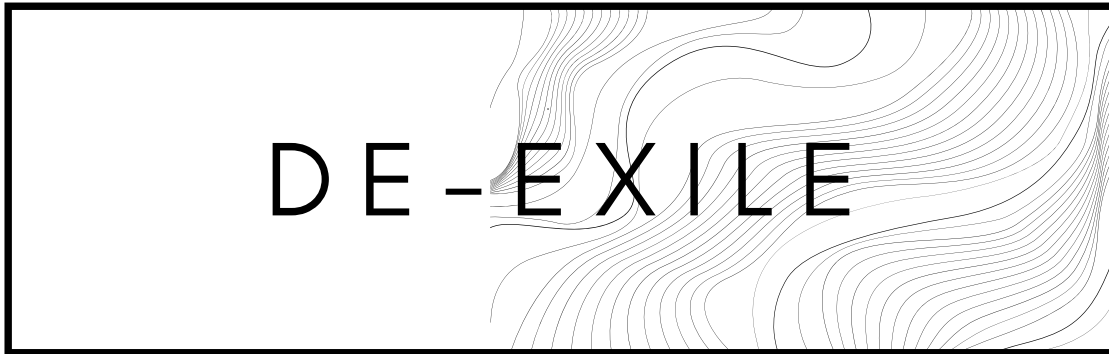
Something I have thought a lot about during the time spent in quarantine is what I can do while I'm stuck here. Thinking that this was the right attitude, I started trying to figure out ways to entertain myself— what hobbies I could develop, books I could read, foods I could make, etc. It all left me feeling flat. In reconsidering Jeremiah, I found myself drawn to Jeremiah 18, The Potter and The Clay. I was struck by how much I felt that God's messages to Jeremiah spoke to my frustrations. While I had been actively trying to figure out what would be the best path for me, instead of figuring out where God wants me to be, I was focusing on what I wanted. As we learn from Jeremiah, we are always better off paying attention to God's intentions for us.

Right off the bat, the very first thing God does in this chapter is tell Jeremiah to wake up and go visit the potter: "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words" (Jeremiah 18:2 ESV). God instantly directs Jeremiah to get up and follow orders. He wastes no time. Then, Jeremiah arrives at the potter's house, where the potter "was working at his wheel" (Jeremiah 18:3 ESV). The potter was already at work, set to task, molding his clay. It begs the question: what truly important thing could I be doing right now? The potter knows his purpose— "And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do" (Jeremiah 18:4 ESV). The potter is attentive to his work and trusting of his artistic insight. He sees when something has gone wrong and he skillfully reworks the spoiled clay into something better, according to his own expert judgement.

When God asks, "can I not do with you as this potter has done?" He is asking Jeremiah and His people to have faith in His ability to transform them and we are being asked the same: to consider God as this expert potter and ourselves as the clay (Jeremiah 18:6 ESV). In recognizing our position as clay we must also realize what qualities of clay—good and bad— are found in ourselves. We can be both malleable and hardened, improved and spoiled, vessels for good and vessels for evil. Our "final product" depends on the potter, our God, but also on our willingness to be molded. The basic clay found in the ground has one big difference from ourselves: it does not choose to harden itself against the potter. It may be left to harden, but its actions are always passive. We have been granted the ability to choose whether or not we are open to the hands of our potter, however, the potter remains the ultimate expert on what should happen to the clay. Clay cannot mold clay.

We can do whatever we feel will fulfill us, but "that is in vain! We will follow our own plans, and will every one act according to the stubbornness of his evil heart" (Jeremiah 18:12 ESV). The potter has the tools and the ability to shape us, but we make the assumption that we have all that we need. Think of what Jesus says to the Samaritan woman at the well: "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14 ESV). All that we physically have will fade away, but it is the water that Christ gives to us that will lead us to eternal life. This is the water of our potter. When the Earthly potter adds regular water to hardened clay he is able to soften, shape, and form it into something better. Imagine what God can do with us and the water that grants eternal life.

That is what we need and it is what God provides for us, but our ability to recognize this need in ourselves is vital. Without realizing our own inability to shape and care for ourselves, we will harden as spoiled clay. It is easy to go down a path of thinking all about what I want to do or what would make me happy, but my ultimate happiness lies in my ability to put aside my own wants and frustrations, see all that God has given me, and allow Him to shape me into the person He wants me to become.



DE-EXILE

It took me weeks to acknowledge that I was actually relieved when Bowdoin College went remote for the rest of Spring 2020. Receiving this news from the safety of my home mid Spring Break, I'm sure some would have thought this relief had come from fear of leaving a safe environment and contracting the disease. The shameful reality, however, was that my relief had less to do with the virus and more with the state of my own heart. It came from the immense need to slow down and take a moment to rest and reflect. This feeling felt so selfish that I was ashamed to admit it, but months leading up to Spring Break, I had been exhausted and drained from fighting a fight I could not win.

As I began to reflect on these feelings, I began to question my heart: "Why was I feeling this way?" Surely God was with me through it all at Bowdoin— I had no reason to feel like I was running on empty. Our Bible studies and Friday fellowships were increasing in number and so blessed by God's provision. My professors were opening up new ideas and knowledge and I loved grabbing meals and spending time with my peers. I had made for myself a home at Bowdoin, and was so thankful for everything God had blessed me with. But why was I joyous to spend the rest of my semester at home? Why did it feel as though staying here for a little while longer was a blessing from God, allowing me a moment to be refreshed and renewed? Feeling as though I was gifted with time to savor precious moments with my parents and sisters, my heart was overfilled with thankfulness.

But in the meantime, as a sophomore who was desperately running a race to secure my summer internship for next year and planning for my year abroad at the highly coveted Oxford University, I quickly became riddled with vulnerability and fear as I felt the pain and frustration of uncertainty surrounding future plans. While at Bowdoin, I was told to network like my life depended on it, partake in summer research that would make my resume stand out, and be so prepared that when one plan falters I have two more backups to choose from and connections to leverage. When Bowdoin officially cancelled this year's summer opportunities, next year's internships were dwindling in number, and I quickly started receiving rejections from the finance firms I had been applying to, I realized upon reassessment that I wasn't even sure why I was so adamant about working in finance in the first place. I was blinded by ambition in pursuit of prestige, success, and honor that I felt wasn't satisfying God's purpose for me in this world.

