

Main Idea- “God is Committed”

The last few weeks marks the resurgence of the box office across the globe where the pop culture brought in a lot of attention in the media. Everyone was either team Barbie or team Oppenheimer or team as someone would call it Barbenheimer. It was interesting how both movies with completely different genres and historical context gathered a lot of attention together. While Oppenheimer focussed on the historical nuances of the world war-2, Barbie created a dystopian world where matriarchy takes precedence. While the Oppenheimer was reconciling human intelligence and the creation of destructive force, Barbie focussed on a comparative utopia where women rule the world. My goal today is not to review these both movies and ask you to pick a team. But these movies reflect a lot of human realities. The real human world is not simple, it is complex, it is filled with complications, it is filled with dynamics of social, economic and political power that is not fair for everyone. Depending on which side of the ceiling we find ourselves in, we are constantly dreaming and envisioning a comparative utopia or a perfect world where we are on the fair side. If I ask you to draw a picture of a perfect world, I believe, we all have something to contribute.

From the beginning of this year, we have been reading the bible together as a church. One theme that has been constant God does not give up on us. He is constantly inviting us to his perfect world but the human beings find themselves repellent to God's invitation. One of the reasons that we see is that this God's world is not in our terms. It is purely designed by God to fulfil His own purposes. Not everyone is comfortable with that. There is a sense of loss of self which draws people away from God. At this time of the year, we are in the book of the prophets, and the theme continues. God pursues his people and His people rebel against him.

Today we are looking at the book of Jeremiah. The prophet Jeremiah was one of the significant prophets in the history of Israel. He ministered in the Southern kingdom of Judah for 40 long years. A little context here- The Kingdom of Israel was divided into the Northern and Southern kingdom after the reign of King Solomon. Jeremiah's ministry could be divided into three significant parts of Judah's history. The first part is where King Josiah was ruling the nation. King Josiah was a godly king and was known for his spiritual reforms. He removed idols and pagan altars that were erected in Judah while engaging in other kinds of spiritual reforms. Most likely Jeremiah joined hands with the king in these spiritual reforms. The second part of Jeremiah's ministry which constitutes the most of the book of Jeremiah. The Kingdom of Judah was going through a religious and a political struggle. There were four kings during that time. People rebelled against God and were engaged in idol worship. Jeremiah was God's mouthpiece who not only proclaimed God's word to the people but also suffered in the hands of authorities because he proclaimed the truth. Jeremiah's ministry culminated in a very pivotal part of Israel's history. Babylon became the superpower who invaded the kingdom of Judah, destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, also, took the the people of Judah as exiles.

The passage that we read today provides us with a glimpse of the ministry of prophet Jeremiah. If you carefully read the book of Jeremiah and could sense the heartbeat of God, we will be able to sense that God longs for his people; he wants that his people worship him; he wants people to people to know that there is no God other than him; he alone is God.

The nature of God is such that he is vested in this world. This world is created and sustained by God. The majestic nature of God is compared to none. He is a God who created this universe that constitutes billions of galaxies. He is God beyond our comprehension, beyond our reason,

beyond our scientific knowledge, beyond everything that human knowledge has access to. Yet, God is vested in a relationship with us.

Last week, Darryl talked about the nature of God who fights for us. Because we matter to God.

The book of Jeremiah highlights the fact that we matter to God. If we read Jeremiah 1:10, we get to see God's calling to Jeremiah. God says, "See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

Now this may sound like a cryptic message but it is a call for God's people through Jeremiah that there is judgement impending on those who are in sin and hope to those who return. If we listen carefully to this message and read the rest of the book, we will be able to hear God's anger and his love towards his people. Why is God so angry? Because He loves.

Because we matter! He does not show indifference but instead he pursues! We matter to God!

Let us delve a little deeper today in understanding in what sense we matter to God! I would like to highlight three different themes that the book of Jeremiah emphasises on how we matter to God.

The created order matters to God.

