

Kings and Prophets 16-07-21a

This is Thursday, the 21st of July 2016. We're returning tonight to our two-session format, but with shorter sessions. With the Lord's help, I'm going to endeavor to stick to my time and cover the material in a happier fashion.

I've been a little disappointed with my inability to keep myself organized, so I think after 20-odd years, my mind just works in a double-session format, and I haven't been able to wrestle myself back down to a single go without being inordinately lengthy. So we'll have a 25-minute session, followed by a five-minute break, followed by our special music, followed by another 25-minute session. You should be out in time to watch the Barnum and Bailey three-ring circus happening in Cleveland before the night's over.

Without further ado, let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, and we'll begin. Father, we are so grateful that you have not left us as orphans. The Lord Jesus promised that we would have the presence of your Holy Spirit as our comforter and our guide, and we sense the imminent and transcendent presence in our souls as we reflect on the truth of your Word, as we endeavor to apply it properly in our lives, as we recognize, identify, and receive your cleansing for the sins that we commit, the failures to which we are so susceptible, and we're grateful that there is reason and there is purpose and there is understanding as we face our circumstances and navigate the course of our lives.

We thank you for the passage that we study tonight in the book of Jeremiah, set in its historical context in the declining kingdom of Judah, and even as we see what appears to be a significant decline in the culture and in the nation around us, we ask your blessing on us that we can take these truths to heart, make them real to us, and enable us to see clearly where they apply to us, how we can best move forward reflecting your glory and shining as lights in the midst of our generation. We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. Last time, as we seek to find some representative samples from the book of Jeremiah, we do not have the opportunity at this point to cover it in great detail, but there are these high points, there are these representative elements within it that help us to see the message that God gave to His people, both the faithful and the unfaithful.

In every generation, you have your sheep and your goats, you have your good and bad fish, you have your wheat and you have your tares. And whether you're talking about believers and unbelievers and the nature of that division, that is one that the Bible doesn't really focus on, surprisingly so given the emphasis upon it certainly in the American evangelical tradition. We are taught from Sunday school on up to view the world in terms of the saved and the unsaved rather than looking at the faithful versus the faithless.

And that is a more accurate cleaver, that is a better separator because it works whether you are looking at the salvation question or at the faith and obedience question. Are you faithful or are you faithless? Obviously, faith begins at the cross, faith begins with claiming Jesus Christ as our

Savior and it proceeds forward, it doesn't end. Paul says, as you have received Christ, so walk in Him.

We receive Him by faith, we walk by faith. And it is supposed to be a continuous process, it is the exercise of the same function. So when God evaluates His people and He evaluates us primarily as individuals in this age, we will be judged individually.

In the Old Testament age, there was national evaluation, national judgment. You don't have the emphasis on the individual at that point because this is how your Old Testament gets to be written, this is how Scripture comes to existence that is going to be profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness to everyone from the day that it was delivered forward. And the big blocks, the symbolic dealings, and by symbolic I don't mean unreal, but they are significant for that time and all times after.

We take those principles and those doctrines, those commandments of God, the communications of God given to the nation and they are persuasive to us as we operate the kingdom of God that is represented in our own soul, the nation of God, the government that represents God's authority structure, God's call to obedience, God's covenant relationship and covenant promises. So it is very helpful to us to look at Jeremiah who is calling out in the days of King Josiah and all the way through to the end of the southern kingdom and past its end and his message is to both kinds of people. So we have to look at his message and decide what part of this is the announcement of judgment, the call to turn, call to repent that applies to the disobedient and the faithless, the apathetic and the indifferent, the idolaters, the self-centered, the people occupied with their own wealth and their own frantic search for happiness, if that rings a bell.

Others are the faithful few. Instead of the few, the proud, the Marines, it's the few, the humble, the people of God who will be rewarded, who will be preserved, who are noted by God, those who are marked by the inkhorn angel for preservation and for special care and attention as judgment falls. We saw last time in Jeremiah 15 and if you haven't already turned there, you can return to Jeremiah 15.

The fourfold fate that God announces, cast them out of my sight, let them go forth. It wouldn't matter if Moses and Samuel were standing here trying to make appeal on their behalf. This judgment is sure and certain.

