

The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

Text

Jeremiah 2:1-8

Topic

God remembers the love of His betrothal to the people of Judah and encourages them to do the same

Title

“An Affiance to Remember”

Introduction

If ever there was a misleading name for a TV show it was the 1950's classic *The Honeymooners*. The marriage depicted was anything but a honeymoon. Bus driver Ralph Cramden had a short fuse and a loud mouth and his wife, Alice, had a sharp tongue and could give as good as she got.

It seemed like every episode Ralph threatened to uppercut Alice so hard he'd send her, as he said, “to the moon!” In another recurring line of dialog he would say to his wife, “One of these days... One of these days... POW! Right in the kisser!”

I guess that was ‘honeymooning’ in the '50's. Today we tend to call that sort of thing spousal abuse.

In his first message to the nation of Judah, Jeremiah portrays God as fondly remembering the honeymoon with His beloved people while they are severely abusing His love for them.

I can't help but be reminded of the words of Jesus, in a letter He wrote in the Revelation to His beloved bride, the church at Ephesus, in which He said that they had left their first love for Him.

If it was possible for Judah and for the saints at Ephesus to leave their first love, it is possible for us... For you... For me.

To encourage us to remember and, if necessary, to return, I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 God Is Prone To Remember The Love Of Your Betrothal, and #2 You Are Prone To Leave The Love Of Your Betrothal.

#1 God Is Prone To Remember
The Love Of Your Betrothal
(v1-3)

The Wilkinson & Boa Bible Handbook says this as it introduces Jeremiah:

Jeremiah is the autobiography of one of Judah's greatest prophets during the nation's darkest days. Apostasy, idolatry, perverted worship, moral decay - these were the conditions under which Jeremiah lived and ministered. An avalanche of judgment is coming, and Jeremiah is called to proclaim that message faithfully for forty years. In response to his sermons, the tender prophet of God experiences intense sorrows at the hands of his countrymen: opposition, beatings, isolation, [and] imprisonment. But though rejected and persecuted, Jeremiah lives to see many of his prophecies come true. The Babylonian army arrives; vengeance falls; and God's holiness and justice are vindicated, though it breaks [Jeremiah's] heart.

In chapter two we have Jeremiah's first recorded sermon. A total of twelve such sermons (or thirteen, depending upon who is outlining!) are recorded for us from here through chapter twenty-five.

This inaugural sermon ends at verse five of chapter three. We're going to take our time and look at it in its thematic parts. The first part describes a betrothal that has been betrayed.

Jeremiah 2:1 Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying,

How, exactly, "the word of the Lord came to" Jeremiah we don't know. It may have been audibly; or it may have been by a distinct impression; or it may have been by some combination of means.

We have the Word of God in its completed, written form. We have the Holy Spirit indwelling us to teach us the Word. Then, too, God still ‘speaks’ to us by His still, small voice. Prophecies, dreams, waking visions, similes and such are all still available for God to communicate with us. We just need to be sure to test everything we hear or receive that is not *in* His written Word *by* His written Word.

Jeremiah 2:2 "Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: "I remember you, The kindness of your youth, The love of your betrothal, When you went after Me in the wilderness, In a land not sown.

This was the opening note of the series of messages warning Judah of judgment and captivity. They were evil, wicked, perverse idolators. They had brought idols into the Temple. They had their children gathering wood for the sacrifices they made on altars to Canaanite gods. They were worshipping the Queen of Heaven.

How did God choose to begin warning these backsliders? **By wooing them!** God revealed His romantic recollections of their first love for Him.

When God said “the kindness of your youth,” it was *their* “kindness” He was remembering, not His own. One odd but informative definition for the word translated “kindness” is *good-deedliness*. It describes a zealous response to God. They were initially zealous to perform good deeds simply because they were pleasing to the One who loved them.

Then God described this time as “the love of your betrothal.” God thought of the early days fondly, as that of a joyous, voluntary, mutual engagement between a Bridegroom and His future bride.

They went after God “in the wilderness, in a land not sown.” In those ancient times people didn’t routinely leave their homes to go out into the wilderness with no prospects of supply. But they did when God led them. It’s reminiscent of the sometimes crazy things people are willing to do when they are madly in love.

