

Two Baskets of Figs and a Cup of Wine

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 09 September 2018

Preacher: Shawn Woo

[0 : 0 0] God's word rings truly only when we hold these truths together in tension. And we see that clearly in our passage for today, which teaches us that God preserves those who deserve it and punishes those who do evil.

In chapters 24 to 25, really, we see two visions, and each vision is followed by an explanation. First is the vision of the figs of God's people, and second is the cup of God's wrath.

So let's begin in verse 1, which gives us the historical backdrop at the time when Jeremiah received the first vision. After Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had taken into exile from Jerusalem Jeconiah, the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, together with the officials of Judah, the craftsmen and the metal workers, and had brought them to Babylon, the Lord showed me this vision.

So Jeremiah received these visions after the first Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem, but before the second Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem, where they razed the entire city and destroyed the temple.

So this is when Jeconiah, whose name, another name was Jehoiachin, Josiah's grandson, was exiled to Babylon, along with the leading officials and artisans of Judah. And then Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah as a puppet king of sorts, and Josiah's third son to reign as king over Judah as a tributary of Babylon.

[1 : 1 8] But as we see in the upcoming chapters of Jeremiah, not long after the Babylonian army had left Jerusalem, Zedekiah and the remaining people, the remnant of Judah, started entertaining these delusional optimisms.

False prophets prophesied that the Babylonian exiles would end very quickly, and that Zedekiah got so excited he even became involved in a conspiracy to rebel against Babylon.

So they're getting excited about God restoring them, but Jeremiah bursts their bubbles with these prophecies in chapters 24 to 25. Unlike some of the prophetic revelations in the previous chapters where Jeremiah first sees an ordinary object or event, and then God provides a prophetic subsequent interpretation, here he receives a prophetic vision from the Lord.

That's why he says, the Lord showed me this vision. And what did he see? It says in verses 1 to 2, behold, two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the Lord. One basket had very good figs, like first ripe figs, but the other basket had very bad figs, so bad that they could not be eaten.

So the baskets of figs placed before the temple suggests a first fruit offering, where people brought the first fruits of their produce or livestock to the Lord as an offering of thanksgiving.

[2 : 4 2] And this offering of first fruits was an acknowledgment of God's provision, the fact that God gave all that they have, but it was also a representation of the remainder of the harvest that was still to come.

It was a way of bringing God the first and the best of the produce in acknowledging of his sovereign lordship over their lives. And in the vision, one basket had very good figs, like first ripe figs, again, showing that this is the kind of fruit that was supposed to be brought as a first fruit offering.

It's the best, the first fruit. But the other basket had very bad figs, so bad that they could not be eaten. These are the rotten figs, unfit for human consumption, the unwanted and discarded figs.

And then in verse 5, God proceeds to explain this vision. Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans, and I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land.

I will build them up and not tear them down. I will plant them and not pluck them up. I will give them a heart to know 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.

[4 : 01] The good figs represent not Zedekiah and those who still remain in Jerusalem and Judah, but those who have been exiled to Babylon.

And those who remained in Judah believed that the worst was over and that they could prosper in the land. They thought, well, we're still in the land, so God's favor must be still on us. But God tells them, the future of Judah does not lie with you.

But with the exiles. And some of the exiled officials were actually the very, the ones who had intervened on behalf of Jeremiah during his persecutions as he gave these prophecies of judgment.

But because these officials were exiled, as recorded, we see their protection in chapters 26 and 36. Because they were exiled in their absence, Jeremiah undergoes some of the greatest suffering and persecution that he's ever experienced up to this point.

So the remaining people are not faithful people. And he says that God, those good figs, God will regard as good, the exiles. And he says that he will set his eyes on them for good.

[5 : 10] And he build them up, plant them, give them a heart to know him. And why does God promise to do this for these people? He says because these people, they will return to God with their whole heart.