At the point that God gave the command to Noah to build the ark, the flood was coming. Noah's not going to be sitting there in an embarrassed confusion with a half-built ark and God says, well, you know, the people really responded and this whole ark thing, sorry, you can call it off. You know, repurpose it, turn it into a museum, sell stuff to animals, invite the population to come, something like that.

Once God says, Noah, build thee an ark of gopher wood, daub it inside and outside with pitch and so forth, there is no turning back of that judgment. Similarly here, from the days of

Manasseh, God said, this judgment is sure and certain, nothing is turning it back. However, individual people can turn at God's reproof.

It will not change the judgment, nor should those people try to pray off the judgment or pray those deserving of that judgment out of it. They have a different set of instructions and that's what we're going to look at tonight. We looked last time at the pronouncement of judgment on those who cannot escape it.

Who will have pity on you, O Jerusalem? Who will bemoan you? Who will turn aside to ask how you are doing? In verse 5, you have forsaken me, says the Lord, you've gone backward, therefore I will stretch out my hand against you and destroy you. I'm tired of delay. I'm tired of relenting.

Peter talks about this, if you recall in his epistle, when he says, people say everything goes on as it was from the beginning, the judgment of God is not coming, the return of Christ is not coming. Do you not know that the patience of God is an appeal to you to repent? He is delaying that judgment, giving everyone a chance. It is not the will of God that any should perish, but that all should turn, but they won't.

And God will eventually weary of staving off judgment and it will come. It is certain. It is detailed in scripture.

The tribulation is on the schedule. Same thing here. But he says in verse 7, I will winnow them with a winnowing fan in the gates of the land.

I will bereave them of children. I will destroy my people since they do not return from their ways. Circle that word in verse 7. They do not return.

This is the Hebrew verb shuv, S-H-U-V. It's a soft B, generally pronounced like a V. The actual bait, if it doesn't have a dot in the middle, making it a hard B, is a sound between a hard B and a V. So depending on what mood I'm in, I'll say shuv or shuv. Return, turn back, turn around, repent, change your direction, shuv, return.

Tonight we're going to pick up, because as I mentioned last time, there are two messages. And this is interwoven throughout Jeremiah. And we looked last time at God's message to those who cannot be redeemed, cannot be rescued.

You have the same thing in one of our memory verses that you, of some, have mercy plucking them out of the fire, hating even the garment spotted by the flesh. You've got to try to get hold of them and pull them out without yourself becoming corrupted and defiled by what has corrupted and defiled them. Hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Of some, have compassion. Others are a lost cause. And there is a sin unto death.

John says, I do not say that you should pray for that. God told Jeremiah, you remember we saw

it in chapter 14, do not pray for these people. You're wasting your time.

Wouldn't matter if the two greatest figures of the Old Testament prayed for them. I'm not changing my mind. I'm fed up.

Well, now we want to look at the other side. What is the message for us? We think of ourselves as faithful. We think of ourselves as those who are not, we're like when the author of Hebrew says, I'm convinced of better things of you, brethren, things that pertain to deliverance, salvation.

We are not of those who fall back, but those who by faith and patience inherit the promises. That's us. Where's our message in all this? That's what we're going to look at tonight.

And we come back to Jeremiah chapter 15. So the title of our message tonight is, here's what the faithful do in a time of impending judgment, in a time of the wrath of God descending on those who have earned it by a pattern of rebellion and disobedience. And we find ourselves in that group as a small minority.

What should the faithful do? So turn with me to Jeremiah chapter 15, verse 19, Jeremiah 15, 19. This is the, thus says the Lord for us. Now I'm starting there, but I'm going to back up just a little, but this is where the message for the faithful begins.

Jeremiah represents them. Jeremiah speaks for them. And when he speaks for them and when he represents their plight and their, their plea, God answers and God's answer begins in verse 19.

Well, what was it that Jeremiah said? Well, we go back a few verses to verse 15, Jeremiah's prayer, his appeal to God as one of those faithful people starts in verse 15 and goes through verse 18. So let's read that. What does Jeremiah say as a faithful man and as a representative of the faithful few? Oh Lord, you know, you know where I am.

You know what's going on. You know what the situation is that we're in. And this is an affirmation.

This is a statement of confidence. God is not busy. God's not blind.

God's not distracted. God's not unavailable. Jeremiah begins with what he understands.

