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Tillamook, Oregon

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Called to Speak for the Lord – the Book of Jeremiah

Studies in Real Repentance

October 11, 2020

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 3

Scripture Reading: Exodus 32:15-29

We are frequently presented with people who claim they have repented – that they have really changed. Often these people base their claim in some miraculous transformation effected in them by the Lord – accompanied then by a demand that we accept their claim and forgive them just as, they insist, God has.

But as we saw last time, the heart of the religious hypocrite is incredibly hard and the Lord's dealings with Judah in Jeremiah's day demonstrate this. Those people *knew* that Jeremiah was a true prophet and spoke God's Word. They not only heard the Lord calling them to

repentance through Jeremiah, but this call was accompanied by real, visible events which showed the people their sin had brought them under God's wrath. Drought, for instance, was one of these signs. Yet they refused to acknowledge their sin and turn from it. Judgment in the form of a devastating invasion from Babylon was coming.

In the latter part of chapter 3, we have the Lord's own description of real repentance. And Jeremiah gives it in a description of what would one day happen when the Lord effects real repentance in the remnant of His people – the true Israel. The Lord is a pretty reliable source to look to when we want to know what real repentance looks like.

Follow along as I read, starting in verse 10-

Jeremiah 3:10-25 ESV Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense, declares the LORD.” (11) And the LORD said to me, “Faithless Israel has shown herself

more righteous than treacherous Judah. (12) Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, “Return, faithless Israel, declares the LORD. I will not look on you in anger, for I am merciful, declares the LORD; I will not be angry forever.

(13) Only acknowledge your guilt, that you rebelled against the LORD your God and scattered your favors among foreigners under every green tree, and that you have not obeyed my voice, declares the LORD.

(14) Return, O faithless children, declares the LORD; for I am your master; I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. (15) “And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding.

(16) And when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land, in those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, “The ark of the covenant of the LORD.” It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again. (17) At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in

Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart.

(18) In those days the house of Judah shall join the house of Israel, and together they shall come from the land of the north to the land that I gave your fathers for a heritage.

(19) “I said, How I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beautiful of all nations. And I thought you would call me, My Father, and would not turn from following me. (20) Surely, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the LORD.”

(21) A voice on the bare heights is heard, the weeping and pleading of Israel's sons because they have perverted their way; they have forgotten the LORD their God. (22) “Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness.”

“Behold, we come to you, for you are the LORD our God. (23) Truly the hills are a delusion, the orgies on the mountains. Truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. (24) “But from our youth the shameful thing has devoured all for which our fathers

labored, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. (25) Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonor cover us. For we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even to this day, and we have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God.”

What is Zion?

You noticed last time that the Lord spoke of this place called Zion:

I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion.

So just what is Zion? It is a very common term in Scripture so let's be familiar with it.

Zion first occurs back in the days of King David:

2 Samuel 5:4-7 ESV David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. (5) At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years. (6) And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites,

the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, “You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off”—thinking, “David cannot come in here.” (7) Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David.

Zion then was Jerusalem. It was a Jebusite city and David took it, called it the city of David, and reigned there. Zion was the city of the king.

Zion is also called Mount Zion because that is the hill within Jerusalem, referred to very often as the Lord's “holy hill,”

(Psalms 2:6 ESV) “As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.”

(Psalms 3:4 ESV) I cried aloud to the LORD, and he answered me from his holy hill. Selah

(Psalms 15:1 ESV) A Psalm of David. O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

(Psalms 43:3 ESV) Send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling!

(Jeremiah 31:23 ESV) Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: “Once more they shall use these words in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I restore their fortunes: “‘The LORD bless you, O habitation of righteousness, O holy hill!’

(Daniel 9:16 ESV) “O Lord, according to all your righteous acts, let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill, because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us.

(Daniel 9:20 ESV) While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my plea before the LORD my God for the holy hill of my God,

So, you see that Zion has multiple shades of meaning. It can be Jerusalem the city, or the hill in Jerusalem on which the temple sat, it can be the place where the Lord’s throne is, or it can be something else – an earthly symbol of the real Jerusalem:

(Hebrews 12:22 ESV) But you have

come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,

(1 Peter 2:6 ESV) For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

(Revelation 14:1 ESV) Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads.

Just as the Lord’s appointed king ruled from a throne in the earthly Zion, Jerusalem, and just as the dwelling place of God was there on His holy hill, Mount Zion, so it will be in the real Zion. Mount Zion is the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of God. Zion is the true temple, the church which consists of Christ’s true remnant. Zion, you could rightly say, *is the New Creation, the entirety of which is the temple of the Lord and His dwelling place.*

So when you come to this term, Zion, in the Bible, you always need to take note of just how it is being used. Look again at verse 14 –

Jeremiah 3:14-17 ESV Return, O faithless children, declares the LORD; for I am your master; I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion. (15) “And I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will feed you with knowledge and understanding. (16) And when you have multiplied and been fruitful in the land, in those days, declares the LORD, they shall no more say, “The ark of the covenant of the LORD.” It shall not come to mind or be remembered or missed; it shall not be made again. (17) At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall gather to it, to the presence of the LORD in Jerusalem, and they shall no more stubbornly follow their own evil heart.

