



BY DAVID BRICKNER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dare to hope

More Christians have been martyred this year than at any other time in modern history.

The moral decay of our culture has many believers wringing their hands while others who claim to know Christ are compromising on the clear teaching of Scripture. You might say these are dark days for followers of Jesus.

The prophet Jeremiah lived during a similar time in Israel's history. He was charged by God to prophesy judgment on his own people because they disobeyed God by conforming to the sins of those around them; their idol worship, child sacrifices and religious prostitution had polluted the land. Jeremiah spoke God's truth in power.

He condemned sin and foretold judg-



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ment. The Babylonians—invaders from what we know as modern-day Iraq—would pulverize Israel's armies and drag the people away into captivity.

For pronouncing such a message, Jeremiah was rejected by almost everyone—and especially by his own family. They plotted to kill him. He was humiliated, publicly beaten and mocked; he was shamed as he was whipped and put in stocks in the public square. Finally he was thrown in prison and flung into a deep pit, where he lay sinking and freezing and near death.

Jeremiah was broken and lonely, yet he wasn't without hope. In fact, he not only lived with a profound sense of hope, but he actually wrote a letter to the people after they were taken captive in Babylon, daring them to hope in the midst of their exile. (See Jeremiah 29:4–7)

How amazing that Jeremiah wrote this letter at all! Remember, these people had caused his pain and suffering and imprisonment.

I don't know about you, but if it were me I would have been tempted to write a letter saying, "See. I told you so. But now you've gotten exactly what you deserve." But Jeremiah doesn't do that. Instead he writes to encourage them and to offer them hope for coping with their pain and loss. I find that striking.

And that is exactly how God responds to us. When we experience the consequences of our disobedience, He doesn't gloat or say, "I told you so." He looks to forgive and bring about our redemption.

In Oatlands, Sydney the Abdallah family offered forgiveness to the driver who killed three of their children in February. The whole world was amazed to see such good people. But it's not merely that they were good people; they were God's people. And those people, acting in His strength, showed the world what a good and loving God looks like.

When we choose forgiveness and grace toward those who have wronged us, we, too, can show others what God is like. And we can do this because it is how God has shown Himself to us.

The second thing that strikes me about Jeremiah is this: he gave the best possible advice to a people who had experienced utter devastation. They had experienced such profound loss, that it was only natural for them to despair of life.

But Jeremiah says something like, "Hey guys. You have to keep on living. Even in exile there is hope, because the God of hope promises to be with you. Learn to live for what good God can make out of it."

All of us today are living in a kind of exile because ultimately our home is with God. Yet God still wants us to live full of hope now and to do good even in our exile because ultimately we represent Him. Our exile may feel like a real sense of loss.

Eventually life delivers the blows of loss and disappointment, even to those who are obedient, as Jeremiah was. Painful disappointments in our relationships may result in loneliness and alienation. Or maybe things haven't turned out the way we hoped

in terms of our job and career. We may be struggling with bitterness over any number of unmet expectations. Some are facing declining health, even the prospect of death before we feel ready for it. COVID-19 reminds us of this daily.

We must realize the temporary nature of life. The things we think will make life perfect can't ultimately satisfy us. Even if we have little or no disappointment in our relationships, career, etc.—even the best of the most wonderful life is tainted with temporality. And the knowledge that whatever we have on this earth is fleeting has caused many people to despair.

That's because we are made for a permanence that is found only in God's presence, a love and a joy that never fades—that is what we truly seek, even if we aren't aware of it. And that is what only He can give.

We can never hope to avoid the pain and brokenness of life this side of heaven—yet we can live hope-filled lives because God's mercies which are new every morning.

Those mercies give us every reason to open our eyes and see what God has for us right here. We can engage with people, be a light to the world around us and also experience and enjoy the blessings that God is offering us here and now.

We can have a measure of that experience now and into the future. We need to believe that and declare that, and order our lives around that ultimate reality. No matter how dark the horizon, we can dare to hope because we know for a certainty, the best is yet to come.

Bits from the Branches

Oct 2020



Thanks to those of you who have been praying for Jews for Jesus during this strange time. We are truly amazed by God's grace in opening doors we would never have imagined during the pandemic! From Hungary, to Israel, to Sydney, and beyond, He's at work. We hope you will be encouraged to see how ministry has continued—and in some ways increased—during this time.

