

## **“BROKEN CISTERNS”**

Jeremiah 2:1-13

Sunday, July 10, 2016

Many of us have been using computers for years. I bought my first computer over 30 years ago in Grand Prairie, Alberta - about a year after I was ordained - a Mac 512, with an 800K disc drive....and get this....the computer and printer cost just over \$3000. Think about what you could buy today.

Since those early days, I've had numerous computers....desk tops, laptops, and now my cell phone. No matter how new or sophisticated, the particular brand doesn't seem to matter, there is one nasty hazard none of us can avoid or protect ourselves from completely - the menacing attacks of some strange computer virus. Yes, computers can actually get sick with some bizarre infection and begin to act very strangely - hacking address files, sending emails at random, along with attachments. Although some viruses are latent, others can corrupt data, impede system performance or cause the hard drive to crash completely. Trying to eliminate them can become very frustrating....and in some cases, very expensive.

Just this past week you may have heard the CBC report about one Anti-Virus software company, Symantec....producers of the popular Norton Anti-Virus program. According to officials from Google, "Symantec dropped the ball here, noting that some of the codes hadn't been updated by Symantec in at least seven years." Symantec was using old versions of open source codes, some containing "dozens" of public vulnerabilities, some of which were known to have been exploited by hackers. Multiple "critical" vulnerabilities have been found in all antivirus software made by Symantec, including Norton brand products. Many are "wormable" vulnerabilities that can be used to make attacks remotely without the user doing anything: "Just emailing a file to a victim or sending them a link to an exploit is enough to trigger it — the victim does not need to open the file or interact with it in any way for the virus to invade your computer.

I tell all you this because it reminds me of Jeremiah. His listeners were infected too, their waters polluted. The virus that infected them, was also of their own making.

Rather than choose to live by the "living waters" of Yahweh, they sought the alternatives which were worthless. They built cisterns of their own. Israel chose to drink out of a mirky pond of contaminated, stagnant water....even while the spring of true living water was available to them.

Through the Prophet Jeremiah, God said, "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water."

Here in chapter 2, the people of Israel are on trial. The imagery before us is that of a lawsuit, and it's God who is doing the prosecuting! Israel is the defendant and is on the witness stand. Jeremiah, serving as prosecuting attorney, is grilling the witness on behalf of his plaintiff, who just happens to be God.

Reading between the lines of chapter 2, Jeremiah was passionate. "No other nation," he argued, "had ever done this before! Nobody changes gods, even when those gods are not real! All kinds of people manage to stay loyal to their gods, even to the worthless idols of their own making, but you ... you have turned your backs on the real thing....turned away from the living God, the source of all that is worthy and good, the spring of fresh water. How can it be? How can it be?"

No other nation has ever changed its gods ... But, of course, Judah didn't think it had! People still went to the Temple. They were "churchgoers" -- affirming their allegiance to God and fulfilling their religious duties, but at the same time, they were modern people, connoisseurs of the good life. Theirs was a both/and life -- you know, you can be religious and still live your life your own way.

Such was the malicious virus that invaded the spiritual hard-drive of their lives. Their religion was broken, empty and dried up. They had lost their identity as God's chosen people. The People of Israel had rejected the true God who was called "the spring of living water," and relied on their own human efforts to satisfy the deep, hedonistic longings of their lives, only to become worthless themselves." Their efforts were like trying to fill a broken, leaky cistern....a futile attempt to fill their lives with meaningless things that kept running through their fingers.

And God said, "Oh, I remember how faithful you were when you were young, how you loved me when we were first married ... 700 years before Jeremiah, it was God who heard their cries and brought them out of Egypt. It was God who caused the waters of the Red Sea to part, making it possible for the people to cross over on dry land. It was God who led them through the wilderness into a new, fertile land. With the law given at Sinai, it was God who made them his own people. God saved them. God saved them for a purpose, and that purpose was ... joy! God meant for them to enjoy the land and its blessings, to enjoy each other and enjoy God, and to be in that land a light to the nations, a special people, a witness people to the extraordinary goodness and mercy of the living God.

“But now,” God said, “you have turned your backs on me. You have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for yourselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water. You have ruined the land ... and you have ruined yourselves.” God and his Word ceased to be the basis for their belief and practice.

