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Sermon Series: *Jesus' Wife, No. 6*

Young Love

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Jeremiah 2:1-13 (NIV)

The word of the Lord came to me: ² "Go and proclaim in the hearing of Jerusalem:

"This is what the Lord says: "I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me and followed me through the wilderness, through a land not sown. ³ Israel was holy to the Lord, the first fruits of his harvest; all who devoured her were held guilty, and disaster overtook them," declares the Lord.

⁴ Hear the word of the Lord, you descendants of Jacob, all you clans of Israel. ⁵ This is what the Lord says:

"What fault did your ancestors find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves. ⁶ They did not ask, 'Where is the Lord, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness, through a land of deserts and ravines, a land of drought and utter darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives?'

⁷ I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable. ⁸ The priests did not ask, 'Where is the Lord?' Those who deal with the law did not know me; the leaders rebelled against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols.

⁹ "Therefore I bring charges against you again," declares the Lord. "And I will bring charges against your children's children. ¹⁰ Cross over to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to Kedar and observe closely; see if there has ever been anything like this:

¹¹ Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols. ¹² Be appalled at this, you heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the Lord.

¹³ "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

We're in Jeremiah, Chapter 2, if you'd turn there. Jeremiah, the second chapter.

You've heard the phrase, "The honeymoon period," and you know what it means, right?

It's applied to jobs, to partnerships, to friendships, even to teams and clubs and church relationships. Anywhere there is a human-to-human relationship involved, you can have a "honeymoon period."

And what it is is that initial time in the relationship when everything is young and fresh and exciting. It's a time when lots of warts are either not yet noticed, or they're intentionally overlooked.

And as long as it lasts, it's great, right?

The problem is, of course, that it doesn't last all that long.

Eventually, friends have differences that can't be just ignored and have to be worked through, and that's not always easy.

Eventually, your business partner and you have a disagreement about how to move forward.

Eventually, the boss makes you do something you don't really want to do, but you have to do it anyway, if you want to keep your job.

Eventually, you find that the club or team or church you joined isn't quite as perfect as you first thought.

And that is the end of "the honeymoon period."

Of course, this whole idea comes from marriage, where the *actual* honeymoon ends, and the couple comes back to normal life: life where all is not mountains and beaches and candlelight dinners and exotic loveliness.

And in that normal life, when the couple run into problems, that's when the marital honeymoon can end.

You've heard the old joke about the stages of marriage as they relate to the wife having a cold, right? Here's a vivid description of the end of the honeymoon.

In the first year of marriage, when the wife gets a cold, the husband responds to her illness like this: he says, "Oh Sugar Dumpling! I am worried about my baby girl. You have a bad sniffle, so I'm going to carry you to the hospital for a checkup and so you can get some rest; and I know your food will not be very good there, so I will bring you every meal from the restaurant down the street."

That's in the first year of marriage

In the second year, when the wife gets a cold, the husband says: "Darling, I don't like the sound of your cough, so I've called Dr. Miller to come here. Now you go on to bed and I'll take care of everything."

In the third year, when the wife gets a cold: "Honey, maybe you need to lie down because there is nothing like some rest when you feel badly. I'll bring you something to eat. Do we have any canned soup in the house?"

The fourth year: "Now look, dear, be sensible. After you've fed the kids, done the dishes and cleaned the floor, you better lie down."

The fifth year: "Why don't you take a couple of aspirin?"

The sixth year: "I wish you'd take a pill or something instead of sitting around barking like a seal."

The seventh year: "For Pete's sake, stop sneezing! Are you trying to give me pneumonia?"

That is a picture of a honeymoon that has ended.

Jeremiah, here, gives us another picture of an ended honeymoon.

Here's the scene: in Jeremiah's day, Israel had long been split into two nations. The northern kingdom had already fallen - taken over by the Assyrians in 721.

And Judah, the southern kingdom, Jeremiah's home, was a mess and in danger of falling itself.

You can read all about it in 2 Kings 22 or 2 Chronicles 34, but the short of it is, those days were bad days, spiritually and morally. Idolatry was rampant. God had been long neglected.

But, just the same, in those days two important things happened.

First, God called Jeremiah to begin preaching.

And second, God raised up Josiah to be king, taking Judah's throne when he was only eight years old.

Josiah was not like most of his nation or his predecessors on the throne. Josiah loved God and he wanted to see His people come to repentance, so he began several national, spiritual initiatives, including the rebuilding of the temple, which had been grossly neglected.

And amazingly, in the middle of that rebuilding process, the book of God's law was found. The Scripture! It had been lost in the temple.

That would be like church people completely forgetting that the Bible exists.

Can you imagine? Sure you can. There are local churches where that's the reality today.

But there in the temple, when they realized what they'd found, they began to read it. Josiah called the people to listen to it, and a revival began that helped the nation to endure.

But God had already been working, because about five years before that, He called Jeremiah to begin his preaching ministry, which is what we have here in Chapter 2.

This is Jeremiah's first message after his commission from God.

