

**Sentence**

All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. *Luke 14:11*

**Collect**

Lord of all power and might, the Author and Giver of all good things, grant in our hearts the love of Your Name, increase in us true religion, nourish us in all goodness, and of Your great mercy keep us in the same, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

**OLD TESTAMENT LESSON**

**Jeremiah 2: 4 – 13**

**PSALM**

**81: 1 and 10 – 16**

**EPISTLE**

**Hebrews 13: 1 – 8 & 15 – 16**

**GOSPEL**

**Luke 14: 1 & 7 – 14**

**NOTES ON THE READINGS. ....**

**Old Testament Lesson**

If ever it comes as a surprise to you that people, even in our own country and community, turn their back on God, please stop and see that this is no modern and singular occurrence. One of the tools necessary to being a Christian in this day and age, seems to me, it is be aware of history, ancient and more modern.

Jeremiah began his work as prophet before the Fall of Jerusalem, before the Exile. One might have thought that the fall of the northern kingdom, about 150 years before, would have been clarification enough to what was left of Israel. But human nature being what it is, even then no one learned the lessons of history. It was not some modern or recent historian or philosopher who realized that the collapse of nations and cultures tend to stem from within, but rather those ancient worthies we call prophets, many of them ‘minor.’

Israel’s fall from grace was monumental: there was no gratitude at the memory of the God Who rescued them from Egypt (and was about to do it again.) There was only the sideways look at other deities that seemed to promise more immediate gratification – the *ba’als* of the Philistines and other locals. Cargo cult gods and goddesses. (Sound familiar?) That final sentence of today’s passage from Jeremiah could just as equally be referring to today’s Western society. They have rejected reality in favour of something immensely inferior, and then blame others for the mess. *What’s new, pussycat?*

**Psalm**

Even the Psalmist is having his word to say on exactly the same subject. And he would have been composing his psalm rather well before dear old Jeremiah was having his word to say. Here is no simplistic response to hard times. Here is the clear recognition that it is only as people, individually and corporately, embrace and live out the obvious values of justice, truth, integrity and compassion, that life will even begin to reflect the possibilities for each and all. *When will we ever learn?*

**Epistle**

This ancient writer may be hard to follow sometimes, but here is the pragmatist for you. He was aware that the People of God are living in a world that disregards God, so that while we live for God we are aware also that ‘we look for a city that is to come.’ A colony of heaven, Paul describes us. So we are a small sample of what very well might be if people gave more attention to that which is important, those values mentioned above. The Faith is, after all, about the redemption of the **world**, and that means everything that is around you, including population.

**GOSPEL**

And is not quite some of the issues that make that redemption more difficult lie embedded in this short and pithy cameo about people. Forget it being a 2,000 year-old tale. It is as modern as tomorrow.

Whatever is it that drives people (us!!!) to set up ourselves as every other person’s superior? Best seat, Best house. Best car. Best income. Best every damn thing. It will always be the case. Even Christians attempt to outdo each other in their ‘faith,’ and if you don’t believe me, listen to them as they say their prayers. It is precisely this attempt to lead, dominate, prove to be better, that drives huge wedges into communities, families, relationships. Ours is the best Church. Ours is the best theology. And we wonder why what we may call unredeemed humanity (or the Western part of it) does not respond to the Gospel! We have yet to be converted ourselves.

Jesus was ever the magnificent hitter of nails on the head. The burster of balloons. Sadly, much of it goes right over our heads.

