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PITS

we've all **been there**

## An Order of Worship for the Home

October 4, 2020

The Pits – week 2 – Jeremiah

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*This service is written for two speakers. Ideally, family members can speak and declare God's grace to one another following this format. For those who live alone, this worship outline can be followed with a brother or sister in Christ over the phone. You may call on a friend to fill this role, or your elder or pastor can worship with you by phone.*

*There is an "offering prayer" included in this outline. As we shelter in place, please continue to worship through giving. You can mail offering envelopes and checks to Calvary or visit [www.calvaryslz.org](http://www.calvaryslz.org) to give online.*

### **Invocation**

Reader 1: We gather to worship. We gather to pray.  
Reader 2: We gather to our God and to his word.  
Reader 1: We gather in the name of our God who is...  
Reader 2: Father, Son and Holy Spirit...  
Together: Amen.

### **Psalm 30:1-3**

<sup>1</sup> I will extol you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up  
and have not let my foes rejoice over me.  
<sup>2</sup> O Lord my God, I cried to you for help,  
and you have healed me.

<sup>3</sup> O Lord, you have brought up my soul from Sheol;  
you restored me to life from among those who go down to the pit.

### **Confession & Absolution**

*Make sure each person present has opportunity to confess to a brother or sister in faith. Go through both parts as many times as needed to accommodate all who are gathered.*

*Behold, it was for my welfare that I had great bitterness; but in love you have delivered my life from the pit of destruction, for you have cast all my sins behind your back. (Isaiah 38:17)*

Christian Confessing: My disobedience is a pit which I have fallen into. My loss of hope is a pit from which I cannot escape. I want to be forgiven. I want to have a stronger faith. God, redeem my life from the pit.

Christian Responding: Your God knows the pitfalls of your life. Not only that, he sent his Son to the pit of death in order to rescue you. In Christ you are forgiven! By his new life, you have new life as well. He is the God who redeems your life from the pit.

Together: Amen.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits,  
who forgives all your iniquity,  
who heals all your diseases,  
who redeems your life from the pit...  
(Psalm 103:2-4a)*

### **Matthew 21:33-46**

<sup>33</sup> "Hear another parable. There was a master of a house who planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a winepress in it and built a tower and leased it to tenants, and went into another country. <sup>34</sup> When the season for fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the tenants to get his fruit. <sup>35</sup> And the tenants took his servants and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup> Again he sent other servants, more than the first. And they did the same to them. <sup>37</sup> Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' <sup>38</sup> But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and have his inheritance.' <sup>39</sup> And they took him

and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. <sup>40</sup> When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

<sup>41</sup> They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons."

<sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:  
"The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone;  
this was the Lord's doing,  
and it is marvelous in our eyes'?"

<sup>43</sup> Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. <sup>44</sup> And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

<sup>45</sup> When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he was speaking about them. <sup>46</sup> And although they were seeking to arrest him, they feared the crowds, because they held him to be a prophet.

### **Apostles' Creed**

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.  
Amen.

### **Message**

#### **Unlikely and Unexpected**

Do you remember the difference between a dead-end and a pit? Last week I told you about my hike through a narrow canyon which ended at a dead-end. Getting out was a matter of backtracking until I could take a different route.

When you find yourself at a dead-end you have one option left; you can turn around and go back. If you find yourself in a pit, you're all out of options. You can't do anything for yourself. You can only hope someone shows up who can lift you out.

I've heard stories about the pits people have encountered. I have friends who needed rescue from the pit of addiction, others who have experienced the pit of debt, some who remember the pit abuse. Maybe you can relate to one of these, or maybe you've experienced your own pit. No matter the pit, I know this truth:

### **Every pit is spiritual.**

If you experience a pit connected with relationships, addiction, money, self-worth, sickness or anything else, that pit is also a spiritual pit. When you're in the pits, you need a Savior.

We'll see this in the story we look at today. Last week we talked about Daniel, but this week we'll go further back in history to Jeremiah's story. Jeremiah was a prophet among God's people in the southern kingdom of Judah. Before his time, the northern kingdom of Israel had been taken into exile by Assyria. That world power had since fallen and been replaced by the Babylonian Empire.