Now, the Lord did bring the captives back to Jerusalem in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah. But you can see from these verses that the Zion being spoken of cannot be just the literal city of Jerusalem. The Zion here is that Zion in which the Lord laid that precious cornerstone, which is Christ. This Zion is *the church*. In God’s true church in the days of the New Covenant, the Lord promised to:

- Bring us shepherds after the Lord’s own heart
- Effect the true way of worshipping Him by people who know Him and worship in spirit and truth, not through outward symbols as in the days of the Old Covenant. This is what “*they shall no more say, ‘the ark of the covenant of the Lord,’*” means. (This was never the Lord’s intent even in the Old Covenant era. Jesus told the Samaritan woman that God seeks those who worship Him in spirit and in truth, not in Jerusalem).
- Jerusalem will be the true throne of God (and therefore it is the heavenly Jerusalem, the New Creation), *and all nations shall gather to it*. The church, the true Israel, will consist of God’s elect from every nation.

Most importantly for us in the New Covenant era then is this:

Hebrews 12:18-24 ESV **For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest (19) and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made**

the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. (20) For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” (21) Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.”

(22) But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, (23) and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, (24) and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Therefore, people whose focus is all the time on some supposed restoration of earthly Israel and earthly Jerusalem on earthly Zion, are on the wrong mountain. And notice carefully that *there are only two mountains!*

- Mount Sinai – Blazing fire, darkness, holiness that cannot be endured by fallen man

- Mount Zion – the city of the living God where His people are in a “festal gathering.”

In other words, the mountains of God’s curse, or of God’s blessing in Christ.

NOTE: Any form of Christianity (which is no gospel at all, see Galatians 1) that takes people back to an earthly Zion, is necessarily going to present a distortion of God and of our standing in Christ.

Galatians 3:10-14 ESV For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” (11) Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” (12) But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” (13) Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— (14) so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

You see then that a correct understanding of Zion is very important.

Real Repentance

As we noticed earlier, this third chapter of Jeremiah gives us the Lord's own description and definition of true repentance. Jeremiah speaks of a future day, the time of the true Israel established by Christ in His blood, when the people of God come to Him in real humility, confession, and contrition. Look at it again:

Jeremiah 3:22-25 ESV "Return, O faithless sons; I will heal your faithlessness."

"Behold, we come to you, for you are the LORD our God. (23) Truly the hills are a delusion, the orgies on the mountains. Truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel.

(24) "But from our youth the shameful thing has devoured all for which our fathers labored, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. (25) Let us lie down in our shame, and let our dishonor cover us. For we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our

youth even to this day, and we have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God."

These are beautiful words. Real repentance is beautiful – and it is very rare. I want to ask all of us to seriously and soberly examine ourselves to see if we really have come to the Lord in repentance and faith:

1. Have you ever admitted your need to be healed from "faithlessness"? And acknowledged that the Lord is the only One who can heal you?
2. Have you ever confessed that the course of your life was or is a delusion, a lie? And that real salvation is only in Christ?
3. Have you ever seen and admitted that "the shameful thing" of your sin is destructive, not only of your own soul but the souls of others?
4. Have you ever "laid down in your shame," and felt the shameful dishonor due you for your sin?
5. Have you ever openly confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord and I have not obeyed His voice"?

Because this is what real repentance looks like, you see.

Many of us came from godless families or worse, families who walked in religious hypocrisy like Jeremiah's countrymen. And this godlessness has often extended back for generations. It has devoured and destroyed as generation after generation walked in it and ended in hell.

YOU are called upon by the Lord to stop this chain of godless destruction. To be the one who repents of it and turns genuinely to Christ so that His blessing rather than His curse is upon you.

Look at it again:

(23) Truly the hills are a delusion, the orgies on the mountains. Truly in the LORD our God is the salvation of Israel. (24) "But from our youth the shameful thing has devoured all for which our fathers labored, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters.

Do you realize then that true repentance, a turning from all of this so that we seek what Abraham sought – a

real inheritance from the Lord – requires a turning from the ways of wicked generations before us. Consider Jeremiah. In order to follow and obey the Lord, he had to break from his evil family and countrymen who then hated him.

So let me ask you this one final question for self-examination – *have you truly broken away from generational evil?* What does that look like? Here it is:

Matthew 10:34-39 ESV "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. (35) For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. (36) And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. (37) Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (39) Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

If our loyalty to family is our ultimate loyalty, if our life's philosophy is based upon "blood is thicker than water" (and I think that the water here is the water of baptism, our confession of Christ), then the shameful thing that has devoured the generations before is devouring you and your children. All those generations labored in vain because they clung to their sin.

And the Lord calls YOU, to break from that evil no matter what the cost. Real repentance cannot exist apart from this kind of obedience to Christ.