As things at home settled in, I took the period of self-isolation as a uniquely given opportunity to reflect. Participating in weekly studies from the study center on the Book of Jeremiah, I examined how God interacted with the nation of Judah and searched for parallels in my life, my conduct, and where I had placed God.

In Jeremiah 7:8-10, we can see that the nation of Judah was not acting in a way that was pleasing to God.

“Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and **go after other gods that you have not known**, and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘**We are delivered!**’— only to go on doing all these abominations?” (Jeremiah 7:8-10 ESV)

Through these verses, we learn that the people of Judah didn’t practice what they preached. Compromising holiness with selfishness and complacency, they believed that God would continue to bless their nation regardless of their heart and conduct. From individual choices to institutional failures, Judah lived according to their own desires and standards. False prophets of that time blithely proclaimed that Jerusalem was forever destined to be “the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD,” taking God’s love and grace for granted (Jeremiah 7:4 ESV), and King Jehoiakim of Judah even had the audacity to throw God’s words into the fire after he heard the prophetic words written by Baruch and Jeremiah. When I think of God, the creator of these people, I feel it is only natural that his response is displeasure:

“For long ago I broke your yoke and burst your bonds; But you said, ‘I will not serve.’ Yes, on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down like a whore.” (Jeremiah 2:20 ESV)

From the beginning, God made for us to worship no other gods besides him. Judah’s rejection of following even the first of the Ten Commandments earned them their exile, where God took them to an unfamiliar land with new language and foreign culture, making them serve the king of Babylon for seventy years. This became the turning point in history when the people of Israel began to believe strictly in our monotheistic creator God.



While in our present time we may not physically build statues and bow down to idols, false gods are evident throughout our modern institutions. Whether it be education, beauty, comfort, science, or even our own self-sufficiency, these idols we worship pervade our culture and our lives in such a way that we learn to become dependent on the wrong things.

Strip it all away. When a pandemic takes politicians to overcrowded hospitals, leaves 401K’s and financial institutions in shambles, prevents us from sharing intimate moments with loved ones and friends, and replaces in-person classes with Zoom meetings, we begin to realize that everything screams uncertainty. But not God:

“At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ The words ‘once more’ indicate the removing of what can be shaken— that is, created things— so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, ‘for our God is a consuming fire.’” (Hebrews 12:28-29 ESV)

The institutions that we are holding onto will only lead to failure and disappointment. While it may have seemed to the nation of Judah pre-exile and to us pre-COVID-19 that to let go of the world was costly and too big a burden, our false gods can never provide what God can. God calls us to put our trust in him alone because he is the only one that is imperishable, perfectly beautiful, and powerful.

As I read the Book of Jeremiah, I felt God revealing to me idol after idol I had been worshiping in addition to God. I immediately felt ashamed, realizing that **I was the modern day version of Judah.** Applying to the biggest finance firms to become “successful” upon graduation, planning my study abroad at Oxford University for the added prestige, and striving to make the Bowdoin community my new home, I had mapped out my whole life for myself, pushing God into a tight corner of my heart to provide for me only when I felt the uncertainty of my plans. My dependence on God’s goodness exactly paralleled that of the false prophet’s assurances, crying that Jerusalem was to be, “the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD” (Jeremiah 7:4 ESV) regardless of their faithfulness to God.

God is greater than my dependence on institutions like my future job and resume, friendship, family, financial security, and my own pride. Through the Book of Jeremiah, God taught me that **there is no such thing as self-sufficiency** and that the only time we are truly secure is when we put our hope in his faithfulness to us. When I recall the relief I felt when I heard Bowdoin College went remote, I realize that I was exhausted trying to find lasting stability in things that are inherently unstable. And all the time, it wasn't that God wasn't with me, but it was my thoughts, priorities, fears, and meditations that weren't in line with his.

For me, **COVID-19 isn't a period of exile**. It is a period of **de-exile** where I have learned to accept the ever-constant invitation of God to draw closer to him, experience his loving forgiveness, receive his correction, and thank him for his promises.

Just as God promised the nation of Judah during their exile:

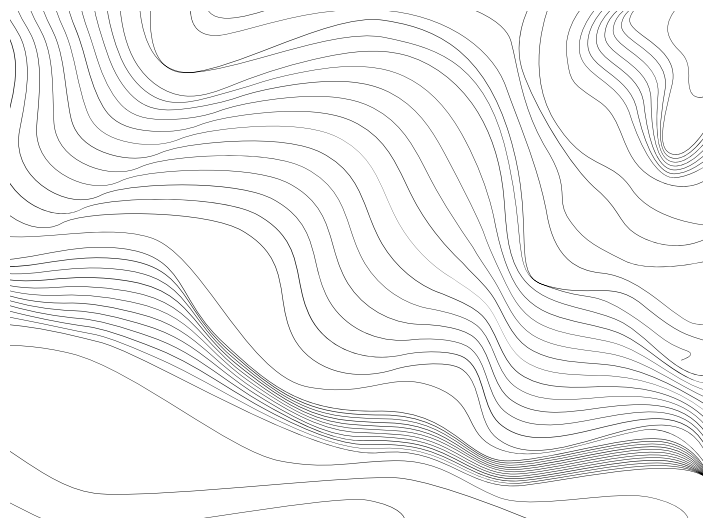
"For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:33-34 ESV)

"Behold, I will gather them from all the countries to which I drove them in my anger and my wrath and in great indignation. I will bring them back to this place, and I will make them dwell in safety. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God. I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me forever, for their own good and the good of their children after them." (Jeremiah 32:37-39 ESV)

I found God the Father waiting for me to realize his loving heart, experience incredible forgiveness, and believe in his never-ending faithfulness. I realized it didn't matter if I made myself a "home" at Bowdoin or in LA, in the UK while studying abroad or in these powerless institutions. **If I am far from God, I will always be in exile**, never truly home, to the Father who loved me from the moment he created me and provides for my every need. Every time we get closer to understanding our relationship to God, we come one step closer to our final destination, to our Father who loves us deeply. Thus, I praise God for remaining faithful, meeting us where we are, and encouraging us to come home to him!