It starts off positively, commending Israel's early love for God back in Egypt—back in the desert. He reminds them of how they committed themselves fully to following God's ways and how they avoided idolatry and managed to keep the temptations of neighboring peoples at bay.

They did as God told them to do in those early years in the wilderness, and they made consistent progress toward their promised land.

We talked about all that a couple weeks ago. God asked for a covenant relationship—a marriage—with Israel at Mount Sinai, and Israel accepted. Except for a couple of small interruptions, Israel followed God faithfully all through the wilderness experience.

Israel kept her promise to God.

And God kept His promises to her, and things went well for everyone, you see?

This is the sort of relationship God wants with people. All people! It is what He made us for: a relationship of delight with Him. He wants to lead us into peace and joy and satisfaction and fulfillment and purpose. The One who made us wants to walk with us and share with us and provide for us and help us and protect us.

God wants nothing less than a marriage, and He wants the honeymoon between Himself and His people to keep on going and going and going.

He wanted that for Israel: the excitement and happiness and contentment and commitment that comes with marriage. All that appears so naturally in young love: God wanted that all to continue, because you see, where God is concerned, honeymoons need not last only for a limited time.

But, sadly and heartbreakingly for God, His honeymoon with Israel ended, because of Israel's unfaithfulness. It ended surprisingly quickly, actually, and for this, Jeremiah critiques His people.

In verse five, he begins speaking for God, describing Israel's rejection of God with this remarkable question: *"What fault did your ancestors find in me, that they strayed so far from me?"*

Think about that for a minute. It's a shocking statement. Imagine the Creator God asking His creation, *"What's so wrong with me that would cause you to leave me?"*

It's rhetorical, of course, and, after asking it, He goes on to reiterate, there in verse 6, all that He had done for them, all this that they had apparently forgotten. God says, *"Israel didn't even consider, 'Where is the Lord, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness, through a land of deserts and ravines, a land of drought and utter darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives—and who brought us into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce?'"*

The people didn't even consider Him.

And neither did the **leaders**, Jeremiah says—the very people who were *supposed* to remember.

In verse eight there, *"Even the **priests** did not ask, 'Where is the Lord?' Those who deal with the law did not know me; the **leaders** rebelled against me. The **prophets** prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols."*

Those who were *supposed* to remember God, and lead the people to remember, failed to do it.

Everyone forgot Him—and so the honeymoon was over.

And it was so disappointing and frustrating to God—you can hear it in His words. He's sad. He's perplexed. He's angry.

It's as if God says, "I loved you so well; how senseless could you be to neglect and ignore and leave me?"

Look at what He says there in verse 10. He challenges them, *"Cross over to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to Kedar and observe closely; see if there has ever been anything like this: Has a nation ever traded its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.)"*

He's inviting His people: *"Look as far as you can to the west and to the east—see if you can find a people—anywhere—who would give up the love of one who loved them so well! And for what? For the sake of worthless idols!"*

Verse 12 there, *“The heavens are shocked at such a thing—so much that they shrink back in horror and dismay!”*

So unbelievable it is: that a people would walk away from their first love, the love of their youth, the love that had been so good and so faithful.

And for what!?! For nothing! For worthless, powerless idols.

In their giving up of Yahweh, they’d made an absolutely terrible trade.

Do you know what people say the worst trade in the history of sports was? In January of 1920, the owner of the Boston Red Sox, Harry Frazee traded Babe Ruth to the New York Yankees for \$100,000 and the ability to secure a \$300,000 loan to finance a musical.

“No, No, Nanette” was the title.

Have you ever heard of it? Of course not. It flopped colossally. But you’ve heard of Babe Ruth, right? Because he and Yankees went on to dominate baseball for the next 20 years, while the Red Sox won absolutely nothing.

Now anybody with any sense at all knows that that was a bad trade.

But Israel’s trade was far, far worse.

In verse 13 there, in what Israel did, God says, *“My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and they’ve dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.*

Two sins: 1) they have forsaken the true God, and 2) they have invented their own.

They traded the “Spring of Living Water” for *cisterns*: cisterns that *they* had to create, and that would *never, ever work*.

Can you see the power in this description?

God—Yahweh—Israel’s first love. Jeremiah names Him here, for the first time, “The Spring,” or, “The Fountain of Living Water.” That’s who God is. That’s who He was to Israel.

It’s sort of like the “overflowing cup” in Psalm 23.

God is the creator of water. He’s the provider of water. He’s where water (and everything else) comes from. It flows out of Him without any work at all on our part.

This is Israel’s God.

But they rejected Him and traded Him for *cisterns*.

You know what a cistern is. It’s a tank that holds water, usually underground, and, first of all, it has to be created. In Jeremiah’s day, they were usually chiseled out of rock.

So first someone has to make it. Then water has to be found somewhere, transported to where the cistern is and then dumped or pumped into the cistern for storage. Then, when it’s needed, it has to be pumped out again.

You see the difference in the image?

Water just flows from a spring—a fountain. A fountain requires nothing of us.

But a cistern is a man-made container for water that we have to find.

Israel made that trade: a spring for a cistern, and a broken cistern at that. A cistern that wouldn’t work!

