

Kings and Prophets 16-07-28a

This is Thursday, the 28th of July, 2016. We're in the book of Jeremiah. We're drawing toward the close of our sampling from this great book.

We could easily spend months and months looking at its message, but we have seen the elements of God's judgment coming to maturity as the sin and evil within both the Northern Kingdom and now the Southern Kingdom have similarly come to full bloom. And there is, of course, a cause and effect here. So that's what we will be looking at tonight in this book is the dual nature of the population.

There is a majority that has made choices that put them in line for this national discipline. At the same time there is a faithful remnant. Jeremiah is a representative and spokesman for them.

He communicates to them while at the same time informing the rest of the nation about why God is about to send them into the Babylonian captivity. So we'll pick that study up this evening. Let's begin by dedicating our time and our concentration and the nourishment of our souls before the Lord in prayer.

Father, it's a wonderful comfort to know that we are not dependent upon ourselves or our own wisdom to navigate the complexities of our lives, the circumstances that prevail in human culture, in human society as we see political movements and religious movements and cultural decline and cultural shifts. And we look at our own responsibilities and opportunities and try to make the best sense we can of our lives. It is such a blessing and gives us such peace to have your word in our souls and the ministry of your spirit there to light our path and guide us in the way so that not only can we have confidence as we move through the obstacle course and face the challenges that come before us, but we know that our lives have a transcendent meaning, there is a purpose, there is a future value that accrues as we seek to do all of these things in a way that is pleasing to you.

We see this happening throughout the history that is outlined in your word and in many cases detailed there. And we pray that as we look at this portion tonight that your Holy Spirit will minister it to each heart in a way that is effective and meaningful, that we can more fully and effectively serve as light and as salt and those who by faith and patience inherit your promises. We know this redounds to the glory of our Savior and we pray these things in His name.

Amen. Well, you remember that God uses, I am tempted to say every trick in the book, He certainly uses a lot of different literary and communication strategies in and through Jeremiah to wake people up, to describe for them what the present situation is, what the future holds, and what their choice is. It is important to observe that we have a choice.

God's judgment here is certain, but it is not inevitable. That sounds like a contradiction, doesn't it? This judgment is certainly coming. It has been predicted, it has been foretold, it has been prophesied, and from the days of Manasseh forward, it is a certitude.

National judgment is coming on Judah, no doubt. It doesn't matter if the most righteous men of the Old Testament were to stand up and try to plead a case for leniency or clemency or extenuating circumstance or anything else. This judgment is coming.

It is absolutely going to happen. And yet, it is not inevitable. How can that be? While the nation is judged, it does not mean that every individual within it will share in that judgment or be consumed by it.

There is a judgment that you are susceptible to that takes you out. You lose everything. There is another judgment through which the people of God are preserved and actually benefited by, or by which they are benefited, if I was going to write that in a paper.

There is a choice. When judgment comes, there is choice. This is something that is often overlooked by the naysayers who like to pillory and hang in effigy the God of the Old Testament.

They caricature Him as capricious, arbitrary, very human-like in His pettiness and His jealousy and His anger. He sort of stamps His divine foot and throws everybody into horrible judgment because He is upset at something they've done. This speaks at a minimum, and to put it charitably, of a gross lack of attention to detail, to the facts, to the presentation in Scripture.

There is always grace before judgment, and there is always the option to escape as an individual. You see God judging groups or people who represent a group. You will have your man picking up sticks on the Sabbath.

You will have Achan disobeying as an individual. But you notice that every single time such an event happens, you don't have a repeat of that judgment. These individuals are used to represent a class or a group or a type.

So, oddly enough, after the Ten Commandments are given, and as we saw last time, God says, if you want to restore judgment in the gates, if you want to see Me relent and rescind this judgment, here is what you need to do. And of all of the heinous crimes that have been detailed, not only here in Jeremiah, but by Isaiah, by Ezekiel, and by a host of other prophets, of the horrible injustices, the child sacrifice, the gross perversion and corruption of justice, violence in the streets, innocent blood shed, the poor, the widow, the orphan, the fatherless, mistreated, taken advantage of, crushed under the heel of people who are in it for their own benefit and their own good. So you would think, well, if God is going to offer an example of behavior that will rescind the judgment, He would pick one of those.

Establish a charity. Start helping the widows and orphans. Stop murder.

Bring these criminals to justice. Stop highway robbery. Stop the horrible corruption in government and in your court system.

The justice dispensed at the gates is no justice. It is self-serving. It is corrupt to its very core.

So fix that and I will relent. But we saw last time, what did God say? Which of all of His commands did He pick and say, do this and you will live? Honor the Sabbath. Don't carry a load on the Sabbath.

