

Outraged Love

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[0 : 00] Well, we're a better place to turn than to the Word of God, where all our help comes from. And we're going to turn now in our Bibles to the Old Testament and to the second chapter of the letter of the prophecy of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah chapter 2. You'll find it in your church Bibles on page 627. And Bob shortly will be opening up this portion of God's Word to us.

Spoken and penned through the prophet Jeremiah many, many centuries ago. And yet the living Word of God for his people today.

So Jeremiah chapter 2 at verse 1. The Word of the Lord came to me, saying, Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem.

Thus says the Lord, I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness in a land not sown. Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest.

[1 : 11] All who ate of it incurred guilt. Disaster came upon them, declares the Lord. Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the clans of the house of Israel.

Thus says the Lord, What wrong did your fathers find in me, that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless? They did not say, Where is the Lord who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits, in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that none passes through where no man dwells?

And I brought you into a plentiful land, to enjoy its fruits and its good things. But when you came in, you defiled my land and made my heritage an abomination.

The priests did not say, Where is the Lord? Those who handled 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. For cross to the coasts of Cyprus and sea, or send to Kedar and examine with care.

[2 : 28] See if there has been such a thing. Has a nation changed its gods, even though there are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit.

Be appalled, O heaven, at this. Be shocked. Be utterly desolate, declares the Lord. For my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

Is Israel a slave? Is he a home-born servant? Why then has he become a prey? The lions have roared against him. They have roared loudly.

They have made his land a waste. His cities are in ruins without inhabitants. Moreover the men of Memphis and Tapanes have shaved the crown of your head. Have you not brought this upon yourself by forsaking the Lord your God when he led you in the way?

And now what do you gain by going to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile? Or what do you gain by going to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates? Your evil will chastise you and your apostasy will reprove you.

[3 : 44] Know and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the Lord your God. The fear of me is not in you, declares the Lord of hosts.

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.

Yet I planted you a choice vine, holy of pure seed. How then have you turned degenerate and become a wild vine? Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me, declares the Lord God.

How can you say I am not unclean? I have not gone after the bales. Look at your way in the valley. Know what you have done.

A restless young camel running here and there. A wild donkey used to the wilderness. In her heat sniffing the wind. Who can restrain her lust? None who seek her need weary themselves.

[4 : 50] In her mouth they will find her. Keep your feet from going unshod and your throat from thirst. But you said, it's hopeless. For I have loved foreigners and after them I will go.

As a thief is shamed when caught, so the house of Israel shall be shamed. They, their kings, their officials, their priests and their prophets.

Who say to a tree, you are my father. And to a stone, you gave me birth. For they have turned their back to me and not their face.

But in the time of their trouble they say, arise and save us. But where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise if they can save you in your time of trouble. For as many as your cities are your gods or Judah.

Why do you contend with me? You have all transgressed against me, declares the Lord. In vain have I struck your children. They took no correction. Your own sword devoured your prophets like a ravaging lion.

[5 : 54] And you, O generation, behold the word of the Lord. Have I been a wilderness to Israel or a land of thick darkness? Why then do my people say, we are free, we will come no more to you?

Can a virgin forget her ornaments or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number. How well you direct your course to seek love.

So that even to wicked women you have taught your ways. Also on your skirts is found the lifeblood of the guiltless poor. You did not find them breaking in. Yet in spite of these things you say, I am innocent.

Surely his anger has turned from me. Behold, I will bring you to judgment for saying I have not sinned. How much you go about changing your way.

You shall be put to shame by Egypt as you were put to shame by Assyria. From it too you will come away with your hands on your head. For the Lord has rejected those in whom you trust.

[7 : 03] And you will not prosper by them. Amen. May God bless this word to us.

And help us to understand it. And to receive it. Now if we could have our Bibles open please. At Jeremiah chapter 2. Which is on page 427.

And we'll have a moment's prayer. God our Father. Particularly at a time like this. How we need to hear your living word.

How we need to drink from you the fountain of living waters. And so we pray Father. That as we open our hearts and our ears. That you will give us listening ears.

You will give us eager hearts. So that we may indeed follow you all the days of our lives. And that you will open your word to us now. In Christ Jesus name.

[8 : 05] Amen. Amen. Very often you get television programs.

Where the presenter says. Some viewers may find parts of this program. Distressing or disturbing. Now when readers turn to the Old Testament prophets.

There are many chapters. Many sections. About which this could be said. This is a disturbing. This is a distressing chapter. Full of colorful.

