

Week 32

August 6 - August 12

2 Kings 24:5-9; 2 Chronicles 36:6-9; Jeremiah 7-20; 22:24-24:10; 29:1-31:14; 49:1-33; Daniel 1-3

As a pastor I have often been reminded of the power and effectiveness of a fitting illustration. As a student I am reminded of this principle time and again. My capacity to learn, retain and understand things increases with illustrations. As you read Scripture it is very apparent that God is aware of that tendency in us. He is always using illustrations and word pictures, or just simply showing us how to do something. For example; Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!" (Mark 1:17)

The reading passages this week will each focus on a specific illustration, object lesson or visual aid.

August 6th

Jeremiah 19-20; Daniel 1. "Better or Broken"

Smash! Bang! Crack! No, it's not the scenes from a Batman series fight. It's the sound of a large clay jar being shattered as it's thrown to the ground.

In the preceding chapter Jeremiah is at the pottery shop and a lesson is given concerning the potter and the clay, but now the illustration is made with the finished product, something unable to reshape. God evidently thought the Israelites were missing some of the seriousness and finality to Jeremiah's repeated message of coming judgment, so God lays out this outline for him to follow; first, present the peoples sins, next, raise and smash the clay jar you bought, then, inform the people that this will happen to them!

It was a powerful message and one would like to think it produced tremendous results. In reality the result was a beating and prison time for Jeremiah. The message obviously struck some chord of conviction. I warned someone about a direction in life they were headed and recently found that they ignored the warning and are suffering the consequences. Cultivate a soft heart to hear God's words.

August 7th

Jeremiah 7:1-8:3; Daniel 2-3. "Idols and Images"

The image of Daniel two is that of a statue with various layers representing various world empires. However, a rock representing God's kingdom crushed the entire statue. King Nebuchadnezzar concludes that if his portion of the image in the dream was the head of gold which represented a limited time period then why not make an entire statue of gold representing a timeless empire. He then commanded the people to bow to that. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would not bow down to the image or what the image represented—a defiance against God's plan.

God frequently commands us not to surrender to idols. Why? What harm is there in bowing to a golden image? Daniels friends knew the whole picture. We tend to think of an image, but it's much larger than that. If we surrender to anything other than God, we have made a statement about our lack of trust or faith in His plan and power. Other than an image (idol), what do you have the potential of surrendering to? (e.g. complacency, greed, a desire for status—popularity in the community, wealth, the one people listen to, etc.)

August 8th

Jeremiah 8:4-11:23. "A Broken Heart"

"Do not be afraid of showing your affection. Be warm and tender, thoughtful and affectionate. Men are more helped by sympathy, than by service; love is more than money, and a kind word will give more pleasure than a present." - John Lubbock (1834-1913)

The illustration today is that of a broken heart (8:18). We know what that depicts. It's not really broken, but it really hurts. Jeremiah witnessed the sorrow of his nation and Jeremiah felt their sorrow as though it was his own. Judah had turned from God and was reaping the penalty. Although he knew the reason for it, Jeremiah still had compassion for the suffering.

Sympathy and compassion are attributes every Christian should possess. Halford Luccock, defined sympathy as "your pain in my heart." How genuinely do you feel the pain of others? When was the last time you wept over someone?

"Sympathy is a virtue unknown in nature." - Paul Eipper (1891-1964)

"Next to love, sympathy is the divinest passion of the human heart." - Edmund Burke (1729-1797)

August 9th

Jeremiah 12-15. "Clean Linen"

Jeremiah, being a priest, was familiar with linen as it was the material of which the priests' garments were made. The belt was worn close to the skin. The linen belt was to be representative of an intimate relationship between God and Judah (13:11).

But then Jeremiah is instructed to bury it, then come back after a long time and recover it. By then the belt was ruined. It illustrated how Judah, after leaving the care of God, would come to ruin.

This is true of all people. There is a passage in Romans, chapter one, which describes the same process; "Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship Him... their minds became dark... So God let them go ahead and do what their hearts desired. As a result they did vile and degrading things... That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires..."