And it just seems so counterintuitive. Why would He choose that? It strikes at the very heart and core of the problem because the problem begins with discrediting God, with deciding that God doesn't deserve to be listened to or obeyed. He's not worth fearing.

You can make a case for social justice at a secular level. Well, it's not nice to be mean to poor people. It's not nice to pick on the weak and the helpless.

Although in reality, people do it anyway. Rapacious business practices that disadvantage poor people even more. Taking advantage of loopholes in the tax system so that it is the middle class and the lower middle class and the poor that bear the brunt of paying taxes because the rich have bought their way out of their responsibility.

But all of this is set aside. God says, stop bearing loads on the Sabbath. Let me see you remember the Sabbath day, which doesn't seem to have an immediate benefit to the poor.

Society, that's a divine and rather arbitrary command. Why does He choose that? Well, to anyone who stops and reflects, and we ought to stop and reflect because it is counterintuitive. If God's upset, quote unquote, because people are being evil, this is His example? Change this and all will be well? What does it tell the discerning listener? God's issue with His people is obedience that is based in and comes from faith.

I will obey God because I trust Him and when He gives a command, I assume it to be right. I assume it to be righteous. I don't have to understand why God gives many of the details in the law of Moses that say you can eat this but not that.

On Sunday, we talked about the, quote unquote, insects that could and could not be eaten depending on whether they go on all fours, their method of locomotion. Why does God care which bugs I eat? If I want to eat a bug, why would He care? If I want to crack open a clam or an oyster and eat it, why does God care? Why does God set these arbitrary and seemingly meaningless standards? And you notice that He's only done that once. He did it for the nation of people who were called by His name who entered into covenant relationship with Him and He says, come out from among them and be ye distinct.

You should be noticeably different and these are some of the things that are going to separate you from the nations, things large and small. What does the Lord require of you, O man? To bring the ox and sacrifice the lamb? To fall down on your face and abjectly worship Him and extol His virtues and sing praise songs to Him? What does the Lord require of you? To love God, love mercy and walk humbly. To reject God is to reject His righteousness.

To reject God is to be faithless, disrespecting the Creator God to whom we owe our existence. Doth not the potter have power over the clay? You wouldn't be dirt of the ground. Where does

man come from? God formed man out of what? Stardust? That's what Carl Sagan will tell you, oh we're made of stardust.

What are we made of biblically? The dirt of the ground. Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return. But what does God do when He scoops that earth together and creates a man? He doesn't leave it as mud, does He? When does man become a living soul? God personally.

No intermediaries, no agencies, no design teams. When it comes to the creation of man, God does it personally, individually, and intimately. It doesn't say, and God called forth a mighty wind, like He hurled into the Mediterranean Sea to get Jonah into the belly of the fish.

How does God enliven what He has made from the dust of the ground? He breathed into His nostrils. This is face-to-face. This is like mouth-to-mouth suscitation, right? It's intimate.

God cares for us. He is personal and He is individual, and we owe our existence to Him. And to flippantly say, well, I don't care if you made me or not.

I don't care if you had a purpose. I don't care if you have a goal. I don't care if that goal encompasses not only fulfilling your purposes, but my blessing and my reward.

I don't care about any of that. I disregard you. I disrespect you.

I dismiss you. I factor you out of my equations. Now that I'm here, I'll go my own way.

You can't help but think of the prodigal son. Father, give me my inheritance, says the son who didn't earn any of it, didn't deserve any of it. Father graciously says, here you go.

Do what you like. And what does he do? He goes off in an utterly self-centered direction, setting his own standards of what's right and wrong, what's good and bad, who's a friend and who's not. And there is a way that seemeth right unto a man.

If it didn't seem right, you wouldn't do it, right? Well, I know this is gonna result in a horrible disaster and misery for me, so sign me up. People say we act in self-interest. Our problem is we don't always know what our self-interest is.

Two-year-old child with a bag of candy thinks his self-interest is to eat it all in one go. Heart is deceitful. We are fallible.

Our perceptions are limited. Our headlights don't reach very far forward in the darkness. And so you think, well, I've got this enormous inheritance that my father, I don't really think about it much, but he's graciously given it to me for no reason other than I belong to him.

And I go off and spend it all on riotous living. Not, and of course he thought this will make me happy. This is the path to goodness and bestness for me.

Of course, he doesn't anticipate some of the concomitant effects and he ends up slopping the hogs and stealing their food to keep himself fed. And he says, you know what? Now that I've learned the hard way, maybe I'll go back and just see if I can be a servant in my father's house. So here's the thing, to summarize what we saw last time, this notion of, if you would observe the Sabbath, I would relent, like so much of what's in the word of God, this is symbolic, it is evocative.

