

Jeremiah 2:4-13  
Trading Glory, and the Living Stream  
Hope Christian Reformed Church  
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About five or ten years back, a phenomenon swept through the world of little boys: Yu-gi-oh cards. Kids collected and traded Yu-gi-oh cards like kids used to collect and trade baseball cards or – later – Pokemon cards. (Or how kids are collecting and trading Silly Bands now.) You buy a package of cards, hoping that somewhere among the standard cards that you keep getting package after package, you'll get lucky. That as you flip through your new package of cards, you'll discover in your possession something special – something rare. A card that's hard to get. A card that all your friends want.

I remember when Yu-gi-oh cards were big because I have younger brothers. And one of my brothers *loved* Yu-gi-oh. He not only collected the basic cards, but he also collected the special, holographic cards.

One time my mom bought my brother a package of the holographic cards. He opened up the package, flipped through the cards, and suddenly his eyes got big. He held up one of his cards and said, “Mom! Wow! This card is so rare! I can't believe I got it!”

Well, a couple weeks later, my brother was out playing with his good friend Tommy (who also happened to be a very business savvy – and sly – kid). My mom and I were sitting together in the living room, and we saw my brother sneaking out the front door with an envelope in his hand. And my mom asked him, “What are you doing?”

And my brother said, “Oh, I'm just trading Yu-gi-oh cards with Tommy.”

But he looked uncomfortable with her question, so my mom kept asking questions. And she said, “Well, what is it you're trading?”

My brother pulled four cards from his pocket. “Tommy's giving me these.” (They were pretty good cards, but nothing too hard to come by.)

So she kept pressing: “Well, what are you giving to Tommy? Show me what's in that envelope.”

Reluctantly, my brother showed her: That special, rare, holographic Yu-gi-oh card. And something else, too: money! Apparently, one incredibly awesome card in exchange for four mediocre cards wasn't enough. Tommy wanted a little cash thrown in, too.

And my sweet brother – who by the way *is very, very smart* – almost got totally ripped off.

He was going trade something so valuable to him for a handful of things that weren't so valuable at all.

Now, my little brother almost made that trade because he was tricked into it. After all, who of us would make such a worthless trade knowingly? On purpose?

Yet it turns out, that's exactly what the people of Israel did: they made a worthless trade *on purpose*. And not only is that just about impossible to comprehend; it's *unprecedented*, anywhere.

Not even foreign nations who worship idols do that.

Nations were loyal to their national gods.

Israel was the only nation that worshiped the true God. And they were they were the only nation to

trade him in for something worthless.

Look at verse 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:

Has a nation ever exchanged its gods?

(Yet they are not gods at all.)

But my people have exchanged their glorious God (or, in most translations, 'their Glory')  
for worthless idols.”

They traded in the God who created them, and loved them - the God who led them out of Egypt and gave them a beautiful, spacious land to live in...and they chose the gods that other nations worshiped instead.

*My people have exchanged their Glory for something worthless.*

[Let's talk about glory for a minute. When *we* think about glory, what do we tend to think of? Probably things like brightness and light. Maybe something like a shining aura. But in Hebrew, the word for glory means, *heaviness...weight*. So, to say that the LORD is glorious doesn't mean that he's bright and shiny. It means that the LORD is *heavy, and weighty, and substantial*.]

So what the LORD is saying to his people through Jeremiah is that

they've traded in something heavy for a puff of smoke;

they've traded in someone substantial for something that can be blown away in the wind.

They've turned away from the LORD who has been a living presence with them, and who has carried them, and who has protected them...and they've traded him in to worship what their neighbors worship.

They've traded this heavy, solidly faithful, one-on-a-kind God for a handful of idols that are a dime a dozen.

Why?

Well, we could go the easy route and judge them, and say, “Well, that's stupid.” But let's think about what it must have been like to be them.

It had been a long time since God led them out of Egypt. (And by 'them', I mean their great-great-great-grandparents.) They didn't *experience* what the LORD did for their ancestors. They didn't *see* what their ancestors saw. They had to live off of collective memory and family stories.

Their leaders should have been leading them to know the LORD...but they didn't seek him, or even ask, “Where is he?”

Man, and the gods of the nations were so close. Their neighbors all around them were worshipping these other gods. And the closer they became like their neighbors, the more they were invited to join in. The more they felt the 'peer pressure' to be like everyone else.

And unlike their God, the LORD, these other gods didn't care about the specifics of their lives. The

LORD gave his people detailed instructions about how to live; and these other gods basically said, “Do these things for me, and then you can pretty much do what you want.”

So the payoff was so immediate, and so satisfying.

And you know, people are people...and we don't change that much from generation to generation. And aren't those some of the same reasons why we, too, tend to trade in the God of glory for other, lesser gods?

For one thing, we often have to rely on family memory, too – because we haven't seen all that we'd like to see with our own eyes.

And a God who is heavy isn't easy to live with. A heavy God tells us what we're supposed to do. A heavy God puts pressure on us and says, “Every move you make in this life – every decision, and word, and thought – matters.”

Other gods don't care. Most gods – especially the gods in our neighborhoods - don't use words like 'sin' and 'consequences' and 'salvation.' Other gods don't watch so closely. And they say things like:

you're fine as you are;

you can pick and choose from as many religions as you want;

you can take the basics of Christian faith and alter them to fit your viewpoints and needs;

you can worship whatever suits you best.

You don't believe in sin? No big deal.