Right? The fact that they'll return to God with their whole heart shows that they were not wholeheartedly following God previously. They too had turned away from God like the remnant that's those who are still remaining in Judah.

But after their experience of God's judgment in exile, they who had formerly turned away from God will repent and return to God with their whole heart. So how we respond to God, this passage is teaching us, how we respond to God's gracious overture matters.

Our actions, our choices have consequences. And we are responsible for them and accountable to God for them. And so thankfully for the exiles in Babylon, God's punishment had proved to be a form of loving discipline that turns them back from their sins and back toward God.

So this is instructive for us. As God's people who experience his loving discipline, we should not despise the Lord's discipline or be wary of his reproof because the Lord reproves those whom he loves.

[6 : 23] As a father, the son in whom he delights. Any discipline we receive from the Lord is an invitation to return to him. It's therefore not a sign of God's hatred, but a sign of God's love, the father's love for us.

In contrast, God says in verses 8 to 10, like the bad figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten, so will I treat Zedekiah, the king of Judah, his officials, the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land and those who dwell in the land of Egypt.

I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth to be a reproach, a byword, a taunt, and a curse in all the places where I shall drive them. And I will send sword, famine, and pestilence upon them until they shall be utterly destroyed from the land that I gave to them and their fathers.

So apparently some of the people of Judah had fled the Babylonian invasion to Egypt as refugees. And the remnants of Judah and the refugees in Egypt will both be treated badly like the bad figs that they are, that cannot be eaten.

And the repetition of the word land really highlights the irony of this, right? Those who have been sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans, God says, I will bring them back to this land.

[7 : 36] But then those who remain in this land and those who dwell in the land of Egypt, God says, shall be utterly destroyed from the land that I gave to them and their fathers. The complacent remnant in Judah are about to be very surprised.

They're thinking to themselves, we're here, it's all good, everything's going to get better from now on. But God says, not so fast. They will be destroyed from the land. And it's those who have been exiled to Babylon that will be restored by God.

And then in chapter 25, 1 to 14, we backtrack a little bit in history and hear Jeremiah's prophecy concerning Judah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the son of Josiah, king of Judah.

So this prophetic word has already been fulfilled in the first Babylonian invasion. And by citing this, Jeremiah uses this as proof that his prophecy regarding Zedekiah and the remnant of Jerusalem will also surely be fulfilled.

So Jeremiah says in verse 3, for 23 years from the 13th year of Josiah, the son of Ammon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the Lord has come to me and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened.

[8 : 48] Jeremiah spoke persistently to them, but stubbornly they have not listened. And Jeremiah isn't even the only prophet that has spoken to them. He continues in verses 4 to 5, you have neither listened nor inclined your ears to hear.

Although the Lord persistently sent to you all his servants, the prophets saying, turn now every one of you from his evil way and evil deeds and dwell upon the land that the Lord has given to you and your fathers from of old and forever.

God persistently sent his servants, the prophets, the Judah, and they, like Jeremiah, spoke persistently to them, yet they refused to listen and turn from their evil way and evil deeds.

This is a good lesson for us. God doesn't send a message of warning and of judgment so that it just slips by. He could barely hear and barely notice and live on. No, he speaks persistently for us to repent.

And those who refuse to repent will find in the end that they have persistently rejected him. And as verses 6 to 7 say, God had said to them through his prophets, do not go after other gods to serve and worship them or provoke me to anger with the work of your hands.

[10 : 01] Then I will do you no harm, yet you have not listened to me, declares the Lord, that you might provoke me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. The word harm used here twice in verses 6 to 7 and the word evil used twice in verse 5 are the same Hebrew word which shows the relationship between the two.

It's because of their evil that evil from God is coming. It's because of the harm that they do that God has designed harm against them. And this Hebrew word is the same word that was translated earlier as bad to refer to the bad figs.

They are the bad figs who do bad things and therefore they will be treated badly. God is just and he will punish evildoers. And our sins have consequences and all of us will be held accountable by God.