## **NOTES FOR A SERMON**

*I have more than a sneaky suspicion that there is enough above to build something on*

**Sentence**

Whoever does not carry the cross and follow Jesus cannot be His disciple

*Luke 14:27*

**Collect**

God of the ages, You call the Church to keep watch in the world, and to discern the sign of the times. Grant us the wisdom that Your Spirit bestows, so that with courage we may proclaim Your prophetic word, and complete the work that You have set before us; through Your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,

**Amen**

**OLD TESTAMENT LESSON**

**Jeremiah 18:1 – 11**

**PSALM**

**139: 1 – 5 and 12 - 18**

**EPISTLE**

**Philemon 1 – 25**

**GOSPEL**

**Luke 14: 25 – 35**

**NOTES ON THE READINGS .....**

There are enormous profundities in this passage, in both an individual and corporate<sup>1</sup> sense. On the one hand, it goes against current sentiments about us humans being ‘self-made’ – which does not really balance with the realities. It also runs against current thinking where we have countries determined to express their control and superiority over others, and then come crashing down.

This passage is, first of all for me, a reminder that I am not self-made, for I do not owe my existence, skills or even potentials to myself. Nor do I owe it to my genetics. I am rather more than the sum of my genes and nerve-endings, and in fact my whole life is an amalgam of all of the above and more. But the reality is that I have been given this enormous gift, with all its ups and downs, to see what I will make of it. It is the Potter Who has provided the scenario. And that Potter is quite capable of some remarkable interventions of His own. I can choose to respond to all this, or to turn my back on this, but I am in no position to be unaffected by it all.

This passage is also a reminder, to me at least, that the same applies to communities, countries, and even civilizations. The more I read and understand Scripture, the more I see this stunning perception by Hebrew prophets and others, that God is Lord of human history, not in any interventionist sense, but certainly in the fact that they see this as a moral universe, and one operates against that morality at some risk to themselves. As a nation becomes irreligious, or ignores what (these days) we call human rights, there is only one way for them to go. In recent decades, we have seen in it Germany, in Uganda, in the USSR, and there are enough examples currently to illustrate further. It is also clear that there are countries and cultures that go through the experience, *and still learn absolutely nothing*.

So here is a lot to ponder. God does not punish; He allows people to make their own choices, but there is that aspect that if I act stupidly or irresponsibly, I will carry the can for that folly, and may well catch up others in the damage that ensues.

This is not a word all that welcome in today’s atmospherics, now is it!

**Psalm**

For some, this Psalm may sound all a little twee or even slightly threatening. It is designed to be neither of those. Here is some worthy ancient who has pondered, as Jeremiah did but from a different perspective, about what it means to be him. And what he realized is that there is quite some encouragement and support to realize that (a) God is very aware of our ins and outs, and (b) we owe the gift of life to Him. That tends to remove much of the almost mechanistic view of ‘person’ that seems to permeate much of today’s thinking ... or lack of it. As mentioned above, there is rather more to you and me than the sum of our nerve endings, genes and experiences bad and good from our youth. This is not to deny the baleful effect of quite some of those things, but it does point to a far more positive response and reaction to those things. I can choose to move up from there. *Thank God!*

**Epistle**

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<sup>1</sup> Not as in ‘companies,’ but in communities, countries, cultures.

There is almost too little space to expand on this remarkable and individual epistle which has been included in Holy Writ. The story of Onesimus (useless one!) is far from that, and is indicative of the potentials and possibilities of change and betterment that stems from the Gospel. This runaway slave had the (mis)fortune to run into Paul, who was under house arrest, in Rome. And the change in the man is remarkable. Paul sent the man back, *no longer as slave but as brother* - and in fairly typical NT manner, quietly demolishes the question of slavery in Christian society. The tragedy lies in the fact that it took Christians nearly 1800 years to catch sight the Pauline reality, in spite of the fact that it is cited in several of the letters of the Apostle. Why do some of us still need rules to make a point and change an attitude?

## **Gospel**

It may be the day and age, but readings such as this one seems – to me at least – to underline the profound seriousness of choice to follow or not to follow Christ. So much of modern and popular Christianity seems, to me, to be feel good, ‘positive’ stuff which has more connection with New Age material than with the Gospel of Christ. In fact, some of that populist stuff has closer connections with capitalism than with anything else. ‘If I am faithful, God will prosper me.’ I remember how some New Guinea indigenous people fostered the Cargo Cult ‘thing’ in the years following World War II.