Maverick City Music "Promises" Lyrics

God of Abraham, God of covenant and of faithful promises
Time and time again You have proven You'll do just what you said
Though the storms may come and the winds may blow I'll remain steadfast
And let my heart learn when you speak a word it will come to pass
Great is your faithfulness to me
Great is your faithfulness to me
From the rising sun, to the setting same
I will praise your name
Great is your faithfulness to me
God from age to age, though the earth may pass away,
Your word remains the same
You're history can prove there's nothing You can't do,
You're faithful and True
I put my faith in Jesus
My anchor to the ground
My hope and firm foundation
He'll never let me down



Prayer

Thank you God for bringing our attention to the Book of Jeremiah in this year's study. I can't wrap my head around the irony that we studied about the justice you brought to the nation of Judah as social isolation and remote learning was brought upon Bowdoin immediately after. God your timing and your ways are unexplainable but I do not question the goodness of your heart. Thank you for granting us this unique opportunity to study your message to Judah before and during their exile to search for truth in our own lives.

God I admit that my idols will never amount to your faithfulness. Help me to let go of my pride and self-sufficiency and trust you with my plans, for I acknowledge that without you I am running a race to find a security that I cannot win.

You can be content with your faith until God pushes you a bit deeper and you realize all the ways in which you've been complacent. Thank you God for pushing me to deeply examine how I would react when all my plans turned to dust and my life was rendered out of my control. Let me never be content with my faith, and continue to test the state of my heart.

Thank you God for redefining the meaning of home in my life. Home is where I have you and because you faithfully never leave me, I will go into places unknown, unseen, and unexpected in hopes that I might come one step closer to you.

My one and only institution, Jesus Christ— prophet, priest, king. . . one and only God— I trust in who you are, what you are doing, and in the mystery of your ways.

Push me into the unknown, lead me into spaces unexpected, and move me to speak your name into spaces that need awakening. Whether it be Bowdoin College, or my home— whether it be Oxford University or Zoom University, I have faith that wherever you send me, you will be waiting for me there.

Prepare my heart for action, increase my faith, and share my part of your plan with me.

Thank you that your words will never pass away.
You are the forever God.
Thank you for loving us always.

In Jesus name,
Amen





Obedience is
Our Love for Him

BY ISMERAI ORTIZ

Jeremiah obeyed God's commands, and urged God's people to also persevere in obedience. Throughout the Book of Jeremiah and the rest of the Bible, God never ceases to remind us that being His people meant obeying His word. But why was obeying God such an essential part of being His people?

Growing up, my faith depended on my parents, following the rules they expected me to follow. Likewise, my relationship with God consisted of knowing the commandments He gave us, and knowing we had to obey them. For me, this was what God consisted of: rules. Not obeying the rules meant consequences would follow, and my attention focused solely on the materialistic rather than the spiritual consequences. Because of this, I didn't understand what it felt like to have a relationship with God; what it meant to feel God's love and in return what it felt like to show my love for Him.

During my teenage years, I went through a period of spiritual drought. If I didn't pray or go to church on Sundays, I felt little to no guilt, and when God's discipline came, instead of fixing my ways, I ignored it and used it as an excuse to go further away from Him. Just as the people of Israel, I "did not respond to correction." (Jeremiah 2:30 NIV).

It took me a long time to once again walk in God's path. Throughout a large period of my spiritual journey, I often felt joy from worshiping God, but the guilt I felt from failing to obey God with full submission was crippling. It was a heavy burden, and I didn't understand why obedience was so necessary. What was this obedience for?

God "gave them this command: Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in obedience to all I command you, that it may go well with you." (Jeremiah 7:23 NIV). Here God tells us that to be His people, we must obey Him, and in doing so, it "may go well with" us. As Christians, we choose to obey God's word. Of course, we're not in any way perfect, and we always fail, but we still try not to sin. The key part of this is that we are trying, and in doing so, we recognize that the consequence of not obeying God's word is that we get separated from Him. Obedience helps us keep close to God.

Disobedience and God's discipline is not a direct cause-and-effect relationship that occurs all the time. Throughout the Bible and in our own lives, we can see how the obedient might face challenges that might seem like punishments from God while the disobedient continue to prosper despite their evil deeds. The former is evident in the Book of Job, where Job, a righteous man, gets robbed of his possessions, stripped of his family, and even develops painful sores all around his body. Likewise, in the present time, we might see people

choose disobedience for short term gain all around us, pursuing their own passions over God, yet they continue to prosper.

At the end of each of our lives, however, every single one of us is inevitably subject to God's perfect judgement. At this time, the righteous will be blessed, while the unrighteous will face their due justice. Thus, not every act of disobedience might be met with discipline in our present lives, but when we don't live according to God's word, we feel empty and might feel resentment towards many aspects of our life, including God. And sometimes (sometimes!) we do face God's discipline— but we should be thankful because this is God's display of love for us!

Solomon gives us this instruction: "My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in." (Proverbs 3:11-12 NIV). Why should we "not despise the Lord's discipline"? Solomon tells us that God disciplines us because he loves us, like a parent that disciplines their child. Even in discipline, God's love for us never changes, and although the pain we suffer from this can make us feel like He doesn't love us, we need to recognize that discipline is necessary to having a right relationship with Him.

God tells us in Jeremiah: "In vain I punished your people; they did not respond to correction. Your sword has devoured your prophets like a ravenous lion." (Jeremiah 2:30 NIV). We see that there is a purpose to the punishment God gave to the people of Israel, he says "in vain" because the punishment did not turn His people back on the correct path. "They did not respond to correction." In other words, He wants us to "respond to correction," to recognize what we did wrong and to once again be close to Him.

