

2 Timothy 2:14-26 “Manner Matters”
Jeremiah 31
Psalm 30
Matthew 2:13-23

(December 18, 2011)

As you listen to Jeremiah 31, I want you to listen for certain themes.

Jeremiah is speaking to Israel about the coming restoration from exile.

The promise to Abraham had consisted of three parts:

Land, Seed, and the Blessing to the Nations.

In other words, living in the promised land, with lots of children,
and with all the nations blessing the Seed of Abraham.

Jeremiah 31 focuses on the first two of these themes, so

listen for the theme of the good land (with bountiful harvests –
grain, wine, and oil);

listen for the theme of the seed (pregnant women; lots of children);

and at the end of the chapter, the promise of the new covenant
is one that Hebrews 8 will apply to the nations,
as the Gentiles are included in the new covenant!

Also listen for how sorrow and lament is turned into joy.

So hear the word of our God from Jeremiah 31.

Jeremiah 31 is quoted in Matthew 2,

speaking of the slaughter of the innocents –

Herod’s slaughter of the baby boys around Bethlehem.

Matthew hears the weeping of the mothers in Bethlehem,

and he hears the voice of Rachel weeping for her children –

the mother of Israel lamenting the exile of her children from the land.

But Jeremiah says that “There is hope for your future, declares the LORD,

and your children shall come back to their own country.” (31:17)

Our psalm of response, Psalm 30, follows the same pattern, from sorrow to joy –

from exile to restoration –

from death to life.

Sing Psalm 30

2 Timothy 2:14-26

We hear something of what it means for someone to be captured by the devil to do his will
in our gospel reading in Matthew 2:13-23 (read).

I want you to think about the implications of what Herod tried to do.

Herod understood that the coming of Jesus was a threat to his rule.
Plainly, Herod thought of ‘the King of the Jews’ as a political ruler
who would supplant him (or his children).

As an Idumean – an Edomite – a descendent of Esau –

Herod would have feared the coming of a king who was “the offspring of David”

And so Herod slaughtered dozens, perhaps hundreds, of children.

As Christmas approaches once more, Herod reminds us that the opponents of Jesus
are in fact ensnared by the devil – ‘captured by him to do his will.’

As you talk to people about the gospel,

you need to remember that there are two things that won’t work:

- 1) you cannot manipulate people into becoming Christians;
- 2) you cannot argue people into becoming Christians!

As long as you think of people as basically good, rational folk
who just need a little prodding in the right direction,

you will not understand what you are dealing with day to day.

The problem with humanity is *far worse* than we want to admit.

Humanity is in bondage.

Humanity is *dead* in sin.

And it is only because the Word has become flesh and dwelt among us –

it is only because of the resurrection of the offspring of David –

that God is now bringing the dead to life through the preaching of Paul’s gospel.

Last time we heard Paul emphasize how we must “remember Jesus Christ,
risen from the dead, the offspring of David” –

and we heard of Paul’s confidence in the Word of God.

Paul may be in chains – but the *word* is not bound!

The Word of God will accomplish the purpose for which God has sent it.

Now in verse 14 Paul tells Timothy to remind the church of these things –

remember Jesus and his resurrection;

remember Paul and how he endured all things for the sake of the elect –

as Paul gave us an example of faithfulness in the midst of trial.

Remember that if we die with him, we will also live with him.

Remember that if we endure (like Paul did),

then we will also reign with him.

But if we deny him – he also will deny us.

Jesus said in Mark 8 (the passage we have used in our visits this year)

“if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.”

You will either deny yourself or you will deny Jesus.
What does it mean to “deny Jesus”?
Well, every time you sin you deny Jesus.
Jesus said to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him –
every time you fail to do that, you deny *him*.
And Jesus says at the end of Mark 8,
that the one who is ashamed of him and his words –
“of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed
when he comes in the glory of his Father” (Mark 8:38).

There is a good example of this in the gospels:

Peter “denies” Jesus three times.
Peter says “I never knew him” three times.
If Peter had persisted in that denial,
then Jesus would have denied Peter on the final day!
But Peter repented –
and Peter demonstrated that repentance by confessing Christ before men.