When one realises that the Gospel has as much to do with redemption of the world (from clear and powerful selfishness,) and that Jesus, here, was underlining the necessity of profound and complete commitment, then light-hearted stuff would appear to have little room at all.

Mind you, one needs to be metaphorical rather than literal if western people are to take hold properly of Jesus’ words. When Scripture talks about ‘hating’ in this sort of context, that obviously harsh word needs to be understood in terms of priority, If I love you, my focus is upon you; if I hate you, then you are relegated to second or third row. So, if I am to follow Christ, I first need to understand quite what it is to which He calls me, and then to be committed and consistent in that discipleship. Responsibility and reliability are two solid requirements, and sadly both of these are often lacking in today’s world.

## **NOTES FOR A SERMON**

*Again, I suspect there is enough to go on already*

**Sentence**

*Jesus said, "I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repents."*

*Luke 15:10*

**Collect**

O God, without You we are not able to please You; mercifully grant that Your Holy Spirit may in all things direct and rule our hearts, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

**OLD TESTAMENT LESSON**

**Jeremiah 4: 11 – 14 and 22 – 28**

**PSALM**

**14**

**EPISTLE**

**1 Timothy 1 (part)**

**GOSPEL**

**Luke 15: 1 – 10**

**NOTES ON THE READINGS**

**Old Testament**

In a way, it is terribly easy to understand why preachers of a century or so ago thundered against their supposedly sinful people. Perhaps it is the guilt thing that seems to affect some humans most, but it does not even begin to hit the spots that the old prophets were outlining. Of all the peoples of their time, Israel and its religion focussed far more on the social issues of justice and truth and integrity, painfully aware of the fact that any peoples of any time bring themselves undone when there is the constant practice of injustice and unfairness in their 'public and private life.'

Here Jeremiah, preaching before the fall of the Southern Kingdom, underlined not only this widespread evidence of injustice in the land, *but also of the determined wilfulness on the part of those predators within the community that bled their underlings to death.*

What modern man seems, likewise, both unwilling to know and disinterested to follow, is that this is a moral universe, and that to follow that self-driven and self obsessive path leads only to the disintegration of the entire community. This time, our time, it may well be a global disaster rather than just a fairly localized one. This is profoundly significant stuff, and we ignore it at our peril.

**Psalm**

Well, what can I add to this most pointed and powerful of psalms. Someone has really thought out the issues and commented accordingly. We may feel it to be a little over the top, but then ever now and again overstatement can bring people to their senses. This is a fascinating Psalm to link with the first lesson.

**Epistle**

A far wiser head than mine commented, some ars back, that when people stop believing in God, they do not believe nothing! *They will believe **anything!*** Nothing new about this either, as Paul commented in his pastoral letter to Timothy. It is a sad but constant human trait to cast aside what is clear and common sense<sup>2</sup> and embrace whatever appeals at the time?

I have long begun to understand that the role of the Church in general and Christians in particular is to have a clear and solid view of the Faith, a solid commitment to it in spite of contrary pressure, and to be around to bear witness if ever and when ever it is asked for.

**Gospel**

Now think about this Gospel cameo in the light of what we have already covered, and notice that even Jesus was aware of the fact that 'many are called but few are chosen.' He was not discouraged by all this but was content by all means to win some. Oddly enough, it will be the so-called sinful one that may well be far more aware of what is important, than another person who is rather more self-satisfied and smug. And it is hard to get through such defences.

I guess it could be said that Jesus was rather more concerned about people who were hurting, and that is often the 'sinful' one, than people who were not. This approach of Jesus was not a matter of dealing with people in

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<sup>2</sup> I have noted elsewhere how 'common sense' is an increasingly rare event these days. Why ever is it that people seem to search for idiocy rather than follow what is clear and obvious and tested by time?

their weaknesses, but rather a matter of empathising with the hurting ones and offering a better way forward. There was never any condescension on the part of Jesus, nor assuming control over vulnerable people. It was all care, pure and simple, and redemptive.