If we turn away from the One who can keep us clean should we be surprised if we get dirty? A life walking away from an intimate relationship with the Savior will only lead to ruin.

August 10th

Jeremiah 16, 17, 18, 35. "Turning Clay"

I remember my first experiences at the potter's wheel. It wasn't safe to be anywhere near me. With the centrifugal force of the wheel, a chunk of clay can fly a long way. Of course, even if something did stay on the wheel it didn't mean it was going to look good. Some of the things I first turned were too thick, and others too thin, and some were so warped that people just assumed they were abstract art (and I never told them otherwise).

I restarted and reformed so many pieces that were not turning right or just didn't look right. Sometimes the clay itself would be too dry. Sometimes it would have hidden air pockets (which don't last through the fire).

A lot of things can happen while you're working clay, but I have never had my clay tell me what it wanted or didn't want. God is the potter and we are the clay. Don't rebel against that but embrace it. Surrender to God's plans for your life. Let God shape you now so that you will not harden the wrong way (consider the next chapter talking about the jar Jeremiah shattered).

August 11th

2 Kings 24:5-9; 2 Chronicles 36:6-9; Jeremiah 22:24-23:32; 49:1-33. "Judging the Shepherds"

"Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged by God with greater strictness" (James 3:1).

James knew there was nothing wrong with aspiring to teach but he was fully aware of an additional responsibility that came with the position. James had read these same passages we are reading today. He knew how the life of a leader could affect others. God made that very clear in the passages today. God accused the present leaders of Judah with leading God's flock to destruction and abandonment (Jer. 23:2). Therefore, He declares; "I will send disaster upon the leaders of my people—the shepherds of my sheep—for they have destroyed and scattered the very ones they were expected to care for."

God expects us to be serious with the gifts and positions he has given to each of us. There is nothing flippant about the way God bestows things upon us, nor in the way He expects us to act. He has entrusted each us with something special. How are you tending what He has entrusted to you?

August 12th

Jeremiah 23:33-24:10; 29:1-31:14. "Spoiled due to lack of Discipline"

"Spoiled children are more tolerated in homes than spoiled food."

I read this quote and thought of the illustration in chapter 24 of the two baskets. One is filled with good figs, and the other is filled with spoiled figs that could not be eaten. God then explains what each basket of figs is representing. The good figs represent those Judeans who go through the discipline and will return to the land. The spoiled figs represent those Judeans who ran from the discipline. Neither group was better at the beginning, but in the end, discipline was to refine them (Jer. 21:9).

We describe a spoiled child as a manipulative, unpleasant youth who lacks discipline. Spoiled figs are here analogous of the same predicament, yet with adults. None of us appreciate receiving discipline at the time (Heb. 12:11), and on the flip side, it's often uncomfortable to have to discipline others (e.g. our children). Discipline from God proves His love for us (see Heb. 12). Don't be discouraged when God corrects you. "He corrects those He loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights" (Prov. 3:11-12).

General Questions for each day:

Summarize the day's Bible passage in your own words.

What thoughts, actions, attitudes or beliefs are addressed in the passage?

How is the Holy Spirit leading you to apply this passage to your life today?

Week 32—August 6th-12th

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Bible Discussion Guide:

What purposes do illustrations serve?

Test your ability to retain the lesson by merely remembering the illustration. For example: What was the message/lesson of the broken jar?

How about the images of Nebuchadnezzar?

...broken heart?

...linen belt?

...potter at the wheel?

...shepherds?

...spoiled figs?

An idol is anything you yield to other than God. What do people have a propensity to yield to? What do you have a propensity to yield to?

Jeremiah had a soft heart. Describe the benefits of a soft heart. Describe how it was displayed in the life of Jeremiah.

God is the potter and you are the clay. Are you 100% content with the potter's design? Are you content knowing God can do whatever He wants to with you? Or does that sound too harsh?

Is it fair for a leader to be judged more strictly than others? Why or why not.

"Happy (blessed) are those whom you discipline, LORD" (Ps. 94:12). Does that really make sense? Define this statement.