

# **Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion**

**Date** : 25 April 2021

**Sermon Title** : Not What We Think

**Speaker** : Rev John Foo

**Text** : Jeremiah 24:1-10

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Jeremiah 24:1 tells us that the Jewish exile was complete; the Northern Kingdom had been exiled to Assyria many years ago and now the Southern Kingdom had fallen to the Babylonians. King Jeconiah and many Jews from the Southern Kingdom were taken captive to Babylon. The temple was ransacked and only a remnant of Jerusalem remained, including Mattaniah who was named Zedekiah, and installed as a puppet king in place of his nephew Jeconiah. (2 Kings 24:17)

### A vision: 2 baskets of figs (Jeremiah 24:2-10)

Jeremiah had a vision of 2 baskets of figs set before the temple of the Lord, one very good and one so bad that they could not be eaten. God explained the meaning of the good and bad figs as follows:

Good figs – Jews who were exiled from Judah to Babylon by earlier invasion

Bad figs – Jews who remained in Jerusalem and those who fled to Egypt

Jeremiah did not go to Babylon with the rest of the exiles. He remained in Jerusalem where he crossed swords with the court prophets:

- The court prophets claimed that God had rewarded those who remained in Jerusalem while God had punished the 'wicked' ones who were exiled to Babylon.
- On the contrary, God revealed to Jeremiah that the good figs were the exiles who were taken captive to Babylon (Jeremiah 24:5-8) while the remnant left in Jerusalem were the bad figs.

The remnant left in Jerusalem thought they had the blessing and favour of God but as far as God was concerned, the opposite was true.

<b>#1 Our circumstances don't determine what's good and what's bad, God does</b>
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The remnant in Jerusalem thought their circumstances were good because they had:

- a) The land which God had promised them
- b) Jerusalem, the city of David

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## c) The Temple

- They thought that God had given the land to their ancestors and promised to defend the city of David for His sake and for the sake of His servant David (2 Kings 19:34) and that the Temple was God's holy dwelling place and thus God would surely be with them and protect them.
- However, God had been repeatedly telling the people that His presence and His glory had already departed from the Temple and the city when they started desecrating the Temple.

We think we can recognise what is good and bad. Even then, what is good for one person may be seen as bad by another person. We often use our common sense to decide on whether a situation is good or bad and these decisions are based on our own judgment and understanding of our prevailing circumstances. However, God alone decides what is good and bad because He knows what is good and bad for us.

✓ **God decides what is good and what is bad**

## **#2 Obedience to God is a blessing**

In Jeremiah 21:8-10 God sets out 2 clear options for the Jews:

Option 1 - To go out and surrender to the Babylonians. If they chose to be taken captive to Babylon, they would save their lives.

Option 2 - To remain in Jerusalem. If they chose to remain in Jerusalem, the cost would be death by the sword, famine or disease.

Common sense would tell us Option 2 is more attractive – to stay in one's homeland instead of enduring the humiliation of being taken captive to a faraway land.

- However God called on the Jews to surrender to the Babylonians.
- God gave the Jews a choice but told them clearly which option was His.
- The Jews knew what they had to do to obey God.

In the end, some Jews decided to choose what looked 'good' for them (based on their own reasoning); to stay in Jerusalem instead of obeying God and going into captivity. This shows us that God's good plans for us could be very different from our own plans or way of thinking.

In Jeremiah 24:6-7, God promised to be with the captives of Judah sent in exile to Babylon.

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- He promised to set His eyes on them for good and to preserve them and bring them back to the land of Judah alive.
- He would protect them and they would return to God with their whole heart.
- God's purpose for sending His people into exile was to discipline them for their disobedience and apostasy. He planned to 'make them over' during their captivity and bring them through a process of healing and restoration there.

When we obey God, He blesses us. Before the captivity, the Israelites were disobedient. On their return from captivity, they were more fervent and committed to God.

Obedience to God is a blessing, disobedience a cost

✓ **God calls us to simply obey Him in what He's telling us to do**

## **Applications**

- God is calling us not to look at the externals but to look at our situation with eyes of faith, beyond the immediate circumstances that we face. He wants us to look at what He will do in our lives when we obey Him.
- If we are not sure what God is calling us to do, go back to the Bible. Scripture always has a word for us for our time, our situation, our circumstances. Our problem is that we struggle to obey or think that the Bible is outdated. The word of God helps us make wise decisions.
- Our lives are made up of small, daily events and routines. Are we ready to listen to God and obey Him even in small daily events and routines? If we obey God in small things, we are more likely to obey Him in big things as well.
- Our human tendency is to maximise gains and minimise losses. Sometimes, God calls us to let go of our gains and accept our losses. The Jews who chose to go into exile had to let go of everything - their land, their city, their Temple. They thought it was a big loss. However, the bigger loss was if they had lost the presence and blessing of God. In the same way, we may be called to let go of things we treasure and to obey Him.

## **CONCLUSION**

Let us not be discouraged by our circumstances as they do not determine what is good or bad. God in His Sovereign wisdom knows what is good or bad for us. We simply need to obey Him to enjoy His blessings, even if we do not understand what He calls us to do. Let us not rely on our common sense looking at the externals, but see the situation we are in with eyes of faith, and obey His word in the Bible to receive His blessing for us.

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## **Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion**

As a group, spend some time to share your success and struggle in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do at the previous meeting.

### A. Review Sermon Content

***Purpose: Reflect on one key takeaway.***

Appoint someone to read Jeremiah 24:1-10 twice, slowly.

1. At the end of the reading, the reader will say, ‘This is the Word of the Lord.’

All to respond, “Thanks be to God.” Our response reminds us that this is the Word of the Lord. Just as God had spoken to His people in the past, He is still speaking to us even today, right now.”

- a. As God's word was read, which verse speaks to you the most?

- b.
  - (i) What is the key takeaway for you from the sermon “Not What We Think”?
  - (ii) How will you align the way you live to your key takeaway?

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## **B. Relate Sermon Content**

***Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.***

- 2a. God revealed to Jeremiah that the Jews taken into captivity were good figs and those who remain in Jerusalem bad figs, while the court prophets claimed that God had rewarded those who remained in Jerusalem.
  - (i) Why is there a difference in view?
  - (ii) What does this tell you about man?
  - (iii) What does this tell you about God?
  
- 2b. How does knowing “Our circumstances don’t determine what’s good and what’s bad, God does” impact how you will view and respond to difficult circumstances in your life?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3a. Are you surprised that God can call you to give up what is humanly considered “gains” or even to incur “loses” to obey Him and be blessed?
- 3b. What is one thing in the Bible that you are unable to obey in the everyday routine of your life?
- 3c. How can your group members help or encourage you to overcome 3b above, in the following week(s) until your next meeting?

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## **C. Testimonies and Prayer**

***Purpose: Give glory to God and seek Him.***

4. Share your testimony on how the Holy Spirit helped you choose to obey God even when you had to give up something precious or important to you. Give thanks to God for the blessing you received through this obedience.

OR

Give thanks to God for His plan to bring you through a process of healing and restoration even in difficult circumstances in your life, as long as you obey Him.

5. With a prayer partner, take time to pray for the concerns in 3b. and 3c. Commit to encourage each other to trust God's definition of what is good or bad and choose to obey Him even when you do not understand fully.

As a group, pray that the Holy Spirit will enable you to see your situations with eyes of faith trusting that God's plan for your good is "Not What You Think".

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