## NOTES FOR A SERMON

At the risk of being repetitive, I mention again that, for the past 30 years or so, I have expressed the concern that although politicians and others have been demanding an increase in population in this fair State, I have questioned the wisdom of that view. This is the driest State of the driest continent in the world, and with our dependence on the waters of the Murray, I have sensed the limitations in that direction. Populations cannot exist without water. Then came the so-called once in a 1,000 year drought, and panic buttons are being pressed all over the place. One aspect of all this I am happy about is that for the first time to my knowledge, urban people are concerned about the crisis that is occurring. *Why is it that no one, least of all our political and other leaders, neither see the problems coming nor do anything about it until the last possible moment?*

There is nothing new in this at all. People with long memories like mine can point to lots and lots of crises arising, and the far-too-late response to them. First World War, Second World War, are instances. Sure, we managed to escape by the skin of our teeth, but we seem always to have lacked the statesmen (or women) to have foresight sufficient to move sooner and more effectively.

Now, here in this morning's First Lesson, we have the evidence that those Old Testament prophets – and Jeremiah in particular, - had a clear grasp of the realities, even though they were political ones actually. That made them national ones, and that made them religious ones. Everything is tied together really, for there can be no separation of realities for us human beings. Jeremiah was aware that the future of Israel lay, not so much in military threats from outside the nation, as it did in the far murkier waters of what was going on within the country. He was problems of integrity and justice, of what the Old Testament calls 'righteousness,' all of which meant that there was decreasing trust between people, and increasing dishonesty in all sorts of areas. Translate 'unrighteousness' as 'selfishness' – and then align our own day and age with its impact, as see that the problem is neither new nor insoluble.

I confess to having been Christian from my youth upwards and whilst my understanding and perception of the Faith was limited in my youth, there has never been much of a time when even what I understood as Christianity was so limited as to be discarded. There is no self-protection in that: I have remained Christian simply because the Faith makes so much sense, **in the real world.**

So I find it rather difficult to take the slightest notice of the tendency of people these days to turn their back on matters of life that have stood the test of time, reject values that their very life depends upon, and choose to follow the most stupid and self-destructive of patterns. Even if they consider that God is dead, they have to recognize that the Biblical values are invaluable. Even if they turn their back on a Church that has tended to avoid facing huge faults in some of its leaders,<sup>3</sup> there is still the clear and present evidence of the solidity of the Biblical (and that means Jewish as well as Christian) values – for they are about people and their needs and hopes and fears.

Perhaps there is an issue that many may have with the Faith, that has often been presented almost in terms of overpowering guilt. A century or so ago, the general expectation was that preachers pounded the 'sin' issue, trying to convince people that they were sinners and thus consigned to hell. However such ancients ever managed to then go on to talk of a loving and forgiving God escapes me entirely. Certainly that stilted emphasis has little connection with the Jesus of the New Testament.

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<sup>3</sup> While it is no excuse, I have estimated that the number of clergy and others guilty of child- and other abuse could be no more than one percent of the total of such people.

**Sentence**

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich. **2 Corinthians 8:9**

**Collect**

Loving Father, Whose Son, Jesus Christ, taught us that what we do for the least of our brothers and sisters, we do also for Him; give us the will to be the servant of others, as He was the servant of all, Who gave up His life and died for us, yet lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

**OLD TESTAMENT LESSON**

**Jeremiah 8:18 – 9:1**

**PSALM**

**79:1 – 9**

**EPISTLE**

**1 Timothy 2: 1 – 10**

**GOSPEL**

**Luke 16: 1 – 13**

**NOTES ON THE READINGS .....**

*There seems to be some sort of common view of the Faith that it is all about softness and comfort and sweetness and light. Well, this set of readings alone ought to be enough to disabuse anyone away from such thoughts. In fact, these readings present some huge problems even to a believer who sees the faith in terms of any distance between the harsh realities of life and spiritual experience.*

