

The God of the everlasting covenant

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 26 January 2014

Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 00] We're returning to the Bibles now, to the prophet Jeremiah. If you have one of our church Bibles, I think you'll find it on page 662. And we're going to be reading together in Jeremiah chapter 33.

Jeremiah chapter 33. Which is a marvelous chapter. Going on from chapter 31 and 32, all about the everlasting covenant of God's promise coming to Jeremiah, this prophet so maligned and so mistreated because he was a true prophet, giving the whole truth of God to the people, not only the good parts, but also the hard parts.

But this chapter indeed is one of the jewels. Jeremiah chapter 33 at verse 1. The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still shut up in the court of the guard.

Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it, the Lord is his name. Call to me and I will answer you and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah that were torn down to make a defense against the siege men and against the sword.

[1 : 29] They are coming in to fight against the Chaldeans and to fill them with the dead bodies of men whom I shall strike down in my anger and my wrath. For I have hidden my face from this city because of all of their evil.

Behold, I will bring to it health and healing. And I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security.

I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and rebuild them as they were at first. I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.

And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise, and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good things I do for them.

They shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it. Thus says the Lord, In this place of which you say it is a waste without man or beast, in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate without man or inhabitant or beast, there shall be heard again the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing as they bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord.

[3 : 00] Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, for the Lord is good, for his steadfast love endures forever. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as at first, says the Lord.

Thus says the Lord of hosts, In this place that is waste without man or beast, and in all of its cities there shall again be habitations of shepherds resting their flocks, in the cities of the hill country, in the cities of Shephelah, in the cities of the Negev, in the land of Benjamin, the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, flocks shall again pass under the hands of the one who counts them, says the Lord.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah.

In those days and at that time, I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called, The Lord is our righteousness.

[4 : 20] For thus says the Lord, David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel. And the Levitical priest shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to make sacrifices forever.

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. Thus says the Lord, only if you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night so that the day will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David, my servant, may be broken so that he shall not have a son to reign on the throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests may be ministers.

As the hosts of heaven cannot be numbered, and as the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the offspring of David, my servant, and the Levitical priests who minister to me.

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. Have you not observed that these people are saying the Lord has rejected the two clans that he chose? Thus they have despised my people so that they are no longer a nation in their sight.

Thus says the Lord, only if I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth, then I will reject the offspring of Jacob and David, my servant, and will not choose one of his offspring to rule over the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, for I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them.

[6 : 04] Amen. And may God bless to us this his word. Now, if you would please have the Bible open at page 662, that's Jeremiah 33, and we'll have a moment of prayer and ask the Lord's help as we come to this.

God, our Father, we thank you that what we hold in our hands is the living word of the living God. We thank you it was not just spoken to ancient Jerusalem, spoken to us and to all who will come after us.

And so I pray, Lord, that you will take my human words in all their imperfection, that you will use them faithfully to unfold the written word. And so lead us to the living word, Christ Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen. Amen. There are a few more joyful and poignant moments in life than when two people stand and look into each other's eyes and promise to love, to honor, promise in good or ill, richer and poorer, sickness and in health.

They are going to live their lives together and they are going to wonderful moment, joyful moment. You know, we live in a fallen world, don't we? Very often marriages go sour.

[7 : 41] Very often, indeed, marriages break up and there is tremendous sadness, tremendous, tremendous heartbreak when these things happen. And if, by the grace of God and by really working together, the marriage is restored, there is joy of a different kind, a deeper kind, joy which comes from having got through the problems, from having surmounted the difficulties and realizing our weakness and vulnerability.

Now, marriage is the image which the prophets and indeed the whole of Scripture use to describe the relationship between God and his people. Sometimes it's a fresh, buoyant relationship.

Other times, it has gone sour. Indeed, it's all but disappeared. And that's the thing that Jeremiah and indeed the other great prophets are wrestling with. How can this marriage be restored?

How can God welcome back into his love and into a relationship his people who have so turned against him? By the way, that's one reason the prophetic, the great prophets are so long.

Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel as they wrestle with this problem. But as you know, in human terms, a marriage can't be put right by just saying, well, let's sweep it under the carpet and forget it ever happened.

[9 : 03] That's a recipe for disaster. No more can the breakup of the relationship with the Lord be put right by simply saying, well, let's forget about it and start again.

