

The more I read and study my Bible and the more life I experience, the more I am falling head over heels in love with the Prophets.

You know who I'm talking about?

If you crack open your Bible to that page in the front that lists all the books of the Bible, and look at the Old Testament books (you can do it right now with one of the Bible's in front of you), there are three basic chunks in the Old Testament.

The first chunk is the history section (Genesis-Esther) – they primarily recount the history of the world with a special focus on the history of one family that turned into a nation (Abram into Israel).

The middle chunk is poetry and wisdom literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs).

The last chunk is the Prophets – all those crazy names you maybe remember having to memorize back in the day (Isaiah-Malachi).

All of those crazy names are the names of real men that God chose to use as messengers. That is what a prophet is – a messenger God sent to his people.

I'm falling in love with those guys with the crazy names.

They can be a little challenging to read at times – they don't read as easily as, say Mark, reading about the life of Jesus. They require some effort to overcome some of the historical and cultural gaps that exist between us and them. You have to do some research to figure out when in the history of Israel they lived, and what was going on at the time. You often have to read slowly and ponder some of the strange to us poetic comparisons that are used. A good study Bible can help with both of those things (I recommend the Lutheran Study Bible).

They can be challenging to read, but in the last year or two especially, I'm finding that it is worth it.

The more I study the prophets the more I find remarkable similarities between their lives and mine. In the prophets I find men who know quite a bit about life as I experience it, and then I get to see how God worked in them, for them, and through them as they handled life.

Take, for instance, the prophet Jeremiah.

Jeremiah grew up in a God-fearing house, taught to love and worship God in a world where more and more people wanted nothing to do with God. Does that sound at all familiar – growing in a God-loving community in a world where more and more people want nothing to do with God?

Jeremiah was asked by God to speak for God to a culture that was walking away from God. Does that sound familiar? How about, **“Go, and make disciples of all nations... teaching them to obey everything I've commanded you”** – the Great Commission that God has given us, his followers today.

Jeremiah was warned by God that people would reject his message (because it wasn't what they wanted to hear; because it made them uncomfortable), they would often hate him for what he had to say, and they would hurt him for saying it. Sound familiar? Ever feel the societal pressure to keep your belief in Jesus to yourself because people might get uncomfortable if you bring it up? Jesus actually promised, **“You will be hated by everyone because of me... If they tried to dismiss me by calling me demon possessed, if they eventually killed me, what do you think is going to happen to my followers?”**

During Jeremiah's day, because of the overtly selfish and immoral way that many were living, the country was in a downward spiral. Bullying, abuses of power, violence, anxiety, anger, and fear were all sky-rocketing and everyone's lives were made worse because of it. Does that sound familiar? Bullying, abuses of power, violence, anxiety, anger, fear, any of that ring a bell?

Jeremiah was told by God that he wasn't allowed to get married and have children. God's reasoning: things were going to get so bad in Jeremiah's generation that any children would be born into a world of horrible suffering. Jeremiah went through life with this constant reminder of how far the world had fallen; of how much of a painful mess sin had made. Does that sound familiar? Maybe your reminder isn't perpetual bachelorhood, maybe yours is a bully at school, constant anxiety, depression, arthritis, cancer, Alzheimer's. Do you have any reminders of how far the world has fallen? Any reminders of how painful of a mess sin has made? Or, to quote another promise of Jesus, **“In this world you will have trouble.”**

Jeremiah would endure this stressful, dangerous, depression-inducing, lonely life of a prophet for over 40 years. Jeremiah didn't just have one or two bad years. For over 40 years Jeremiah had to live and work through some of the most violent and tumultuous events in Old Testament history. Does that sound familiar to any of you? Not everyone has it to the same degree as Jeremiah, but do you ever feel like life is a constant string of problems? Have you ever had a particular problem drag on much longer than you wanted it to?

If you take the time to read Jeremiah you will probably find more. You'll hear him emptying his heart to God, and you might find echoes of our own prayer life. You'll read about specific things he went through and maybe remember something similar you endured. And maybe most importantly, you'll read about a man who put his hope in the promises of his God, like you.

I'm falling in love with the prophets because the more I read them, the more I learn about them and from them, the more I am reminded about how God works in, for, and through imperfect people who lived in challenging times.