And he says, Lord, you know, you understand the situation here. I'm telling you, I'm going to rehearse before your throne, something that I know, you know, but I'm going to say it anyway. And isn't this the nature of our prayer? Sometimes we say, well, an omniscient God already knows the end from the beginning answers before we ask.

Prayer may not be that important. Au contraire, mon frere. It is important.

And we come before God and we rehearse before him. We make the argument. We tell him

what he already knows.

Why? Prayer is not a helpful reminder to God. Prayer is a helpful reminder to us. It is for our benefit.

Prayer is an exercise that benefits us. It is like the memory verse review that we do. It benefits us to rehearse and refresh in our minds, the truth of God's word.

Oh Lord, you know, remember me and visit me, pay attention to me, meet my needs, honor your promises and those provisions and those blessings that you have said you would provide. Remember me and visit me and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. This is an oblique way of saying, I am being persecuted.

I am hard pressed. I am receiving abuse from those who don't think and understand as I do. Does this ever happen to you? Do you take flack for being a believer? Do you take flack for your understanding and your respect for what God says and what God does in history? If you've been anywhere in the educational system and spoken up in class, you know what I'm talking about.

From the professor, from the textbook, from fellow students, you will get mocked, derided, abused, contradicted, dismissed, disrespected, trivialized, shouted down, called names, pigeonholed, being the recipient of bigoted, prejudiced, unfair, unkind and ignorant and irrational opposition. It doesn't even make sense, but because it is largely unanimous, you can't get a word in edgewise. You appeal to reason, but we're in the postmodern age where reason does not persuade.

Facts do not tip the balance in your favor. You point out a fact and it is just ignored. I read an interesting thing.

I was looking at something in a different context, talking about thinking patterns. I was actually researching this notion that dumb people believe in God and smart people don't, that there's an inverse correlation between intelligence and religiosity. This has been put forward by some allegedly scientific studies.

The more educated you are, the less faithful you're likely to be, and so forth. I was just looking into this, and there's really actually some pretty fair cautions about drawing that conclusion from these studies because people fall into different categories in terms of how they think. Some of us are very analytical in our thinking, and we reason based on given facts.

We try not to step beyond what the evidence shows. This is your courtroom case type of thinking. You can't make that claim based on that evidence.

That's hearsay. That's innuendo. That is a conclusion without a basis.

That's correlation without causation, and so on. This is where your logical fallacies come into

play, and you're very rigorous. You build it like a geometric proof back when we used to learn proofs in geometry.

That's analytical thinking. Other people are intuitive thinkers. You arrive at the conclusion, and you can't necessarily explain how you got there.

You have an instinct. You get it without necessarily having to go through all the intermediate steps. You know what I'm talking about, right? Well, different kinds of thinking.

When you speak up in class now in the postmodern age, and you try to present facts, here's the thing. One of these studies that I was reading as I was analyzing this whole question of what kind of thinker are you, what kind of religious thinking do you have, and what kind of faith do you have, and so on. One of the facts that came out in the side research that goes with this is that once a belief is established in someone's mind, your brain treats it exactly the same as a fact.

Beliefs and facts are treated exactly the same. Now you think about that a little bit. It's important to be sure that your beliefs are valid, because once you stick your beliefs into your thought process, they are indistinguishable in your reasoning from facts.

So if you believe that you are a victim, as far as your brain's concerned, your victimhood is a fact. And unless you are willing to revisit your persuasions, and it's relative. Jeremiah 17 9, remember what it says? What's Jeremiah 17 9? It's one of our memory verses.

The heart is deceitful above all things. It's deceptive. And here's the thing.

If you can't tell the difference between actual facts and what you have accepted as a belief, if you don't have an objective reference, you're like a boat in the middle of the ocean. You can measure the wind, and you can measure the water. This is science.

I can measure, I'll throw the log. Remember the log was an actual floating thing with a piece of line attached to it with measurements. And when you would log the speed through the water, how many knots, that's how many knots in the line attached to the log.

You throw the floating log out at the bow of the ship, and you count how many knots do you have to let out before the log reaches the stern. And that's your speed, knots. K-N-O-T-S, which became nautical miles.

