



# The Fiery Bones

Jeremiah 20:9

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Text

Jeremiah 24:1-10

Topic

Jeremiah is shown two baskets of figs, one ripe, one rotten, that illustrate the people of Judah

Title

*"The Basket Case Scenario"*

Introduction

MacGyver could fix anything with common, everyday materials.

In the series' pilot, after MacGyver uses a paper clip to short-circuit a highly advanced timing device on a nuclear warhead and diffuse the bomb at the very last second, he comes back to save the day with chocolate. He uses it to plug up a sulfuric acid leak explaining that, when mixed with acid, the sugars in chocolate form a thick, gummy residue.

People refer to MacGyver all the time when they have to improvise.

Just a few weeks ago surgeons at University of Kansas Hospital faced a dilemma. They had a healthy liver from an organ donor but it was too large to fit into their transplant patient. They decided to cut the liver in half and use it to save two patients.

At the press conference after the procedures one of the surgeons said, "transplant surgery is sometimes like MacGyver surgery."

You know who else is like MacGyver? God is, when He's working on your spiritual heart. He uses common, everyday materials at His disposal and through them shows you He loves you and has a glorious future in mind for you.

You know what else is like MacGyver surgery? God working on your spiritual heart. He uses common, everyday materials at His disposal and through them shows you He loves you and has a glorious future in mind for you.

In many cases the common, everyday materials available to God are in categories we do not appreciate or approve of. He uses suffering, affliction, adversity, persecution and the like.

Why does He use those things?

- Look around. We live in a fallen world.
- Look within. We are sinful human beings.

Suffering, affliction, adversity, persecution and the like are the materials readily available to God to work on our sinful hearts.

A few words in our text that gripped me were "I will give them a heart to know Me..."

Is that not what Adam and Eve had in the Garden - a heart to know God? Is that not what they forfeited and what God has been at work to restore - a heart to know Him?

I want to have a heart to know God and I know you do as well.

Our text will describe two groups of people in sixth century Judah, You guessed it - one group has a heart to know God while the other says "No" to God.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Humbling Yourself Accompanies A Heart To Know God, and #2 Hardening Yourself Accompanies A Heart That Says "No" To God.

## #1 Humbling Yourself Accompanies A Heart To Know God (v1-7)

Our chapter describes the Jews after the second Babylonian invasion and deportation in 597BC. The nobles and the craftsmen and the finest young men have been taken to Babylon. Daniel and his three friends are there, as is Ezekiel. The stage was set for one final invasion in which Jerusalem and its Temple would be destroyed and most of the Jews who remained in Judah would be killed.

God likened these two groups - one in Babylon and one in Judah - to two baskets of figs.

### Jeremiah 24:1-3

1 The Lord showed me, and there were two baskets of figs set before the temple of the Lord, after Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the princes of Judah with the craftsmen and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon.

2 One basket had very good figs, like the figs that are first ripe; and the other basket had very bad figs which could not be eaten, they were so bad.

3 Then the Lord said to me, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" And I said, "Figs, the good figs, very good; and the bad, very bad, which cannot be eaten, they are so bad."

Baskets of just-ripened figs would be a common sight outside the Temple because they could be offered as firstfruits to The Lord.

Obviously it was unusual to see a basket of bad, very bad, figs that could not be eaten and certainly would not be offered.

I like it that the illustration was simple. We try so hard to complicate God and His Word. Maybe we want to seem smart, or at least not dumb. Let's work hard to stay simple, clear, and plain.

For his part Jeremiah could repeat the details accurately. He let the Word of God speak for itself.

### Jeremiah 24:4-7

4 Again the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

5 "Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: 'Like these good figs, so will I acknowledge those who are carried away captive from Judah, whom I have sent out of this place for their own good, into the land of the Chaldeans.'

6 For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up.

7 Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.

A foreign power who worshipped pagan gods had twice invaded Judah and carried-off Jews who were now permanently exiled in Babylon. In exile they had their names changed and were expected to eat unclean foods and were subject to all manner of worldliness and wickedness.

Yet God said, **twice**, that it was for their own "good."