Now, this chapter, the climax of chapters 30 to 33, I said a few weeks ago, some people call this the book of consolation. That is a weak and dismal word.

Consolation is what you get when you don't get what you want. A consolation prize is something you're given if you don't get the real prize and so on. This is not the book of consolation.

This is the book of the God who keeps his promises, the God who never fails, the book of the God of the everlasting covenant, which is our title today.

Now, his promises in history confirm that he will keep those promises at the end. I said already there are multi-layered fulfillments.

[9 : 59] When the Lord says the cities will be rebuilt and the countryside inhabited, looking forward a hundred years or so to the return of people like Nehemiah to rebuild the city, to rebuild the walls, that's fairly low key.

Looking forward to the day of Pentecost when the people, as Isaiah said, did come to Jerusalem, did hear the word of the Lord and many hearts were transformed. But these are only partial fulfillments.

We are still looking ahead. That's the thing about the gospel message. It's always looking ahead. Now we're wallowing in nostalgia for some mythical golden past, but looking ahead to a more glorious future.

This is a message of reassurance. In other words, a message for us all. If you're wondering whether to become a Christian, this is a message that tells you that God is faithful.

If you're a young Christian and finding it tough and difficult, this is a message for you as well. If you're middle-aged and struggling with the busyness and the frustrations of middle life, this is a message too.

[11:05] If you're old and getting tired of the battle, it's a message for us all. A message of the God of the everlasting covenant. So let's look at this chapter then.

First of all, who is this God? There's no point in praying to a God or listening to a God unless they can be relied on.

This is, first of all, verses 1 to 9, the God who can deliver what he promised. We all make promises every day. Some of them we keep, some of them we don't keep.

Some of them we don't keep because we had no intentions of keeping them in any case. Others we don't keep because of circumstances beyond our control. This is a God of whom it will never be said circumstances beyond his control prevented him keeping his promises.

And you notice what he says to Jeremiah in verse 2, Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it, the Lord is his name. Then again at the end of the chapter, this God can deliver because he is the creator.

[12:14] That's the point. We'll come back to that in a moment. This God is giving reassurance, first of all, to the prophet. Verse 1, The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time while he was still shut up in the court of the guard.

A horrible experience and later on in later chapters get worse as he's put in an underground cistern at one point. One of the most harrowing and dreadful things had ever happened to one of God's servants.

The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time. Jeremiah, in effect, the Lord says, there's a greater reality than the court of the guard. You are in the court of the guard.

You can't ignore it. There's a greater reality. Just as in a later generation, God was to, the Lord was to stand by Paul when he was in prison and some of the great letters like Ephesians come out of that prison experience.

Just as at the end of the Bible, he's come to John the apostle on Patmos. I was in Patmos, says John. He also says, I was in the spirit.

[13:17] The greater reality. Now, we are not shut up in the court of the guard. But everybody here has problems, difficulties, hardships, and issues which we have to deal with.

That is, if you like, the equivalent of the court of the guard. And in these circumstances, a message of reassurance comes to the prophet. That's where verse 2 is so important.

Jeremiah, let me remind you, says the Lord, who I am. Thus says the Lord, who made the earth, the creator. My help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

It originated from him. And who formed it. This is a word, this is the potter's word, the artist's word. I formed it with loving care, with tender detail and attention.

David in Psalm 139 used that of the unborn baby in their mother's womb. When I was in my mother's womb, your hand formed me. Now, you see the point.

[14:16] I'm not going to spend so much time and attention on this world or on you, Jeremiah, that I'm going to abandon you in the end. And Nossus formed it to establish it.

what the Lord does, he will continue and complete. And we'll come back to that in a moment. And he calls himself the Lord, the name of the covenant, Yahweh, Israel's God, the God who has pledged himself to Israel and to us with promises that he cannot and will not break.

So, Jeremiah, you're in prison. Jeremiah, it's dreadful, but Jeremiah, look beyond it. I am in charge of this situation as well as of any other.

And the reassurance also comes to the people. Now, the situation is grim, I've said before. The city is months from destruction and already dreadful things are happening.

Read the book of Lamentations about the starvation, about the deprivation, about the looting and about all the, the way that all the worst instincts of people were coming out.