Apart from bringing us closer to God, our obedience to Him shows the love we have for Him. "If you love me, keep my commands." (John 14:15 NIV). We are already saved from sin through Jesus, "so if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:36 NIV), therefore our obedience is meant to bring us closer to God, and also to free us from our sins.

At first, my understanding of God and obedience consisted of only knowledge, but when I finally felt the love for God in my obedience, I wanted to love God with all of my being. I wanted to have a conversation with Him through prayer, engage in His word for answers and comfort, and look to Him in times of happiness and in times of sadness. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." (Jeremiah 29:11-13 NIV). We must seek him "with all of our heart", and in doing so, we leave no space for anything that is not Him.



A RESPONSE

What just happened? Of course we all know the facts: a dangerous pandemic, record-setting unemployment numbers, life in America on pause. But that's the macro view - for each of us, the pandemic's effects are felt differently. As we continue to stay isolated and wait until we're allowed to resume our lives, one word that likely encapsulates our individual experience is loss.

Now imagine you're living in Jerusalem two and a half millennia ago, in 596 BC. This time, it's not a virus, but the powerful Babylonian army that has twice deported some of the more prominent people in your city. Maybe you're one of them. And this happened despite the exhortations of some false prophets, who had proclaimed that the people would not be taken away and that disaster was not looming. Sound familiar? Here too, is a feeling of intense loss - of altered plans and altered livelihoods. But this time, you're not being sent home. You're off to a foreign land you've never seen before. God's chosen prophet, Jeremiah, says the impending exile is judgment for Jerusalem's lack of faithfulness to God.

But that's not the only disorienting thing. Jeremiah also conveys God's message to the Israelites as they make the journey to Babylon. Here's part of it, taken from Jeremiah 29:

"Thus says the Lord of hosts.... Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters... multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:6-7 ESV)

How surprising. As God's people are uprooted from the land he had promised them, bound for an alien culture, why might God command that they settle in and work for the welfare of their captors? God had promised Abraham a land for his descendants, and now they were being forcibly removed from it. But God also promised that in him, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:3) In Jeremiah's letter to the exiles, God exhorts his people to keep fulfilling this second promise, even as the first is seemingly placed on hold. A few verses later, God promises that He will keep this first promise with equal fidelity, describing His plans to bring you [the people of Judah] "back to the place from which I sent you into exile" (Jeremiah 29:14). But it won't happen immediately. It's a radical faith that God asks of His people, that they wait for the good promised them and live faithfully in the interim. As His people today, we are called to that same faith.

God's words, spoken through Jeremiah, map well onto the current COVID-19 crisis. As Christians, we are called to seek the welfare of our nation by staying home and keeping good hygiene. We build houses and plant gardens by supporting those around us. We ought to pray fervently for the healing of the sick and the wisdom of our leaders. But the word of the Lord is also relevant for our entire lives. In a larger sense, the Christian walk through life is a journey through exile, as we wait to be brought to a heavenly city. God's exhortation to seek our city's welfare, then, applies broadly to our sojourn on earth. It's worth using this pandemic, largely a time of isolation, as an opportunity to reflect on how Christians are called to

engage the world.

So what does the welfare of our "city" - whether a country, town, or institution - look like? We find examples throughout the Bible of faithful witnesses in a godless environment, including Daniel among the Babylonians and Esther among the Persians. Both held positions of influence and answered to a pagan ruler - but they were not sinful for doing so. Instead, they lived faithfully, building houses and planting gardens. Daniel, for example, resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's food as he received a Babylonian education (Daniel 1:8). Both Daniel and Esther honored God in working for the good of the society they lived in, and as a consequence they did good for their own people, God's people, as well. This assurance is evident in God's charge that in its [the city's] welfare you will find your welfare (Jeremiah 29:7). We also find encouragement in Joseph, who diligently shouldered responsibility during years of famine in Egypt. Thanks to his prudence and devotion to God in trying circumstances, Egypt survived the famine - and God's people, the Israelites, found a home in Goshen. Even in the midst of exile, God protects His people and desires for them to bless those around them.

As a Christian, being faithfully and thoughtfully engaged in the welfare of our city does not come without its risks. Included in God's words to the exiles is a warning:

"Do not let your prophets and your diviners who are among you deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams that they dream." (Jeremiah 29:8 ESV)

TO LOSS

BY WILLIAM BUSCHING

As Christians, we must rely on God to guard us from deception. Faithful discernment is a skill developed over time, through prayer and study of Scripture, and through total reliance on God and His word. Take King Solomon, who upon inheriting the united kingdom of Israel felt woefully inadequate to the task, hard-pressed to discern what was right or necessary to govern. Yet instead of relying on his own understanding, Solomon yielded to God and asked for wisdom:

"And now, O Lord my God... I am but a little child. I do not know how to go out or come in... Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" (1 Kings 3:7, 9)

This request pleased the Lord, 1 Kings goes on to say, and He responded by granting Solomon his request. If we faithfully ask God for wisdom as we work toward the welfare of our own cities, He promises to provide. He knows the plans He has for us as we build houses and plant gardens.

We also behold a remarkable promise from Jesus, given shortly before His death. He promises a Helper, sent from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, who will bear witness about Jesus (John 15:26). Indeed, the Holy Spirit is sent by God to dwell in every believer, encouraging and advising us as we fulfill God's purposes for our lives. The Holy Spirit helps us understand God's capital-t Truth, as revealed through Scripture. Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will convict the world concerning sin and

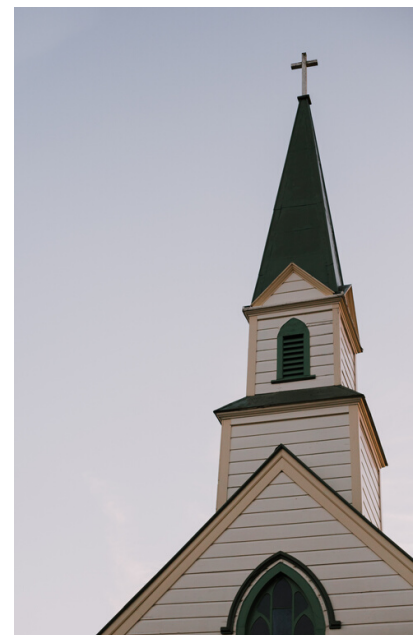
righteousness and judgment. (John 16:8) As Christians, we must serve the Lord faithfully, seeking His wisdom and working where He has placed us in our call to seek welfare.