It makes spiritual sense if we remember that God's purpose was to give them a heart to know Him. They were far from Him, going through the motions of worship but living in the world. He had been calling to them, for many decades, through His prophets but to no avail. Looking upon them as a group, seeing their collective idolatry, God determined to use Babylon to bring them to repentance. It was time to intervene in order that they might "return to [God] with their whole heart."

Maybe a few words from Job will help put this into perspective. After his incredible suffering Job was able to declare, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You" (42:5). His heart had been affected by affliction for his good.

Should God have left them alone? Of course not. Did He have to be so harsh? He used what was at His disposal, given their hardheartedness, to effect the necessary transformation.

They were sinners living in a fallen world but God would MacGyver their hearts to know Him by using what was at His disposal.

You and I remain sinners. We are saved sinners having been justified by faith. God uses what is at His disposal in this fallen world to effect transformation so we might have "hearts to know Him."

For our part we ought to humble ourselves in our sufferings, in our adversities, in our afflictions, in our persecutions, so God might reveal attitudes and impulses and habits that we really **do** want Him to transform.

I'm suggesting what this text is suggesting, that if you are going through something God wants to use it so you will "know Him" more than ever before. It's what every Christian's heart longs for. It's just that we would rather God do it by showering us with health and wealth and prosperity.

You know what I hear a lot from Christians? A trial will come upon them, something severe like cancer, and they will say, "We never really had any trials to speak of until now." You know what else they say? They say they didn't understand the depth and breadth of God's grace and mercy and love until the trial either.

God is good all the time and what you are going through is for your good if you will humble yourself and return to The Lord.

## #2 Hardening Yourself Accompanies A Heart That Says "No" To God

(v8-10)

By now you may have forgotten the basket of bad, very bad, figs.

Jeremiah 24:8-10

8 'And as the bad figs which cannot be eaten, they are so bad' - surely thus says the Lord - 'so will I give up Zedekiah the king of Judah, his princes, the residue of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt.

9 I will deliver them to trouble into all the kingdoms of the earth, for their harm, to be a reproach and a byword, a taunt and a curse, in all places where I shall drive them.

10 And I will send the sword, the famine, and the pestilence among them, till they are consumed from the land that I gave to them and their fathers.' "

On the surface this may sound indiscriminate on God's part. After all, did these people have a choice as to whether or not they would be left behind?

Actually they did have a choice. Jeremiah had been urging the nation's leaders to surrender to Babylon but they had refused. Instead of obeying God they looked to Egypt for political and military aid. Some had even fled to Egypt against God's expressed will.

The people remaining in and around Jerusalem wanted to be there against God's will.

It's even been suggested that they thought themselves superior to the exiles since they remained in the Promised Land.

Given the situation they found themselves in they chose to say "No" to God, evidence of a hard heart.

There's a long-running theological debate as to whether God hardens your heart or you harden it. I came across this quote that puts it into what I think is the proper biblical perspective.

"A man hardens his own heart by not yielding to the will of God, while God hardens a man's heart by not yielding to the whims of man."

A man hardens his own heart by not yielding to the will of God, while God hardens a man's heart by not yielding to the whims of man.

God won't yield to your whims. He knows that anything other than, or outside of, His will for your life is bad for you both in the short run but mostly in the long run. If you insist on rebelling against His will He cannot change. God hardens your heart by not changing His will, demanding instead that you comply.

Think of a parent disciplining their rebellious child. If the child will humble himself, great; you're back in fellowship. But if he won't humble himself, you cannot simply change your mind. As you hold your ground against rebellion the child's heart hardens all the more, confirming he is in sin, until such time as he humbles himself. That is the sense in which God hardens the sinner's heart.

God wants to give you a heart to know Him. As long as we remain this side of Heaven, in these bodies of sin and death, we will be subject to God MacGyvering our hearts to know Him using the common materials He has at His disposal in our fallen world.



Of course, if you are a Christian, you already know Him in the sense of being saved. What we are talking about here is an ongoing experience with God, a deepening intimacy with Him.

Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God. It's for your good.