[15 : 23] The reality is grim. And you get a little touch of this verse here, verse 4, For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of the city and the houses of the kings of Judah that were torn down to make a defense.

They're already, in fact, destroying the city themselves and many of the Judean town, many of the Judean houses were built on hills. Jerusalem, as you know, is a hilly place. And of course, when they were destroyed, the rubble slid down into the valleys, which is why when Nehemiah returned, it's such an enormous task to clear the rubble.

Think about that, clearing the rubble of an ancient city without modern devices to move rubbish and so on. That shows his commitment. Anyway, the Lord is saying, even though your houses have gone, what does a house symbolize?

A house symbolizes security, doesn't it? A house symbolizes a place you go to for refuge from the busyness of the world. Now, as I said, the problem the prophet is wrestling with is this.

How is this situation going to be reconciled with you like the marriage of God and his people? Look at verse 5. They are coming in to fight against the Chaldeans, the films, the dead bodies of men whom I will strike down in my anger and my wrath, for I have hidden my face from this city because of all their evil.

[16 : 49] In other words, God is saying, look, yes, you really have deserted me. You really have abandoned me. You really have disgraced and broken the covenant. No, there is no attempt to water it down, no attempt to gloss it over, no attempt to make excuses.

But look at verse 6. Behold, I will bring it health and healing and I will heal them and reveal to them the abundance of prosperity and security. I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and rebuild them as they were at first.

Notice how comprehensive this is. I will heal them and that, of course, has a physical aspect as well as a spiritual aspect. I will rebuild. I will restore.

This is not going to be a patched up job. This is almost going to be a, this is going to be a renewal of marriage vows, essentially. I still love my people. I still love my bride and I am determined that whatever happens, I'm going to have her back.

It's a generous, it's a generous and wonderful, wonderful picture. And verse 8, I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin. Sin and rebellion are two words that are often used.

[18 : 03] Sin means the basic human nature that causes us to act and think the way we do. But as rebellion is deliberate, sometimes translated transgression.

This is deliberate sin. All sins are deliberate to some extent, but I used to find helpful the prayer we used to pray in the Anglican College in Durham.

Lord, forgive us for weakness, for negligence and for our own deliberate fault. Sometimes we sin through weakness.

We know it's wrong, but we're not strong enough to resist. Negligence, that's carelessness because we are not disciplined enough, but there is deliberate fault. We know it's wrong and we still do it.

The wonderful thing is there is forgiveness even for deliberate fault. There is forgiveness, there is healing, there is cleansing, there is rebuilding.

[18 : 59] And notice verse 9, this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise, and a glory before all the nations of the earth. We shall hear of all the good that I do for them.

They shall fear and tremble. Now, this is a fascinating verse. See what the Lord is saying. The Lord is saying, when people look at my restored people, they'll be filled with awe.

Remember, the church on earth is not a show house. The church on earth is a building site. A building site is messy, a building site looks totally incoherent.

Nobody seems to know what anybody else is doing. Now, that is the church on earth. But, one day, the church on earth is going to be the church in glory and will indeed be a praise and a glory for all the nations of the earth.

So, when we try to make too much of the church on earth, remember, we're the building site. We're not yet the show house. And, this is what God is saying.

[20 : 04] Jerusalem, you are an absolute mess. Jerusalem, you have abandoned me, but I have plans for you, as he had said earlier, plans to evolve a future and a hope.

So, that's the first thing about the God of the everlasting covenant. He is the God who can deliver on his promises. There is no possibility of God not fulfilling his promises, however much his people may fail to fulfill theirs.

Secondly, verses 10 to 13, the quotation here from the Psalms, give thanks to the Lord of hosts for the Lord is good for his steadfast love endures forever.

He is the God of steadfast love. This great Hebrew word *heseth*, which means the covenant love that God shows to his people, the covenant which he will not break and the covenant which persists.

Really, it persists from the very creation of the world. When God created the world, that was, in a sense, his first covenant. The word covenant is not used about creation, but nevertheless, God is already giving himself in love to creatures that he has made.

[21 : 19] So, first of all then, the positive overwhelms the negative. Verse 10, it is a waste without man or beast and the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem are desolate without man or inhabitant of beast.

There shall be heard again. It's interesting, in the original, there will be heard again begins the verse. So, you see what's happening.

