

JEREMIAH 33:10-16**RESTORATION**

I'm no authority on computers or computer history, but from what I've been told the operating system known as Windows Millennium Edition was the first one to introduce a feature called "system restore" way back in the year 2000. It was meant to simplify troubleshooting and solve problems in case something was installed that was messing up how your computer worked. If your computer crashed, you could select "system restore", specify the date to which you wanted your machine to reset, and "Viola!" Problem solved. Some people thought it protected your documents – like the personal financial information you entered on Wednesday, or your daughter's history report she started writing on Monday, or your favorite computer game – but no such luck. Apparently, it only protected the operating system's files not your documents. Wouldn't it be fabulous to have a "system restore" feature for human beings? Just imagine! Peter could "system restore" to the day before he began the affair. Sue could go back to the day before she entered bogus information on her tax returns. Roger could choose the day before the big fight that caused his son to leave home. System restore.

I want you to think with me for a few minutes about restoration. We all need it sooner or later. We get run down, depleted, worn out, burned out, defeated, depressed, discouraged, broken. Sometimes we even crash and burn. The reasons are many. Sometimes it's because of our own sins and failures. Sometimes it happens because of the sins and failures of others that affects us. Sometimes it's not about sin or evil at all. It just seems like an inevitable part of life. Regardless of the source, we find ourselves in a hard, difficult, and miserable place needing restoration of some kind.

We finish up a journey through the Old Testament book of Jeremiah today. I've compared reading through the book of Jeremiah to trekking through a hot, dry, thirsty desert. Jeremiah was a prophet who lived in a hard, difficult, and miserable time. God gave him a hard, difficult, and miserable message for God's people in that day and time. But every now and then, when you read through Jeremiah, you'll come upon a beautiful, uplifting, life-giving passage. These passages are kind of like oases – cool, shady, thirst-quenching refuges from the heat of the desert. The oasis I want us to read today is really about restoration. Let's read it just now. What does God have to do with restoration? Everything. How does He restore you and me when we need it? Well, first of all...

IT HAPPENS WHEN I HAVE SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO.

Jeremiah sounded really positive and upbeat in the verses we read today. But his personal situation was actually anything but positive and upbeat. If we went back a few chapters, we'd learn he was in prison in the city of Jerusalem when he wrote these words. Why? Zedekiah, the king at that time, had put Jeremiah there because of all his negative prophecies. Jeremiah was considered a traitor by many of his own people. He told God's people that judgment was inevitable because of their rejection of the Lord over hundreds of years. They'd worshipped other gods. They'd been personally immoral. They'd taken advantage of the poor. God's judgment was now inevitable and

inescapable. Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Babylonian empire. The temple of the Lord would be demolished. Most of the people would be deported or exiled to Babylon some 700 miles away. All of those incredibly bad events were just about to happen when Jeremiah first spoke the words we read a few minutes ago.

So, personally, Jeremiah was not having a good day. He was in prison and he was hated by just about every person he knew. In addition, Jeremiah was incredibly sad over what was going to happen to God's people - the Jews. In reality, Jeremiah was a great patriot. He didn't want to see his beloved nation destroyed. He didn't want to see his home - the city of Jerusalem - burned down. He didn't want to see the Temple of the Lord ransacked and its walls torn down. He didn't want to see members of his family and his friends killed or dragged off in chains to a foreign land. On the one hand, he hated God's message. He hated having to say what he was called to say. On the other hand, he loved God. He was obedient to proclaim God's message regardless.

Jeremiah struggled with feelings of depression, hopelessness, and the loss of everything that seemed to make life worth living. The only thing that sustained Jeremiah in those terrible days was the glimpse God gave him of a glorious, restored future for God's people. In other words, God gave him something wonderful to look forward to. God's people would not remain in exile forever. They'd return to the land. The city of Jerusalem and even the Temple would be rebuilt. The nation of Israel would be reborn. When would this happen? In about 70 years. True, the present was terrible and immediate future was grim beyond words. Jerusalem and the country around it were going to be a wreck for a lengthy period of time – places not really fit for people or animals. But restoration would take place. It wouldn't happen in Jeremiah's lifetime, to be sure, but still God assured him it would happen. Even though it looked like it, God hadn't abandoned His people. Jeremiah described what this future restoration would look like there in v. 10-13. Jeremiah saw social restoration. Once again, the sounds of joy and gladness would be heard in the streets of Jerusalem. The happy sounds of marriage celebrations - laughter, music, and singing - would once again be enjoyed. Jeremiah saw economic restoration. Out in the countryside, sheep would be plentiful and healthy. Most importantly, Jeremiah saw spiritual restoration. Jeremiah saw people coming to a rebuilt Temple to worship the Lord joyfully singing, "Give thanks to the LORD Almighty, for the LORD is good; his love endures forever" (Jer. 33:11 NIV) as they came. History tells us everything Jeremiah saw came true.