In pursuing this call, we are to build houses and plant gardens, working heartily, as for the Lord and not for men (Colossians 3:23). And since the Lord looks at the heart, we must trust the Holy Spirit and work to guard our thoughts and attitudes as we love those in our city and work for their good. It's no easy task - surely the people of Judah felt it difficult to love those who had taken so much from them. But the Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and instead desires for us to be His ambassadors in a godless and unfriendly climate (Ezekiel 33:11). The Apostle Paul describes how we ought to model our hearts after Christ in the work we do on earth. We are to avoid arrogance and hostility in engaging with those who do not know the Lord, loving them as our Heavenly Father does. As we dwell in cities not our own, enduring loss and hardship as we do the work of One scorned by many, may still prayerfully seek our city's welfare, modeling Jesus' love and desire to engage with those in authority as well as with the people of the land.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect....

Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer....

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Romans 12:2, 12, 14-18)



OUTCASTS & EXILES

BY JOHN THORPE

We attended a choral concert of twenty singers from a local choral society in the chapel of the Bowdoin campus this winter. They had selected a set of pieces for their performance that related to the theme of 'Outcasts and Exiles.' Each song was either a reflection of the theme or characterized the life of the composer who wrote the music. Heightened by the music, this made for a powerful exposition of this theme and demonstrated how this subject spans the centuries of experiences with pieces ranging from Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179) to Paul Hindemith, exiled to the U.S. from Nazi Germany.

Readers of the Bible would not be surprised to note that eight of the twelve pieces performed were Biblical texts or based on Bible stories. God is no stranger to the subject of being exiled or outcast as shown first by his people, the Israelites who were oppressed, enslaved, and refugees and is also shown in the lives of the main characters of the Bible- Moses, Gideon, David, Elijah, Esther, Jeremiah and scores of others. But God not only notes the suffering of his servants being outcast and exiled, He himself knows this suffering in Jesus Christ. Jesus, who was a refugee from Herod in his first years, rejected by the religious authorities in his teaching years and finally executed by both religious and government leaders only for declaring his true identity as the Son of God, suffered as an exile and outcast. Well did Isaiah prophesy that the Messiah would be

Despised and rejected

A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and as one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised. (Isaiah 53:3 ESV)

Isaiah writes this description, not merely so that we will take pity on the one who suffers, but also to instruct us that this is




the path toward redemption, that is, the very answer to suffering.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering. He was pierced for our transgressions; He was wounded for our iniquities.

A man or woman who hears of the suffering of refugees in some distant country may have pity on them and even send money to alleviate the suffering, but the one who goes and lives alongside those who suffer and who, themselves, bear the pain, danger and social reviling of those who suffer, will be instruments of healing, redemption, and rescue, all propelled by love. This is not to minimize these initial expressions of pity, as indeed, the road begins there, but the redemption that takes place is proportional to a person's willingness to be present alongside those who suffer. Who has not been inspired by stories of people who have emptied their own lives and aspirations for the good of others? Movies, books and stories shine with this theme.

The power of this message of sympathy coupled with action is not only an inspiring story but has become for us the wisdom and power of God. God rules over creation and is also the One who bears suffering (despised and rejected) and through this suffering rescues the very people who have brought on his suffering. The reign of such a God is the final word on how the universe works. This declaration that God himself is the author and finisher of mercy, propels the world forward toward the kingdom of God in which, powered by his love, peace will ultimately reign.





SPEAKING
FOR GOD IN
THE IN
BETWEEN
TIMES

BY EDWARD M. KEAZIRIAN ('73)

In reading the scriptures one is struck by the intensity and sense of urgency in the prophetic and apostolic messages. One reason for this is that the authors were often writing to address a crisis of one sort or another among the people of God. The prophets delivered God's word to Israel whenever the nation was threatened, whether from the outside by the hostility of another nation or from the inside by disobedience, apostasy, or conflict among the people. Similarly, the apostles wrote to churches or individuals in the midst of conflict, threats of persecution, false teaching, or apostasy. So the stakes were always high.

In addition to that, authors were also conscious and concerned that time was short. Threats were imminent and serious, requiring an immediate and decisive response by the community. That was and is the nature of speaking for God in the "in-between" times—the time between the beginning and ending of a crisis.

Among the many voices in the trajectory from the prophets in Israel to the apostles in the early church, two stand out for their awareness of the times and their commitment to speak for God amid the turmoil of the "in-between" times. This article will discuss the two-age framework that represents the biblical conception of time, the major events that define an "in-between" time, and the parallels between Jeremiah and Paul as they both spoke for God in the "in-between" times. Finally, the article will conclude with principles that may be drawn from Jeremiah and Paul and applied to our lives, as we too are called and commissioned to speak for God in the "in-between" times.

This Age and the Age to Come

In the Jewish thought-world of the first century, all of time was viewed as comprising two ages: this age and the age to come. This two-age framework is mentioned routinely throughout the Bible, although not always in those terms. This conception of time appears in the Old Testament representing the thought-world of the Ancient Near East in general and of Israel in particular.

The Old Testament Perspective

Within that perspective this age meant this present world—the created universe (the heavens, the earth, and the seas and all they contain). It referred to the material world of time and space as they knew it, but it also embraced all the human systems of organization that belonged to this age: governments, nations, economic systems, as well as the injustice, exploitation, oppression, and conflicts that arose to characterize this age. The Psalms

abound with laments, pleading with God for justice, peace, and deliverance from the suffering and conflict that threaten to overwhelm and destroy the people of God. In contrast to Israel's understanding of this age, the age to come represented that time when God would decisively intervene to overthrow the present world order and establish an eternal kingdom characterized by righteousness, justice, and peace. In Israel's religious and political history David was the typological Messianic king whose coming would mark the end of this age and inaugurate the age to come.