*If there is one thing that has delighted me continually about the Hebrew faith that we have inherited from the past is precisely the way that the wise ones of Israel recognized the absolute need to cope with the ugliness of life and looking to find God's hand even in that. When modern-day Christians avoid that enormous challenge, the only thing they have left is to try and disappear into some sort of other-worldly vapour. Anyone who attempts to escape or sidestep reality – in whatever sphere of human endeavour – is destined to end up in a total and absolute mess. **Never forget that! EVER!***

**Old Testament Lesson**

*Is there no balm in Gilead* This was a favourite saying of my mother, who knew her Scriptures very well, but I doubt she understood the context.

Unless we are aware of one of the most formative experiences of Jewish history, the impact of this passage (and much of the major prophets) will go past our ears without comprehension. And that would be tragic in the extreme. The sack of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple, in fact the destruction of the nation, was an event so shattering to the people that they were left wondering if God was dead or even never existed. In 597BC or thereabouts, the life of Israel was snuffed out, and almost all contemporary thought on the subject was, that if a god's temple was destroyed, then so was the god and all of the religious ritual attached.<sup>4</sup> This was end of world stuff, in a way. Or so it seemed. But here in this remarkable passage, (a passage paralleled time and again in the Old Testament prophets,) Jeremiah saw clearly that not only was the hand of God very evident in the whole event however ugly, but that it hurt Him as much as Israel, who had brought the disaster upon themselves.

If you wish it put simply, then ponder this: do you not learn far more from your disasters, than you do from the things you do right – and does not the former experience remain almost as bedrock to the rest of your life and living?

**Psalms**

Now it becomes clearer, does it not, that the Psalmist is pondering the same event (or series of events) trying to see where God's hand is in it all. First of all the psalmist looks to God to belt the living daylights out of whoever perpetrated the ugly business, and then goes on to realize that the real responsibility lay at the feet of Israel herself. That alone is a huge step forward. Mind you, it would take several more centuries before the People of God began to realize that God's wrath (v 6) was far more significant than severe punishment – rather it is seen as the Lord stepping back and requiring humans to cope with the consequences of their foolish choices, not to punish but rather to hope we learn from those errors and stupidities, so that they are not repeated.

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<sup>4</sup> Remember Samson and the bringing down of the temple of Dagon then!

## Epistle

*I am cheeky enough to suggest that you read a little further than the selected verses, and see whether you can cope with Paul's injunctions about the female part of the population. Depending on your point of view, you may well have conniptions with the Pauline view. Mind you, I suspect it was more a practical response to the day rather than a theological one. Paul was not quite the misogynist that many seem to think.*

In line with what we have seen in the preceding readings, this passage shows Paul's very Jewish recognition that God is Lord of all humanity, and that nothing in life escapes His purview and care. Please note that 'salvation' has as much to do with wholeness and health as it does with rather more 'spiritual' matters. So Paul's concern in this pastoral epistle of his was the welfare of the people of God, and in fact the entire population.

## Gospel

Now this parable has presented hundreds of generations with confusion, especially when believers could not imagine Jesus having any truck at all with dishonest and embezzling people. Isn't it strange that we Aussies who can hand out the satire and sarcasm often fail to realize when others use such stratagems. Jesus was simply pointing out that the lateral thinking and actions of the worldly-wise needs to be reflected by the faithful ones. There is never any call to be naïve nor stupid – far too often the Church tends to be 'run' by amateurs when it needs a far more professional approach, looking at all the possibilities. This never means any diminution of morality or values: it does mean taking the responsible reaction to whatever is going on.

In other words, whilst money is important to the extent that – these days at least – a person needs *some* resources, it remains true that the greater asset is always the person not the bank account. It is a truism that is fast being lost by the world at large, and people are hurting as a result. So the question has to do with priorities, - which is why part of the next verse is included in the reading to make a salient point.