But what God revealed to Jeremiah was greater than what happened in the next 70, or 170, or 270 years. "In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land." (Jer. 33:15 NIV) Who is Jeremiah talking about there? Who is this Branch person? Jesus. 600 years before Jesus actually walked and lived on the planet, Jeremiah predicted His coming and what He would accomplish. It would be a completely different, but far more important kind of restoration. Did you know referring to the coming Messiah as the Branch is found in several places in the Old Testament? For example, the prophet Isaiah said, "Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot—yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root." (Is 11:1 NLT) Another prophet, Zechariah, said, "This is what the LORD of

Heaven's Armies says: 'Here is the man called the Branch.... Yes, he will build the Temple of the LORD. Then he will receive royal honor and will rule as king from his throne. He will also serve as priest from his throne, and there will be perfect harmony between his two roles.'" (Zech. 6:12-13 NLT)

The image of the Branch comes from the world of genealogy. Most of us are familiar with an extended genealogy being depicted as a tree. The trunk is the original ancestor and the branches depict the different descendants coming from that person. King David was Israel's greatest king. In Old Testament times, when one of his descendants was sitting on the throne of Israel, it was a sign that God was present and blessing His people. Jeremiah's devastating prophecy meant that David's royal line was going to come to an end literally – and it most certainly did in terms of literal kings. But not so fast says Jeremiah. God was going to restore David's royal line in a different way in Jesus. Over in the New Testament, Jesus confirms that He Himself is the Branch or the Root of David. "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." (Rev. 22:16 NIV) That's the reason why the genealogies about Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke are careful to show Him as a literal, physical descendant of David. But, of course, Jesus never became the literal, physical king of the nation of Israel. No, His kingship was and still is bigger in scope. It can't be confined to one nation. It's cosmic in its reach and influence. So, Jesus was and is the literal descendant of David, but His kingship is far greater than anyone could have imagined.

So, what does all of this have to do with you and me? Jeremiah lived in a very hard, difficult, and miserable time. To make it worse, he was God's primary vehicle of all the bad news. How did God keep Jeremiah from being crushed by his situation? How did God keep hope alive in Jeremiah's mind and heart? How did He restore Jeremiah? He gave Jeremiah something to look forward to. Some of it was about the nation of Israel being literally restored in 70 years. And some of it was about the coming of the Messiah. Brothers and sisters, sometimes God asks us to live in and through very hard, difficult, and miserable times personally. Darkness falls around our lives. Physical burnout and spiritual fatigue threaten to overwhelm us. It might be the result of losing someone to death we love deeply. It might be divorce. It might be trouble in the lives of our children. It might hearing devastating news about our own health or someone we love. It might be financial uncertainty. Like God's people in Jeremiah's day, we might feel abandoned by God at times. Sometimes God will come and fix the problems in our lives by His grace. We should always pray and ask Him to do so with hope and expectation. Often God responds graciously and we see His power working in our lives. We experience restoration in this life. Praise God when that happens!

But, we also recognize that restoration isn't always experienced in our own life span. We live in a sinful, broken world. Just as Jeremiah looked forward to the first coming of Jesus, we look forward to the second coming of Jesus. He's the One who's going to set everything right again. He's the One who's going to dry every tear and remove every kind of sin and evil. The Bible says, "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of

God. First, the believers who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. So encourage each other with these words." (1 Th. 4:16-18 NLT) The Bible also puts this future and complete restoration like this, "But we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth he has promised, a world filled with God's righteousness." (2 Pt. 3:13 NLT)

David Peterson, a pastor, tells about a time when he was preparing a sermon. His little daughter came in and said, "Daddy, can we play?" He answered, "I'm awfully sorry, Sweetheart, but I'm right in the middle of preparing this sermon. In about an hour I can play." She said, "Okay, when you're finished, Daddy, I am going to give you a great big hug." He said, "Thank you very much." She went to the door and then she did a U-turn and came back and gave her daddy a bone-breaking hug." David said to her, "Darling, you said you were going to give me a hug after I finished." She answered, "Daddy, I just wanted you to know what you have to look forward to!" The promises in the Bible of Jesus' return and the creation of the new Heaven and the new Earth will bring genuine restoration to your heart and spirit if you believe them.

Jeremiah had a choice to make. He could look around his present situation and give up in despair. Just throw in the towel. Or, he could believe what God's Word assured him of. You and I face the same choice. Do you just believe only what your eyes tell you is happening today or do you believe God will have the last word? God restores us by giving us something every day to look forward to. He may do it in this life. But, if not, He will do it when Jesus returns. Now, here's another way He brings restoration.

IT HAPPENS WHEN I HAVE SOMETHING TO COME BACK TO.

