

THE LINEN BELTS

INTRODUCTION

Good morning everyone! Today we are going to be wrapping up our justice series, now obviously it's not a subject that we can ever set aside, and move on from, but I hope that this series has served as a spark, which can develop into a real fire our hearts to seek Godly justice. Our vision as a church is to have a greater influence - influencing our community, building family, and reaching the next generation - and this is one of the ways that we do that.

So today I want to take us to Jeremiah chapter 13. Jeremiah was known as the 'weeping prophet.' Historically, he was prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah in the Old Testament – right before Judah ultimately fell to Babylon - and was led away into captivity. God sent Jeremiah, to a crumbling nation, to warn them of their impending demise – a warning they did not listen too.

Now the reason I want us to look at this, is because I don't want us as individuals, and as a church, to make the same mistake. I want us always listen to the Lord's warnings, or else we too will find ourselves becoming a crumbling church and christian community. So let's look at the message of the Lord through the prophet Jeremiah; Jeremiah 13, verse 1;

Jeremiah 13:1-11

This is what the LORD said to me: “Go and buy a linen belt and put it around your waist, but do not let it touch water.”² So I bought a belt, as the LORD directed, and put it around my waist.

³ Then the word of the LORD came to me a second time: ⁴ “Take the belt you bought and are wearing around your waist, and go now to Perath and hide it there in a crevice in the rocks.”

⁵ So I went and hid it at Perath, as the LORD told me. ⁶ Many days later the LORD said to me, “Go now to Perath and get the belt I told you to hide there.”⁷ So I went to Perath and dug up the belt and took it from the place where I had hidden it, but now it was ruined and completely useless.

⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁹ “This is what the LORD says: ‘In the same way I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.

¹⁰ These wicked people, who refuse to listen to my words, who follow the stubbornness of their hearts and go after other gods to serve and worship them, will be like this belt—completely useless!

¹¹ For as a belt is bound around the waist, so I bound all the people of Israel and all the people of Judah to me,’ declares the LORD, ‘to be my people for my renown and praise and honour. But they have not listened.’

This prophetic picture is a lot like one of Jesus' parables. In scripture we see that the Lord would often speak through the prophets in very practical ways, so that everyone could clearly understand.

In those days, the belt or girdle was a very practical piece of clothing. It held your robe in place – think of a dressing gown without a belt! The most common ones were leather and would hold your money bag, knife etc, almost like a utility tool belt, but the linen ones were fancier and often decorated with embroidery. Jeremiah was also a priest, so it was likely that it was a special priests linen belt.

Exodus 39 says this about these belts or sach's;

29 The sash was made of finely twisted linen and blue, purple and scarlet yarn —the work of an embroiderer—as the LORD commanded Moses. (Exodus 39:29)

I'm very grateful to Tracey for making one for me to illustrate this morning.

(Pull out good linen belt)

The priests one, would have been purple, but I think you get the idea!

So God tells Jeremiah to buy one of these, to put it around his waist, and not to let it touch any water. We are not 100% sure of the significance of that, other than it possibly being an obedience thing.

God then spoke to Jeremiah again, and told him to take the belt, and to hide it in the rocks at a place called Perath. We can't know for sure, but biblical scholars think that an area close to this spot... is likely to be the place.

(Picture)

Jeremiah did exactly what God told him. He hid the linen belt somewhere in these rocks and left it there. Again, we're not sure for exactly how long, but we are told 'many days later,' God told him to go and dig it up again.

Once again, Jeremiah obeyed. And as you can imagine, the beautiful linen belt was not nearly what it once was. It was not ruined and useless. Something like this...

(Pull out ruined linen belt)

God now begins to reveal what this is all about. He says to Jeremiah; "Jeremiah, do you see this ruined and useless belt? This is what I am going to do to the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem."

"Why Lord?" ... "Because these wicked people, they refuse to listen to my words, they follow the stubbornness of their hearts. They go after other gods to serve and worship them. And so they will become like this belt – completely useless."

As I read through this earlier this week. I felt deeply challenged by the Lord to think about my own life, and our church community.

Have we got proud? Proud of what we have achieved? Let's not deceive ourselves, just doing a justice series at our church does not make us a people of justice. We now have to walk the talk. As wonderful as it is that we have got to be a part of the rise of Living Hope, if this is our only response to justice, and we have developed a pride in this. We are on dangerous ground.