## NOTES FOR A SERMON

**My** prelude to the notes may well give a clue as to the direction a sermon might take this weekend. And it runs rather contrary both to what used to be the populist view of God, but now becomes something of the more recent populist 'Christian' understanding of how God works.

I confess to being very cross at people who deride the faith, and the faith's adherents, especially when that criticism may well apply to the views of some adherents, but has little or no connection with the reality. May I be a bit more specific, -although it ay be more than a little painful for some.

Back when I was young, during World War II and its aftermath, there was a very common criticism of God, by those who had been through the utter horror of war. 'If God is supposed to be a God of love, and I have just passed through all that ugliness, then either God does not exist, or 'love' is an utterly untrue definition.' Very many people turned their back on God, on religion, and on anything even slightly connected, and it does not take much imagination to understand why. On the other hand, there has always been a great need to see God as rather more than some sort of protection from life's reality, or as One Who is supposed to look after His own.

If that sounds hard, let's take a look at ordinary human relationships, to see something of which way is really up. I recall countless situations where someone's child or children became entangled in destructive and damaging ways, and the parents' response was to describe their child as 'not like that,' or 'was led astray by others.' It was a sort of almost wilful blindness on the part of the parents, who would say things like 'my child, right or wrong.' A closer examination of the story may well find doting parents whose perception of love was to allow their child to do anything or go anywhere. In later days, it is often a matter that parents neither care nor know what their kids are up to, and feign disbelief when the egg hits the fan. 'My child would never do that!'

In other words, many of such folk seem to consider that love is like an open cheque book that pays for their kids' idiocy, and expects their kin to be grateful, learn from the experience, and become more mature. With parents like that, there is small chance for any real growth except downwards.

In spite of seeing the failure of that approach, many of such people expect God to be operating at the same level, and get very angry or disheartened when nothing like that occurs.

**Sentence**

Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

*James 5: 16*

**Collect**

O God, You declare Your power most chiefly in showing mercy and pity; mercifully give us such a measure of Your grace, that, running in the way of Your commandments, we may obtain Your gracious promises, and be made partakers of Your heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

**Old Testament Lesson**

**Jeremiah 32: 1 –3a & 6 – 16**

**PSALM**

**91:1 – 6 & 14 – 16**

**EPISTLE**

**1 Timothy 6: 6 – 19**

**GOSPEL**

**Luke 16: 19 – 31**

**NOTES ON READINGS**

*Actually, the real impact of these readings came to me when I typed out the Sentence for today. ‘Pray ... that you may be healed.’ You may not be aware of the fact that the Greek word soteria (σωτηρια) covers all sorts of things from ‘salvation’ to ‘healing’ and even ‘wholeness.’ It may well seem rather strange to confess your sins to others, because that is sticking your neck out, is it not. **BIG TIME**. It is being most vulnerable. Now, do not read what follows as any sort of order, but it strikes me that so much of our destructive tensions in life come from our constant refusal to allow anyone at all close to us, **because we can do it all on our own!** If and when I do that to myself, I put all manner of pressure on me – and those around me – and life becomes most uptight. Only if and when I will and am able to trust you, (and you are trustworthy, too ,let me underline in red, ) that anything like soteria comes to me. We can trust each other, and supportive of each other, and if you have never been there, then you have no idea of the relief from pressure that this provides. I kid you not!*

**Old Testament Lesson**

Who in their right mind would be a prophet!!!! That is a statement not a question. Here at one of the most critical periods in Hebrew history, Jeremiah can see what lay ahead for the nation and its king and people. Here is no star-gazer, but a man who is well aware of the pressures and realities of life, history, politics and warfare. No rose-coloured glasses for Jerry, eh! But into what a bind that puts the poor bloke.

Yet in this really quite strange passage, there remains hope, even if it was a long-distance hope. Stop and look again at what Jeremiah was about to do. (a) He was aware painfully that Israel was about to be destroyed, without pity or escape. Then (b) he engaged in the purchase of land that his kinsman situation required him to do. In other words, he took a rather long-term view of life and history, and know that God would bring Israel through the huge difficulties of the time, to another situation where much of the stress would remove. Short-term gains are often not worth the paper on which they are written.