And what exactly is the harm and evil that God's people did? Their evil is summarized as idolatry. The sin of going after other gods to serve and worship them, provoking God to anger with the work of their hands.

Instead of worshiping the God who made them with his hands, they were worshiping so-called gods that they made with their own hands. That's the folly of idolatry.

[11 : 18] And we are so prone to it. We create technology to serve us. And then we enslave ourselves to it.

Letting our phones and computers dictate and control the rhythms of our lives and distract us from the most important things in life. We create, we produce with our own hands.

We create entertainment to serve us, to amuse us, to relieve us. But then we enslave ourselves to it. We let entertainment spill over into our home and work.

Instead of a diversion, they become an obsession. And we live for the next vacation, the next movie, the next game, the next TV show. We create idols with our own hands.

We create alcohol and recreational drugs to make us merry. And then we enslave ourselves to them and become depressed and unhappy addicts.

[12 : 24] We find a job and we work hard so that we can make a living. And then we enslave ourselves to our jobs and get consumed with climbing the corporate ladder, no longer working for a living, but living to work.

We create grades. We create grades to ensure our learning. And then we enslave ourselves to getting good grades, taking shortcuts and cheating to make the grade at the expense of our learning.

I can think of so many more examples. We give birth to children. We love and nurture them. And then we enslave ourselves to them.

As if they have the power to confer on us our sense of success and identity. As if how quickly they reach their developmental milestones and how smart they are, what colleges they go to, what kind of jobs they get, and how much money they ultimately make define us.

This single verse concisely and profoundly sums up the human predicament. We provoke God, who created us with his own hands, by worshiping the work of our own hands.

[13 : 46] Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts in verses 8 to 11, because you have not obeyed my words. Behold, I will send for all the tribes of the north, declares the Lord, and for Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, my servant.

And I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and against all these surrounding nations. I will devote them to destruction and make them a horror, a hissing, and an everlasting desolation.

Moreover, I will banish from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the grinding of the millstones and the light of the lamp. Voice of mirth, gladness, bridegroom and bride, the grinding of millstones and the light of the lamp.

These are all signs of life and human activity. And all of these will cease in the land. And interestingly here, God calls Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon.

Look in verse 9. What does he call him? My servant. In the same way, the exact same way that he had used to call his prophets, my servants, in verse 4.

- [14 : 55] This shows something remarkable about God's sovereign power because obviously Nebuchadnezzar, as you can see in the context, was not God's servant in the same way Jeremiah was God's servant.

Jeremiah was someone who knew the Lord and was committed to following him at all costs. Nebuchadnezzar, on the other hand, is a pagan king who does not know the Lord and has no interest in following him.

And yet, within God's sovereign plan, Nebuchadnezzar, like Jeremiah, is doing God's bidding. He is God's servant because God rules over all the nations because he is the king who sovereignly directs the course of history.

He is God's servant. And this is cause for us to rejoice as those who belong to God. Some people tell me, well, if God is truly sovereign, as you say he is, that means his sovereign hand is behind even all of our sufferings and misfortunes.

How can such doctrine provide comfort for people who are in distress? Yes. Doesn't that make God a cruel tyrant? Nonsense, I say.

- [16 : 11] Why? In fact, the alternative scenario where God is not in full control of everything that happens is terrifying and provides no comfort for those who belong to him.

Imagine, let's say, there's a family member of yours who just made a terrible mistake, a life-altering mistake, and imagine that God is not sovereign over history and over his life. How can you comfort that family member?

What are you going to tell him? Well, this really was your fault after all, and there's nothing you can do to change it. You really messed up God's plan for you this time.

Comforting. What if someone is a member of an oppressed minority, and those who hold power are wickedly exploiting and abusing them, and what if God were not sovereign?