As we look at these two belts today. Which best describes you?

Have we refused to listen to God's words? Are you tuning him out because you don't like what he is saying to you?

Have our hearts become stubborn? Have they become hard?

Have we served and worshipped other gods – or put other things before God in our lives?

As I have considered the state of the post-covid church, and I have thought about these belts ... I need to tell you church, I'm concerned. I don't say this to judge, or to condemn, but I am seeing some signs that I am very worried about. I think we need to talk a bit about these today.

• **I see complacency**

I see this in many ways. Perhaps it is sign of the times in which we are living. But I worry that the love of many has grown cold. This happened to the church at Laodicia, and God called them out on their lukewarmness and warned them that unless they repented, He would remove his lamp stand from their church, which represented his Spirit and presence. They were challenged to return to their first love with Jesus. What about us? What about you? Is your love for Jesus still burning strong, or have you backslidden into complacency. Are you more interested in watching Netflix than spending time with Him?

• **I see compromise**

Most of us know other people... who have sold out, who've given in to the dark forces of greed, sin, self-absorption, or ruthlessness. In the process, they threw Godly character and integrity out the window.

And even if you don't personally know someone who's done this, a quick scan of the news headlines on any given day, will usually yield a pastor, an athlete, a politician, or a business leader who has.

So how does a person get there? Even if your family hasn't forsaken you, and it hasn't cost you your job, you may sometimes look in the mirror with the sinking feeling, that you didn't do what you should have done, and you're not who you thought you'd be.

You know how compromise starts? Subtly.

Catch it before it's too late, and it takes you down.

https://careynieuwhof.com/the-7-most-likely-challenges-to-take-you-out-or-stunt-your-growth-as-a-leader/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Why+do+great+leaders+fall%3F+And+why+do+they+never+see+it+coming%3F+7+reasons%3A&utm_campaign=9%2F4+the+7+reasons+you+will+be+fired+this+year

- I see **callousness**

Hannah is our little gymnast in the family. It always amazes me how quickly her hands start to form hard calluses from the bar work she has to do. Those beautiful soft little hands, start to get as tough as nails. Now while that is normal and good for gymnastics, it's not good when that happens to your heart. One of the ways we can respond to all the need and injustice around us, is to allow our heart to get hard and callous. But we can't let that happen - we need to pray that God will give us soft hearts, that are not hardened toward Him or the people around us.

- I see **casualness**

I am concerned about a casualness toward God, and a casualness toward church that has set in over the past few months. Please don't misunderstand me, I'm not having a go at those who are being careful of COVID and wisely staying away, but I think that many others have developed new habits over the past few months, and many of us have realised how awesome a Sunday morning can be without having to go to church! Especially in a place like Cape Town, with the beach, the mountains, and the lifestyle. Now don't get me wrong, I love getting out into nature probably more than most, and this is important, and we have to make time and place for more of this in our lives, but not at the expense of church. Some over this time may have fallen out of the habit of how important church fellowship is. It's become easy like Sunday morning! Friends, for some, it's time to have a reset, a restart, and to get back to your spiritual home. We cannot be too casual about our commitment to the Church of Jesus Christ.

- I see **cynicism**

I know how hard this can be. If you have found yourself becoming cynical toward church, toward people, don't shut down. God is probably calling you to re-open your heart. When you feel cynicism and numbness entering your life – don't give up and just think "Well, this is the way it is now". No. It does not have to be like that. Commit to reopen yourself to God, to church, to people, to encouragement, and to hope.

One pastor said it like this;

You probably didn't start out in life as a cynic. But if you're like most people, you find yourself growing a little more cynical with every passing year.

Cynicism begins not because you don't care, but because you do care. It starts because you poured your heart into something, and got little in return.

As much as you may not want to admit it, cynicism is a choice. Life doesn't make you cynical. You make you cynical.

Once-a-cynic doesn't mean always-a-cynic. Not if you get Jesus involved.

If you are having a crisis of faith - bring that to the Lord. Talk to one of us. Jesus can help you re-open your heart and bring healing and restoration.

https://careynieuwhof.com/the-7-most-likely-challenges-to-take-you-out-or-stunt-your-growth-as-a-leader/?utm_source=ActiveCampaign&utm_medium=email&utm_content=Why+do+great+leaders+fall%3F+And+why+do+they+never+see+it+coming%3F+7+reasons%3A&utm_campaign=9%2F4+the+7+reasons+you+will+be+fired+his+year

Now all these things... complacency; compromise; callousness; casualness; cynicism, this can all sound very negative! But the Lord is speaking and working in us so that we can change this narrative. These don't have to be words that define us. The Lord is with us, and wherever His presence is, there can be change, there can be forgiveness, there can be healing, because where the spirit of the Lord is... there is freedom!