That’s a clear enough image for us, but it was even more startling for Jeremiah’s original hearers, because they were people who lived in a semi-arid land, where water was prized and thirst was common.

How utterly absurd of them to trade the source of all that is precious and rare and life-giving in order to have to cut cisterns, and then to find, themselves, water to fill them—water that is dirty and unpredictable and that leaks out and disappears.

How senseless to make such a choice.

And how disappointing and sad to God that they did—that they left what was good for what was broken.

How disappointing and sad to God that they gave up a way that works for a way that doesn’t.

How disappointing and sad that God’s people chose the worthless over the worthy.

Actually, the circumstances were worse than just disappointing and sad, because, you see, broken cisterns kill their makers.

Nobody carves a cistern and expects it to *not* work. You make your cistern and fill it with water and expect to find the water there when you need it.

But you only find out your cistern doesn’t work after it’s too late, after you’ve filled it and the water leaks out. When you come back to get the water you need and find it gone, that’s when you realize you’ve messed up.

By the time you realize your cistern is broken, it’s too late.

Broken cisterns kill their makers, because they can’t provide the water they need when they need it.

Broken cisterns also disappoint those who search, because broken cisterns promise more than they wind up being able to deliver. People come to them expecting to find water, but when they open them, they find only dust.

Broken cisterns kill those who make them, and those who trade for them, and they disappoint those who search—for water, for truth, for their thirst to be quenched.

God’s people had traded the worthy for the worthless.

And Jeremiah says there in verse 5, that in that choice—in their trade, they became worthless themselves.

What’s that mean? It means that when someone trades God in for useless knowledge, useless wisdom, useless principles, or useless morals, not only does that person, himself or herself, self-destruct, but anyone who comes to that person looking for wisdom or knowledge finds in him or her only dust.

They fail as examples, as teachers, as leaders—because they have nothing of substance to offer.

And when that happens to leaders, they put the whole family, church, community and nation at risk you see?

Everything becomes warped. Nothing works right. Truth is skewed. Principles are diminished and priorities are misplaced.

And everyone is affected. Everyone suffers.

Trading away Babe Ruth ruined the Red Sox for decades.

Trading away God ruins individuals and families and communities and nations, potentially for ages.

Israel experienced this sort of progressive deterioration. She fell further and further into sin and all the despair and suffering that accompanies sin.

And she didn't even realize it. Israel didn't even realize how bad off they were.

Jeremiah is shocked at the blindness of the people: at how mindlessly and thoughtlessly, and yet passionately, they chased after broken cisterns, things that did not work, things that were contributing to their own destruction.

Does that not sound like so much of our nation – our culture today?

How passionately does our world pursue the eradication of God, and in doing so, we're desperately trying to build our own cisterns – that will surely kill us and all who come after us.

And how wise so many think they are in their attempts to do things so foolish!

In his book, *Murder in the Cathedral*, T. S. Elliott observes how only "the fool, fixed in his folly, may think he can turn the wheel on which he turns."¹

Now, are you ready for some good news? God used Jeremiah and Josiah to bring at least a partial awakening to Israel about her situation.

It wasn't a great awakening, but it was a good awakening.

We might wonder, "Will there be a Jeremiah and a Josiah to help us?"

It's hard to say.

The better question to ask might be, "Am I, personally, with all my heart chasing after the Fountain of Living Water, or am I wasting my time building leaking cisterns?"

¹ Elliott, T.S. *Murder in the Cathedral*. Faber and Faber, London. 1935, 24.

In my life, in what I think and what I value – in my priorities, have I traded the Fountain for a broken cistern?

Am I chasing after other lovers, or am I embracing the love of my youth?

There's only one way that works.

There's only one path that leads to success, eternally.

Stay faithful to Jesus – to His ways – to the love you enjoyed with Him when you first met Him.

If you've strayed from Him, return to Him, while you can. Today is the day of salvation. Return to Him. He will receive you, and He will, once again, give you living water for your good and for His glory.

Closing Prayer: Father, thank You for this word that You gave to Jeremiah that still speaks powerfully today. Thank You for the grace that we see in all of this. Even then, You were calling your people back to Yourself. You were inviting them. And the same is true today: You invite us to yourself. Those who have walked away from You, those who have made a bad trade somewhere back in their lives: Lord, would you help them and us to stay true to You, to our first love. And help those who have made a bad trade to return to You. Thank you for the mercy and grace that You have made available to us and that make redemption possible, that make the undoing of bad trades possible, so that we can live truly with the Fountain of Living Water. In Jesus' name. Amen

Closing Song: *My Jesus, I Love Thee*

Benediction: If you've not traded away Jesus, your first love – the love of your youth, praise the Lord for you, and may the love and commitment between you always be a honeymoon.

If you have, however, traded Him away, I urge you: get rid of the empty cisterns in your life. Repent of that sin, and ask Jesus to return to that place of first love.

And if you've never yet received Jesus, would you, today, invite Him to become your true and first love. The Lord is faithful; He never forsakes His own, never forsakes His own.

Bless you. Thank you for coming to worship,.