What would you tell her? How would you comfort her? Well, God's not evil. These people are evil. God just can't control these evil people. You're just going to have to deal with these evil people until you get to heaven, I guess.

- [17 : 18] These kinds of setbacks and suffering in our lives would be utterly devastating and disheartening if it were not for the fact that God is sovereign. If these things happened outside of God's power, it would be devastating.

And because God is sovereign in and through all situations and circumstances and people, Romans 8, 28 tells us that we know for those who love God, all things work together for good for those who are called according to His purpose.

God's sovereign plan goes forward through those who submit to Him and through those who resist Him. That's how far-reaching God's rule and power is.

And God's prophets and the world's tyrants are likewise God's servants. Let this truth be a comfort to you this morning. Think about that person or thing in your life that you think has the power and potential to derail your plans and ruin your life.

Maybe it's that big exam that's coming up or a performance review at work. Your professor who can pass or fail you. That hiring manager that can give you that dream job that you want or leave you unemployed.

- [18 : 37] Your boss who can relocate you or fire you. Or that government official that can take away your vouchers or deport you from your country. They are not in control of your life.

God is in control of your life. They are but God's servants. Do you get this? What freedom you will experience if you really believe this truth.

And what peace will fill your heart no matter the circumstances in your life. And the fact that even Nebuchadnezzar is serving God highlights the absurdity of Judah refusing to serve God.

Verse 6 says that in spite of God's command the people of Judah went after other gods to serve and worship them. Yet little did they know that even in their disobedience they are serving and advancing the purposes of God because for their stubborn refusal to serve the Lord in verse 11 says that they will serve the king of Babylon 70 years.

Because Judah refused to serve the true God they will be reduced to serving men who claim to be God. Now this period of subjugation will be 70 years and 70 is a symbolic number of fullness and completion.

[19 : 58] For example in Genesis 10 70 nations are used to represent all the nations that are scattered throughout the earth. And in Exodus 24 70 of the elders are selected to represent the entire camp of Israel before God.

So likewise 70 years represent the full span of life. So that's why Psalm 90 10 says the years of our life are 70 or even by reason of strength 80 yet their span is but toil and trouble they are soon gone and we fly away.

So the 70 years they represent the full normal lifespan and not necessarily a literal 70 year period. And so we use and obviously we use numbers in this way too in English when someone tells you wait a minute they don't mean literally a minute they'll get really annoyed if you start counting 60 seconds they mean wait for a short indefinite period of time.

And likewise when someone says hey she went the whole nine yards doesn't mean she went literally nine yards it means she went all the way we use numbers in these symbolic ways all the time and that's what the Bible does too.

So it doesn't mean the literal 70 years here but it gets close because it represents a lifespan this prophecy was fulfilled at the fall of Babylon in 539 BC which was literally 66 years after Nebuchadnezzar's ascension to the throne in 605 BC.

[21 : 21] Now Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian empire themselves will not escape God's judgment and after God has used them to punish the other nations they themselves will be punished for their sins so God says in verses 12 to 14 then after 70 years are completed I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation the land of the Chaldeans for their iniquity declares the Lord making the land an everlasting waste I will bring upon that land all the words that I have uttered against it everything written in this book which Jeremiah prophesied against all the nations for many nations and great kings shall make slaves even of them and I will recompense them according to their deeds and the work of their hands so God's justice will prevail in the end and so even if it seems like evildoers are getting their way and if God's using them to work his purposes in our lives we could still trust that in the end God's justice will prevail and that he will punish those who deserve his punishment in due course God preserves those who do good and punishes those who do evil and no one will escape his fair and exacting judgment so all of that is really a summary and explanation of the vision of the figs and then starting in chapter 25 verse 15