The passage that we read today talks about Jeremiah's field trip to the potter's house. God asked Jeremiah to visit the potter's house so that God can teach him a lesson. Jeremiah looks at this potter who is engaged in hard and concentrating work. Most probably, as the Bible archaeologists would claim, the potter's wheel would be two stone wheels that are placed on a vertical axis. The lower of which is spun by the kicking of feet and the upper wheel is used to shape the clay. Now if we sense that imagination, it is an emblem of intentional hard work. The

potter's feet, hand, his eyes, his mind, his body and his everything is committed to the vessel that he is creating. He is also committed to the design that he has in mind. God teaches Jeremiah that he is like a potter who is at work. We matter to him. We do not exist by accident or by chance.

We are work in progress in our potter's hand. Have you seen a potter at work or been in a pottery class. It is not putting some coordinates together in a machine to mass produce them. It is intentional, it is creative, it is work that demands a lot of patience. That is what God says in ch. 18:6, "behold, like the clay in the potter's hand, so are you in my hand".

In fact the Hebrew term used for the work of the potter, "yasher" means to fashion or shape or to create. God reminds Jeremiah that He is the creator and we are his creation. God did not just create this world and left it to tend for itself. But He is vested in it. He is constantly at work. He is constantly at work in our hearts, moulding us, shaping us to be the people that He wants us to be. We are his creation and we matter to him. He chose us and made us his own and he never gives up on us. He chases us with his relentless grace and sometimes breaks our heart the way the potter breaks the clay and moulds the vessel to the design that the potter intends.

We live in a world that teaches us to create a world and a version of self according to our desire, according to the ways that we seem fit. But the scripture calls us to a contra cultural reality where we let the potter design us the way he seem fit. Only the creator knows what our life purpose is! We do not know! That is why it is important to find ourselves in all humility before God seeking God's purposes fulfilled in our lives.

Since we are God's creation and it is God who created everything and God is vested in his creation, created order matters for God. What do I mean for that?

Let me read ch. 23:24. It says, “Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? Declares the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? Declares the Lord”. God reminds the house of Israel that this earth belongs to God. He not only created this earth but his presence fills this earth. He created everything with a purpose. He designed the world with a purpose that brings him all the glory. However, for the house of Israel, God’s purpose didn’t matter; God’s law didn’t make any precedence; they did not deal things with truth, they did things that brought dishonour to God’s name; they direct their steps in seeking their selfish desires; in a nutshell, they did what seemed right in their sight. In doing that they mess up God’s created order. Its like I go to somebody’s house and mess up with their decor. The owner of the house kept the decor with a particular purpose and intention. And if I go and mess up things, the owner can get really pissed.

The God of the bible created this world, He owns this world and His presence fills this world. He created an order based on his purpose and intention. He created laws that fulfils his purpose and intentions. He revealed this laws to us through the scripture. That is why everything that we do matter. Every decision that we make, every relationship that we maintain, everything that we do (both small and big) matters to God. We are in God’s world where there is a created order. We are called to revere that created order and follow God’s law. The opposite of not following God’s law is actually bringing chaos to the world. Quite often we have a tendency to see the laws and commandments as mere list of duties. We want to fulfil the duties so that we please God and score brownie points in order to receive God’s blessing or get to heaven. But the truth is following God’s commandments does not guarantee God’s favour. In fact, there are people who follow God’s commandments without having any relationship with the God of the Bible. Also,

the moral standards of God is so high that any amount of good works or right conduct does not match unto God's standards. We are saved purely by God's grace. We receive God's favour purely by His grace. So, the purpose of our right conducts is not to earn God's favour but because we are favoured by God. And because we are favoured by God, we revere God's created order. We follow God's law in all that we do. Be it mundane or be it world impacting, God's law always take the precedence. Because for God created order matters.

Another aspect in understanding the aspect of God's created order is that God maintains that God is the creator and we are his creation. He does not allow anybody to take up his place. It is a common desire in human beings since the time of Adam and Eve is that we take up his place. We want to run our lives the way we like and the way it suits us. While this being the root desire, people take up the place of God sometimes in a much larger scale. Irrespective of the nature of the scale that we operate on, the principle remains. God is the creator and we are his creation. And that is the creator order. Babylon was the the world's superpower during Jeremiah's time. They were devouring nations for fun. They even destroyed big nations like Egypt. God even allowed the Babylonian empire to take hold of Israel and they took people of Judah to exile. But when we come to the final chapters of Jeremiah, God pronounces judgement against the great Babylonian empire. The details of the judgement would indicate that the great Babylon will be winnowed out like a flour. A great empire will be reduced to ruins; a city that no one would like to live.