Today we look at another example of this principle.

Paul says that Timothy should remind the Ephesians of these things.

And he does this by laying out three points:
the substance of the pastor’s task (v14-19) in rightly handling the word of truth,
the manner of the pastor’s task (v20-25a) as a sanctified vessel,
and the goal of the pastor’s task (v25b-26)
that *God* might lead them to repentance.

1. The Matter of the Pastor’s Task: Rightly Handling Word of Truth (v14-19)
a. Charge Them Not Quarrel about Words (v14-15)

¹⁴*Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers.* ¹⁵*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.*

The matter – the substance – of the pastor’s task is all about the *word*.

Notice how many different words in verses 14-19 are about *words*:

“remind them”
“charge them”
“quarreling about words”
“the word of truth” (v14-15)
“irreverent babble”
“their talk” – “truth” – “saying” (v16-18)

Paul severely warns the church against logomachy.

Yes, logomachy is an English word!

It is borrowed from the Greek word used here by Paul (logomachein):

Logos – word

Machesthai – to fight or quarrel
Logomachy is a dispute over words.

We often think of logomachy – quarreling over words –
as a minor problem.

But Paul is talking about something that cuts to the very heart of the Christian faith.

Paul distinguishes between “rightly handling the word of truth” and logomachy.
What is the difference?

Irreverent babble leads people into more and more ungodliness.

Their talk spreads like gangrene (in the ancient world

“gangrene” could also include ‘cancer’).

Logomachy – disputing over words – leads to death –
and logomachists – word-fighters – like Hymenaeus and Philetus,
have “swerved from the truth.”

Why are *words* so essential?

You’ve heard that saying, “sticks and stones may break my bones,
but words can never hurt me”?

Yeah, right!

The reason why words *hurt* is because words are powerful.

In the beginning, God *said* “Let there be light” –
and there was light.

As John puts it – “in the beginning was the *Word*.”

The Word of God is powerful.

And because the eternal Word of God is powerful,
therefore created words have their own power as well.

But because of sin, words have the power both to build up and to tear down.

It was the serpent’s “logomachy” – disputing over words –
(has God really said...?)

that brought humanity under the power of sin.

The Word is supposed to build up God’s people.

Our conversations should not be filled with disputing,
but with edification.

You can have a good debate!

Indeed, some of the most edifying discussions can come
when people with different perspectives seek further understanding
in their conversation together.

But we must always be careful that in our debate and discussion,
we do not turn to logomachy.

Because Paul tells Timothy to *charge them before God*

(this is an oath formula!)

charge them before God *not* to fight over words.

Why?

Because logomachy *does no good, but only ruins the hearers.*

The word for “ruin” is “katastrophe” – or catastrophe!

Logomachy is a catastrophe for the church.

How does logomachy start?

Logomachy starts when someone loses sight of the Word of God –

and gets lost among their own “words.”

That’s why Paul says to Timothy,

“do your best to present yourself *to God* as one approved,

a worker who has no need to be ashamed,

rightly handling the word of truth.”

Timothy’s work – the pastor’s work –

is to present himself to *God*.

Pastors can forget this.

It is really easy for me to start focusing on what *you think* of my sermons.

But as soon as I focus on what you think –

I am losing sight of the word of truth –

which is what you really need to hear!

b. Avoid Irreverent Babble – which Leads to Ungodliness (v16-17a)

¹⁶*But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, ¹⁷and their talk will spread like gangrene.*

When pastors lose sight of their calling,

when they fail to rightly handle the word of truth,

the result is irreverent babble –

which then leads people into more and more ungodliness.

Irreverent babble is *anything* that distracts from the gospel –

and especially false doctrine – preaching that openly contradicts the apostolic message.

We heard this phrase “irreverent babble” at the end of 1 Timothy,

when Paul said to Timothy,

“O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you.

Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge,

for by professing it some have swerved from the truth.” (6:20-21)

Now we are told that irreverent babble results in ungodliness.

As we saw in 1 Timothy,

the mystery of godliness – or the “secret of piety” –
has to do with the central doctrinal beliefs that then overflow
into a life that is *visibly* conformed to the pattern of Christ.