God uses a different image to address the nations Jeremiah says in verses 15 to 16 thus the Lord the God of Israel said to me take from my hand this cup of the wine of wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it they shall drink and stagger and be crazed because of the sword that I am sending among them so the metaphor of the cup of wrath the cup of the wine of God's wrath is used frequently by the Old Testament prophets and the punishment causes those who drink it to stagger and be crazed because of the sword that God is sending among them so it's the image that it's trying to capture is this the drunkenness lowers the person's inhibitions and sense of caution right it impairs their speech their reasoning ability their balance their fine motor skills and coordination among other things and so a drunk person is senseless literally and defenseless vulnerable and completely at the mercy of those around him it's a picture a drunk person is a picture of dispossession and surrender in a similar way the cup of the wine of wrath will make the nations who drink it staggered with drunkenness so that they are completely vulnerable to the sword that God is sending their way and so

Jeremiah says I pass the cup to all these nations in verses 17 to 18 there's a surprise because ironically the first nation that drinks this cup of the wine of wrath is not the surrounding pagan nations but Jerusalem and the cities of Judah God's people are the first to be punished for their sins and that's a remarkable statement because people in Judah scoffed at the other nations we are the chosen people Israel they are the nations and yet God numbers them among the nations and they're the first to be punished of course if all these pagan nations are accountable to God how much more the nation that he chose for himself that belonged to him and so Jeremiah after that extends the cup of the wine of God's wrath to all the surrounding nations and after all the other nations have drank from it verse 26 says the king of Babylon also shall drink and then Jeremiah says to them this is what will happen this is what God says verses 28 to 29 drink be drunk and vomit fall and rise no more because of the sword that I am sending among you and if they refuse to accept the cup from your hand to drink then you shall say to them thus says the Lord of hosts you must drink for behold

I begin to work disaster at the city that is called by my name and shall you go unpunished you shall not go unpunished for I am summoning a sword against all the inhabitants of the earth declares the Lord of hosts for those of you who enjoy a drink or two being forced to drink alcohol might not seem like a terrible punishment but it is I'm reminded of the news article I read last year when Timothy Piazza a freshman at Penn State died after being hazed with an alcohol gauntlet at the fraternity initiation party he was forced to chug wine vodka and beer and he got so drunk that he fell head first down a flight of stairs about 15 feet long he had a fractured skull and a lacerated spleen and blood was seeping into his abdominal cavity for hours and he was throwing up and twitching and these other so-called brothers because they're also drunk instead of calling 911 they splashed him with some water and slapped him in the face hoping that he would wake up and then they left him alone and at what point he tried to get up because he knew he was in mortal danger and started walking toward the door but then he fell again and hit his head and no one called for medical help until 12 hours later long after he was dead that's the kind of terrifying picture that is being painted here

God says drink be drunk and vomit fall and rise no more because of the sword that I am sending among you that should fill us with terror they cannot refuse the cup that Jeremiah is handing to them because the sword of punishment is unavoidable and the nations will be like an incapacitated drunkard utterly vulnerable and helpless then Jeremiah continues in verses 30 to 33 the Lord will roar from on high and from his holy habitation utter his voice he will roar mightily against his fold and shout like those who tread grapes against all the inhabitants of the earth the clamor will resound to the ends of the earth for the Lord has an indictment against the nations he is entering into judgment with all flesh and the wicked he will put to the sword declares the Lord thus says the Lord of hosts behold disaster is going forth from nation to nation and a great tempest is stirring from the furthest parts of the earth and those pierced by the Lord on that day shall extend from one end of the earth to the other

[27 : 34] God will come against nations with his fierce judgment and his comings compared to roaring thunder and a lion's mighty roar a lion of course is a symbol of courage royalty and power and I once was fortunate enough to catch two male lions at the Bronx Zoo having a roaring contest it was awe inspiring they say that a lion's roar can be heard five miles away that awe inspiring and fear provoking roar of a mighty lion captures aptly captures the fierce judgment with which the king of kings will come and that metaphor is continued in verses 34 to 38 Jeremiah says in verse 34 wail you shepherds and cry out and roll in ashes you lords of the flock for the days of your slaughter and dispersion have come and you shall fall like a choice vessel as I mentioned last week shepherds are a metaphor for rulers of the nations and since they did not shepherd their people properly but slaughtered them and scattered their people their flock the shepherds themselves now will be slaughtered and scattered by the lion that is the