You and I read the story of the Exodus and see and hear these people grumbling and complaining on almost every page. *That’s not what God*

chose to remember of them! He remembered only their passionate love and their promise of a lifetime of commitment.

We can't say of God that 'love is blind,' but He certainly is selective in what He chooses to remember and think about. It's here in the Book of Jeremiah where we will encounter the oft quoted, much loved verse,

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.

This opening sermon is a great example of God thoughts toward His people - what He chooses to think about and to remember.

Jeremiah 2:3 Israel was holiness to the LORD, The firstfruits of His increase. All that devour him will offend; Disaster will come upon them," says the LORD.' "

"Holiness" here means *separated* to the Lord. God called out a unique people for Himself and they responded, separating themselves to the Lord.

They were "the firstfruits of His increase," meaning they would have the privilege of showing all the other nations, peoples, tribes and tongues on the earth what it meant to be loved by God.

As they went about revealing Him He would keep them safe in the world - miraculously safe.

If you are a believer, God thinks about how much you were overwhelmed by His love when you first got saved. He remembers your good-deedliness. Your willingness to follow Him anywhere, at any time. He fondly recalls the love of your betrothal.

That's exactly what Jesus thought about the church at Ephesus. They were busy doing everything in the name of the Lord but with no love for the Lord. He still saw them as His beloved bride and spoke to them of returning to their first love, to the love of their betrothal.

You and I are grumblers... complainers... sinners. God chooses to remember us as His betrothed.

If the idea that Jesus looks upon you this way doesn't humble you, doesn't break you down, doesn't produce in you an aptness to repent, then you're pretty far removed from the first love He's describing.

Although these verses are about how God saw Judah, and by application how He sees us, it's good to remember how **you** felt about God when you first got saved. There was an abandonment, an obedience, a willingness, a submission, that defied rational explanation.

That's how we should live still. You see, since we are betrothed and awaiting the Bridegroom from Heaven to come for us, we haven't even gotten to the wedding! Technically, the honeymoon can't be over **because we haven't even had one yet!** Eternity with Jesus in Heaven is our honeymoon.

Remember your first love. Jesus does - fondly.

#2 You Are Prone To Leave
The Love Of Your Betrothal
(v4-8)

When a relationship is failing we like to say, "it takes two." That's not always true, by the way. One partner can do a lot of damage on their own.

"It takes two" is **never** true with regard to a relationship with God. His love never changes and can never fail. It only takes one, and in the fifth century BC the one was the kingdom of Judah.

Jeremiah 2:4 Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob and all the families of the house of Israel.

About 930BC Israel had split into two nations - Israel to the north and Judah, "the house of Jacob," to the south. Israel was overrun and taken captive by the Assyrians in the mid 700's BC. Jeremiah included them in his sermon because the things he was saying applied to the Jews before the split.

Jeremiah 2:5 Thus says the LORD: "What injustice have your fathers found in Me, That they have gone far from Me, Have followed idols, And have become idolaters?"

“Injustice” would be better translated “iniquity,” meaning *wickedness* or *evil*. The Jews acted as if God had somehow betrayed them, had somehow mistreated them, had somehow tricked them. It was as if they had discovered some secret wickedness of God’s.

In the Star Trek feature film, *The Undiscovered Country*, the USS Enterprise and its famous crew are commandeered by Spock’s brother who is on a search to find God on the other side of something called the Great Barrier. When they brave the danger and finally find ‘God,’ *he wants to use their starship*. Captain Kirk utters the classic line, “What does God need with a starship?”

‘God’ starts shooting at them! (He’s a notoriously bad shot, by the way). He turns out to be a cosmic criminal who deceived them into finding him so he could break out of his imprisonment.

That’s how the Jews were treating God. As a cosmic criminal who had somehow deceived them into following Him.

Jeremiah 2:6 Neither did they say, 'Where is the LORD, Who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, Who led us through the wilderness, Through a land of deserts and pits, Through a land of drought and the shadow of death, Through a land that no one crossed And where no one dwelt?'