Who Speaks for God

The ones who spoke for God throughout Israel's history were the prophets. As the derivation of the word itself suggests, a prophet is one who "speaks before." This idea of speaking before has two nuances, both of which help to elucidate the prophet's role. Speaking before might imply a locational idea, as in standing before God or standing before the people to speak. This visualization of the prophet, standing as it were, in front of the Lord, representing God to the people and delivering words from God to the people, portrays the primary role of the prophet. The prophet was selected and appointed by God to bring messages from God to the people of God.

The second nuance of speaking before implies a temporal idea. The prophets often spoke of events before—sometimes long before—they ever took place. This was—and perhaps still is—the more popular notion of a prophet, as one who foretells the future. Then as now, anyone who can lift the curtain on the future and accurately predict what will happen will inevitably occupy a position of power and influence within the community. This was especially true of prophets in Israel's history putting them in the precarious political position of advising kings.

On the one hand, the prophet was bound to speak truthfully God's word to the people. Typically, the word of God was a message of encouragement and comfort, reminding the people both of the faithfulness of their God and of their obligation to worship and serve their God exclusively. In bleak or threatening times, then, the prophet turned the minds and hearts of the people back to God for sustenance and hope in the midst of national crisis. This was the message that the kings wanted to hear, especially when faced with the prospects of war. Before going to war every king wanted the assurance of God's favor and the promise of victory over the enemy.

On the other hand, however, perhaps more often

than not, the prophet's message was a word of rebuke and warning to the king and people alike for their failure to honor and worship their God. Instead of serving God exclusively as required by their covenant, Israel repeatedly rejected the one true God in favor of foreign gods that were really not gods at all. In response to Israel's persistent apostasy—often depicted in prophetic metaphor as repeated infidelities of an adulterous wife, the prophet assumed the role of prosecuting attorney in God's lawsuit against the nation. The prophet presented the indictment, listing incontrovertible evidence of repeated covenant violations, projected a guilty verdict, and then announced the impending judgment of God against the nation—typically in terms of military defeat, banishment from their homes, destruction of their land, and even the ultimate punishment of death.

This was definitely not the message that kings wanted to hear from their prophets. Therefore, except for the rare instance when a king heeded the prophet's warning, led the people in repentance, and thus avoided the dire consequences of God's judgment, prophets were viewed and treated accordingly as religious and political enemies of the king. Consequently, prophets typically suffered hardship and abuse of all kinds for their loyalty to God and faithful proclamation of God's word. Their circumstances were only aggravated by the plethora of false prophets—flatterers of the king—who opted for the political expediency of telling the king precisely what he wanted to hear whether it was the truth or not.

Amid the difficult, often life-threatening, circumstances endured by the prophets, their comfort and hope lay in the realization that the authority and protection of God were bestowed upon them at their calling and commissioning by God. As the gravity and solemnity of this calling to speak for God dawned upon them, a sense of fear and inadequacy likewise arose within them. This common reaction, seen in Moses, Gideon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others, at their prophetic call reflects God's tendency to choose—humanly speaking—the least likely candidates to speak for God. The humility of the prophet speaking for God stood in dramatic contrast to the arrogance of the king intent upon defying God, thus making the sovereign power of God and the exclusive claims of God so much the more compelling.



The New Testament Perspective Just as the Hebrew scriptures present a two-age conception of time reflecting the Jewish thought-world in which those scriptures were written, so too the Greek scriptures preserve, and even refine, the idea that all of time consists in this age and the age to come. In describing the birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the New Testament identifies him as the promised Messianic king whose coming would signal the end of this age, the establishment of God's eternal kingdom, and the inauguration of the age to come. Indeed the Greek title Christ and the Hebrew title Messiah mean essentially the same thing, both denoting "the anointed one" in their respective languages. However, these references to the Messiah, the turning of the ages, and the kingdom of God are not the formulation of the New Testament authors, but rather come from Jesus himself.

Throughout his ministry Jesus preached and taught in the prophetic tradition of ancient Israel. His scriptures were Israel's scriptures, he quoted extensively from the Law and the Prophets, and he recognized the divine authority that stood behind them. After his resurrection Jesus discussed the events surrounding his death and resurrection with two disciples as the three of them walked together to Emmaus. "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27 ESV). As they listened to Jesus, those ancient prophecies came alive for them. Their "hearts burned within them" as they listened and realized that those ancient truths had been fulfilled in Jesus.

This continuity between Jesus and the ancient prophets was evident to other disciples as well, as they viewed him not only as a prophet himself speaking in Israel's prophetic tradition, but as speaking and acting with an authority that other prophets lacked. Furthermore, they recognized that he was the fulfillment of ancient promises regarding their long-standing messianic expectations: a new prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15-18), God's anointed king (Psalm 2), the son of David who would reign forever (2 Sam 7:12-13, 16), and the suffering servant whose death would atone for sin and make many righteous (Isa 53:4-12).

Who Speaks for God

This turning of the ages represented the culmination of God's plan for human history and thus merited a new and definitive voice speaking for God. The author of Hebrews identifies that voice as Jesus himself. "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all

things, through whom also he created the world" (Heb 1:1-2, ESV).

