

## Why are the Jews persecuted? 10<sup>th</sup> November 2019

### Opening Reading: Psalm 98

<sup>1</sup> Sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvellous things;  
his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.

<sup>2</sup> The LORD has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

<sup>3</sup> He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to Israel;  
all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

<sup>4</sup> Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music;

<sup>5</sup> make music to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing,

<sup>6</sup> with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn— shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

<sup>7</sup> Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.

<sup>8</sup> Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy;

<sup>9</sup> let them sing before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.

### Sermon Reading Jeremiah 31 (excerpts)

#### Verses 1-6

"At that time," declares the LORD,

"I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people."

This is what the LORD says: "The people who survive the sword will find favour in the wilderness; I will come to give rest to Israel."

<sup>3</sup> The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love;

I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. <sup>4</sup> I will build you up again, and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt. Again you will take up your timbrels and go out to dance with the joyful.

<sup>5</sup> Again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; the farmers will plant them and enjoy their fruit. <sup>6</sup> There will be a day when watchmen cry out on the hills of Ephraim, 'Come, let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God.'"

#### Verse 10

<sup>10</sup> "Hear the word of the LORD, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands:

'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.'

For the LORD will deliver Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they.

#### Verse 21

<sup>20</sup> Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight?

Though I often speak against him, I still remember him.

Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him," declares the LORD.

#### Verses 31-

<sup>31</sup> "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. <sup>32</sup> It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.

<sup>33</sup> *"This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. <sup>34</sup> No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD.*

*"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

<sup>35</sup> *This is what the LORD says, he who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar— the LORD Almighty is his name: <sup>36</sup> "Only if these decrees vanish from my sight," declares the LORD, "will Israel ever cease being a nation before me." <sup>37</sup> This is what the LORD says: "Only if the heavens above can be measured and the foundations of the earth below be searched out will I reject all the descendants of Israel because of all they have done," declares the LORD.*

## Introduction

Last week we looked at questions people shared and tried to discover answers

- I deferred this question from last week
- Because I felt it needed more time to do it justice
- And answer it properly

## Question

**Why do people hate/fear the Jews so much? (With racism on the increase it could be quite pertinent from a historical but also timely perspective).**

I think this question deals with two issues

1. Racism in general
2. And antisemitism as a specific and pervasive form of racism

## Thoughts on Racism

Racism is caused by many factors

- It is far more complex than we can discuss this morning
- But at its heart is sin
- Right from the start people have sought to blame others for their own sin
- We see this in Genesis 3 After eating the forbidden fruit Adam and Eve hid from God

<sup>9</sup> *But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"*

<sup>10</sup> *He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."*

<sup>11</sup> *And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"*

<sup>12</sup> *The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."*  
(Gen. 3:9-12)

Two consequences of sin – fear and blame

- These are at the heart of racism
- A form of moral cowardice
- A fear of accepting our own sinfulness and excusing ourselves by denigrating others

We see it again in Genesis 4

- The story of Cain and Abel

*The LORD looked with favour on Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favour. So, Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.*

*<sup>6</sup> Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? <sup>7</sup> If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."*

*<sup>8</sup> Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. (Gen. 4:4-8)*

A well-known story

- Cain is furious God has not accepted his offering
- Instead of accepting God's rebuke he blames his brother

'Victim blaming' is a modern phrase for an old problem

- That desire to excuse our faults by deflecting our anger to someone else
- Then excuse our abuse by convincing ourselves they deserved it.
- It is the same with greed - We want what we haven't got
- So, we convince ourselves those who have it don't deserve it.

James tackles this

*What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. (James 4:1-2)*

If we extend these sins from personal to group situations

- A group, tribe or nation begin to live is disobedience to God
- Or attempts to dispossess another whose resources are desirable
- They do not have the integrity or courage to admit their own fault
- So, they find a minority group to blame - someone to scapegoat
- Then they begin to invent reasons why they are inferior or unworthy
- And at its worse they dehumanise them totally

We see this in the language of racism

- It always describes impersonal groups – never individuals
- If an individual crime is committed it is used to defame the whole group.
- And it is easier to mistreat a group than someone we acknowledge as an individual.

So, anyone who is different or distinctive can be a victim of this

- We fear those who we identify as different
- We scapegoat them for the problems we face.
- And justify our sin by blaming them.
- Making the excuse they somehow deserved it.

I read an article in a newspaper quoting some Psychology research.

- That suggested we all have a sense of fairness and justice
- But although this is essentially a good thing it can be turned on its head
- In that if we see a person or group persistently suffering unfairly
- We find it easier to conclude they must have somehow deserved it.
- Than to challenge the inherent injustice

Over time these attitudes become entrenched

- And as the scale of abuse or exploitation increases – so does the scale of blame.
- We see that in our own history
- As western nations began to colonise other countries, they needed a greater form of self-justification
- Initially this was provided by conquest.
- Our victory must be because we are favoured over the conquered

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century (1800) theories of racial groups began to emerge.

- It became known as Eugenics but has no scientific basis at all.
- But it enabled people to claim superiority of 'white' races over the 'black'
- And formed the basis of the Nazi ideology.
- They epitomised the 'dehumanisation' of those they deemed inferior

Lest we become complacent Christians were not immune to this

- And bible verses have been misused to justify our exploitation of other 'races'
  - If you remember the story of Noah, after the flood he gets drunk
  - He is shamed by his son and afterwards he curses his grandson, (Genesis 9:24-25)
- When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, <sup>25</sup> he said, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers."*

The argument was made that Canaan was the ancestor of the African nations

- So, it was God's will they should be slaves.
- This is stretching a point to its illogical conclusion
- God did not curse Canaan, Noah did
- And it was an example of sinful 'victim blaming'
- Not an attitude to be emulated.

