

The Real Transformer Jeremiah 24:1-10

The year was 2007. In my humble opinion, it was the year that one of the greatest movie franchises came to life for me. With the release of the first movie in the franchise, I was so excited to see characters of my childhood cartoon days come to life in a relatable, albeit, a farfetched and highly exaggerated movie. Of course it must be said that the movie I am talking about is somewhat of an action movie but at the same time, it has humour, a bit of romance and a whole lot of nerdy and geeky aspects. The entirety of this particular franchise revolves around the concept of alien robots that come to earth, robots that have the ability to transform from their almost "human-like" states into cars, or trucks, motorbikes, jets and even helicopters. And even then, they are not limited to a particular form, they can change into any mode of transport they so desire. For me of course, if I had that ability, I for one would become a Redbull F1 car, but that's just personal preference. But as all good action movies should have, there are two factions within this alien race, there are the good guys and there are the bad guys. The age of the transformers was upon us, and after 12 years, 6 movies, countless man-hours of preparation, screenwriting and scripting, hours of recording and re-recording, editing, and of course the watching of some of the most amazing battle scenes and quirky moments, it became clear from the very beginning that the good guys were always going to win.

How simple would life be for us if this were only the case? How simple it would be if there were a dedicated team of professionals working together, day and night, scripting out our very existence, planning everything out so that we would always have the best camera angles, the best lighting angles and ultimately leading to the best outcome? How interesting would it be having your very own theme song, created for your particular life, and having it play back for you as you make a grand entrance into any room? How simple it would be knowing that if we made a mistake, we could simply roll back the tapes, have a retake, edit it all later so that what we ended up with was a movie worthy of that golden globe or that Oscar, maybe we'd even settle for a simple nomination? But let's face it, life is not a movie is it? For the most part, there are no retakes, no "cut and roll back" moments, there's no directors or producers saying, "ah... we'll try that again from the beginning, but maybe add a little bit more of this to it." There's no ability to transform into whatever form we so choose. We can choose to make ourselves appear in a different light or to make ourselves even just blend into our everyday situations, to make it look like we have everything together but at the end of the day, whether we try to do this or not, what we end up with is simply two things: A show or a mask that we think we're creating to make ourselves look different, and the person truly under the mask. And I assure you that only one of these two things truly matters in the eyes of the Lord.

Jeremiah is given this vision from the Lord during a somewhat turbulent time in Israel's history. By this time, Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonian empire, thousands of people have been taken into exile to Babylon, that includes, as was recorded in this passage, the king of Israel, his officials, the artisans and craftsmen, basically anyone who was strong, able and fit for war. Those who were left behind in Jerusalem were the poorest in the land, the weak and even the elderly. Many even had the forethought to run from this coming invasion, fleeing to Egypt where they would escape this destruction and find refuge and safety. This vision given to Jeremiah is of course about the two specific groups of people, those taken into exile, and those left behind. But the outcome is not quite what we would expect is it?

Jeremiah's vision is of two baskets, each filled with figs, one with figs that are very good and one with figs that are so bad that they cannot even be eaten. And these two baskets were "placed in front of the temple of the Lord", an image of the sacrificial procedure in **Ex 29:42-43**. The procedure called for the Israelites to gather, literally *to meet*, the Lord there. Now though, it's not a burnt offering that is brought before the Lord but the people themselves become that very offering. Paul echoed this sentiment in **Rom 12:1** where he called the people to offer their bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord. As God's people, this was always going to be the case as He called us into His presence, to live nearer to Him, to act out and act upon His word and His commands and to be a reflection of Him within this dark and fallen world. And for more than 200 years, the Lord's warning came to His people through the prophets, growing ever more intense as the years went by. His call was for them to turn away from

their sin, to turn away from their corrupted nature, to turn back to Him in an act of repentance, with their whole heart to turn back to the God who called them.

Those good figs, those people of God, who were taken during the Babylonian exile, it is those people that God chooses to transform. Why? Because what the Babylonian exile ultimately turns into is a divine punishment from God, or if you prefer, it is God disciplining His people. He uses this situation to break the corrupt, hollow, idolatrous and selfish ways of His people, almost as if through this situation, His people would, under the hardships of captivity, be cleansed from their former ways, cleansed from their sins. It was God that allowed it to happen and through this, His people were finally able to learn to fully rely on God. **V7. says it like this, "I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart."** This is the transforming power of God, that He would give them new hearts, hearts for the Lord, hearts that would always seek after Him and His will. This transformation is not in human strength nor can it be achieved through human intervention or planning, but it is solely the work of the Lord in us.

The bad figs though, those who either remained in Jerusalem or who had fled to Egypt, it is those people who fell further away from God. And this is not because they stayed or fled, well I would suggest not in its entirety, but rather, it was because of the fact that they became smug, they began to gloat in the fact that they had escaped the punishment, the hardship, the destruction that came via the Babylonians. They thought that they had outsmarted God, and in turn, looked down on those who were taken. But this was not God's plan nor His purpose for the exile. Everything about this was about teaching His people that they could not do whatever they wanted, they could not continue in their old ways and they surely could not rely on themselves for salvation and blessing. But even though these people had escaped the immediate wrath of God, they could never truly turn back to Him, their hearts would never receive the transforming work of God and it is this that leaves them outside of the will and purpose of God. This is what God says about them, vv.9-10, **"I will make them abhorrent... gave to them and their fathers."**

At the end of the day, we can put on the masks, we can try to hide behind them thinking that we have everything under control, "we have outsmarted the Lord" and escaped His divine punishment, or we can remove the masks, reveal the true person underneath, accepting that Jesus bore our punishment, but we are still in need of God's transforming work in us.

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