Who Speaks for God

Although this prophetic tradition may have reached its quintessence in Jesus, it did not end with Jesus. Before his crucifixion and again thereafter, Jesus commissioned his disciples to speak for him. They were to carry on his prophetic ministry of healing, announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God, and warning people about the final judgment awaiting those who reject God. He gave them his authority such that those who welcomed them welcomed him and those who rejected them rejected him. Jesus also endowed them with his Spirit—the Spirit of truth—to teach them, to remind them, and to guide them in all truth, revealing the things that Jesus had left unsaid and declaring to them the things that were yet to come. Thus the apostles were called and commissioned to speak for Christ, with the power of the Holy Spirit upon them, the presence of Christ with them, and the authority of God behind them. Like the ancient prophets these apostles of the new age were initially filled with doubt, uncertainty, apprehension and fear. It was not until the Holy Spirit filled them (Acts 2:1-4) that they began to speak with the boldness, power and persuasion that would turn the world upside down.

The In-Between Times

Some have likened the prophetic view of future events in scripture to the phenomenon that hikers encounter when looking at a series of mountains peaks extending from the near foreground toward the distant horizon. As the eyes scan from the nearer peaks to the more distant peaks, one's depth perception decreases and so the eyes are less able to judge the distance between subsequent peaks the further away they are. While one can generally perceive the distance from one peak to the next in the foreground, the more distant peaks seem to be superimposed on each other so that it becomes impossible perceive any distance between them at all. This flattening of depth perception serves as a good illustration of how the turn of the ages is viewed from the perspective of the ancient prophets compared to that of the apostles.

Among the ancient prophets the most common expression denoting the culmination of God's purposes for this age and the commencement of the age to come was "the day of the Lord." It was also referred to as "that day," or simply "the day." Those three expressions at face value seem to imply a fairly abrupt transition from one age to the next, as though the change took place from one day to the next. However, from the perspective of

the apostles, and of Jesus himself, the transition actually involved an overlapping of the ages as framed by the two comings of Christ.

The first coming featured the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. These events signified the inauguration of a new age (the age to come) and the arrival of the kingdom of God. The death and resurrection of Christ also represented God's judgment against sin and death. Therefore, Christ's first coming, while not signifying the end of this age, certainly marked the beginning of the end.

As his earthly ministry drew to a close, Jesus prepared to return to the presence of the Father. Before leaving, he promised to send a Helper, the Holy Spirit. Moreover, he also promised that he himself would return to the earth. That second coming, or Parousia ("appearing"), will feature the gathering of believers, the general resurrection, the final battle, the enthronement of Jesus Christ, and the final condemnation and eternal punishment of Satan, his angels, and all those whose names are not written in the Book of Life. With the appearance of the new heaven and the new earth (Rev 21:1-4), the first age (this age) will finally come to an end as the first heaven, first earth, and the seas will all have ceased to exist.

Therefore, what appeared to the ancient prophets—from their distant perspective—as one event, the day of the Lord, is actually an overlapping of the ages with many events occurring over a long period of time. Some of what the ancient prophets foretold as future events have already taken place. For example, Joel foresees an outpouring of the Holy Spirit related to the coming day of the Lord, an event that Joel believes is imminent (Joel 2:1-2, 11, 28-32). In his sermon at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit filled and empowered the apostles, Peter quoted Joel's prophecy and proclaimed that it had been fulfilled that day. All of that occurred in conjunction with the first coming of Christ.

At the same time, the battles and cosmic calamities that Joel also associated with the day of the Lord (Joel 2:9-15) have not yet occurred. Similarly, the vision of the Ancient of Days and the enthronement of the one like a son of man (Dan 7:9-14) have yet to occur. Both of these would seem to be associated with the second coming of Christ and the end of this age. Therefore, the whole series of events that occur during the overlapping ages, as viewed from the vantage point of the apostles, were compressed into one event by the ancient prophets who saw them from too great a distance to discern the spacing between them.

This overlap of the ages, as framed by the two comings of Christ, defines the “in-between time,” that is, the time between the beginning of the age to come and the end of this age. New Testament authors also refer to this in-between time as the last days. Therefore, from the perspective of the New Testament, the Church is a feature of the last days.

A Closer Look at Jeremiah & Paul

Although they were separated in time by nearly seven centuries, Paul had a great affinity for Jeremiah and probably looked to him as a model for his own ministry. While it is to be expected that their stories would overlap at points because of their role and identity as prophets, the similarities are too numerous and precise simply to be coincidence.

The accounts of their call and commission are strikingly similar. Both were identified and set apart to be prophets while still in the womb. Although they were Jewish, both were appointed to preach to the Gentiles (literally, “the nations”). Both experienced a theophanic encounter at their calling. Jeremiah heard the voice of God and was touched by God on his lips, while Paul saw a bright light (a vision of the resurrected Christ) and also heard a voice. Both had a verbal conversation with God during the encounter and both expressed great reluctance and apprehension in response to their calling. Jeremiah resisted the call on the basis of his youth and his inability to speak (admittedly a major liability for one whose ministry consists of speaking for God to the people). Although Paul did not resist the calling and was willing to comply, the fact that he had been struck blind by the vision of Christ caused him to question what he should do.

As an aside it is important to note that Paul did not express directly to Christ any reluctance or apprehension about his calling. However, in each of the three reports of his encounter with the risen Christ (Acts 9:1-9; 22:1-11; 26:9-18), Paul did mention his former hostility toward the church and the violence he had inflicted upon it. Several times in his ministry Paul recalls that as something that should have disqualified him for service to Christ. However, each time he mentions it, the gravity of his sin becomes an occasion to showcase the grace of God. With each downward step in his status from least of the apostles (1 Cor 15:9) to the least of the saints (Eph 3:8) to the foremost of sinners (1 Tim 1:15), Paul magnifies the grace of God all the more. Although Paul did not raise his persecution of the church in his conversation with the risen Christ, that was nevertheless an issue. The Lord took the initiative in mentioning it to Paul and in doing so essentially dismissed it as a disqualifier.

That was a grievous sin, but the grace of God was sufficient to forgive it.

This is an essential vignette in understanding that no prophet is worthy in his own right to speak for God. In the presence of God’s holiness and glory every prophet is aware of his wretched unworthiness and must be forgiven himself and made worthy by the one who calls and commissions the prophet to speak for God. Every prophet’s testimony must be that of Paul. “I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy . . . and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim 1:12-14).