Lord and they shall fall like a choice vessel we've seen the image of the broken vessel in previous chapters it's the picture of a delicate fine vessel that crashes and is broken to all kinds of pieces and verses 35 to 38 they say that no refuge will remain for the shepherds nor escape for the lords of the flock a voice the cry of the shepherds and the wail of the lords of the flock for the Lord is laying waste their pasture and the peaceful foes are devastated because of the fierce anger of the Lord like a lion he has left his lair for their land has become a waste because of the sword of the oppressor and because of his fierce anger earlier in verse 30 mentioned God's roar his voice and his shout and those three words are contrasted here with the shepherd's voice cry and wail God roars and the shepherds whimper God shouts in triumph and the shepherds wail in defeat when God visits judgment upon the nations no matter how powerful they are and how seemingly indestructible they are they will be like the shepherds who run before the lion who has left his lair

God is a sovereign king who preserves those who do good and punishes those who do evil there's one slight problem however we like the idea of God's justice but what if we are in the latter category what if we are not good doers but evil doers what if we like the people of Judah deserve to be judged along with the nations and there's no escape from this cycle is there no escape the cup of the wine of God's wrath is being thrust forward to our mouths and we cannot turn to its left or to its right because all of us scripture teaches have sinned against God because all of us have rebelled against him and worshiped the work of our own hands we are evil doers and we must drink the cup of the wine of God's wrath and we could hear the lion's mighty roar approaching and we know that we do not stand a chance running is futile and fighting is foolish our judgment is inevitable and who then can save us who can save us from this avenging

God no one no one can save us no one except for God himself and praise be to God God did intervene to save us God the father sent his only son Jesus Christ to save us he the son of God Jesus became a son of man he lived a blameless life he kept the commandments of his father perfectly and deserved only the father's favor yet he willingly laid his life down in order to save undeserving sinners and on his way to the cross in Mark 14 36 during his agonizing prayer at the garden of Gethsemane Jesus prayed Abba father all things are possible for you remove this cup from me yet not what I will but what you will what is this cup before which the son of

God sits agonizing and sweats blood this is the cup of the wine of God's wrath it represents the entirety of God's judgment of Jesus suffering and death that was reserved for us Jesus who should not have tasted even a drop of that cup of the wine of God's wrath instead submitted to his father and drank that cup down to the dregs so that there would not be a drop left for you and me who have entrusted their lives to Christ that means the Christian is never the object of God's wrath God may still lovingly discipline us as our heavenly father but that is not wrathful vengeance that's not punishment for sin because Christ has already been punished for our sins in our place often

[33 : 27] Christians believe that Christ died for their sins in theory but not in practice they still interpret their misfortunes and sufferings as divine punishment for their sins but that's a lie of the devil if you have trusted in Jesus for salvation that he has already drunk the cup of God's wrath and there is none left for you Charles Spurgeon writes there is not a drop of wrath in a river full of the believers grief does that does not that take the bitterness out of affliction and make it sweet but if you have not trusted Jesus for salvation you are still living for yourself and worshiping the work of your own hands and there is judgment still left for you according to Revelation 5 5 Jesus Christ is the lion of Judah of the tribe of Judah the root of David who has conquered so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals of judgment the lion of Judah is at large to execute the swift judgment of God and if you remain in your sins the mighty lion opposes you you must turn from your sins and toward God through Jesus Christ and if you renounce your sins and believe in Jesus his life death and resurrection for your salvation and the lion of Judah no longer fights against you but for you he will avenge your suffering at the hands of evildoers and restore God's justice in the end the cream and the the iron and pour the the hard or no right and