God reminds his people that He is God and we are his creation. It doesn't matter how big an empire we create or how powerful we are or where we find ourselves in the status quo. God is still the creator and we are his creation. And he does not allow the big players to take control of

the disadvantaged for long. He allows them to flourish but his judgement is always impending.

Because the created order matters to God.

Dear church, it doesn't matter where you find yourselves in the world of fairness and justice. Be assured that for God created order matters! This would mean three things;

- we are a work in progress in God's hands and he is committed to us in moulding and shaping us to be a person that he wants us to be.
- God's law precedes everything that we do. If we go against God's law, we bring chaos. This world belongs to God.
- God is the creator and we are mere creation. God does not let anybody take his place. In his due time he brings justice to the victims.

Created order matters to God.

True worship matters to God

When we read through the pages of the book of Jeremiah, the dominating theme that run through the prophecies of Jeremiah is that God calls the house of Israel back to him. The house of Israel or the people of Judah has given themselves in idol worship and worshipping false gods. True worship matters to God!

The book of Jeremiah reminds us that this world belongs to God and God of the Bible alone is God. He is the God of all creation and the God of all nations. The reason that the understanding of this concept is important in the scripture is because there is a territorial understanding of God in the biblical times. Every nation had their own god. Each god was connected to a particular land. Different gods were worshipped for different purposes. There is god for prosperity, fertility, rain, war and so on and so forth. That is why in the scripture that Yahweh establishes himself as

the God of all creations, God of all nations. Even though Yahweh appeals himself to people, the people of Judah always resorted themselves to idol worship and were far away from the worship that God intended them to be.

God hates idol worship because true worship matters to Him. True worship matters to him because there is no other God beside him in the entire universe. The book of Jeremiah uses the language of a marital relationship and sexual infidelity to explain idol worship. God charges the people of Judah that they are unfaithful in the marital relationship with God. And they committed adultery in devoting themselves to other gods. These are some serious languages and grave accusations.

Sexual unions in marital relationships are one of the most intimate relationship that one can imagine. It is a kind of relationship where the guards are off and the couple are in their most vulnerable situation. Adultery can be viewed as making a mockery of that vulnerable relationship and it can become one of the most unforgiving offence in a relationship. Yahweh accuses of adultery when his people resort themselves to idol worship.

How about us today? Are we succumbed to any idol worship today? Paul Tripp, a pastor, author and conference speaker in his book *Instruments in Redeemers Hands* says ““Human beings by their very nature are worshipers. Worship is not something we do; it defines who we are. You cannot divide human beings into those who worship and those who don’t. Everybody worships; it’s just a matter of what, or whom, we serve.”

This means that we are all prone to idol worship. How do we know that we are worshipping idols? How do we know what idols do we worship? Interestingly, this actually can be understood from the concept of adultery. I learnt this psychological concept. How do you know you are

cheating your spouse? When you intentionally choose to spend more time with the other individual, feeling codependent and more comfortable to make choices with regarding your life decisions and whose acceptance is pivotal.

Idol worship is something similar. You spend more time and energy with your idol, you feel dependent on the idol, your life choices surround the idol and seek your idol's acceptance as well. Now, what are these idols? The idols are mere images and sculptures that are made with stone and wood. Is there anything wrong with these images and sculptures? They are in fact a reflection of good human creativity. The problem occurs when these products of human creativity has a sense of meaning attached to it and that meaning defines who you are. Similarly today, the idols that we have can be anything. It can be our jobs, our money, our family, our church attendance, our praying abilities, our good works, our intelligence and the list can go on. Now, these are good things and some of them are great things. But if these define who we are and life feels meaningless without these, they can lead to idol worship.