Jeremiah 2:7 I brought you into a bountiful country, To eat its fruit and its goodness. But when you entered, you defiled My land And made My heritage an abomination.

While God was choosing to selectively remember the love of their betrothal, the Jews were willfully choosing to forget it.

Where you set your mind; what you choose to think about and to remember; is very, very important. God always sets His mind on His love for you. Even if He must ultimately discipline you, it is motivated by His love for you.

What is your mind set on, really? *What* or *who* do you think about? And do you think that you *can* or *cannot* choose what to think about? You can; you should; you must!

Jeremiah 2:8 The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' And those who handle the law did not know Me; The rulers also transgressed against Me; The prophets prophesied by Baal, And walked after things that do not profit.

The priests and the princes and the prophets were especially singled-out as being responsible for the defection of the people. Everyone was accountable but the leaders even more so.

Two things come to mind with reference to the responsibilities of leadership:

1. The first thing that comes to mind is that we ought not to be so anxious to lead! Let God raise you up. Don't promote yourself. In the New Testament Book of James we are even told, "not many of you should presume to be teachers... because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (3:1 NIV).
2. The second thing that comes to mind, though, is that if you are called to lead, *you had better get with it!* Pastor Timothy was told by the apostle Paul to stir up the gift that was in him, roll up his spiritual sleeves, and get to work pastoring the church in Ephesus.

Almost all of us are called to lead someone, some way. Are you a husband? Better get with it! Are you a parent - dad or mom? You're a leader and you'd better get with it! If you've been a believer longer than someone else, you're to be discipling them by your example. Better get with it!

God was wooing His chosen nation. They would not repent. He would therefore allow the Babylonian armies of King Nebuchadnezzar to besiege them three times - the third time destroying both the city of Jerusalem and its Temple. Then, in captivity for seventy years, their hearts would return to Him and He would regather them.

What about the church at Ephesus? Did they remember the love of their betrothal after Jesus wooed them in His letter?

One source says this: “We have no way of knowing whether they corrected their problem and later were poisoned by some false doctrine, but, sadly, the church died sometime during the second century.”

When Jesus wrote to the church at Ephesus, He was writing to “whoever has an ear to hear.” It was to the church universal, down through history, right up to our church.

We are prone to leave the love of our betrothal. Pastor Robert Robinson understood this, even at the young age of twenty-two, when he wrote the words to the familiar hymn, *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*. In the fourth stanza we sing,

*O to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
Prone to leave the God I love;
*Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.**

Whether Judah is being addressed by Jeremiah, or the church by Jesus, God portrays our wandering from the love of the betrothal as our choice. First love isn't lost; it is **left**. We leave it for some substitute that cannot love us with an everlasting love. We leave it for a poor substitute.

God's solution to first love left is for us to “remember.” This remembering has at least two components to it:

1. The first component is to identify the thing you've substituted for Jesus. To His affianced in Ephesus He said, “remember from where you have fallen” (2:5). When you fall normally it's because you tripped over something, or something stumbled you. In this context Jesus was saying you can fall over something that becomes a stumbling block to your love for Him. Is it the love of money? A love for the world? An idol that takes His place? Another person? The ministry?

2. The second component is to realize what Jesus thinks of you. Here is how the Holy Spirit describes Jesus as your Bridegroom.

Ephesians 5:25 ... [Jesus] Christ also [loves] the church and gave Himself for her,
Ephesians 5:26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

Ephesians 5:27 that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.

Is *anything* or *anybody* other than Jesus going to do that for you? *They're not because they can't!*

But He can, and He will. Now, if you remember, really remember, the love of your betrothal, you can't help but "repent," which means *to change your mind*.

Then you will find yourself back in an attitude of good-deedliness.

Let's close on another stanza from *Come Thou Fount of Many Blessings*. See if this is your heart's desire and, if it isn't, **repent**.

*O that day when freed from sinning,
I shall see Thy lovely face;
Clothèd then in blood washed linen
How I'll sing Thy sovereign grace;
Come, my Lord, no longer tarry,
Take my ransomed soul away;
Send thine angels now to carry
Me to realms of endless day.*