Vivid. Full of rather violent imagery. And shocking language. And these abound in the great prophets. Another example would be Ezekiel 16.

Which Rupert led us through so ably. Some 16 months ago. These chapters. Where the prophet is saying. Look. What has happened to God's people.

[9 : 04] Is not pretty. It's not attractive. It's not beautiful. And it's not meant to be. So that is why this chapter. Is so disturbing. And just a couple of introductory points.

This young prophet. Has been called to speak for God. In dangerous times. As we saw a few weeks ago. And verse 17. Just a few lines up.

In chapter 1. Says this. You say to them. Everything. That I command you. Jeremiah. Jeremiah. You don't have any right. To change this message.

Don't dress it up in any way. Don't water it down. Don't pretend it's easy. Say whatever. I command you. And this is what's happening. He's been given a message.

To pluck up. Unbelief. And godlessness. And in the ruins. To rebuild. To build. And plant. And he knows. That judgment.

[10 : 01] And exile. Are coming. He knows. That God's people. Are doomed. He knows. That they're going to be taken off. To Babylon. Even the great. Reformation.

Of the good king. Josiah. Is only going to hold that up. For a little bit. And so. We've got here. In this chapter. And in the following chapters. Is a selection.

Of the prophecies. That he gave. In these days. Before the king's. Reformation. Had begun. To make any effect. Or impact. Jeremiah. Preaches to the people.

And Jeremiah. Tells them. That there is judgment. Terrible judgment. Coming. That's the first thing. But the second thing. Is this. I've called this whole series.

The prophet. Of the costly. New covenant. I was going to say. Most people. Preach on Jeremiah. Not all that. Not nearly enough. People preach on Jeremiah.

[10 : 56] As it happens. And most people. Who write. On Jeremiah. Divide the book. Into two halves. There is judgment. There is doom and gloom. Up to 31 and 32.

And then there is the new covenant. Now I believe. That's fundamentally. To misunderstand the book. That's not what's happening. In the book at all. There is covenant language. Right from the beginning.

This is the language. Of the lover. God. The great lover. Outraged. And heartbroken. As his bride. Deserts him. And goes after.

Other lovers. You see. This is not the stern. Unemotional. Judge. Who pronounces doom. On someone. He doesn't know. And doesn't love. This is the language.

Of the heart. Of God. Hence the title. For today. The outraged lover. How deep. The father's love. For us. How vast. Beyond all measure.

[11 : 51] And we can see this. Developing. Throughout the chapter. There is judgment. But it is the judgment. From an outraged lover. Not from an impersonal judge.

So let's look at it. As it develops. First of all. We have the fickle bride. In verses 1 to 13. Thus says the Lord. Verse 2. I remember.

The devotion. Of your youth. Your love. As a bride. The Lord is thinking. Of Israel's. Springtime. The days. When she left. Egypt. The days.

She faced. All the rigors. Of the desert journey. Verse 6. Who led us. In the wilderness. In a land. Of deserts. And pits. In a land. Of drought. And deep darkness. In a land.

That none. Passes through. Where no one. Dwells. And this is the. This is God's. Aching. Memory. You were. You were so.

[12 : 46] Genuine. Then. You were my. Genuine. Bride. At that time. In spite of the rigors. And difficulties. And you were to be my first fruits. Verse 3. Now the first fruits.

Were the first yield of the harvest. Set aside for God. Acknowledging that all the produce of the earth. Comes from him. And that one day.

All the nations would worship. One day. All the nations. Would be gathered. A time of honeymoon. A time of young love. But how brief.

That was. I remember. The devotion. Of your youth. And then. Verse 5. What wrong. Did your fathers. Find in me.

That they went far from me. They went. After. Worthlessness. What happened. They chose. Unreality. This is. The word.

[13 : 41] Worthlessness. The word. Hevel. A puff of wind. The Hebrew word. That's often used. Of idols. They forgot. The gracious rescue. From Egypt.

They forgot. The rewards. Of the promised land. And this is the choice. For God's people. In every age. Are we going to have the Lord. Or are we going to have.

Worthlessness. This is a message. For all of us. Young students. Who now. Are keen. And enthusiastic. About the Lord. Over the years.

As I've worked with students. I've loved to see. The enthusiasm. The energy. The sheer. Devotion. To the Lord. Make sure you don't go off the boil.

Where are you going to be. In 10 or 20 years time. What about the middle aged. And older people here. Do we look back. On our enthusiastic youth.