If you are married, you will agree with me. We step into marriage because we love the other person and we have the excitement of getting to know the other person at a deeper level. But what happens in the marriage is that you start getting to know yourself more instead, you start staring at your own sins and your idols get exposed. I remember the first time when Blessy told me that I hurt her. I was shocked; I couldn't believe that she would say something like; I thought I was a good guy; I don't hurt anyone. That day I learnt that "I am a good guy" is the idol that I carry in my heart.

The manner in which marriage exposes our sins and idols, the deeper relationship with God will always expose our sins and idols in our life. God appeals to us through the book of Jeremiah that

you don't need any idols to derive life's meaning. All the idols are temporary! They always have the tendency to disappoint you! God is eternal! Worship him and him alone! In all areas of life, worship God and denounce the idols. True worship matters to God!

May our hearts draw closer to God and engage in true worship where we weed out all the idols in our life.

His people matters to God

The book of Jeremiah reminds us that he is the creator and we are his creation. It also reminds us that God delights in true worship and he charges idol worship as adultery. The people to whom Jeremiah was prophesying were failing in both the areas. Their moral life fell short of God's standards, they were accused of injustice and oppression, they exploited the poor and vulnerable sections of the society, they broke God's covenants, they persecuted God's messenger etc. Their spiritual life was in ruins as well. They were worshipping idols and were not devoted to Yahweh. Now, this is bad and very bad because people of Judah is living in complete rebellion. The prophecy of Jeremiah is in response to that. How do we make sense for us today?

According to biblical scholars, one of the ways to understand the book of Jeremiah is through the understanding of a covenant. What is a covenant? It is a formal agreement between two parties. During the Biblical times, it was the most common practice among the kings and the vassal state. Usually this covenant has a legal document where the blessings and curses are mentioned. This would mean that if the vassal state follows the requirements of the sovereign king, all the blessings/benefits of the covenant applies. However, if the vassal state breaks the covenant, they become the subject of the curses. The book of Deuteronomy is the perfect example which portrays the book of covenant.

If we use the covenant language for the book of Jeremiah, God is the sovereign king and the kingdom of Judah is the vassal state. The issue at hand in the book of Jeremiah is that the kingdom of Judah has broken the covenant and are faced with the charge of the curse which is brought upon them with the pronouncements of judgement. In a nutshell, the kingdom of Judah breached the trust of the covenant and are facing consequences.

The good news however, is the message of hope which is unique in God's covenant to his people. God is not a random king who treats a vassal state like an acquaintance and chews them off when they fail to keep the covenant. Instead, God's covenant to Judah carries an overtone of relentless grace and unconditional love. However, the gracious and loving nature of God doesn't spare the consequences of rebellion. Instead, sin is treated as sin while the grace of God is always available for the repenting believer.

There is always hope in God's economy. If we read chapters 31-33, we read God's promise of restoration which signifies God's commitment to his people. God promises restoration, healing and a new covenant. While this covenant is broken, God promises a new covenant. Let us read Ch. 31:33, For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God and they shall be my people. In Vs. 30, this is called as the "New Covenant". And this new covenant is what God planned not only for the people of Israel but to all of us where we become part of God's household.

Jesus initiates this new covenant during his last supper with the disciples where the bread and the wine that represents his body and the blood becomes the sign of the new covenant. Jesus took upon the curses and the judgement of the covenant upon himself so that we may live. My dear

church, in Jesus there is no condemnation but there is life. In him there is always hope. And this hope exists not because as a human we have a scope of improvement. But because God is gracious. He pours his grace upon us and makes us his own. No amount of good works or devotion or knowledge qualify us to his grace. We are his people because he is a gracious God. And to this gracious God, his people matters. He never gives upon them. He does not tolerate them when his people sin but definitely doesn't give up on them. He is like a potter who is determined to create a vessel that he seems as best. He is committed to his task, he is working hard on us. Because we matter to God.

Dear church, we worship a God who not only created this beautiful universe but is committed to it. The creation matters to him, the created order matters, true worship matters to him and we matter to him. So, may I invite you to find rest in God's presence. May you be assured that you are loved, belonged and God is committed to you because you matter to God. And he says, I am your God, you are my people. It doesn't matter where you are in your faith journey. God is committed to us.

Let us pray-