There will be heard again, the voice of mirth and gladness, and in between is sandwiched this description of the negatives of the darkness and desolation that is Jerusalem.

Now, I'm not going to say remember what I said about chapter 4 because you won't. But, in chapter 4, Jeremiah compares the exile to the darkness and desolation at creation when the spirit of God was of God hovered on the waters and created light and life.

And, once again, this is the kind of picture that's here. It is darkness, it is desolation, it is death. And when the Holy Spirit moves, when the creator of God moves, it will be utterly transformed into the vibrant life of the new creation.

[22 : 35] So, the positive overwhelms the negative. And there will be rejoicing, verse 11, the voice of mirth, the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voices of those who sing as they bring offerings to the house of the Lord.

And they sing from Psalm 136, which we sang earlier and from other psalms. Give thanks, he is good, his steadfast love endures forever.

Now, it's interesting, verse 11 brings together the whole of life. As I said, the metaphor of the wedding, of the marriage, is the basic metaphor in the Bible.

And the wedding is so often a symbol of new creation. There is communal rejoicing as the life of society begins again with its high moments of celebration.

And that moves seamlessly into the voices of those who sing as they bring thanksgiving into the house of the Lord. You know, you see how the whole of life going together. One of the reasons why many people find church boring is because they want to separate life into secular and sacred.

[23 : 44] They want to have, they want to keep God for Sunday or for special occasions. Now, if that's the case, we are going to find God boring.

It's like great Aunt Matilda visiting at Christmas and you're expected to find that occasion for rejoicing. If God only visits at Christmas or is only there on Sundays and it seems irrelevant, you see what this verse is saying is the whole life together is to be offered to God.

The life, the whole of life is God's. And in the new creation this will happen perfectly. It doesn't happen very often perhaps in this creation.

Remember in this creation we are tuning our instruments. If you've ever had, if you've ever had children who practiced an instrument, it was not a thing of beauty, the joy forever.

If you heard the notes of the trumpet echoing, echoing, through the house. But once someone has learned to play, then it's a real joy and delight. And at the moment we are tuning our instruments.

[24 : 47] We're not quite there yet. So we'll be rejoicing. There will be restoration, verse 12. Once again, the place that is waste. Both the countryside and the city will be transformed with the good shepherd leading.

There's going to be habitations of shepherds. And this fascinating little phrase at the end of verse 13, shall flocks again, shall pass under the hands of the one who counts them.

Images of the shepherd counting the sheep back into the sheepfold. And under the hand suggests the shepherd touching. Kind of mark of affection. Now ultimately, this is fulfilled in Revelation 7, verse 17, where John writes, the lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and he will

guide them to the springs of living water.

This shepherd image, not of course a sentimental image of all an innatural evening, little lambs that bleat, because the shepherd, we know from the story of David, had to defend against wolves and bears and so on.

Nevertheless, there is both strength and gentleness here. And the emphasis is on restoration. The cities will be restored.

[26 : 00] The countryside will be restored. So he is the God who can deliver what he promised. He is the God of steadfast love. And in the third part of the chapter, verses 14 to 26, he is the God who finishes his good work.

In this world, we often leave projects half finished. Sometimes because we lose interest in them. Sometimes because circumstances arise that we can't complete them. But God always completes what he begins.

And here is the way he is going to bring it about. A persistent theme in Jeremiah is the theme of bad leadership. Jerusalem is in the mess it is because of bad leadership.

Bad kings, bad priests, and bad prophets. We know the new creation will not be like that. The restored city, the new Jerusalem will not be like that because the leadership will be wonderful.

First of all, there will be a true king. Verse 15, in those days and at that time I will cause a righteous branch to spring up for David and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.

[27 : 14] The true king, David's descendant, will reign and the branch picture of life and hope. And when he reigns there will be justice and righteousness.

The great theme of the letter to the Romans, the righteousness of God which will then be completely exemplified in his people. The city of the great king as Psalm 48 calls will be truly established.

Now, once again, let me emphasize the significance of David. It's difficult to exaggerate his importance in scripture. What I want to say is that in David's kingdom on earth round about 1000 BC that little piece of real estate at the eastern end of the Mediterranean there was actually a true window into the kingdom that is to come.

It was flawed, it was partial, it was imperfect and David himself was flawed and imperfect. Nevertheless, first of all it fulfilled the promise to Abraham.