That's a little bit of a fake etymology, but it'll work for my purposes. But that's how they would measure it. Well, that's science, right? You can get an anemometer, and you can measure the wind.

You can get a wind vane and measure the speed and direction of the wind on your vessel. What's the problem here? If you calculate your progress across the face of the planet by how fast the water is moving under your keel and how fast the wind is blowing across your boat, you

can make a certain calculation. But what's the problem? You have no objective external reference.

If you cannot see the stars, if you cannot take a bearing to a known point on the land, you have no way of knowing if that air mass is moving with you so that you feel no apparent wind or the apparent speed of the wind is not absolute. It's relative. And your progress through the water is relative.

It's not absolute. If you could see down to the sea bottom, you might think that, well, look, the water's flowing from bow to stern. I'm going forward.

But on the bottom, if it were suddenly clear, you would see that that's just a current. And although you're making some headway against the current, you are actually going backward. We need for our deceitful hearts an external reference.

And this is the beauty of being a believer is we have God's word and God's spirit to correct our beliefs when we are humble, when we are teachable, when we are persuadable from God's word. Our beliefs are also facts. They are not blind.

They are not relative. They are not deceitful. They're not self-serving.

They're not ambiguous. They are not illogical. This is the gift that God gives us is a heavenly absolute to measure our thinking by.

So in Jeremiah chapter 15, Jeremiah begins by saying, Oh Lord, you know, you are the absolute standard of knowledge. You know the facts. Remember me and visit me, take vengeance on me, on, on my persecutors for me, on my persecutors.

And we know that we get this resistance. It's cultural. It's personal.

It's all over the place. Know that for your sake, I have suffered rebuke. It's one thing to suffer rebuke because you do silly things or you do something kind of on your own.

But if it is like what Jesus talked about, blessed are you when you suffer and are persecuted for my name's sake. That's a different thing. When it is our Christian identity, when it is our beliefs, when it is our stand and our light that is shining in a crooked and perverse generation.

If we suffer for that, God says we are blessed. Jeremiah says this is happening to me. He says, verse 16, your words were found and I consumed them.

Remember Job, I have taken the words of your mouth. They're more important than my necessary food. Your words were found and I did eat them.

And your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart. It wasn't ritual. It wasn't just because I have to motivation, appreciation, understanding, enthusiasm, the joy and rejoicing of my heart.

I am called by your name. Oh, Lord, God of hosts. I did not sit in the assembly of the mockers, nor did I rejoice.

I sat alone because of your hand for you have filled me with indignation because your words were found and I ate them and they're the joy and rejoicing of my heart. When I look around me, I can't tolerate the company of evil men. I can't stand in the way of sinners.

I can't sit in the seat of the scornful. My delight is in your law. Oh, Lord.

And I meditate in it day and night. It defines me. It says who I am and it necessarily and inevitably separates us from those who treat it indifferently or who treat it lightly, who don't take it seriously.

Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable and refuses to be healed? There doesn't seem to be any remedy for this. I find myself alone. I have to sit at my own table.

I don't have many friends. I don't seem to have a lot of social life. You've alienated me.

Why couldn't I be a hail fellow? Well met. And I would have all kinds of friends and all kinds of activities and be one of the crowd. But I find myself odd man out, odd woman out.

I'm without associations and without much fellowship. Are you going to be to me like an unreliable stream as waters that fail? And what this is a reference to in Israel, you have the wadis. And in the spring with the rains washing down the mountains, if you came there and said, I'm going to homestead, look at this wonderful Creek here with freshwater.

I'm going to, I'm going to build my house here. And so you do that in the spring and you say, this is great. What a wonderful location.

Everything is green and lush. I've got plenty of water, but in Israel, as the summer progresses, there's no more rainfall hitting the mountains and the wadis become dry ditches. Remember Elijah by the brook or the wadi Cherith.

And pretty soon there's nothing left. And so Jeremiah's appeal is, did I camp by a temporary stream? Are you not the river of living water that is always faithful and always present, always sustains me? Can I not be that tree with my roots in that wonderful water of life? Well, in verse 19, God is going to answer. Do we identify? Does anybody find a kindred spirit in Jeremiah here? I think we all do.

So aren't we anxious to hear what God is going to say to this appeal? Well, he's going to answer it and answer it very clearly and very, very directly. And that's what we'll look at after the break.