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## *Called to Speak for the Lord – the Book of Jeremiah*

To Understand and Know Him

*December 6, 2020*

**Sermon Text:** Jeremiah 9:23-24

**Scripture Reading:** Jeremiah 9

Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, (24) but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

“All are greatly deceived who think themselves blessed while alienated from God...it is a vice innate in all mortals to be proud of their own excellency. Whatever we think

valuable ought to be acknowledged as received from God.

All men attend to various pursuits, but the knowledge of God is neglected. We see with what energy everyone pursues his own fancies, while hardly one in a hundred spends half an hour in the day seeking the knowledge of God.”  
(Calvin)

Knowing God. To know the Lord is to have *life*. We see the crucial importance of seeking it over and over in the Bible:

Ephesians 1:15-17 ESV For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, (16) I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, (17) that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, **may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him,**

Colossians 1:9-10 ESV And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, **asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in**

all spiritual wisdom and understanding, (10) so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

1 John 5:20 ESV And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, **so that we may know him who is true**; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.

The people of Jeremiah's day did not know the Lord. They boasted that they did, but look at this again:

Jeremiah 9:3-6 ESV They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, **and they do not know me, declares the LORD.** (4) Let everyone beware of his neighbor, and put no trust in any brother, for every brother is a deceiver, and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. (5) Everyone deceives his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves committing iniquity. (6) Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they

refuse to know me, declares the LORD.

To know the Lord is to love Him and His Word. It is to obey Him willingly and to walk in His ways. It is to believe Him, to thank Him, to fear Him, and to worship Him alone. To reflect His image in our own lives and ways.

There are many people, as in Jeremiah's time, who boast about their religion. The Pharisees did and they are still with us now. You can find them easily. Look for instance at the websites of so many local churches where they lay out in great exactness and precision the very letter of Scripture on various doctrines. The statements are on their face, accurate. They describe justification, sanctification, the Trinity and so on truthfully. But it is very common that such places leave out what is really important:

Matthew 12:7 ESV And if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless.

Boasting, in other words, is extremely common in the visible church. But unless, as we are about to see, that

boasting (which is really not the prideful thing we think of when we hear this word) is *that we really do know the Lord*, then it is false religion.

Look again now at Jeremiah 9:23-24 –

Jeremiah 9:23-24 ESV Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his **wisdom**, let not the mighty man boast in his **might**, let not the rich man boast in his **riches**, (24) but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

The Scripture here identifies three common things about which people are given to boasting:

- Wisdom
- Might/strength
- Wealth

Such boasting is evil and is here forbidden by the Lord. It entails the sin of pride which wrongly exalts man as if he were God. As such it is a fundamental trait of the devil.

## 1. Boasting of Wisdom

Isaiah 5:21 ESV Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and shrewd in their own sight!

1 Corinthians 1:19 ESV For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

1 Corinthians 3:18-19 ESV Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. (19) For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,”

Psalms 10:4 ESV In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, “There is no God.”

Proverbs 16:18 ESV Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

Pride and boasting are always associated in the Bible with evil. At the root of this sin is the exaltation of man to the place of God. The Lord hates the boaster and sets Himself against him.

That is why pride precedes destruction and a fall. And the prideful man is a violent man – he is entitled to be worshipped and those who do not give it to him receive his wrath.

Here we see this boasting of one's wisdom. But the world's wisdom is actually foolishness. It always leads to atheism – “there is no God.” It does not submit to God and therefore real wisdom always evades the man who boasts of his wisdom!

Proverbs 1:7 ESV The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Notice that the kind of wisdom the Lord is forbidding here is *his wisdom* – the “wise” man's own wisdom. This is why, for example, academia in the university always devolves into foolish ignorance when the Lord is despised and rejected. Pick whatever subject you want – biology, mathematics, physics, philosophy, the arts, economics, law – and they will always end in foolishness when the Lord is rejected. That is the kind of boasting of wisdom that the Lord is forbidding here. Let not the wise man boast of *his* wisdom.

James 3:13-18 ESV Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. (14) But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. (15) This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, **but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.** (16) For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. (17) But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. (18) And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

## 2. Boasting of Might

I suppose this is the kind of boasting that we see here in king Nebuchadnezzar-

Daniel 4:28-33 ESV All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. (29) At the end of twelve months he was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, (30) and the king answered and said, **“Is not this great**

**Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power** as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" (31) While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, "O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, (32) and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will." (33) Immediately the word was fulfilled against Nebuchadnezzar. He was driven from among men and ate grass like an ox, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers, and his nails were like birds' claws.

When a man boasts in his own power and strength and might he necessarily exalts himself as God – *for the glory of my majesty*. The Lord will not tolerate it. The truth is that a man has no power in himself. Kings are particularly prone to this wickedness.

1 Corinthians 4:7 ESV For who sees

anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

This really is humbling. We have nothing at all – no power, no possessions, no life, no intellect...nothing that we have not received from the Lord. So there is no basis for anyone to boast. Where men do not humbly acknowledge this, there is no true religion.

