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Tillamook, Oregon

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Called to Speak for the Lord – the Book of Jeremiah

Living for Christ in a Wicked
Nation

January 10, 2021

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 11-15

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 11

What I would like us to do this morning in our study of Jeremiah is to consider Jeremiah's experience and relate it to our own. Jeremiah, perhaps more than any other OT prophet, is very personal. He includes his grief, for instance, at the evil of his nation. He gives us accounts of how he was persecuted by family members. He shares his anguish over the destruction of his country by the wicked, unrepentant sins of the people. And he records for us his prayers – including his prayers that call for the Lord's justice upon these wicked, unfaithful people to whom the Lord had showed so much favor.

Through Jeremiah's experience then, we have a picture of what any real Christian is going to experience in this evil world. We live in days which are growing more and more like the time of Jeremiah. And this bent toward evil, this defiance of the Lord, has been going on in our nation for decades now. The norm it seems is for evil to prevail *and the people love it so.*

We should not be surprised, even though we are saddened by it all and we find ourselves more and more praying for God's justice upon the wicked.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 ESV But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. (2) For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, (4) treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

John 15:18-19 ESV “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. (19) If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

There is only one thing that is going to remedy this, and that is the return of Christ.

Alright then, let’s look at some sections of these chapters in Jeremiah and consider what it is like for the godly to live in an ungodly, evil nation.

Do Not Pray for Them

We have looked at this command of the Lord to Jeremiah before and it shows just how full the evil was in Judah:

Jeremiah 11:14 ESV “Therefore do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer on their behalf, for I will not listen when they call to me in the time of their trouble.

Jeremiah 7:16 ESV “As for you, do not pray for this people, or lift up a cry or prayer for them, and do not intercede with me, for I will not hear you.

Jeremiah 14:11 ESV The LORD said to me: “Do not pray for the welfare of this people.

Jeremiah 15:1 ESV Then the LORD said to me, “Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my heart would not turn toward this people. Send them out of my sight, and let them go!

Think about the depth of these people’s sin:

Jeremiah 11:6-10 ESV And the LORD said to me, “Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem: Hear the words of this covenant and do them. (7) For I solemnly warned your fathers when I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, warning them persistently, even to this day, saying, Obey my voice. (8) Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but everyone walked in the stubbornness of his evil heart. Therefore I brought upon them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not.” (9) Again the LORD said to me, “A conspiracy exists among the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. (10) They have turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers,

who refused to hear my words. They have gone after other gods to serve them. The house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant that I made with their fathers.

You see the willfulness of it. The knowingness of it. They *knew*, and yet they insisted on pursuing false gods and evil. They mocked the Lord. They said “He does not see.”

Our own nation today, and really all of western Europe – England, Ireland, Scotland, France, Italy, Germany...- has been at war with the Lord for a long, long time. Most of these places were once Christian. Some were even centers of the Reformation. But what do you see in them today?

- Paganism
- Atheism reigning in the universities
- Immorality and perversions embraced and touted as the new normal
- Christians being persecuted and silenced
- Destruction of anything that is a part of a Christian history or heritage
- Lawlessness

- And, perhaps most evil of all, wickedness in the churches. We have the “lying prophets” now that Jeremiah had to contend with.

Western civilization is becoming increasingly un-civilized as a result of this war against God. So it was in Jeremiah’s day, and so it is in ours.

Jeremiah was commanded by the Lord not to pray for such people. And we need to pray for real wisdom in this respect ourselves, lest we find ourselves praying wrong prayers for the wrong people!

I see this about every single day. Christians having a wrong-headed focus upon the wicked, all the while ignoring the plight of God’s real people at the hands of the wicked. When we do this, we are working at odds with God!

Instead, Pray Like This

Jeremiah 11:18-23 ESV The LORD made it known to me and I knew; then you showed me their deeds. (19) But I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter. I did not know it was against me they devised schemes, saying, “Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, let us

cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more.” (20) But, O LORD of hosts, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you have I committed my cause.

(21) Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the men of Anathoth, who seek your life, and say, “Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD, or you will die by our hand”— (22) therefore thus says the LORD of hosts: “Behold, I will punish them. The young men shall die by the sword, their sons and their daughters shall die by famine, (23) and none of them shall be left. For I will bring disaster upon the men of Anathoth, the year of their punishment.”