[14 : 35] With embarrassment. What if God looks back on it. As the time when we love Jesus. More than we do now. This is a. This is a lifelong message.

For all of us. Don't choose Hevel. Don't choose. Unreality. But why. What has gone wrong. Look at verse 8.

Which seems to me. To be the key to the whole chapter. In many ways. The key to the whole book. The priest 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 a bail. And went after things. That do not profit. Here is a word.

For the leaders. Of God's people. The leaders of the institutional church. The priests. Leaders of the people. Remember the priests.

[15 : 30] Are not just those who offer sacrifices. In ancient Israel. They were to be the teachers. What have they gone after. They are not interested in the Lord. They are interested in red tape.

They are interested in officialdom. They love words like committees. And commissions. That is what they want to run. A religious institution.

The priests did not say. Where is the Lord. All they were interested in. Was the institution. All they cared about. Was the fabric.

Teachers. Teachers. Teachers. Who know everything. But the Lord. Those who handled the law. Did not know me.

There is liberal theology for you. Everything about the Bible. Everything about theology. But no knowledge. Of the living God. The shepherds.

[16 : 29] The shepherds. Transgressed against me. Shepherds who cared about everything. Except the flock. Shepherds who. Cared for themselves. And for their position.

And the. And here is now. A theme that's going to run through the whole book. The prophets prophesied. By Baal. So broad minded. They don't know the difference. Between Baal.

A worthless idol. And Yahweh. The Lord of heaven and earth. The God of Israel. People who. Want to prop up.

An institution. Who care for it. Far more. Than they do. For the gospel. Who change. The glory. Of the Lord. To.

Look at verse 11. Has a nation. Changed its gods. Even though they are no gods. But my people. Have changed their glory. Now this word. Glory. The Hebrew word. Kavod.

[17 : 23] The opposite of Hevel. The glory of God. Is the utter reality. Of God. And the blinding light. Which shows. That reality. This is what the prophet is saying.

You have turned aside. Towards. Unbelief. Towards. Liberalism. Towards. Red tape. Towards. Propping up an institution. But you have forsaken the life.

Giving gospel. Verse 13. For my people. Have forsaken. Have committed. Two evils. They have forsaken me. The fountain. Of living waters. And hewed out cisterns for themselves.

Broken cisterns. That can hold no water. Look at what liberalism has done in the churches. Emptied the churches. Look at what false teaching has done.

Turned away the nation's life. From God. That's what happens. When people forsake. The fountain. Of living waters. When the fickle bride.

[18 : 20] Turns away. From the loving Lord. Who brought her out of Egypt. Out of the hand. Out of the. The house of slavery. And turned to vain idols.

So that's the first thing. The fickle bride. And of course. The image of the bride. Is at the very heart. Of the covenant. Covenant. Covenant is not a contract. Signed by. Two solicitors.

Who don't. Who don't even know each other. Covenant. Is a marriage relationship. And the. The people of God. Have forsaken. The living God. And now it becomes collective.

If you like. The image of the bride. The intimate. Personal relationship. Becomes now. The faithless people. The fickle bride. And secondly. Verses 14.

To 28. The faithless people. This is a consequence. Of turning away. From the living God. And the first thing. That happens. Is they. Try to find.

[19 : 17] Unreliable allies. Verse. 18. What do you gain. By going to Egypt. To drink the waters. Of the Nile. Or what do you gain.

By going to Assyria. To drink the waters. Of the Euphrates. Now. The actual. Historical details. Are obscure there. Fair to the power.

Politics. Of the time. Where various kings. Tried to prop up. The decaying nation. By alliances. With what they saw. As the superpowers. But the general.

But the general meaning. Is clear enough. Both Egypt. And Assyria. Had been oppressors. In the past. And would be again. Given a chance. After all.

More recently. Assyria. Had taken the northern kingdom. Off captive. Into the. Into the land. Of Assyria. This is what happens. When God's people. Lose confidence.

[20 : 11] In the fountain. Of living waters. And turn their back. On the living word. They look for other ways. To gain influence. Thus. We have compromise.

Watering down. Of the gospel. Trying to become. Acceptable. In the marketplace. Of ideas. Conforming. To the world's standards. And sexual matters.

And all other kinds. Of matters. We try. Desperately. To gain influence. By aping the world. Which of course. Is why. Most decent. Worldly people. Would have nothing.

To do with a church. Like that. What's the point. Of going to a church. Which is simply. An echo. Of the world. Why bother getting up. On a Sunday morning. Unless you're going to get.