It is the Christmas season and there will be gift giving and gift receiving. Think of someone who has nothing, who is given a gift graciously from someone, and then they hold it up and boast about how they obtained it!!

Let not the mighty man boast of his might.

### 3. Boasting in our wealth

I think that John must have had this kind of boasting in mind here:

1 John 2:15-16 ESV Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is

in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.

Pride of life. Pride of self. Pride of stuff. What a wicked thing it is to refuse to thank the Lord for His blessings, and instead to boast of what WE have gotten!

All of this boasting – boasting of wisdom, of might, and of wealth – is something the Lord must break us of. And most typically the way He sets about doing this humbling of His people is to make us weak and show us our weakness. For example:

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 ESV But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. (10) For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Weakness = strength because when we see our weakness, we rely on the Lord’s strength and cease boasting. All down

through church history, Christ’s true people have experienced this. He leads us into places to show us our weakness so that our faith is in Him alone. Think of Moses’ 40 years in the wilderness being prepared.

We have seen it here in this church and I really hope that we have all learned the lesson. It has been the Lord’s doing to dwindle our number to a handful, to take us through difficult times, and He continues to do so – but it was only after so much of that humbling that He chose to use us for His ministry. I mean, the thing is laughable in a sense – that this little tiny group of people in this unknown place, and with members who are spread far and wide whom we cannot see, that this feeble group with really nothing to boast about – is being used by Him in a remarkable way. Around the world! And we must never take any credit for it or we would be fools. We didn’t do it. The Lord did.

Earthly wisdom, might, and wealth *are a trap and stumbling block*. Start boasting about these things and you can bet that a fall is coming!

### Something to Boast About

Jeremiah 9:24 ESV but let him who

boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

The right kind of “boasting” is not really boasting, is it? Here the Lord is saying something like this:

*“If you want to tell others about something that you are proud of, then tell them that the Lord grabbed hold of you out of His pure mercy and grace, delivered you from hell and gave to you a new heart and adopted you as His own child. That is something to announce from the rooftops.”*

Look again at those evil countrymen of Jeremiah’s –

Jeremiah 9:3-6 ESV They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, declares the LORD. (4) Let everyone beware of his neighbor, and put no trust in any brother, for every brother is a deceiver, and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer. (5) Everyone deceives his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth;

they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves committing iniquity. (6) Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, declares the LORD.

In other words, these wicked people just like wicked boasters of our day, claimed to know the Lord but in fact they practiced wickedness. “They proceed from evil to evil.” In contrast, the Lord delights in:

- Steadfast love
- Justice
- Righteousness

Notice that phrase “in the earth.” It is easy to miss but I think it is vitally important. Why didn’t He just say:

“I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness.”

It seems to me that “in the earth” emphasizes the here and now. It is not just that the Lord delights in love, justice, and righteousness, “up there,” or at some future time, but that *any love, justice, and righteousness in this world proceeds from Him*. And furthermore, that He delights in seeing these things

carried out by His people. *Now*. And His exercise of these things *now*.

Do you understand then that the Lord, as our Father, is not some frowning god who cannot be pleased? Look at it. He *delights* in it when He sees His qualities carried out through us. He is *happy with us when we who know Him carry out the things He loves*.

And we can boast in this – that He is our Father and we are His children, and that He loves and delights in us.

You may have had a father or mother who you just could not please. I talked with a lady recently who grew up under very wicked parents and one of the things that she suffered was their constant criticism. Never good enough. Everything she did was scorned.

But God as our Father in Christ is not like that. *As we walk in His truth, as we obey Him and live out the life of the new creation He has given us, He is pleased with us. He delights in us.*

Job 1:8 ESV And the LORD said to Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away

from evil?”

This is something to boast about with the kind of boasting that is right. I suppose it is a boasting that goes right back to Him rather than resting upon ourselves. This boasting is really our praise, honor and thankfulness to Him. It is this:

Psalms 40:1-17 ESV To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David. I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. (2) He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure. (3) He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God. Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.

(4) Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after a lie!

(5) You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your wondrous deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told. (6) In sacrifice and offering you



have not delighted, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.

(7) Then I said, "Behold, I have come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me: (8) I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." (9) I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; behold, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD. (10) I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.

(11) As for you, O LORD, you will not restrain your mercy from me; your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me! (12) For evils have encompassed me beyond number; my iniquities have overtaken me, and I cannot see; they are more than the hairs of my head; my heart fails me. (13) Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me! O LORD, make haste to help me! (14) Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether who seek to snatch away my life; let those be turned back and brought to dishonor who delight in my hurt! (15) Let those be

appalled because of their shame who say to me, "Aha, Aha!"

(16) But may all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; may those who love your salvation say continually, "Great is the LORD!" (17) As for me, I am poor and needy, but the Lord takes thought for me. You are my help and my deliverer; do not delay, O my God!