



Kirknewton and East Calder Parish Church of Scotland

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Sermon: Rev Dr André Groenewald

Reading: Jeremiah 23. 1-6

Background of the reading

Last week I talked about the terrible tragedy of the fall of Jerusalem and how devastated the people were. This morning I want to emphasize on what happened before Jerusalem fell in the hands of the Babylonians. The book of Jeremiah is telling us about the neglect and disobedience of the people of Judah to the Lord God before, during and after the fall of Jerusalem.

The Prophet Jeremiah came originally from Anathoth. He was the son of Hilkiyah. He was still young when he was called as a prophet in the thirteenth year of King Josiah. He first prophesied in Anathoth, provoking the anger of his villagers and family. He then moved to Jerusalem, a one-hour walk from home. From the start of his role as a prophet he had it very difficult. His prophetic role demanded a lot from him. He could not marry and several times he was in trouble with his own friends and family and even with the ruling kings. In a certain way he was quite an “unwilling servant” and questioned God about his calling as a prophet. But his own personal difficulties, struggles, and wrestling with God are one of the most astonishing tales in our Bibles. It is a tale of an ordinary fallible human being who had to tell his own people not what they wanted to hear but what the Lord was telling him to tell them!

He prophesied against the king Jehoiakim, and dared to assault the king and the Temple. His stature grew even more in Zedekiah’s reign. Repeatedly, he warned the king from revolting against Babylon but the king did not listen. The revolt broke out, yet the king kept consulting him, either by messengers or personally. The ministers wanted him dead but did not dare kill him. Charging him with desertion to the enemy, they jailed him in a pit-house where he would starve to death, but the king moved him to a better prison, ‘the court of Guard,’ where he received food until the fall of Jerusalem in 586 b.c. The Babylonians freed Jeremiah from prison, committing him to the care of their Judean governor, Gedaliah, son of Ahikam. After the latter’s assassination, the prophet and his secretary Baruch fled to Egypt.

In Chapter 23 Jeremiah is telling the leaders of Judah, the so-called shepherds that they have not been attending to the flock of God. They led them astray and therefore the Lord God is going to allow them to be scattered to Babylon. There the Lord will become their shepherd, faithfully attending to them, looking after them. They will

become plentiful again and on their return to Judah he will provide them a righteous king out FROM the line of David – “a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land”. His name will be “The Lord Our Righteousness”. It is interesting to note the word play in the Hebrew text. The current and last king of Judah Zedekiah’s name meant: “My righteousness is Yahweh”. Now Jeremiah is looking beyond him and is talking of a totally new king with a different name. I think it must have been quite an insult to King Zedekiah to hear that the Lord was going to replace him with a different king with a different name. But Jeremiah is looking into the future.

David was the icon of what it meant to be king. The Jews regarded him as the best king that ever ruled. Although the people of Judah might feel hopeless and lost, God is promising them a new future with a new king that will govern them wisely and just from the line of David! They must never give up hoping. God is still in control.

Amen

Sermon

Last Tuesday we all heard the news of Prince William’s engagement to Miss Kate Middleton. And yes all we heard the whole day was speculation upon speculation when and where they will be getting married.

How do we feel about kings and royalty?

I heard a lot this week how people feel about royalty in general and it seems evident that a lot of people cannot be bothered. A lot of people feel that they are out of touch with reality. A lot of people struggle to find in them good examples to follow. But to their credit we must admit; they are human beings just like us. If we can falter so can they!

I think Jeremiah was pointing to the distressed people who felt the tensions mounting in Jerusalem that God will provide them a new leader in future. He will allow them to be destroyed but He will again in His mercy grant them blessings. He will give them a new king which they can follow. A king that will tick all the right boxes, someone like David.

But in the end God gave them and us so much more. Let’s be realistic – the characteristics of the promised king as an earthly human being is not realistic. We all know ourselves. For a human being it is not possible to “reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land”. We are fallible and utterly corrupt. I mean to say how many governments; earthly kingdoms have come and gone!

It is no wonder God had to intervene himself just as He said through his prophet Jeremiah. He became the shepherd king Himself. In Jesus Christ He was much more than David could ever be. David was a human being. Jesus is God and saved humanity from sin, death and hell.

- Unlike David, Jesus the Shepherd king never ever faltered, or went back on His words.

- Unlike any other earthly king you do not have to make a special appointment and pay a fortune to visit His palace. HE is everywhere. He has already paid the price with HIS blood.
- Unlike any other earthly king you do not have to stand in long queues to see him. Actually you can have a special personal relationship with HIM by honouring and obeying HIM, through faith alone.
- Unlike any other earthly king you do not have to be of royal descent or decorated to even speak to HIM. You just need faith to speak to him. And you can speak to him anytime you want to. And in our congregation there are a lot of opportunities if you do not want to pray alone, like the ONE tomorrow where all the Christians across UK are going to pray for the Nation.
- Unlike any other earthly king He does not go on holiday or a weekend away.
- Unlike any other royalty He does not appear in Gossip tabloids. We have never to be ashamed of the things He did and said!

Jesus became the example of everything and more than what Jeremiah prophesized. But till this day, the Jews are still waiting for this promised King who will change all the wrongs to the right!
Amen