At Jeremiah's time, Babylon was threatening Judah. The setting for this story from Jeremiah 38 is the siege of Jerusalem. In fact, the siege has been pressing for some months already. Jerusalem has waited, hoping against hope that help might come from Egypt. No help will come, and Jeremiah brings a message from God which leaders in the city do not want to hear.

*<sup>2</sup>“Thus says the Lord: He who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live. He shall have his life as a prize of war, and live. <sup>3</sup> Thus says the Lord: This city shall surely be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon and be taken.” (Jeremiah 38:2-3)*

Twice Jeremiah speaks this prophetic formula indicating the authority for his words, “Thus says the Lord.” This is not Jeremiah's opinion. This is not his personal commentary on the situation. This is God's word, but the reception it receives is not kind.

*<sup>4</sup> Then the officials said to the king, “Let this man be put to death, for he is weakening the hands of the soldiers who are left in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm.” (Jeremiah 38:4)*

They refuse to acknowledge this word from God. The officials view Jeremiah’s message as *his* word, and they claim it is harmful. Yet, if you noticed, Jeremiah said in surrender to the Chaldeans people would have their “life as a prize of war.”

It’s worth considering: Which war are the officials most concerned about? Are the Babylonian armies the enemy, or is God their enemy? Is it possible that the political independence to which they cling is the very lie they must let go of?

The officials make their request to the King in Jerusalem, and they get their answer.

*<sup>5</sup> King Zedekiah said, “Behold, he is in your hands, for the king can do nothing against you.”*

*<sup>6</sup> So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. And there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud. (Jeremiah 38:5-6)*

Jeremiah did what he was told. Jeremiah was faithful to his God. Jeremiah was obedient, but...

### **Obedience can land you in a pit.**

This is the harsh reality of following a good God in a world corrupted by sin. Discipleship does not make life easy or comfortable. God told his people as much when he called them to be his own.

*You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine. (Leviticus 20:26)*

Jesus presses this same point further.

*If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. <sup>24</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. (Luke 9:23-24)*

*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26)*

As we follow Jesus, you and I are called to the same obedience as Jeremiah. It's the same obedience to which he called Israel. His message wasn't just challenging people to do something difficult. He was telling them to do the very opposite of what they wanted. Nobody wants to surrender to invading armies. You may be killed. At best, you'll become a slave.

The call to follow Jesus is no less intimidating. Picking up a cross means grabbing hold of the very thing which will kill you, and agreeing to haul it to the place of execution. It's not just difficult – it's the very opposite of what we want.

Now, if that wasn't enough, this calling gets tougher. It's not that obedience *might* land you in a pit. It would be nice if it were only a possibility. We prefer think of the pit as a "maybe," because then we can believe that "maybe" it won't happen. But it doesn't work like that at all.

### **Obedience to Jesus will always land you in a pit.**

Following Jesus will bring you to a place of dependence on Him alone. Discipleship will always force the recognition that there is nothing you can do to save yourself.

In reality, you and I don't mind the dead-ends so much. When we're able to backtrack, we're able to tell ourselves that we'll do better next time. We're able to fool ourselves into thinking that we can solve the problems we face. That's what the officials we're telling themselves at Jeremiah's time.

But the pit is not just physical. The pit is spiritual. Unfortunately, we often need to face earthly problems before we see the spiritual problems plaguing us. Sometimes a more tangible pit is the only thing which will help you and I see the spiritual pit we're trapped in.

When we finally realize that we're in a pit, we're ready to admit our need. We're ready to receive help. We're humble enough to allow someone else to do the work of lifting us up. When we see the pit, we're ready for a Savior.

Listen to what a savior looked like for Jeremiah.

*<sup>7</sup> When Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern... (Jeremiah 38:7)*

Now, wait a minute. Who is this guy? First off, he's a foreigner. Ebed-melech is not an Israelite, he's from Ethiopia. Most likely, he was acquired through war or trade, so he's a slave or at least an exile from his own country. Plus, he's a eunuch. Eunuchs were excluded from the temple assembly. They were outsiders to worship. Ebed-melech is second-class in Israel, politically and spiritually. He is the least likely candidate for modeling salvation, yet he is the one through whom God works salvation for Jeremiah.