The comparison of Jeremiah and Paul presents further clues of his influence on Paul. Both were sent to the Gentiles, but both also began by preaching to the Jews. Both considered the failure to honor and worship God as the beginning of their indictment against the people of God. Both recognized that the people were fulfilling rituals without changed hearts. Paul quotes Jeremiah four times in addressing idolatry, the need for circumcised hearts rather than bodies, the need for the new covenant, and the absolute, irresistible urge to proclaim the message that God wants the prophet to deliver.

Both Jeremiah and Paul suffered much hardship and abuse because of their calling and their unwillingness to compromise the message. Both have left accounts of the suffering they endured and both remained single because of the hardships associated with their respective callings as prophet and apostle.

Finally, both were called and commissioned to speak for God in the “in-between” time, but the nature of the “in-between” time differed. Historically Jeremiah was active in calling the people of God to repentance for 20 years before the threat against them from Babylon even became evident. He began preaching about 625 BC. During that 20 years Babylon was slowly working its way north and west, forming alliances with the Chaldeans and Medes, retaking the territories that had been lost to Assyria, and finally defeating Egypt. By 603 BC Babylon effectively controlled all the territory encircling Jerusalem. The threat was evident and the final destruction of Jerusalem became inevitable.

Having been ignored for those 20 years by the kings and people of Judah, in 603 BC Jeremiah turned his attention to the Gentile nations

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Thus the “in-between” time for Jeremiah was measured from the time when the judgment that had been foretold actually began, that is, when the armies of Babylon actually arrived at the gates of Jerusalem and began their siege. The “in-between” time ended when Jerusalem was finally destroyed. Those are clearly evident dates from history as Jeremiah was preaching to a nation as the nation’s fate hung in the balance.

For Paul the “in-between” time related not to the fate of a nation, but to the consummation of God’s plan for the whole creation. Paul begins his letter to the Romans with the statement, “the wrath of God is being revealed . . .” (Rom 1:18), but not against just one nation. Rather, it is being revealed against all the godlessness and wickedness of humanity. This revelation took place in Christ at his first coming. God’s wrath was revealed at the cross and for Paul that marked the beginning of his “in-between” time. In the last chapter of his letter to the Romans, Paul makes this statement, “The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Rom 16:20). The enemy to be destroyed here is not a foreign king or marauding empire. Rather it is the ruler of this world, the ruler of the demons, that is about to be destroyed. Here again, this is not the end of a nation, but rather the end of this age. This will occur at the final battle and is associated with the second coming of Christ. In contrast to the clear dating of Jeremiah’s “in-between” time, the end of Paul’s “in-between” time is known only to God.

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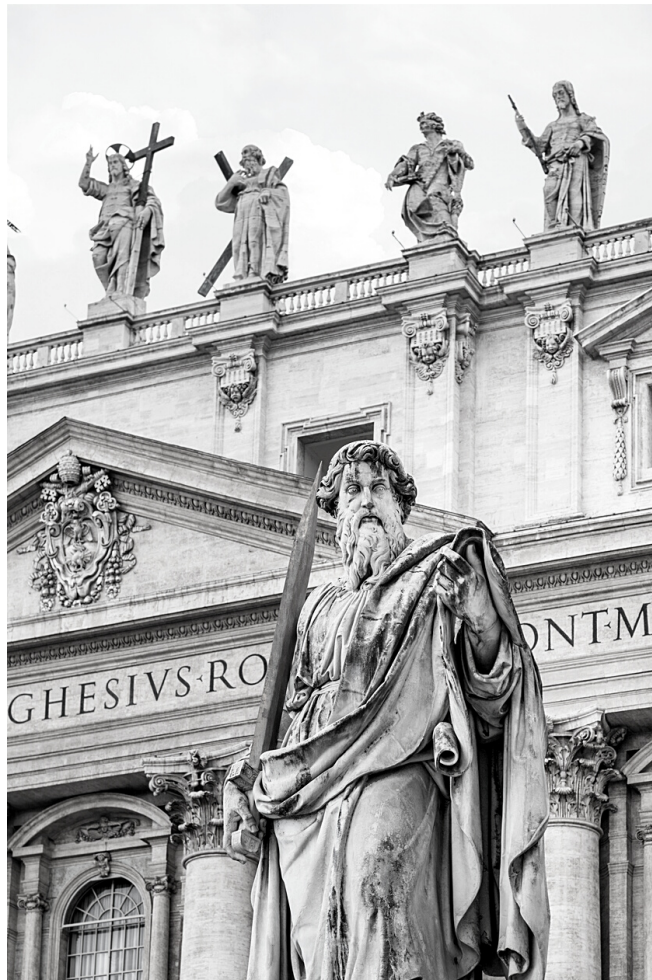
Conclusion

In all of these parallels between Jeremiah and Paul we see a trajectory of the prophetic role across scripture. In the center of that trajectory is Jesus Christ, the quintessential prophet who not only speaks for God but is himself God. Several insights from this study ought to shape our understanding not only of the prophetic role in scripture, but our own place in that trajectory as well.

Just as Jesus commissioned his apostles to continue proclaiming the gospel to the nations, so too he gave that same commission to the whole church. That means that every believer stands in that trajectory from Moses through Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul, all the centuries of church history and into the 21st century. Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations."

Aside from the death of Christ there is no greater demonstration of the love, mercy, grace, and compassion of God than the prophets in the "in-between" times. The God who is not willing that any should perish, but that all come to the knowledge of the truth, sends his prophets to call sinners to repentance even in the midst of the unfolding judgment. Even in the years while Babylon was sacking the Jerusalem, God's prophets were pleading with the people to repent. The church has been commissioned to speak for God in the ultimate "in-between" time. We do not know how much longer this time will last, so we must make the most of the time that we have.

The call and commission to speak for God is not easy, and to be faithful in it could cost you everything. But in that hardship and suffering we are assured of God's presence, his protection, and his provision. We take comfort in that and find our satisfaction in knowing that we have been faithful and obedient to his call and commission.



whatever is good.