Now in 2 Timothy, we hear that irreverent babble
(a failure to rightly handle the word of truth)
will result in “more and more ungodliness”

If we *forget* “Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David,”
the result will be that our lives will bear less and less conformity to Jesus.

Okay – by this point you are ready for an example.

What does Paul mean by logomachy – this “irreverent babble” that leads to ungodliness?

c. Example: Hymenaeus and Philetus (v17b-18)

Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, ¹⁸who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some.

Hymenaeus and Philetus have swerved from the truth –
they have strayed from the path –

saying that the resurrection has already happened.

Apparently Hymenaeus and Philetus claimed that the resurrection of Jesus
was your resurrection,
and so therefore, there is no future resurrection of the body.

This may sound like pure silliness –
isn't it obvious that the resurrection hasn't happened yet?

But you can still find people today who embrace the ideas of Hymenaeus.
They are sometimes called “hyper-preterists” or
“consistent preterists” as they prefer.
They believe that all the prophecies in the Bible were fulfilled in 70 A.D.,
and so there is no future bodily resurrection for the believer.

Paul uses this as an example of the sort of “logomachy” – fighting over words –
that is a catastrophe for the church – “upsetting the faith of some.”

Paul says that the teaching of Hymenaeus and Philetus
has “overturned” the faith of some.

What does it mean that some people's faith will be “overturned”?

In verse 19 Paul explains the two sides to this question:

d. God's Perspective and Ours (v19)

¹⁹*But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his,"*

so on the one hand, from God's perspective,

“the Lord knows those who are his.”

The elect will never fall away entirely – but will always be restored to repentance.

God's firm foundation stands.

The elect *will* obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

But on the other hand, the seal on God's firm foundation includes a second statement!

The fact that God knows those who are his,

does not weaken his call to us:

and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

Not everyone who says, “Lord, Lord,” will stand in the final judgment.

It is not the one who “names the name of the Lord” who endures to the end –

but the one who *departs from iniquity*.

If someone says, “I am a Christian,” but he believes that the resurrection has already happened, then he has denied the faith.

If he does not depart from iniquity and return to sound doctrine,

then we have no reason to believe that he belongs to Christ!

God's election and our responsibility are not pitted against each other in Paul.

And Paul does not expect Timothy to try to figure out “who” is elect!

Indeed, the illustration that Paul uses in verses 20-21

suggests that Paul thinks that in the house of God there will be a mix.

The church includes both honorable and dishonorable vessels:

2. The Manner of the Pastor's Task: the Sanctified Vessel (v20-25a)

a. Example: Household Vessels (v20-21)

²⁰*Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. ²¹Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.*

This is precisely the language that Paul uses in Romans 9

to speak of how God has prepared some vessels for honorable use,

and some for dishonorable use.

In a great house there are the honorable vessels used at the table of the Lord of the house.

And after the digestive processes have had several hours to do their work,

there are the dishonorable vessels used to throw the results out the window!

Now, you might respond by saying,
“But we *need* both the honorable and the dishonorable vessels!
We need something to get rid of the crap!”
That’s true.

And, from time to time, God sends to his church
dishonorable vessels to get rid of the disgusting things that have started to pile up!

Paul is saying that Hymenaeus and Philetus are the dishonorable vessels in the church.
Heretics – logomachists – force the church to handle the word of truth carefully.

And, if you cleanse yourself from what is dishonorable,
you will be a vessel for honorable use,
set apart as holy – consecrated to God –
useful to the master of the house,
ready for every good work.

(The implication is that if Hymenaeus and Philetus would repent,
there is still hope for them)

We’ve been talking about the *matter* of the pastor’s task –
the substance of what he is supposed to do.
But we need to say a word about the *manner* of the pastor’s task –
how he is to go about his work.

If the substance isn’t there – if he is quarreling about words, engaging in irreverent babble,
and swerving from the truth,
then there is isn’t much more to talk about.
He has already failed!

But the *manner* of how he conducts himself is also important.
And in fact, when we get to the conclusion,
we will see that Paul thinks that his *manner* of conduct
is what God will use to bring “opponents” back to the truth.