Jeremiah was once, like us, *naïve about evil*. In this case the evil he was once blind to was a murderous plot against him *by his own family and fellow priests!* People he assumed would be his friends and allies.

Notice how they disguised their evil plans for him in language like this (with a “wink...wink”) –

“Let us destroy the tree with its

fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name be remembered no more.”

And all the while, Jeremiah was, as he describes it himself – “a gentle lamb” being led to slaughter, yet he did not know he was the target of their murderous plans. That is, *until the Lord opened his eyes*.

“The LORD made it known to me and I knew; then you showed me their deeds.”

It is a very dangerous condition to be in – this business of naivete about evil. This notion of “always thinking the best” about others. To insist upon this is to refuse to believe Christ’s repeated warnings to us that the world will hate and persecute all who follow Him.

Think on this carefully. It is very difficult to come to the realization that people who seem closest to you in fact hate you and are plotting to destroy you. These enemies of Jeremiah’s were, let me remind you again, *his own family and his fellow priests*. The people of his hometown, Anathoth.

Consider the history of the church. *Who has always been the chief persecutors*

of Christ's people, of Christ's ministers? Who were the earliest persecutors of the apostles and church? The priests. The clergy. The "established" church. Who led the murderous assaults on the Reformers, on anyone who dared translate the Bible? The answer is the same – the clergy, the priests, the established church. Where did the primary opposition against Whitefield and the revival of his day come from – the clergy, the priests, the established church.

Therefore, we have no excuse today to be naïve about these things. The Lord has shown us and He has warned us. We must not insist that we know better than He!

Listen to the wicked again:

Jeremiah 11:21-23 ESV Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the men of Anathoth, who seek your life, and say, **“Do not prophesy in the name of the LORD, or you will die by our hand”**—

This murderous, destructive hatred of Christ *is the same spirit that is in the enemies we face today and the sooner*

we are wise to it, the better. If you follow Christ, if you are born again and know Him, then people around you who hate Him will show their hatred of you. People who tell you overtly or covertly, “stop talking to us about Bible stuff. Who are you to tell us? You carry this talk too far.” Such people *do not love you. Even if they are your parents or children or brothers or sisters.*

I saw this in my own parents as the years went on. The more I grew in the Lord, the more they disdained me. They claimed to be Christians, but they gravitated to the ungodly and distanced themselves from me. When I first became a pastor (my father thought I was being foolish for leaving my career as a police officer), I still had some very good times with them. They would come to Montana and visit and we would go deer and antelope hunting, fishing up in the Rocky Mountain lakes, and I was always sad when they had to leave and we wouldn't get to see them for months.

But as the years went by, it was painful to see – and Jeremiah surely experienced this even more – it was painful to see the increasing coldness and even disdain in their attitudes toward me. And yet it would have been

foolish of me to keep denying it. Many Christians just refuse to believe Jesus' words –

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.

This is part of paying the price to follow Christ. It is a pathetic thing to see those who claim to be Christians spending their lives trying and trying and trying to earn the approval of both Christ AND family members who hate Christ. Jesus said we can't have it both ways.

So here is an important prayer-

Jeremiah 11:18 ESV The LORD made it known to me and I knew; then you showed me their deeds.

“Lord, open my eyes. Show me their deeds. Make it known to me who they are and what they are doing.” *Because I assure you that you are going to remain in bondage to evil as long as your remain blindly naïve to the evil around you. Seeing it brings freedom.*

Why do the Wicked Prosper?

Here is still another experience of Jeremiah that we are frustrated by in our day:

Jeremiah 12:1-6 ESV Righteous are you, O LORD, when I complain to you; yet I would plead my case before you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive? (2) You plant them, and they take root; they grow and produce fruit; you are near in their mouth and far from their heart.

(3) But you, O LORD, know me; you see me, and test my heart toward you. Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and set them apart for the day

of slaughter. (4) How long will the land mourn and the grass of every field wither? For the evil of those who dwell in it the beasts and the birds are swept away, because they said, “He will not see our latter end.”

Jeremiah knows that the Lord is righteous. He begins his prayer confessing it. “When I complain to you...I know you are doing right.” And yet, why does the way of the wicked prosper?