You don't believe Jesus actually rose from the dead? No big deal.

And the payoff is so immediate...and there's nothing heavy weighing on us.

But when we trade in a heavy God for ones that apply less pressure...what else do we find?

The LORD says through Jeremiah that these 'gods' aren't really gods at all. The word for 'idol' comes from the same word that means 'worthless.'

The LORD says it's like trading in a stream flowing with fresh water in exchange for an in-ground pool, full of stagnant water. And it's cracked, so all that water's leaking away.

A stagnant god:

Won't refresh you.

Doesn't move.

Won't keep you on your toes.

Won't surprise you.

And like a dear friend and mentor recently said to me: “If you have a god you can figure out...then what's left?”

If you're dealing with a god who can't hold water...

Where does your meaning come from?

What's going to tether you?

What's going to sustain you when tragedy comes, and all the philosophies you've built don't actually give you comfort, and you need some sort of *substantial* hope?

A god who can't hold water doesn't even *know* you, personally – doesn't have eyes to see, or ears to hear, or a heart to love, or a mind to know you.

I have a friend who spent a season of his life not believing in the God of glory. And one day he was sitting beneath this willow tree, and he felt this emptiness. And he reached a breaking point. And he said: “If there isn't a God who knows how many leaves there are on this tree, and who knows every blade of grass, and who knows what I'm thinking right now...who knows *me*...then I don't want to live.”

And to make matters even worse, there's also this (verse 5): Those who followed worthless things became worthless themselves.

You take on the character of the thing that you worship.<sup>1</sup>

Trade in the God of glory, and exchange him for something less heavy...and no wonder we ask:

Why is my life stagnant, not going anywhere?  
Why am I so out-of-touch with people's needs?  
Why do I do harm?  
Why do I feel so hollow?

And the LORD asks in verse 5, “What fault did your ancestors find in me, that they strayed so far from me?”

What fault did *you* find in me, that you strayed so far?  
Have I ever done anything wrong?”

And it turns out...he hasn't.

It turns out that the God of glory keeps wanting his people.

It was the LORD who rescued his people from slavery in Egypt.

Verse 6:

It was the LORD who led them through a 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.

Oh, but the God of glory traveled with them, and kept them safe, and led them on.

And it was the LORD who brought them into a fertile land  
to eat its fruits and rich produce.

And as his people keep turning away from him, it's the LORD who keeps calling them back.  
As his people keep running away, it's the LORD who keeps pursuing them.

The LORD keeps pursuing them because the God of glory keeps his promises, and his promises mean something. His promises are weighty.

Here in Jeremiah 2, the words of the LORD are strong...because the Living God is also a jealous God.

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<sup>1</sup> I don't remember the source, but this idea comes from Old Testament theologian, Walter Brueggemann.

He wants *all* of his people's love, and *all* of their trust. He doesn't want them to worship anyone else, or anything else...because only the LORD has their best interests in mind. In his glory, the LORD is the only one who loves them.

And in his glory, the LORD will *never* break his promise to his people.  
The LORD will *never* trade his people for *anything* else.

*That* holds water.

Do you want to talk about heaviness?

This God spoke, and he set the universe expanding, and he set the earth spinning, and he breathes life into everything that lives. And he said, "It's good," and he loved this world dearly.

But his people who kept running away, over and over again. So he took on flesh, and dwelt among us. In the person of Jesus Christ, he died for our sins, and rose from the dead, to rescue us from the power of sin and the curse of death.  
And now his Holy Spirit dwells in and among his people.

The God of glory listens to our prayers.

He's always present – even here in this room.

He walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death.

He comforts us in our sorrow.

He brings resurrection so that death is never the last word: Just as Jesus rose from the dead, so we, too, will rise.

He brings hope where there is no hope.

Where there's isolation, he makes family.

Where there's despair, he brings joy.

Where there's conflict, he brings peace.

Where there's death, he brings life.

The glory of this God is in his power.

The glory of this God is his faithfulness.

The glory of this God is his grace.

You see, this is why we say God is glorious: His promises hold water.

The sacrifice he made to put us into right relationship with him is heavy.

And his presence is a weighty presence – not just in the world at large, but also in our lives.

When my friend sat beneath that willow tree he said, "If there's not a God who knows me, I don't want to live." Well, the living God called him by name. In fact, I heard him tell that story among a group of seminary students who were training to be mentors and discipleship leaders for students at Calvin College. The LORD not only called his name...but has also been using him to call others' names.

And you know what, people of God? We take on the character of the One we worship.

The God of glory gives us worth.

The God whose love and faithfulness are solid...makes us faithful and loving people.

The God who is actively at work in this world...works in the world through us.  
The God whose promises hold water...enables us to point to the promises of God, which hold water.  
The God of glory takes his people, the church...and *we* reflect his glory.

The Holy Spirit will do that as we spend time with God's people, and sing the songs of our faith, and humble ourselves before the Bible.

In a minute, we're going to sing a song of response – a simple song about the glory of God. But before then, Dora's going to play for a little bit, and we'll have an opportunity for silent prayer.

If there's anyone here who's traded their Glory for something worthless...tell him you're sorry, and let it go now: His glory is in his grace. And he'll never trade you for anything.

And if you're here and you've seen the truth of this – if you've experienced the weight of the LORD over and over...praise him. His glory is in his faithfulness.

All of us here: stand in awe before him, and drink deeply from this living stream, because there is no one like him.

Amen?

Thanks be to God!