I want to drill down on a phrase in Jeremiah 33:16. "In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The LORD Our Righteous Savior." (Jer. 33:15-16 NIV) The Lord our righteous Savior. That word "righteous" or "righteousness" in the Bible has many meanings. To the original group of people to whom Jeremiah gave this prophecy it probably meant the Lord was going to establish justice once again in their city of Jerusalem, in their nation, and provide salvation from all their enemies. Whether or not Jeremiah knew exactly what Jesus would do at the cross and through the empty tomb is up for debate. But that phrase – the Lord our righteous Savior - points to the central fact of what we call the Gospel – the good news of what God has done through Jesus. Jeremiah himself couldn't look back on that great event because it was 600 years in the future for him. But you and I can look back on it - or we can come back to it - as often as necessary to experience personal restoration.

One of the most important truths we hold dear is that Jesus has made and makes us right with God through His death and resurrection. Sin puts you and me on the wrong side of God. A relationship with Him is impossible to even get started on our own. It's necessary to be morally perfect to begin and maintain a relationship with God, because

He Himself is absolutely holy and perfect. The penalty for our sin is eternal separation from God. What so many people who don't want to follow Jesus fail to appreciate is the simple fact that no one in here or out there ever qualifies for a relationship with God on our own merits. We can never do enough or be good enough to be right with God. Because each of us is already sinful, we're in a hopeless situation before we even start trying to have a relationship with God. The Gospel – the good news – is that God is willing to accept a substitute to pay the penalty for our sins, but this someone has to be morally perfect. God is willing to transfer my sin and its penalty to this perfect substitute. God is also willing to transfer this person's righteousness – a right standing before God or full acceptance by God - to you and me. And not just once, but over and over and over again – day after day – for all eternity. Jesus literally became – and always will be – our righteousness before God.

This all important, central truth is all over the Bible. Just consider these passages that drive it home for us today. The Bible says, "Yes, Adam's one sin brings condemnation for everyone (We all now have a sinful nature that results in death or separation from God.), but Christ's one act of righteousness brings a right relationship with God and new life for everyone. Because one person disobeyed God, many became sinners. But because one other person obeyed God, many will be made righteous." (Rom. 5:18-19 NLT) In yet another place, the Bible says, "For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ." (2 Cor. 5:21 NLT) Jesus took our place. He paid our penalty. His right standing before God – His full acceptance by God – is transferred to you and me.

Someone might say, "Great, but how long is this arrangement good for? I still commit sins. I may be sinning less now than before I put my trust and faith in Jesus, but my sinful nature is still a major problem for me. Is Jesus' right standing before God transferred to me forever?" The answer is, "Yes, absolutely!" The Bible says, "If anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world." (1 Jn. 2:1-2 NLT) Jesus literally became – and always will be – our righteousness before God.

This is one reason what we're about to do – celebrating Communion – is so precious and important to followers of Jesus. I don't know about you, but my own sinfulness can drag me down many times. I do things I shouldn't do. Or, I don't do things that I should do. My attitudes towards God and other people can be all wrong. It's easy to get discouraged by what I see in my own life at times. But Communion is a powerful reminder God uses to bring about restoration in my life. How? Communion invites me to come back to something essential and foundational. I have a relationship with God yesterday, today, and tomorrow only because of what Jesus did for me. Jesus is my one and only hope. And my hope is well placed in Him. Sometimes personal restoration happens when I have something to come back to. Communion is the opportunity to come back to – and rest upon – the incredible, wonderful, liberating, and life-giving truth that Jesus became – and always will be – my righteousness before God.

Several in our church family enjoyed the documentary, "Facing Darkness" about the Ebola crisis shown in area theaters at the end of March. I was interested to learn that Ebola survivor, Dr. Kent Brantly, donated the plasma in his blood to three patients, echoing what one of his former patients did for him before he left Liberia. Brantly was caring for sick Ebola patients with the relief ministry, Samaritan's Purse, when he became the first American diagnosed with Ebola. His condition was worsening before he was flown to the United States in an air ambulance. Before he left, one of his former patients, a 14-year-old Ebola survivor, gave him a unit of blood for a transfusion. After his recovery, Brantly donated his own blood plasma to three other people receiving treatment for Ebola: another Samaritan's Purse doctor, a freelance cameraman, and a nurse in Dallas. Fortunately, they all survived and recovered.

Here's how doctors think it works: When confronted with any virus, the immune system creates antibodies to specifically target the virus, kill it, and keep it from coming back. Once a person has antibodies, they stay in your blood for life. If the Ebola antibodies found in an Ebola survivor's blood can be imported into a person sick with Ebola, those antibodies can help the patient's immune system fight off the deadly virus. Doctors say that even though the sick person's body is trying to make antibodies, an incredibly powerful infection like Ebola can be so overwhelming that the sick person's immune system is often unable to keep up with it. As a result, the sooner someone gets a blood plasma transfusion, the more likely it is to help that person recover.

In a much more potent and effective way, followers of Jesus have been restored to a relationship with God – and can maintain a relationship with God - by receiving the blood of Christ. That's what this table reminds us of every time we come to it. Jesus' blood is 100% effective in giving new life to anyone and everyone dead in our sins, without God, and without hope in this world. It's the best kind of restoration available. We can come back to it and for it over and over and over again. Let's ask for and receive the restoration only God can provide through the body and the blood of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.