That is a whole lot of introduction to get to what is actually the main point of this sermon. Here it is. Are you ready?

If I have learned anything from the prophets, in general, and especially Jeremiah, it is this: **the key to living this side of the Garden of Eden is a laser-like focus on the promises of God**; especially because sometimes the promise is all you have.

I've already shared a lot of the struggles that Jeremiah had to go through. In chapter 23 God narrows in on one particular struggle: bad shepherds. This was one of the perpetual problems of Jeremiah's life: bad shepherds.

It is clear in the context (especially if you read chapter 22) that the shepherds God is talking about are the kings and leaders of Judah in Jeremiah's day. Because of the godless, immoral, power-abusive ways of the leaders of Jeremiah's day God saw his people like a flock of sheep scattered without a shepherd, lost, and vulnerable to the evils of the world.

God narrows in on that one particular problem, identifies it and then makes a two part promise in that section the Pastor Adam's read a bit ago. And for Jeremiah, with everything he was going through, this promise was priceless.

Part One of the promise: God was going to punish those bad shepherds. He wouldn't let them continue hurting people forever.

And best of all, part two of the promise: he promises salvation. He uses beautiful imagery too, doesn't he? Those bad shepherds had scattered the flock, **"But I myself," declares the LORD "will gather the remnant of the flock out of the countries where I have driven them and will bring them back to their pasture, where they will be fruitful and increase in number. I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing."**

The LORD promises salvation in general and then he promises the Savior. Those last two verses point directly to Jesus, the one who would bring that salvation, the descendant of David who would be a good and just King.

"The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD our Righteous Savior."

A beautiful promise, right?

And for Jeremiah, for him to survive, to persevere through all of the challenges that surrounded him, this promise was all he had – and here's the kicker: the promise was enough.

Jeremiah is sometimes called "the weeping prophet" because in his book he pours out his soul to God over all the challenges I've been talking about, but do you know what God calls Jeremiah? Right at the beginning of his work God said to Jeremiah, **"Today I have made you a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land – against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land. They will fight against you but will not overcome you, for I am with you and will rescue you."**

A fortified city, an iron pillar, a bronze wall – knowing everything Jeremiah would face, God called Jeremiah unbreakable. Why? **"Because I am with you and I will rescue you."**

Throughout the 40 years of his work, with all the suffering he endured, Jeremiah found many occasions to weep, to pour out his soul to God, but never as one without hope **because of the promises of God.**

So, friends, here we are today, some 2600 years after Jeremiah and God would have us find a little bit of that same iron and bronze to fortify our souls.

This is what Christ the King Sunday is all about (really it is what all of Christianity is about), a laser-like focus on the promises of God. Specifically today God would fortify our hearts with the very promise he made Jeremiah.

It's the same promise the Jesus made to that thief on the cross, **"Today you will be with me in paradise."**

It's the same promise that Paul wrote about in his letter to the Colossians, **"He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."**

No matter what you are going through today. No matter how you are feeling as we kick off the crazy holiday season. No matter what comes around the corner. God promises to you: No matter how scatter you may feel in life, no matter what scary, dangerous, and lonely places sin drives you, I myself will gather you. Like a shepherd ranging the hills looking for his lost sheep, I will find you, I will bring you back, I will save you. I will bring you to a place where you will never again be afraid or terrified about anything.

And Jesus, that righteous Branch from David's line, he will rule wisely and do what is just and right. You will be saved. You will live in safety because the LORD our Righteous Savior rules.

A little bit of iron and a little bronze – the promise of your God for you.

Friends, Jesus Christ is King of kings and Lord of lords. As King he promises he is reigning wisely and will do what is just and right in the land. As King he promises that you do not have to be afraid or terrified. No matter what you go through, whether or not your life plays out like Jeremiah's, your King's promises are for you.

A laser-like focus on the promises of God – that is how Jeremiah made it through life, and now he lives forever in Jesus' kingdom.

A laser-like focus on the promises of God – what might that look like for you? You don't need to overthink it. It's as simple as sitting in a pew like this as often as you can, or sitting at your table at home and reading a book like Jeremiah.

The promises of God are waiting, right there, to make you a fortified city, an iron pillar, a bronze wall because the King of kings is with you, and the Lord of lords will rescue you.

Hail Christ our King.

Amen.