Bogi Kozma reports from BUDAPEST.

“Beyond Schmooze’ is a new gathering where we invite our contacts to discuss spiritual topics that are intellectually challenging, such as why a good God allows people to suffer. I led the first ‘Beyond Schmooze’. We examined the topic of miracles from the viewpoint of the Old Testament, the Talmud, as well as modern rabbinical writings, and also from the New Testament. Seven guests attended, and after the group discussion, we had some good one-on-one conversations. Then the next month, Avi Snyder, pioneer of our work in the former Soviet Union, Germany, and Budapest, was our speaker, and we discussed what it means to be God's chosen people. Eight guests attended, and again, we had good conversations.

Since lockdown we decided to do livestream. We wondered if the technology would be conducive to the event, but 27 guests—more than three times as many as before—joined us! Even our Orthodox Jewish friends stayed to the end as I concluded the evening with the message that Yeshua the Messiah is the Prince of Peace, and that His purpose is much more than bringing the victory for one nation at one point in history.

“Pray that these events continue to inspire meaningful conversations with Jewish people who don't yet know Jesus—not only during this time of restric-

tions, but face to face after the virus.”

Note: Bogi Kozma serves with our Budapest team in partnership with Christian Witness to Israel.

PARIS. Branch leader Joshua Turnil reports.

“Lionel Gimelfarb, a Jewish believer and a trained pastor, has been on our staff for two years. He and his wife, Valérie, are both triathletes, and Lionel is also a trained fitness instructor. His background gave us a unique way to minister during the pandemic.

“As part of the pandemic lockdown in our country, bicycling was banned, and people are only allowed to walk or jog within one mile of their homes. Most live in apartment buildings and are not getting enough exercise. Lionel created a livestream video called ‘Fit to Faith’ which he streams every Monday to Friday morning. The video provides 30 minutes of cardiovascular exercise for all levels of fitness, accompanied by spiritual songs and Scripture verses.

We wanted Jewish people who don't yet know Jesus to feel welcomed and included, so we chose our Scripture verses from the Old Covenant, and we used a lot of Hebrew. More and more Jewish people who aren't yet believers have been tuning in! Please pray that this endeavor will bear fruit in the future, and that the fruit will endure!”

You Are Reaching Jewish New Yorkers for Jesus

Last year, our New York team relocated to Greenwich Village, just down the street from New York University. Jews for Jesus founder Moishe Rosen first caught a vision for new ways to reach Jewish people with the gospel in “The Village,” and it's still a great place for creatively communicating the good news.

We had a terrific autumn outreach to last year's returning students, and we even had Bob Mendelsohn with us for a big part of that outreach. (Thanks, Australia for the loan!) We thank God for a space where we can warmly welcome people to gather for Bible studies, Shabbat dinners, holiday events, and more. As COVID lockdown orders start to lift and people slowly begin engaging in social interactions once again, we will be ready to meet people's hunger for community and spiritual support, and we look forward to sharing what Jesus means to us.

But even during the height of the pandemic in NYC, our missionaries were not slowed in their efforts to reach out to seekers during shelter

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JEWS FOR JESUS™

Keeping the gospel contagious

BY RUTH ROSEN

Back in the 1970s, Jews for Jesus founder Moishe Rosen said that too many churches were unintentionally “vaccinating” people against the gospel. He’d say, “Some give just enough of the gospel to ensure that others won’t catch a case of it.” Well, Moishe used to say a lot of things, and they often balanced each other out. For instance, one of my favorites was, “You can’t turn off what the Holy Spirit is turning on.”

So, despite some churches “vaccinating” people with the gospel, the Holy Spirit is perfectly capable of keeping the gospel wonderfully “contagious.” And He calls us to take part in that. I think Moishe would have deeply appreciated all our efforts—not just those made by Jews for Jesus, but by so many ministries and individuals across the globe—to help “keep the gospel contagious” during the pandemic. None of us liked having our lives disrupted, and we grieve with those who have suffered great loss—and yet it does seem like God is using this season to further the gospel. Now what?

► Keep praying full force! As obvious as that sounds, it’s easy to pray less once we feel a crisis has passed. Let COVID-19 remind us that the whole world continues to be in spiritual crisis

without Jesus. Pray for people to realize their need for God, and to receive His gift of life through the Messiah.

