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Called to Speak for the Lord – the Book of Jeremiah

When Ahab and Jezebel Rule:
How are we to Live?

January 24, 2021

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 25:1-3

Scripture Reading: 2 Kings 21:19 –
23:30

Jeremiah 25:1-3 ESV The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), (2) which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem: (3) “For twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, to this day, the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken persistently to you, but you have not listened.

I am going to read to you the Scripture record of one of the most remarkable people in the Bible – King Josiah of Judah. King Josiah was one of the rulers in the time of Jeremiah and you can be sure that Jeremiah loved him. Jeremiah would have enjoyed a time of favor and peace during the 31 years this king reigned. The record of his years is remarkable. Listen to it –

2 Kings 21:19-26 ESV Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Meshullemeth the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. (20) And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as Manasseh his father had done. (21) He walked in all the way in which his father walked and served the idols that his father served and worshiped them. (22) He abandoned the LORD, the God of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the LORD.

(23) And the servants of Amon conspired against him and put the king

to death in his house. (24) But the people of the land struck down all those who had conspired against King Amon, and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place. (25) Now the rest of the acts of Amon that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? (26) And he was buried in his tomb in the garden of Uzza, **and Josiah his son reigned in his place.**

2 Kings 22:1-20 ESV Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath. **(2) And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and walked in all the way of David his father, and he did not turn aside to the right or to the left.**

(3) In the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, son of Meshullam, the secretary, to the house of the LORD, saying, (4) "Go up to Hilkiyah the high priest, that he may count the money that has been brought into the house of the LORD, which the keepers of the threshold have collected from the people. (5) And let it be given into the hand of the workmen who have the

oversight of the house of the LORD, and let them give it to the workmen who are at the house of the LORD, repairing the house (6) (that is, to the carpenters, and to the builders, and to the masons), and let them use it for buying timber and quarried stone to repair the house. (7) But no accounting shall be asked from them for the money that is delivered into their hand, for they deal honestly."

(8) And Hilkiyah the high priest said to Shaphan the secretary, "I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD." And Hilkiyah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it. (9) And Shaphan the secretary came to the king, and reported to the king, "Your servants have emptied out the money that was found in the house and have delivered it into the hand of the workmen who have the oversight of the house of the LORD." (10) Then Shaphan the secretary told the king, "Hilkiyah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king.

(11) When the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes. (12) And the king commanded Hilkiyah the priest, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and

Achbor the son of Micaiah, and Shaphan the secretary, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, (13) "Go, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found. **For great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us.**"

(14) So Hilkiah the priest, and Ahikam, and Achbor, and Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter), and they talked with her. (15) And she said to them, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: 'Tell the man who sent you to me, (16) Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will bring disaster upon this place and upon its inhabitants, all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. (17) Because they have forsaken me and have made offerings to other gods, that they might provoke me to anger with all the work of their hands, therefore my wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched.

(18) But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, thus shall you say to him, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Regarding the words that you have heard, (19) **because your heart was penitent, and you humbled yourself before the LORD, when you heard how I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they should become a desolation and a curse, and you have torn your clothes and wept before me, I also have heard you, declares the LORD.** (20) Therefore, behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the disaster that I will bring upon this place.'" And they brought back word to the king.

2 Kings 23:1-30 ESV Then the king sent, and all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem were gathered to him. (2) And the king went up to the house of the LORD, and with him all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the priests and the prophets, all the people, both small and great. **And he read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant that had been found in the house of the LORD.** (3) **And the king stood by the pillar and made a**

covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people joined in the covenant.

(4) And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and the keepers of the threshold to bring out of the temple of the LORD all the vessels made for Baal, for Asherah, and for all the host of heaven. He burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of the Kidron and carried their ashes to Bethel. **(5) And he deposed the priests whom the kings of Judah had ordained to make offerings in the high places at the cities of Judah and around Jerusalem; those also who burned incense to Baal, to the sun and the moon and the constellations and all the host of the heavens.** (6) And he brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD, outside Jerusalem, to the brook Kidron, and burned it at the brook Kidron and beat it to dust and cast the dust of it upon the graves of the common people.

(7) And he broke down the houses of the male cult prostitutes who were in the house of the LORD, where the women wove hangings for the Asherah. (8) And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had made offerings, from Geba to Beersheba. And he broke down the high places of the gates that were at the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which were on one's left at the gate of the city. (9) However, the priests of the high places did not come up to the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they ate unleavened bread among their brothers.