Many of you might be familiar with cisterns, and may have used them. I have drunk water from many cisterns....in Bermuda....and in Northern Alberta.

Cisterns were also important in Israel during Jeremiah's day.

Archaeologists have uncovered thousands of them. The land was arid and they could experience long dry spells. In those days the people would dig cisterns, and then line them with bricks and plaster so they would hold the water. But they would often develop leaks and the cistern would dry up, and they would have no water. It was ridiculous for people trying to fill broken cisterns, and then to scrape out the little bit of stagnant water in the bottom, and yet, refuse to drink from the fresh spring water which was flowing right next to them. This was a picture/allegory of the people of Israel.

Cracked cisterns that can hold no water. Oh what folly! ... living like a bunch of cracked pots ... chasing after life, trying to fill their cisterns with the things of this world. At the end of the day, life was plagued with a deadly virus leaving them empty, dry and meaningless at the very core of their lives....all because they have forsaken God, the fountain of living water.

But what about our world today? It has been said, what we seek the most in life will shape our character, personality and relationships. In the place of seeking God, we seek self-gratification....serving the god of feeling good. If we live only for material goods, social standing or security, if we live only for “ME” we will become people without substance....nothing more than spiritually dry empty, cracked cisterns.

The pleasure explosion of summer has sent many dipping into the pond of life trying to find personal satisfaction somewhere else. There are people today who have what C. S. Lewis describes as “incommunicable and unpleasant want.” The one thing that makes us different from the people of Jeremiah’s day is that we have more things available to us with which we try to satisfy the deep longings and thirsts of our lives. We pile up possessions and seek for pleasure. Everyday we try to fill the cisterns of life with things and discover that life always leaks out faster than we can fill it. Thanks to the internet, we live virtual lives and think we are really living. As we make feeling good an absolute need, there will be no need or knowledge of God. The need to feel good leaves us constantly unsatisfied and empty. Whether we are rich or poor, strong or weak, prominent or unknown, we can become like broken cisterns.

From the Canticle of the Turning, Rory Cooney writes:

*Though I am small, my God, my all, you work great things in me. And your mercy will last from the depths of the past to the end of the age to be.... My heart shall sing of the day you bring. Let the fires of your justice burn. Wipe away all tears, for the dawn draws near, And the world is about to turn.*

My friends, we are often found to be a thirsty people, chasing after things that do not profit....time filled with a myriad of activities, but deep down at the centre of our lives, in that place where God should be, there is an emptiness. Life has become like a leaky cistern.

Does life hold water for you, or is it constantly dribbling away through the cracks? No matter how impressive the cisterns of this world look, they will always leave you dry and empty.

Jeremiah's words are not just harsh words of judgement. They are also words of hope - words of invitation for God's people to hear once again God's invitation for all who are thirsty. God alone can satisfy the emptiness of the human soul.

My friends, let us be hungry and thirsty, not for what feels good, but for what is right! As a deer longs for a stream of cool water, may we long for nothing less than the presence of the living God! Come to the fountain of living water and find refreshment that truly satisfies.

A time will come when we have to stop digging and put down our shovels. In John 4:10, Jesus told a woman who had a tortured past: "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." In the Revelation of John, the Spirit and the Bride (who is Jesus) say: "Come. Let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

### **Are you thirsty this morning? Are you really thirsty?**

My friends, we are called to be a special people....and we need fresh water to live. As the deer longs for a stream of cool, refreshing water, may we long for nothing less than the refreshing, life-giving presence of the living God.

In C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia episode, The Silver Chair, Jill is lost and thirsty in a strange land. She finds a brook, but she sees Aslan the Lion (a symbol of Jesus) lying beside the water. Aslan growls and tells her she may come and drink.

"May I ... could I ... would you mind going away while I drink?" said Jill.

The Lion answered with a look and a very low growl and as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience. The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

"Do you promise not to – do anything to me if I do come?" said Jill.

"I make no promise," said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer. "Do you eat girls?" she said.

"I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

"I daren't come and drink," said Jill.

"Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion.

"Oh, dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then."

"There is no other stream," said the Lion.