

The text that we are about to read was written during a rather difficult time for God's people living in Jerusalem and in the country called Judah. Israel and Judah were one country after King Solomon and David but then Israel was conquered in 721 BC by the Assyrians.

Judah survived as a country but then the Babylonians conquered the Assyrians and Judah came under Babylonian control beginning around 600 BC. In the text we will be reading, the Babylonians are preparing to capture and destroy the city of Jerusalem and haul the people off into captivity and exile.

We will be reading words from the prophet Jeremiah who tried to call the people into faithful obedience to God. Jeremiah warned God's people that they needed to be faithful to the covenant that God made with them through Moses.

Jeremiah tried to remind God's people of the laws, including the 10 Commandments, that were given to God's people to abide by. Most of the words from the prophet Jeremiah are a call for the people to become obedient to God once again.

But the people do not listen, and Jeremiah becomes the voice of a frustrated God. Jeremiah expresses the frustration of God after the people refuse to love God and love neighbor. The people decide to craft their own gods that serve them rather than them serving God.

The people are experiencing the judgement upon their actions and are being carted off into exile. They are fearful as they are seeing their city destroyed and worried that God had abandoned them because of their mistakes.

In the midst of their fear and anguish, Jeremiah offers up these words of hope.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

Jeremiah becomes the voice of God's judgement upon the people for their disobedience. But Jeremiah is also used by God to be the voice of hope and second chances.

We have all made mistakes in our lives. Sometimes our mistakes are pretty big. Some of us look at some of the mistakes we have made and get down on ourselves. We get into a pity party and think that we are worthless because of these mistakes that we have made.

And it's hard when some people in our lives have given us criticism that points out the mistakes that we have made. It may be a co-worker, it may be a spouse, it may be a parent, it may be a friend, it may be a student, or it may be a teacher. It stings when our mistakes are pointed out.

But sometimes the criticism is done to make us become better than we are.

Let's watch a clip from a recent episode of "America's Got Talent." In the show, different people from around the country share their talent and hope that the judges vote in their favor to advance them along to the next round.

Show video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RrbSHxXSdbc>

Some of us have come into worship feeling bad about some mistakes that we have made. Our reactions to our mistakes are really bringing us down. We are feeling a sense that we have really messed up big this time.

Or maybe some of us have come into worship feeling that we have made several small mistakes, but they are building up for us. We are thinking that there must be something wrong with us.

Jeremiah spoke to a group of people that ignored his concerns for years and they faced God's punishment for their actions. But then Jeremiah shares that God is going to give them a second chance. That God is going to write new words on their hearts and provide them with a new covenant.

Why does God continually give us second chances? Think back to the video that we watched. Think about what this singer was like before and then what happened after she was given a second chance.

We are given second chances because God seems to believe that we can learn and grow and become something more. We do not need to wallow in pity for our mistakes. We can accept the grace from God that we are given second chances.

God is calling out to us through Jesus Christ and inviting us to accept forgiveness for our past mistakes and to be open to the second chances which are being provided. Our faith is built upon an invitation to follow a God who is a God of second chances.

And if we blow the second chance? Don't worry.

God offers us a third chance and a fourth chance and a fifth chance as well.

God continues to invite us to accept forgiveness and to try again with new promises from God. AMEN.

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-Given: March 18, 2018 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)