You're supposed to get this with your sentient advanced intelligence. He's not talking about, well, I'd just be happy if everybody quit carrying stuff on Saturday. God's a little bit smarter than that.

His ways are a little bit higher than our ways. What is this emblematic of? What does it, what is its essence? If you can do what I ask you to do, just because I asked you to do it, even if it doesn't make much sense to you, even if you think, well, you know, I could increase my profits and my goals by a seventh. What is that? 13 and a half percent, something like that.

If I could just work on Saturday like I work every other day in Israel, but because God has said, reserve the Sabbath day and do no work in it, stop and reflect. Think about your God who put this entire earth together for you and everything that surrounds it in six days and rested and looked it over. And by the way, Adam and Eve are around.

What do you think of all the things God created? What do you think when he was resting on the seventh day? What was he looking at? When two people fall in love and get married and a short time thereafter, preferably longer than nine months after, here comes a child, you know, they've built a life, they've built a home, they've put together a schedule and they've got furniture and they've got a kitchen and they've got a place to live and they've got transportation and some employment, all the rest of it lined up. But what is it that they sit around looking at? It's their child. There's nothing you can watch longer than your child.

You never get tired of looking at them. What do you think God did on the seventh day? We make much of, the Bible makes much of, he rested on the seventh day, what was he looking at? Well, you know, I sure do like that crab nebula. That was really a fine piece of work right there.

Look at the way those stars are scattered. You know, this distribution of galaxies is really, you know, just a model of the symmetry and the order of my divine power and will and what do you think God was looking at on the seventh day while he rested? The same thing parents look at when they're not at work and providing and keeping everything running, what do they look at? You can sit and stare at your child, no end, no end. You can watch videos of your child, no end.

You can take them and inflict them on other people, no end, because it's the most fascinating thing in the world. God was looking at us. He was looking at Adam and Eve on the seventh day.

What else? Zebras, crawdads, we're made in his image and after his likeness, he's gonna come down to the garden in the cool of the day and he's not down there to pick peaches. He's looking

for Adam and he's looking for Eve, the highest and best and culmination of those six days of creation. It's the last thing he did and he did it personally.

He breathed into nostrils the breath of life. How tragic is it when that Adam and that Eve turn their back in disregard and in disgust from the creator God, from the God of covenant, from the God of blessing and by the way, the God who is the source of life and of blessing and say, I've got a better idea. So God will use that circumstance because he has created free will and he honors it.

Free will is not free if you don't honor it. Free will volition for us is not free if God says, well, that's enough of that and stops us just as Eve is reaching out for the fruit, she's paralyzed. Oh no, don't do that.

Just before sunset, before Satan says, I will be like the, God just shuts his mouth. You're the angel of the stops and starts. Well, I'm stopping your mouth before you commit a sin because there's gonna be horrible consequences that result.

Free will, God given is free. So what means is God going to use to teach and to call, to draw, to urge repentance, to demonstrate that separation from him is death? Why is the wages of sin death? God just flipped open a book and stuck his finger down and said, well, the wages of sin is measles. No, the wages of sin is red hair.

No, the wages of sin is being an albino. And no, the wages of being black, wages of sin is going blind. You know, God just made it up.

So it is an inevitability. God is the source of life. He is the one that inspired us just like he inspires his word.

And to take God out of his word is to make it uninspired. This is your apocrypha. This is your, you know, there's no end of people that say, oh, you know, how do you, the lost Bible, the apocryphal books and the pseudepigraphical gospels and all the rest of the stuff that was weeded out in the latter days of Israel, in the early days of the church.

And they act like, well, you know, it's just arbitrary. It's not arbitrary at all. It's anybody who has an instinct for life.

I'll give you an example. I was, we feed our dogs fresh meat as a part of their diet because it's good for them. We buy it in bags, it's frozen, we thaw it out.

And well, it's been a busy week and I thawed out some of this meat and I fed the dogs with it. And the phone rang or something happened. Well, I left it sit out all day.

That night I thought, well, you know, it's probably okay. You know, look at the stuff dogs eat, how bad can it be? So I fed them that evening after having left it out all day. Well, they wouldn't eat it.

I said, you're a dog for crying out loud. I can't leave you in the same yard where the cat goes because you'll eat anything. You won't eat this.

Dogs know when most of the time when they shouldn't eat a thing. It doesn't smell right. This is not food, they say, and they won't eat it.

We who are alive in Christ have an instinct for life. We can smell it, we can taste it. Taste and see that the Lord is gracious.

If you are asking and seeking and knocking, you're not gonna get a rock or a snake or a scorpion. You know how we got these 66 books of the Bible? People like you and people like me looked at everything that was available. This is food, this is life, this connects me to my heavenly Father.