God says to Abraham in Genesis 15, your descendants will rule this land from the river of Egypt, the Nile to the river Euphrates. That's exactly what happened in David's reign.

[28 : 31] David conquered all that territory and indeed Solomon reigned over that in his earlier and better years. There's a real sense of God's kingdom spreading into the surrounding areas which of course is going to be taken up in the book of Acts.

You will be my messenger in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. And the other thing that shines in David's reign is his generosity particularly to Mephibosheth the grandson of Saul who tried to destroy David and of course the son of Jonathan David's great friend.

So as he brings Mephibosheth the lame cripple to his table he shows what's going to happen in the new Jerusalem when people like Mephibosheth people like us are going to be welcomed to the banquet to the feast in the new creation and anticipates the kingdom and in Jeremiah's own time the very beginning of his ministry there'll be another glimpse of such a kingdom in the great reforming king Josiah and memories lingered of the great reformer Hezekiah so there are genuine glimpses of the kingdom that's only going to be fulfilled in the future remember what Gabriel says to Mary in Luke chapter 1 he will reign the child to be born will reign on the throne of David over the house of Jacob forever and ever so there'll be a true king there will be justice there will be peace there will be there will be harmony and there will be love in the whole community because the king is reigning and there will be true priests secondly verse 18 the Levitical priest shall never lack a man in my presence to offer burnt offerings to burn grain offerings and to make sacrifices forever now the priests in Jeremiah's time were corrupt function of the priest was to bring God to the people and the people to God and of course in a sinful world to offer sacrifices mentioning two of them the burnt offering the most basic sacrifice which the sacrifice removing sin and the grain offering symbolizing fellowship and peace the point is that is only fulfilled in the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus the sacrifice that can never be repeated to which nothing can be added the true king the true priest pointing to the king priest

Jesus Christ who gave himself for his people and this is going to happen because of God's covenant verse 25 again thus says the Lord if I have not established my covenant with day and

night and the fixed order of heaven and earth then I will reject the offspring of David and David my servant will not choose one of his offspring to reign over the offspring of Abraham Isaac and Jacob and then it's mentioned earlier in verse 20 creation itself as I say is a covenant and verse 22 deliberately echoes the promise the deliberately sorry verse 20 25 26 the last verse the offspring of Abraham Isaac and Jacob the whole story so you see how once again Jeremiah is bringing together a rich tapestry he's ranging through the whole Old Testament story pointing forward to the New Testament to the one covenant which the one God in the one Lord

Jesus Christ brings about I will restore their fortunes and have mercy have steadfast love upon them once again restoring don't misunderstand that word it can sound like consolation well you know I'll make it all right again it is making it all right it is forgiving sins it is renewing it is pointing back to Eden and the promised land and so on but there is so much more that's to come and that's the and that is the very essence of the covenant we will never get to the end of it we will never exhaust it we'll find in it all the good and gracious gifts gathered up together I'm going to give the last word to C.S.

[33 : 02] Lewis who talks about this more wonderfully than anyone else I've come across this is when the friends of Aslan are approaching the real Narnia which is to come its glory is breaking over their heads let me read a bit of it the light ahead was growing stronger Lucy saw that a great series of many colored cliffs led up in front of them like a giant staircase and then she forgot everything else because Aslan himself was coming leaping down from cliff to cliff like a living cataract of power and beauty the very first person Aslan called to him was puzzle the donkey you see bringing in all the people all the creatures who had been despised Lucy said we're so afraid of being sent away Aslan you've sent us back to our own world so often no fear of that said Aslan have you not guessed and Aslan says you are as they called it in the shadowlands dead the term is over the holidays have begun the dream has ended this is the morning as he spoke he looked no longer like a line but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page now at last they were beginning chapter 1 of the great story which no one on earth has read which goes on forever in which every chapter is better than the one before

I don't know about you many of you are Presbyterians but I want to say hallelujah when I read something like that let's pray Lord God how we praise you for the covenant covenant fullness in glorious flood how sinful we are how weak we remember the great words of the apostle John whenever our hearts condemn us God is greater than our hearts and he knows everything so reassure us strengthen us and give us the grace to look forward to that glorious day when all will be renewed and when you will indeed restore the fortunes of your people we ask this in Jesus name Amen