**Psalm**

It does not take much in the way of imagination to see that the Psalmist was preaching the same sermon. Stop long enough to realize that the psalmist would, almost certainly, have come from a previous period of Jewish history, and could well have been from several hundred years before. **His** experience in **his** time would have been helpful for Jeremiah as it is for us. Let’s not kid ourselves; there is nothing terribly special about our time in history, and for all our modernity and hi-tech gear, we still need to look at long-term issues. Our current scare about water should be enough to keep us on our toes.

**EPISTLE**

Dare you to begin to tie in the readings and thoughts so far for today, and catch sight of how significant and relevant this Epistle really is. Far too many people have been overcome by the apparent attraction of great wealth,

and have no other goals than that.<sup>5</sup> As Paul told Timothy, the **love** of money is the root of all evil, and it is also the root of much of the division and separation between us humans. That division and separation is the complete opposite of soteria, do you realize!

## GOSPEL

And here it all is in story form. You have heard the parable often, and whilst you need to remember that parables are parables and need to be pondered rather than pulled apart, you have pictured both the power of the opposite of soteria, and the longing of both characters for that wholeness. Whilst there are many paths to discovery, there is only one path to soteria, in whatever shape you look for it.

## NOTES FOR A SERMON

How would you cope if you were ever put in the position that Jeremiah found himself?

History seems to show how, in times of crisis, the needed leaders somehow bubble up from among *hoi polloi*, like Churchill for instance. Whilst history may well regard such leaders as hugely important, those individuals themselves will also be well aware of the great cost to themselves, particularly if they remain true to their calling and responsibility. History has rather too many examples of those who began well, but finished up making a monumental mess of the situation in which they found themselves.

Back to that original question. I would dare you to see that it was not so much a matter of belief in God that led Jeremiah to be well aware of the vast dangers to Israel, but an awareness of the political and national situation. He knew that there was a great and destructive climax about to hit his beloved country. And he was not afraid to speak the truth, when everyone else wanted propaganda and spin and baloney. *How few political leaders – and their constituents really want the truth. And yet, what chance do any of us have unless we face and respond to the realities.*<sup>6</sup>

Some may well have called Jeremiah negative, faithless, a leader astray of people. However here was a man who was ever the realist. No baloney. No spin. Just plain hard solid fact. Only from there was a solid basis to act.

Notice, too, that Jeremiah was also very much the person of faith. He knew enough about God, and enough about Israel's history, to be aware that here was no 'end-of-the-world' scenario, however climactic the probabilities. Here, Jeremiah saw, was a powerful if destructive lesson for Israel, and one from which that nation had the chance learn some lessons hugely significant. Up to this point, even Jewish leaders had played bobsidie with what they knew to be the ultimate realities, and now they were about to pay the price. Israel may well have been the most religious nation on earth at the time, and certainly had the most developed perceptions about truth and reality, but they had denied them, put them to one side, and counted up all their shekels and superiority to the poor even of their own land. Peoples and nations have done this interminably, but just as interminably they have paid the price. Nations and even civilizations have destroyed themselves on exactly the same anvil.

But there is life beyond nationality and civilization, because those ancient verities remain imperturbable. Paul made that clear in his letter to Timothy, and he was not just being the religious Christian when he wrote those words. He was being the real human. And we need to take the long-term view of such realities, in order to adjust our own actions and attitudes to what is ultimately true.

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<sup>5</sup> One of the young men in the Bible Study group at the local prison is paying the price for following this path. And he saw himself as Christian before and during his debacle which was no accident but rather his design. He knows now where that got him, and has the next 25 years to ponder some more. He is currently all of 30 years old!

<sup>6</sup> Now you begin to see what 'Reality TV' is an utter **contradiction in terms, pardon me!**