I find Him there because I am a seeker. Here He is. I don't find Him in the additions to Esther.

I don't find Him in the Gospel of Judas. I don't find Him in the apocryphal books. I don't find God there.

I know God when I find Him. He's the one that gave me life, and when I connect with Him, that life flows. The Spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

Have you ever wondered, when you look at these animal documentaries, there could be a whole beach full of seals, there can be a whole herd full of cattle or elephants or name your mammal, and somehow the young always find their mother. They know their group. They know their kin.

There is a connection there. They have no trouble. A cow will ball and ball and ball over her calf.

They've got cow genetics. They're all cows. They're all related in a herd.

You're telling me this one calf just smells slightly different, and each calf smells, what, like fingerprints? No two of them smell exactly the same? How does the cow know its calf? How does the creature know its creator? When you are looking, when you are seeking, you know Him when you find Him. What does God say? You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart. Now what happens if you've done that, and there is covenant relationship like Judah has, and then they turn their back on that and say, I will be like the nations.

I will sacrifice my children to Molech. I will abuse the poor. I will forego and abdicate all of my covenant responsibilities before God.

God says, if you loved me, you would keep my Sabbaths, and everything else would flow from that. I wouldn't have to tell you to take care of the widow and the orphan. I wouldn't have to tell you to find these people that are doing child sacrifice on my holy mountain and stone them to death and purge them out of Israel.

They're a cancer, they're a malignancy. You not only tolerate them, you extol them, you join them, you participate. They're your customers, they're your neighbors, and it's hail fellow well met, and everybody does what is right in his own eyes.

You are not my people, and the easiest way to demonstrate it, you don't keep my Sabbaths. If you kept my Sabbaths, everything else would follow. It's like an a fortiori argument.

They're not seeking. This is the condemnation, and when you separate yourself, when you walk away from the inspiring life of God, God doesn't have to inflict a consequence. I compared it earlier this week to one of your appliances running merrily along.

If your appliance could reach out a mechanical hand and pull its plug out of the wall, are you punishing the appliance because it's no longer running? The appliance unplugged itself from the source of its power. The consequence, not running anymore, not being able to move the hand again, is inevitable. The wages of sin is death, not because God arbitrarily picked it.

It's nothing else can happen. If there's free will, and if you can choose to walk away from the source of life, what, God is supposed to give you life anyway just because you want it? Who's the God here, Him or you? Well, you made me, and now I expect you to sustain me no matter what I choose. No matter what I decide, you should make sure nothing bad happens to me and keep me alive and make sure I'm happy even though I disregard you entirely and commit sins of the high hand.

There is two consequences. There are two consequences to connection with God. One is life.

The other is righteousness. What happens when the funeral procession comes out of the city as Jesus and his disciples are entering, and Jesus walks over to the stretcher with the dead young man on it, and contact is made. Jesus touches the dead man.

Which direction do things flow? Does death flow to Jesus? Does corruption and defilement flow to Jesus? When he touches the young man, what happens? There is life. Even Jesus speaking, the word of the Lord Jesus, Lazarus, come forth. The one who lives and believes in me will never die.

That's the word of the Lord. The word of the Lord, the presence of the Lord, the power of the Lord, the touch of the Lord is life. If he reaches out to the little girl in the upper room, Talitha, kumi, life from the dead.

Now if the Lord never goes, if there's no contact, if there's no word of the Lord that is heard, remember at the end of Daniel, the day is coming when those who sleep in the dust of the earth will hear the voice, and many who sleep in the dust will awake. Some to a resurrection of life and others to a resurrection of shame and contempt. But it is the word of the Lord that brings life.

The problem here is not that God is petty, that God is jealous, that God is angry, that God is sort

of humanly ticked off and so he's gonna make everybody pay for being disobedient, not enough oxen being brought. What do you think God is being shorted of by people's disobedience? If God is in heaven and in the realms of glory and people are disobedient on earth, what are they taking away from God? Why would he be angry and petty and jealous and so on? The judgment of God on disobedience, on sin and on faithlessness is a big picture item. What's the best way to avoid getting that lesson? Recharacterize it, twist it, redefine it, call it petty and shallow and cheap instead of large and heavenly and all important.

You search the scriptures because in them you think that you have life, keeping these little petty rules and regulations. If I'm just a good person, good things should happen to me. What did Jesus say? Life is standing in front of you.

This is the mistake that Judah makes and this is what Jeremiah calls them out on. You're rejecting your creator God. We're going to see it in the verses that we read when we come back from the break.

We're going to take a look at three chapters in Jeremiah. We're going to sample these three messages but this is the background and when you put these words of God in this context, it distills a great part of the theme and the message of the book of Jeremiah. That's what we'll see when we come back.