(10) And he defiled Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, that no one might burn his son or his daughter as an offering to Molech. (11) And he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, at the entrance to the house of the LORD, by the chamber of Nathan-melech the chamberlain, which was in the precincts. And he burned the chariots of the sun with fire. (12) And the altars on the roof of the upper chamber of Ahaz, which the kings of Judah had made, and the altars that Manasseh had made in the two

courts of the house of the LORD, he pulled down and broke in pieces and cast the dust of them into the brook Kidron.

(13) And the king defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, to the south of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. (14) And he broke in pieces the pillars and cut down the Asherim and filled their places with the bones of men. (15) Moreover, the altar at Bethel, the high place erected by Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, that altar with the high place he pulled down and burned, reducing it to dust. He also burned the Asherah.

(16) And as Josiah turned, he saw the tombs there on the mount. And he sent and took the bones out of the tombs and burned them on the altar and defiled it, according to the word of the LORD that the man of God proclaimed, who had predicted these things. (17) Then he said, "What is that monument that I see?" And the men of the city told him, "It is the tomb of the man of God who

came from Judah and predicted these things that you have done against the altar at Bethel." (18) And he said, "Let him be; let no man move his bones." So they let his bones alone, with the bones of the prophet who came out of Samaria.

(19) And Josiah removed all the shrines also of the high places that were in the cities of Samaria, which kings of Israel had made, provoking the LORD to anger. He did to them according to all that he had done at Bethel. (20) And he sacrificed all the priests of the high places who were there, on the altars, and burned human bones on them. Then he returned to Jerusalem.

(21) And the king commanded all the people, "Keep the Passover to the LORD your God, as it is written in this Book of the Covenant." (22) For no such Passover had been kept since the days of the judges who judged Israel, or during all the days of the kings of Israel or of the kings of Judah. (23) But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah this Passover was kept to the LORD in Jerusalem.

(24) Moreover, Josiah put away the mediums and the necromancers and the household gods and the idols and all the

abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might establish the words of the law that were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the LORD.

(25) Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him.

(26) Still the LORD did not turn from the burning of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him. (27) And the LORD said, "I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and I will cast off this city that I have chosen, Jerusalem, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there."

(28) Now the rest of the acts of Josiah and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? (29) In his days Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. King Josiah went to meet him, and Pharaoh Neco killed him at Megiddo, as soon as he saw

him. (30) And his servants carried him dead in a chariot from Megiddo and brought him to Jerusalem and buried him in his own tomb. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's place.

2 Kings 23:31-32 ESV Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. (32) And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his fathers had done.

Is that how you would write the story? Is that the ending you would give it? Probably not. I suppose we might classify it in literary terms as *a tragedy*.

Tragedy, branch of drama that treats in a serious and dignified style the sorrowful or terrible events encountered or caused by a heroic individual.

Jeremiah was certainly not the only godly person among the prophets to experience this kind of tragedy. And I suppose in our own nation in respect to the length of time, only the people who

lived during the 12 year presidency of FDR might have come close to such an experience. Or in England, those who went through the terrible trials and wonderful victories of WWII under the leadership of Winston Churchill. I recommend to you that you watch on youtube the video of Churchill's funeral and the procession with his coffin down the Thames with all the huge cranes in the shipyards "bowing" and the tears being shed in the massive crowds.

Such were the days of Jeremiah – for 18 years of Jeremiah's prophetic ministry (and no doubt for really the first 31 years of Jeremiah's life) this remarkable King, King Josiah, reigned in Judah. He effected far-reaching reforms, guided by the Word of God, *in spite of the fact that the majority of the people did not repent of their evil.*

And then, King Josiah perished in battle. He was trying to stop Pharaoh and his armies from going north and attacking Assyria, but he was killed. The Lord had said that he would not have to see the destruction of Judah that the Lord was going to bring upon its evil people. And this is how the Lord fulfilled that promise.

How would you feel? 31 years of a godly, wonderful king suddenly brought to an end and all the reforms he effected cancelled out at the hands of his own wicked son who came to the throne.

I said that this is not the only time such a thing happened in Israel or Judah. Here is another that Isaiah experienced.

2 Chronicles 26:1-23 ESV And all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. (2) He built Elath and restored it to Judah, after the king slept with his fathers. (3) Uzziah was sixteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. (4) And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done.

(5) He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who instructed him in the fear of God, and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper. (6) He went out and made war against the Philistines and broke through the wall of Gath and the wall of Jabneh and the wall of Ashdod, and he

built cities in the territory of Ashdod and elsewhere among the Philistines. (7) God helped him against the Philistines and against the Arabians who lived in Gurbaal and against the Meunites. (8) The Ammonites paid tribute to Uzziah, and his fame spread even to the border of Egypt, for he became very strong.