► Ask people how they are doing, and listen carefully to their responses. Questions like “Has COVID-19 changed anything about what you value, or how you want to live your life?” might open interesting conversations that can take a spiritual direction.

► Expect to hear people talk a whole lot about what is wrong and who is to blame; look for ways to segue into a concise and biblical observation about what is wrong in the bigger picture. You might even have the opportunity to explain how Jesus was willing to “take the blame.”

► Please let Jews for Jesus be a resource to you and to Jewish friends who are interested in Jesus. We will gladly connect with your Jewish friends. If you or they are not comfortable with that, and if you’re looking for help in your witness, we will connect with you. The quickest way to reach us is online. Anyone who comes to our website www.jewsforjesus.org.au will receive an online greeting and a “How can we help you?” But you can also phone us at +61.2.9388.0559 and ask for your call to be directed to someone who can help you in your witness to a Jewish friend.

Together, by God’s grace, let’s keep on keeping the gospel contagious!



in place orders, and they became even more innovative and adaptive, reaching people through any medium available.

New York branch leader Liz Goldstein reports, “Though Sheila* is a New Yorker, Josh Sofaer first connected with her from his home in Los Angeles—over LiveChat. Josh passed her name and number to us, and I met with her a couple of times by phone. Sheila’s Christian boyfriend had been sharing the gospel with her, but, as a Jewish person considering Jesus, there were things she couldn’t quite understand. She needed to talk to another Jewish person about Jesus, and that’s exactly what we did. I also gave her Shoshannah’s phone number (Shoshannah is one of our veteran missionaries), so that more than one of us could be available to her. When Shoshannah connected with her, Sheila had already become a believer! Thank you for your prayers and support that make it possible for Sheila and so many others to meet the Prince of Peace.”





BY BOB MENDELSON- AUSTRALASIAN DIRECTOR, SYDNEY. OCTOBER 2020

There's nothing good about evil and there's no hope in redeeming horrible things, saying that evil is good. Isaiah warned the Jewish people about this mistake which was dangerous and prevalent in his days.

"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" (Isaiah 5.20)

I appreciate the good nature of so many people in Australia and other countries, who looked in March when global attention turned to COVID-19, saw what needed to be done to knock the virus out of their world, and got to work to make that happen. That took place in South Korea and in various countries of the world. I like that people saw the problems and set to work to make the coronavirus into something less than significant.

Of course there were many around the world who didn't respond or when they finally did respond, were ill-equipped or ill-tempered to take on the task of elimination, of mitigation, of sensible victories over the disease and as a result thousands upon thousands of people are dead and many more are going to suffer long-term debilitating results that are no good from their contracting the virus at their home or the rally, at the pub or the fitness centre.

Saying 'she'll be right, mate' to another at these times is nothing more than what Solomon intimated when he wrote, "Like one who takes off a garment on a cold day or like vinegar on soda, is he who sings songs to a troubled heart." (Prov. 25:20) We cannot make light of the sadness and the commensurate troubles of those who suffered and who are still suffering due to the virus, the lockdowns, the mental stress, and the economic

losses. These problems are all real, and good people are among those who have been suffering.

When one donor couple wrote me last month from South Australia about what they are seeing there. I was tremendously encouraged. "We've prayed for years for Awakening...and we are beginning to see this in the middle of the pandemic. So many churches are developing prayer teams across denominations and praying together... Many churches are praying for Israel and coming to love Jewish people!" They wrote much more, but that segment seriously blessed us.

We are seeing that in the Eastern suburbs of Sydney particularly and are excited. When God moves prayer champions to the same prayers, it's as if he's about to act for his own name's sake.

Do I therefore think COVID is a good thing? I won't call evil good, nor good evil, but I'm glad that "when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will raise up a standard against him." (Isaiah 59:19). And Paul wrote the Romans, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril [add COVID-19], or sword?...For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:35-39)

Will COVID win? Not a chance! Keep your eyes fixed on Yeshua and love your neighbour. Ask that person if they are ok, if they need anything, and let's be turning the darkness of global gloom into the light of the glory of God for them, for your suburb, for your state, and for our countries. To God be the glory!

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