Some people seem to think that truth is all that matters.
If you rightly divide the word of truth, then “manner” doesn’t matter!

And so Paul says in verse 22

b. The Lord’s Servant Must Not Be Quarrelsome (v22-25a)

²²*So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*

Flee youthful passions.

Flee the desires of young men.

If Timothy is to be an example to the church in Ephesus –
if he is to be an exemplary Christian –
then he must flee those desires that are common to young men.

Nowadays we tend to think immediately of sex –
and that is one of them!

But “passions” or desires include a whole variety of temptations.

Jesus speaks of “the cares of the world, the delight in riches,
and the desire for other things” (Mark 4:19)
as the thorns that choke the Christian life.

Paul speaks in Galatians 5:19-21 of the desires of the flesh
as including, “sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality,
idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries,
dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these.”

What is it that you desire?

What is it you seek?

Paul says to *pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace,*
along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

My task is to pursue these things – to seek these things –
along with you.

What does it mean to *pursue* righteousness, faith, love and peace?

Think back to what Jesus said:

“seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,
and all these things [all the things you need for daily life]
will be added to you.”

How does righteousness characterize our life together?

When someone has offended someone else –
is there repentance and forgiveness?

How is love reflected in our midst?

Or do we instead seek our own way?

Righteousness, faith, love and peace.

This is what we are to pursue together as a church.

In contrast,

²³*Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.*

²⁴*And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,* ²⁵*correcting his opponents with gentleness.*

The word for “quarrel” in verses 23-24
is the word at the root of logomachy –
“machesthai”.

The Lord’s servant must not be a fighter.
He must not be “quarrelsome” – he must not be given to foolish controversy.

In verse 23 Paul says, “Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies;
you know that they breed quarrels.”

But then in verse 25, he says that the Lord’s servant must be able to teach,
correcting his opponents with gentleness.

So, what should I do?
Should I engage those who are in error?
Or have nothing to do with them?

I’m reminded of my favorite proverb – from Proverbs 26:4-5:
“Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.
Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.”

If my speaking would embroil me in “foolish, ignorant controversies”
then I should be silent.
But if I can speak kindly, gently into a situation,
then I should speak – and correct my opponents with gentleness:

“patiently enduring evil.”

If they go after *me*, that’s okay.
They went after Jesus first!
It’s only part of what it means to suffer for the sake of Christ.

And Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, was not quarrelsome – he was not a fighter;
therefore, neither should I, as the Lord’s servant, be quarrelsome.

You see, when you remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David –
that changes everything in the way that you relate to other people.

Because “remembering Jesus Christ” is not just an intellectual exercise!
Remembering Jesus Christ is a day-by-day, moment-by-moment
exercise in denying yourself, taking up your cross, and following him.
It’s about fleeing youthful passions – fleeing your worldly desires –
and *together with all those who call on the Lord from a pure heart*,
pursuing “righteousness, faith, love, and peace.”

And the goal of all this is that:

3. The Goal of the Pastor's Task: That God May Grant Them Repentance (v25b-26)

God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,²⁶ and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.

Notice how Paul says this.

It's not that *you* will lead them to repentance.

It's not that *you* will bring them to a knowledge of the truth.

I know better than to think that I can change people's hearts!

It is *God* who grants them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.

My confidence is not in my persuasive powers of speech.

My confidence is that *God* will use the means he has ordained –

the reading and preaching of the Word, the sacraments, and prayer –

in order to grant repentance to those who are in bondage to the devil.

Paul says that the opponents of the gospel –

even those within the church (like Hymenaeus and Philetus) –

have been ensnared by the devil,

captured by him to do his will.

If people are basically good and just need a little prod in the right direction,

then sure, we would be quite capable of doing *that!*

But Paul says that humanity is in bondage to the devil.

The people you meet every day

will only come to repentance if God grants them repentance –

if God rescues them from their bondage to the devil.

But God has promised that he will do this through the patient endurance of his servants –

through the preaching of the Word, the sacraments, and prayer.

And so therefore we have great confidence as we go out into the world,

because the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ is growing,

and it will continue to grow until it fills all the earth.