(9) Moreover, Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the Corner Gate and at the Valley Gate and at the Angle, and fortified them. (10) And he built towers in the wilderness and cut out many cisterns, for he had large herds, both in the Shephelah and in the plain, and he had farmers and vinedressers in the hills and in the fertile lands, for he loved the soil.

(11) Moreover, Uzziah had an army of soldiers, fit for war, in divisions according to the numbers in the muster made by Jeiel the secretary and Maaseiah the officer, under the direction of Hananiah, one of the king's commanders. (12) The whole number of the heads of fathers' houses of mighty men of valor was 2,600. (13) Under their command was an army of 307,500, who could make war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy. (14) And Uzziah

prepared for all the army shields, spears, helmets, coats of mail, bows, and stones for slinging.

(15) In Jerusalem he made machines, invented by skillful men, to be on the towers and the corners, to shoot arrows and great stones. **And his fame spread far, for he was marvelously helped, till he was strong. (16) But when he was strong, he grew proud, to his destruction.** For he was unfaithful to the LORD his God and entered the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense.

(17) But Azariah the priest went in after him, with eighty priests of the LORD who were men of valor, (18) and they withstood King Uzziah and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary, for you have done wrong, and it will bring you no honor from the LORD God."

(19) Then Uzziah was angry. Now he had a censer in his hand to burn incense, and when he became angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in the presence of the priests in the house of the LORD, by the altar

of incense. (20) And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead! And they rushed him out quickly, and he himself hurried to go out, because the LORD had struck him.

(21) And King Uzziah was a leper to the day of his death, and being a leper lived in a separate house, for he was excluded from the house of the LORD. And Jotham his son was over the king's household, governing the people of the land. (22) Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, from first to last, Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz wrote. (23) And Uzziah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the burial field that belonged to the kings, for they said, "He is a leper." And Jotham his son reigned in his place.

Once again – *a tragedy*. Think more about Isaiah. How would he have felt about all of this? To enjoy so many years of the rule of a godly king, to see the tragedy of that king falling to his own pride. I suspect that Uzziah repented, but he remained a leper. And Isaiah would have grieved.

What do *we do* when a wicked ruler comes to power? What do we do when Ahab and Jezebel reign? You remember the accounts of their evil, especially the wickedness of Jezebel, during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha.

I would suggest to you that we do the very same thing *as we should when we have a godly Josiah or Uzziah ruling in our nation*. Let me explain.

In the year that King Uzziah finally died, where do we find Isaiah?

Isaiah 6:1-13 ESV In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. (2) Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. (3) And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" (4) And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called, and the house was filled with smoke.

(5) And I said: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and

I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

(6) Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a burning coal that he had taken with tongs from the altar. (7) And he touched my mouth and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for.”

(8) And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” (9) And he said, “Go, and say to this people: ““Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.” (10) Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” (11) Then I said, “How long, O Lord?” And he said: “Until cities lie waste without inhabitant, and houses without people, and the land is a desolate waste, (12) and the LORD removes people far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. (13) And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump

remains when it is felled.” The holy seed is its stump.

Do you understand? We must *see the Lord lofty and exalted, seated upon really the only throne that truly matters.*

And there is something else. Listen to it again:

(8) And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Then I said, “Here I am! Send me.” (9) And he said, “Go, and say to this people: ““Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’

We keep right on doing what the Lord has called us to do. And we can do it with confidence because we have seen the Lord seated upon His throne. We know that HE is the one ruling and that Ahab and Jezebel cannot make a move outside of His purpose. The drama that looks like tragedy, it turns out, is perfectly scripted by the King of kings.

If you focus your thoughts just upon Ahab and Jezebel, or even upon a good ruler of our nation, your feelings are going to vacillate between high hopes and deep despair. Back and forth you

will go. Your experience spiritually will be what we might call bipolar disorder of faith:

behold his face.

Bipolar disorder is a mental illness marked by extreme shifts in mood. Symptoms can include an extremely elevated mood called mania. They can also include episodes of depression.

Psalms 11:1-7 ESV To the choirmaster. Of David. In the LORD I take refuge; how can you say to my soul, “Flee like a bird to your mountain, (2) for behold, the wicked bend the bow; they have fitted their arrow to the string to shoot in the dark at the upright in heart; (3) if the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

(4) The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man. (5) The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. (6) Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. (7) For the LORD is righteous; he loves righteous deeds; the upright shall