*—the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate—<sup>8</sup> Ebed-melech went from the king's house and said to the king, <sup>9</sup> “My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they did to Jeremiah the prophet by casting him into the cistern, and he will die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city.” <sup>10</sup> Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, “Take thirty men with you from here, and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies.” (Jeremiah 38:7-10)*

We already saw the king's lack of leadership when his officials came asking to do away with Jeremiah. Has he turned a corner? Personally, I don't think so. If you read beyond today's story you'll see him seek out Jeremiah's counsel, but fail to act on it. King Zedekiah keeps hoping that his situation was the result of a wrong turn and a dead-end. He refuses to see that he's trapped in a pit every bit as much as Jeremiah.

*<sup>11</sup> So Ebed-melech took the men with him and went to the house of the king, to a wardrobe in the storehouse, and took from there old rags and worn-out clothes, which he let down to Jeremiah in the cistern by ropes. <sup>12</sup> Then Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said to*

*Jeremiah, “Put the rags and clothes between your armpits and the ropes.” Jeremiah did so. <sup>13</sup> Then they drew Jeremiah up with ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard. (Jeremiah 38:11-13)*

This foreigner is the most unlikely and unexpected savior. Yet, he is the one God sends to Jeremiah.

### **God’s salvation will appear unlikely and unexpected.**

That’s how our God works. He doesn’t often save by the power structures of this world. He uses the weak to shame the strong. He uses the foolish to shame the wise. He calls the despised and the have-nots, and in these we see His power and love and grace at work.

Jesus was an unlikely and unexpected Savior too. Born among livestock, he began his life on the run. He grew up in a backwater town derided for its lack of prominence. He ended up travelling from place-to-place with no real home. If Isaiah’s words are taken as true prophecy, he wasn’t much of a looker either. When he was arrested his friends bailed on him. The couple acquaintances he had in Jewish leadership were no help, and apparently, he had zero contacts in the Roman government (the real power structure of his time).

Yet, Jesus was truly God in flesh. By the reckoning of our world he was a nobody, but Jesus is the Son of God. As unlikely and unexpected as he may appear, Jesus is your only hope, and he will save you from the pit.

Like those rags and worn out clothes collected by Ebed-melech, the stories of Jesus teaching, healing and revealing God’s grace have been collected for you. A rope was lowered into your pit when Jesus went to the cross on Good Friday. Then on Sunday morning, by his own resurrection Jesus proved he has power to raise you from any pit, even the pit of death.

When you read about Ebed-melech in Jeremiah’s story, I want you to see Jesus. This foreigner is the most unlikely and unexpected Savior.

One final word on this story. We see Jesus foreshadowed in Ebed-melech. We also see how God provides salvation through real people – even the most unlikely and unexpected people. I wonder if God can provide salvation through people as unlikely and unexpected as Calvary?

Calvary is not a likely candidate to save anyone. We've lost far more than we've gained in recent years. We're kind of forgotten in San Lorenzo. Organizationally, we're a skeleton of what we were just 5 years back. 90% of our church is over 65, and more than 90% are Caucasian. That means we're from a different generation and different cultural background than most of our neighbors. We're foreigners to them, and they to us. We may be the most unlikely and unexpected choice. Can God save others through us?

He seems to choose the unlikely and unexpected. He might use you to save others from the pit. Your God wants to do just that. First, allow him to save you.

Amen.

### **Prayers and the Lord's Prayer**

*Share prayer requests with one another. Pray over the requests shared, then pray the Lord's Prayer together.*

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

### **Offering Prayer**

*If you have an offering present as you worship, you may place your hands over it during the offering prayer.*

Reader 1: With thankful hearts we receive from you, O Lord.  
Reader 2: With thankful hearts we respond.  
Reader 1: Receive our thanks and praise.  
Reader 2: Receive our offerings.  
Together: Receive us as your own.

**Blessing** (Jude v24-25)

Reader 1: Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy,  
Reader 2: to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
Reader 1: be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority,  
Reader 2: before all time and now and forever.  
Together: Amen.

*As applicable, please share this resource with others who would benefit. An electronic version is available at [www.calvaryslz.org](http://www.calvaryslz.org). We can also add friends to our mailing list if that is preferred.*

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