The life-giving fountain. Of waters. As well. To stay in bed. Wash the car. Read the Sunday newspapers. That's what happens. When the church. When God. God's people. Try to find.

[21 : 04] Unreliable allies. And they turn away. From the covenant. Lord. And again. The root. Is in the heart. Verse 19.

Your evil. Will chastise you. And your apostasy. Will reprove you. Know and see. That is evil. And bitter. For you. To forsake. The Lord.

Your God. The fear of me. Is not in you. Declares. The Lord. Of hosts. What have they done. They've turned. To bogus worship. Verse 20.

Long ago. I broke your yoke. And burst your bonds. Once again. A reference. To the exodus. I am the Lord. The Lord. Your God. Who brought you out. Of the land of Egypt. Out of the house.

Of slavery. I rescued you. From bondage. I rescued you. From slavery. And now you're turning. To pseudo. Freedom. You're turning. To the worship.

[21 : 58] Of Baal. Now Baal. Or Baal. Is a name. For a whole variety. Of gods. In the Old Testament. It simply means. Lord. Or master. And Baal worship.

Mixed two things. Which are always going to be very popular. One thing that Baal worship appealed to. Was the sense of the other. The sense of the numinous. The sense there is something bigger than us.

Which of course is a God. Implanted instinct. God who has placed eternity. In our hearts. As the book of Ecclesiastes says. And the other of course was hedonism. Enjoying yourself.

All the time. With no. There's no ten commandments. No. No demands to. No demands to live. In a godly way.

And therefore. Instead of freedom. We become slaves. To self. Indulgence. That of course is why. This sexually loaded imagery. Verse 23.

[22 : 57] Look at your way in the valley. Know what you have done. A restless camel. Running here and there. A wild donkey. Used to the wilderness. In her heat. Sniffing the wind. Who can restrain her lust.

This is uncomfortable. This is vivid. Shocking language. And of course. It is a parody of covenant. Isn't it? Instead of being loyal.

And faithful. Married to the covenant lord. His people run after. A string of lovers. They think with their hormones. They throw themselves around.

Sexual. The sexual revolution. Which promises liberty. As of course. Simply enslaved people. What happens. When the. God given boundaries.

Are transgressed. Women are treated. As objects. Men simply treat them. For their own indulgence. That's what's happening here. This is the root. Of the matter.

[23 : 56] And once again. Look at verse 26. As a thief is shamed. When caught. So the house of Israel. Shall be shamed. They. Their kings.

Their officials. Their priests. And their prophets. The dreadful leadership. Here. Who say. Verse 27. You can see how far the unreality has gone.

They are not living in the real world. They are living in a world of fantasy. Who say to a tree. You are my father. And to a stone. You gave me birth.

Now the tree here is almost certainly the Asher of Paul. The symbol of the goddess. Of fertility. And the stone is probably a figure of a male god. And you can notice of course the utter confusion.

The female symbol is called father. And the male symbol is called mother. When we break out of the god given. Bounds the male and female in the image of god.

[24 : 56] It's no accident that confusion and utter unreality results. It's no accident is it. That since sexuality is at the very heart of the image of god.

In the image of god. He made them male and female. He created them. That Satan is particularly determined to destroy and corrupt this.

Satan is particularly determined that humanity will depart from the image of god. And instead of course of the covenant with the great lover. We have what the prophet Isaiah calls a covenant with death and hell.

That's what's happening here. Yesterday in that wonderful wedding that Willie's already referred to of Lynn and Stephen. We read the song of songs with its true celebration of sexuality in the image of god.

It's true rejoicing in the joys of human love. As a gracious gift of a loving father. But when God's people abandon the fountain of living waters.

[26 : 04] It's scarcely surprising that what flows is a polluted stream from broken cisterns. And after all verse 13. If it weren't so tragic it would be amusing.

Not only have they behaved arrogantly. They behave absolutely foolishly. How stupid. How foolish. A way to behave. Brought hewing out cisterns that can hold no water.

And so often the Old Testament prophets do this. It's not so much the wickedness of idolatry. Although it is wicked. But the stupidity of idolatry. Which lives in a world of unreality.

And the prophet's task of course. And the preacher's task. Is to open people's eyes to reality. T.S. Eliot said humankind cannot bear very much reality.

Jeremiah is determined that they are going to. And verse 28. Where are your gods that you made for them yourself? Let them arise if they can save you in your time of trouble.

[27 : 04] Are all these godlets going to do anything to save you? Of course not. For as many as your cities are your gods. O Judah. Minding us surely of Acts 17. Where Paul was grieved to see the city wholly given of Athens.