It is worth thinking about this idea of racism being a curse

- Because that is what it is
- We 'curse' someone by seeking to determine their destiny by our words
- We devalue and condemn them

And it is also important to remember that it was through Jesus that these curses are broken

- Paul tells the Galatian Christians
- Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." <sup>14</sup> He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*
- (Galatians 3:13-14)

Paul is saying Jesus, not only took our sins on the cross

- He took our curses.
- Those racist, sexist or other derogatory prejudices that we curse others with
- Have been taken by Jesus and replaced with blessing
- This means two things
  - 1- We don't have to live under the curse anymore
  - 2- Those who curse us with racist attitudes have actually cursed Jesus

This is what Matthew 25 is about

- The difference between the sheep and the goats
- Jesus says  
*"Whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."*

### Thoughts on Anti-Semitism

Now let's tackle the specific form of racism that is antisemitism.

- The question is, why are the Jews so often the victims of our racism?
- Throughout history they have been victims of both racial and religious prejudice.
- Probably the most persecuted peoples of all time.
- In the Bible we see it, Exodus and Esther are two examples
- Their adherence to their faith and identity has made them distinctive
- This has made them an easy target for evil men

It is ironic that the early church was persecuted for refusing to comply with Roman religion

- But once Rome became 'Christian' with the conversion of Constantine
- The Christians began to persecute the Jews for refusing to comply with Christianity.
- The excuse used was they were the ones to blame for Jesus death

This is nonsense, of course

- We know Jesus died for our sins
- So, we are responsible for his death
- This takes us back to blaming others for our own faults
- And is incompatible with personal repentance.

But this has led some to argue that we are instruments of God's punishment

- The Jews brought it on themselves
- There is a passage in Matthews account of Jesus crucifixion
- Where Pilate washes his hands in front of the crowd and says  
*"I am innocent of this man's blood, it is your responsibility!"*
- And the people answer, *"His blood is on us and on our children!"* (Matt. 27:23-24)

This is an example of misuse of scripture

- It is victim blaming and is definitely not an excuse for antisemitism
- In Isaiah 50 God describes how his judgement came through the Assyrians
- Yet he did not hold the Assyrians guiltless

<sup>6</sup> *'My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray and caused them to roam on the mountains. They wandered over mountain and hill and forgot their own resting place. <sup>7</sup> Whoever found them devoured them; their enemies said, "We are not guilty, for they sinned against the LORD, their verdant pasture, the LORD, the hope of their ancestors."* (Isaiah 50:6-7)

<sup>17</sup> *'Israel is a scattered flock that lions have chased away. The first to devour them was the king of Assyria; the last to crush their bones was Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.'*

<sup>18</sup> *Therefore this is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: 'I will punish the king of Babylon and his land as I punished the king of Assyria. <sup>19</sup> But I will bring Israel back to their own pasture, and they will graze on Carmel and Bashan.* (Isaiah 50:17-19)

We have no excuse.

- Whatever our justifications
- God will not hold us guiltless for our mistreatment of the Jews

This implies another important factor

- It is not just racism the Jews suffer from
- They are God's chosen people and they carry the name of The Lord God
- As such there is a spiritual dimension to their persecution
- All evil is inspired by Satan and Satan particularly hates the Jews
- Because they are God's chosen people
- He will destroy them if he can

There is a spiritual battle going on

- Paul tells us *"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* (Ephesians 6:12)
- And anti-Semitism is part of that battle.

In his letter to the Romans Paul expresses his passion for his own people

- How he longs for them to come to faith in Jesus
- And believes God has promised he will draw them back.
- He says we, as Christians should love the Jews because they are God's people

Romans 11: 25- 32

<sup>25</sup> *I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers and sisters, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, <sup>26</sup> and in this way all Israel will be saved. As it is written:*

*"The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob.*

<sup>27</sup> *And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."*

<sup>28</sup> *As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies for your sake; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs, <sup>29</sup> for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable. <sup>30</sup> Just as you who were at one time disobedient to God have now received mercy as a result of their disobedience, <sup>31</sup> so they too have now become disobedient in order that they too may now receive mercy as a result of God's mercy to you. <sup>32</sup> For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.*

## Conclusion

Obviously, there is much more that could be said on this subject

- But I think we need to finish by thinking about what we should do.
- How, as followers of Jesus we should behave and react to racism and antisemitism
- I have 4 ideas to

### 1. Refuse to use the language of racism

- Avoid using derogative or emotive terms of descriptions
- Including describing people in group terms
- E.g. 'The Jews', 'The youth of today' or 'immigrants'

### 2. Challenge reasonably those that do

- Don't reply evil with evil
- But neither can we just ignore it
- I am informed it was John Stuart Mill, who said in 1867:
- "Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing."

### 3. Resist the temptation to victim blame

- We none of us deserve anything.
- It is only by God's grace we are anything
- The only person who was ever genuinely superior was Jesus
- And he lived a life of compassion, love and mercy towards others

### 4. And most of all Pray

- As we said this is a spiritual battle
- It will not be won by worldly means
- Prayer is the main way we can defeat the evil one.
- Pray for victims of racism and prejudice
- Pray for all God's people facing persecution
- Pray for the Jews.
- The Bible tells us to "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Psalm 122:6)

Let's end with some of the words we started with

## Jeremiah 31:10

<sup>10</sup> "Hear the word of the LORD, you nations; proclaim it in distant coastlands:

'He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd.'

For the LORD will deliver Jacob and redeem them from the hand of those stronger than they.