

No Pain, No Gain

Lessons from the Two Baskets of Figs



"I will give them hearts that recognize me as the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me wholeheartedly" Jer. 24:7 NLT

Why doesn't God stop evil and suffering in the world? According to biblical prophecy, He will end evil after Christ's second coming, Millennial reign, the final Judgment, and the new heavens and earth (Rev. 19-22). However, until then, He allows evil to run its course due to humanity's fall in the Garden (Gen. 3) and uses evil to accomplish a greater good. God used a basket of figs as an object lesson to illustrate this to Judah.

Jeremiah 24 can be divided into two parts: (1) Good Figs (24:1-7) and (2) Bad Figs (24:8-10).

Central Lesson:

God uses pain and problems to correct us and change us for our good.

1. **God uses pain and problems to correct and _____ us** (24:5). *"The good figs represent the exiles I sent from Judah to the land of the Babylonians."*

Judah would be exiled into Babylon for 70 years (Jer. 25:11-12). God repeatedly sent Prophets to call Judah to return to Him, but they refused to listen (25:3-12). God sent Judah into Babylon to correct them and change them into "good figs." God also allows us to experience pain and problems to correct and change us to become the "good figs."

Bible teacher Warren Wiersbe writes, **"The destruction of Jerusalem and the fall of Judah were not accidents; they were appointments, for God was in control."** Hebrews 12:11 adds, *"No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way."*

2. **God is watching over us and _____ about us even when He allows times of pain and problems** (24:6). *"I will watch over and care for them, and I will bring them back here again. I will build them up and not tear them down. I will plant them and not uproot them."*

God knew the exile would correct and change Judah. He intended to refine them and return them to their homes in Jerusalem. God would use the exile to build them up and to plant them. He would use the pain to produce good.

We must not think that God has abandoned us when we experience pain and problems. He cares about us and is watching over us. But He allows pain and difficulties to run their course because of the good things they will do for us. See Romans 8:28 *"And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them."*

3. **God knows everyone's _____ and corrects and changes those whom He knows will respond to Him** (24:7) *"for they will return to me wholeheartedly."*

God loves us so much that he wants to correct and change us for our good. Pain and problems seem to be the most effective tools God uses. C.S. Lewis wrote, **"God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world"** (*The Problem of Pain*). Pain gets our attention when we ignore God's other means of speaking to us (Bible reading, small group Bible study discussion, preaching God's Word, regular church attendance, etc.).

When we experience pain and problems, we must reflect on what God may be trying to tell and do in us. We need to examine our hearts and ask ourselves: Is God correcting something in me or teaching me something important? Am I willing to *submit* to the correction and change God seeks to accomplish within me?

The Life Application Study Bible adds: **"The fresh, ripe figs represented the exiles to Babylon, not because they themselves were good, but because their hearts would respond to God. He would preserve them and bring them back to the land. The spoiled figs represented those who remained in Judah or ran away to Egypt. Those people may have arrogantly believed they would be blessed if they remained in the land or escaped to Egypt, but the opposite was true, because God would use the captivity to refine the exiles. We may assume we are blessed when life goes well and cursed when it does not. But trouble is a blessing when it makes us stronger, and prosperity is a curse if it entices us away from God. If you are facing trouble, ask God to help you grow stronger for him. If things are going your way, ask God to help you use your prosperity for him"** (24:2-10).

4. **God withholds His favor and _____ those who persistently reject Him and do evil** (24:8-10). *"8 'But the bad figs,' the Lord said, 'represent King Zedekiah of Judah, his officials, all the people left in Jerusalem, and those who live in Egypt. I will treat them like bad figs, too rotten to eat. 9 I will make them an object of horror and a symbol of evil to every nation on earth. They will be disgraced and mocked, taunted and cursed, wherever I scatter them. 10 And I will send war, famine, and disease until they have vanished from the land of Israel, which I gave to them and their ancestors.'"*

The bad figs represent King Zedekiah, his officials, the people remaining in Jerusalem, and those who escaped to Egypt. These individuals persistently remained in their sin and rebellion against God. But they would not escape the Babylonians, whom God would send to destroy them (v. 10).

Most people view God as loving and merciful, but He is also Holy and just. He cannot ignore evil. He is a righteous judge who must punish sin.

In addition to being merciful and just, God is also patient and slow to anger. He allows people the opportunity to repent of their sins and turn to God. But God's patience will come to an end, and He will deal with persistent sin. Sometimes, people ask why God seems to allow evil people to prosper and avoid judgment. The answer is in God's patience. He is allowing sinful people to turn from their sins to Him. But sinfulness will eventually meet justice at God's designated time.

Central Lesson:

God uses pain and problems to correct us and change us for our good.

- Accept Christ as your Savior. ► As a Christian, dedicate your life to Christ. ► Invite someone to next Sunday's study. ► Attend a small group.
- Read the Bible. ► Pray for friends that need Jesus.