Wholly given to idolatry. It was said by an ancient writer. It was easier to find a god than a human being in Athens. How different from here O Israel.

The Lord is God. The Lord is one. He is the one who made heaven and earth. The fickle bride. The faithless people.

And eventually verses 29 to 37. That is going to lead to a futile result. After all they've chosen Hevel. They've chosen unreality.

They've chosen futility. And we have a series of pictures in 29 to 37. Of irresponsibility and corruption. Why do you contend with me?

[28 : 04] You have all transgressed against me. Declares the Lord. In vain I have struck your children. They took no correction. Your own sword devoured your prophets like a ravening lion.

And later on in the book in chapter 26. This is to be fulfilled literally. When Josiah's feckless son Jehoiakim kills the prophet Uzziah.

See once we depart from God. Once God is dethroned. There is literally no end to the slippery slope. Because when we take away the Lord. And the relationship with the Lord.

The covenant. Then morality. We have a simple matter of social convention. So there is this painful denial of relationship.

Verse 32. Can a virgin forget her ornaments. Or a bride her attire. Yet my people have forgotten me days without number. Now we all lapse in our love for the Lord.

[29 : 03] The worst thing we could do with a passage like this. Is to moralize and say oh they do it but we don't. We all lapse in our love for the Lord. But this is not a lapse.

That's the point. You days without number. My people have forgotten me days without number. This is deliberate persistent apostasy.

That is the point. The throwing away the signs of love. Throwing away the bridal ring. Throwing away the wedding dress. And once again strongly sexual language.

Because as I say this is a parody of covenant. Verse 32. How well you direct your course to seek love. So even to wicked women you have taught your ways.

You're now to learn from prostitutes says the Lord. You are actually teaching them. So there is denial of relationship. And there is no repentance.

[29 : 59] That is the thing. Verse 35. You say I am innocent. Surely his anger has turned from me. After all this. What do they say?

I am innocent. Now that is not the language of a repentant sinner. That is not the language of a bride. Who wants to return to the husband of her youth.

That is the language of pride. The language of arrogance. Of defending the indefensible. Verse 23. How much you go about changing.

You shall be put to shame by Egypt. As you were put to shame by Assyria. When God's people look to the world for allies. Sooner or later the world is going to get fed up with them.

And sooner or later the world is going to throw them out. And despise them. And the question that is left here. At the end of the chapter. The Lord has rejected those in whom you trust.

[30 : 58] You will not prosper by them. It may look as if you are having some success. Aping the world. It may look as if you are riding high.

It may look as if you are in positions of power. The Lord has rejected those in whom you trust. And so you will not prosper by them.

The question that is going to run right through the book of Jeremiah. As I say. It is not going to come first of all in chapters 31 and 32. Or the new covenant is. It is going to run through the whole book.

Can the great lover accept them back? Is this the end? Now in one sense it is the end. Jeremiah could not save the people from exile.

The great reforms of the godly Josiah could not save people from exile. So in that sense the judgment is real. This is not cheap grace. However.

[32 : 00] There was one to come. Who was going to take that anger upon himself. And open the kingdom of heaven to all who believe. The vilest offender who truly believed.

That moment from Jesus the pardon receives. They were being rejected. Not because they had sinned. Not even because they had sinned. Days without number.

But because they would not repent. You see that is what Bonhoeffer called cheap grace. Which he defined as the cross without repentance.

The gospel without judgment. That's what these people wanted. And yet. Even at this lowest moment. We know that there is one who is going to show us how deep the father's love is for us.

One who is going to come and stand between his people. Who will repent. And the judgment. One who is going to open the kingdom of heaven to all who believe.

[33 : 06] If we choose to be the fickle bride and the faithless people. Then we are going to end up in the futile empty result of judgment. To return to him.

If we come. If we stop pretending in our own righteousness. And basically say Lord be merciful to me a sinner.

That is the way back. And that is not just the way back. That is the way forward. Because that is the gospel of God's grace. Amen.

Let's pray. God our father. How penetrating the scriptures are.

They indeed divide right to our very heart. They leave us nowhere to hide. They leave us with no excuses. And yet once we reach that place.

[34 : 04] We thank you. That there is the way back to God. From the dark paths of sin. Father we pray. That as we take that gospel in our lips.

And in our lives. We will be faithful to it. And proclaim the deeds of him. Who called us out of darkness. Into his marvelous light. Amen.

Amen.