But we do have a choice... Hold up both belts.

God said to Jeremiah in verse 11;

11 For as a belt is bound around the waist, so I bound all the people of Israel and all the people of Judah to me,' declares the LORD, 'to be my people for my renown and praise and honour.

Oh Lord, we want to listen, we want to obey.

Bind us again to you Lord.

My friend, are you still bound to the Lord?

Are we still bound to following Jesus?

Are we still wrapped up in his Spirit & presence.

Are we still bound to His body?

Are we His people! For His renown, and His praise and honour!!!!!!

So here is what I am dreaming and praying our church will be like...

Rather than complacency; compromise; callousness; casualness & cynicism;

• **I see a church that genuinely follows Jesus**

Like this belt, I want us to be bound to Jesus. Last week Jeremy spoke so powerfully about following Jesus, and how as we do this, He transforms us. May we all be priests that love him, serve him, and follow him wherever he leads.

• **I see a church that maintains justice**

Not my words - they are the words of another Old Testament Prophet, Isaiah. God spoke through him and said;

Maintain justice and do what is right, for my salvation is close at hand and my righteousness will soon be revealed. ² Blessed is the one who does this—the person who holds it fast. (Isaiah 56:1-2b)

Isaiah 1:17 says; **Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.**

As we learn to seek justice together... I wanted to let you now that we want to pull together those who are passionate about this. If you feel God is drawing you into this, I want to encourage you to speak to Damian our Youth Director, he would like to help start a group that can look at transformation in our community.

Church, let's maintain justice and do what is right. Blessed is the one who holds to this.

- **I see a church that holds to the truth**

In researching about critical race theory, intersectionality and privilege, these challenging subjects, I have been reminded of how important where we get our truth is.

One of the errors we can make... in responding to justice issues, is that we can shift away from where we get our truth. So I want to remind you today that truth is not determined by people or groups of people through their hardship or life experiences.

That's not how truth works. Truth is true outside of anyone's perspective. Two plus two equals four, regardless of the melanin in your skin or any of your past experiences. Cricket balls fall from airplanes regardless of what anyone believes about gravity. Truth is located outside of a person's perspective. As Christians, we must remember where truth comes from: the bible. God's Word is always true ([John 17:17](#)). It is the foundation for all truth claims.

So we need to remember what true justice is. Hold fast to that truth, no matter how unpopular. Speak it out. Demonstrate it. Be the salt and light Jesus commands us to be.

<https://www.challies.com/book-reviews/why-social-justice-is-not-biblical-justice/>

Finally today;

- **I see a church that loves one another**

As we close out this series, instead of adopting secular methods to fix spiritual problems, Christians should look to the Scripture to address sinful behavior. Thankfully, God has given believers tools to combat all kinds of injustice.

The term "one another" is used over 90 times in the New Testament. This phrase is one way God shows us how we should work with our brothers and sisters who have been mistreated, acknowledging and correcting, if needed, known injustice. As Christians, we ought to care for one another regardless of skin shade, social status, nationality, disability, or personal struggles. We should . . .

- Love one another ([John 13:34](#))
- Build one another up ([1 Thessalonians 5:11](#))
- Give preference to one another ([Romans 12:10](#))
- Encourage one another to good deeds ([Hebrews 10:24](#))
- Bear with one another's burdens ([Galatians 6:2](#))
- Be hospitable to one another ([1 Peter 4:9](#))
- Pray for one another ([James 5:16](#))

https://answersingenesis.org/racism/critical-race-theory-church/?utm_source=articlesmedia&utm_medium=email&utm_term=20201003&utm_content=1-banner-cta&mc_cid=09c75afe47&mc_eid=7cc5603437

A long time ago, God called the prophet Jeremiah to challenge His people who had become broken and useless to Him.

Is God speaking to us today?

If he is, I pray that we will listen and obey. Because this is not his plan for us...

(Hold up ruined belt)

We were created to be bound to him...

(Hold up good belt)

We were made for his renown in all the world, and for his praise and honour!