This has been a question asked by God’s people in all times.

Psalms 73:12-14 ESV Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches. (13) All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence. (14) For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning.

Job 21:7-14 ESV Why do the wicked live, reach old age, and grow mighty in power? (8) Their offspring are established in their presence, and their descendants before their eyes. (9) Their houses are safe from fear, and no rod of God is upon them. (10) Their bull breeds without

fail; their cow calves and does not miscarry. (11) They send out their little boys like a flock, and their children dance. (12) They sing to the tambourine and the lyre and rejoice to the sound of the pipe. (13) They spend their days in prosperity, and in peace they go down to Sheol. (14) They say to God, ‘Depart from us! We do not desire the knowledge of your ways.

The Lord answers Jeremiah’s question, and instructs him and admonishes him. Listen very, very carefully to the Lord’s words here:

(5) “If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you are so trusting, what will you do in the thicket of the Jordan? (6) For even your brothers and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you; they are in full cry after you; do not believe them, though they speak friendly words to you.”

It seems that this interchange must have happened early on in Jeremiah’s ministry. A time when the general climate was that Judah was still considered “a safe land.” (Although

God's judgments had already started, but the cry of the day was still "Peace,Peace...").In those times, Jeremiah (being a godly man) was perplexed. He saw wicked, evil people in his country *prospering*. They broke God's covenant regularly but, it seemed, they just kept prospering.

Listen again to Jeremiah's prayer-

(3) But you, O LORD, know me; you see me, and test my heart toward you. Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and set them apart for the day of slaughter. (4) How long will the land mourn and the grass of every field wither? For the evil of those who dwell in it the beasts and the birds are swept away, because they said, "He will not see our latter end."

He wants the Lord, and rightfully so, to *act*. He wants the Lord to winnow out the wicked so that the Land and the righteous can be blessed again.

But the Lord says to him-

(5) "If you have raced with men on foot, and they have wearied you, how will you compete with horses? And if in a safe land you are so trusting, what will

you do in the thicket of the Jordan?

I think we can distill these verses down into this:

"Jeremiah, you need to learn that things are not as they appear. In fact, Jeremiah, things are worse than you think they are."

Jeremiah was praying for a "fix." I take it that he believed if God would just judge the wicked and purge them from the nation, the days of blessing for the righteous would return. *"Pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and set them apart for the day of slaughter."* Then the days of blessing would return.

But Jeremiah was wrong, just as we are so often wrong in our day. *Things were far worse than Jeremiah thought and in fact God's remedy was going to be much more radical than he imagined.*

Things were not as they seemed. Jeremiah had only "raced with men" in a "safe land." If he was troubled by what he saw and if he believed that it could all be "fixed" by the Lord's dealing with the wicked, then when the full stroke of the Lord's judgment upon Judah comes – *a full destruction that He has already determined to bring –*

the thicket of the Jordan – how ill Jeremiah cope?

Let me apply this to our day as we end. God sees it all. We see only the surface. And as a result, we can err like Jeremiah did in thinking that *if God will just judge and deal with the wicked in our nation, if He would just purge our land of evil, then “God Bless America” would come about once again.*

What did Jeremiah have to learn? How many righteous people were left in Judah? *Almost none.* God was going to purge the nation indeed – He was already acting to do so. *But when He brought it about, there was no Judah left.*

And so it is today. We love our country. We would like to see God blessing America. But He has told us that as this present age approaches its end, evil will grow and grow. America is not the end to which the Christian looks. What if...what if our nation is in a far more evil condition than we understand? What if *things are not as they seem?* What if there is only a small remnant of the godly in our nation and what if He is moving to act for His glory – *but His plan and His action is not what we have in mind? What if God’s decree is not*

“God Bless America”? What if it is judgment? What if our concept of how many “godly” people left in this country is wrong? This was Jeremiah’s problem, you see. And he had to be instructed and admonished and corrected.

Because if we are not corrected, if we are thinking on these things in our own day wrongly – and that likelihood is high – *what is going to happen when we find ourselves running with horses, or in the thicket of the Jordan?* That is to say, what is going to happen when evil keeps increasing, when the wicked keep right on prospering, and when the Lord brings judgment instead of blessing upon this nation? I can tell you. Our faith will fail. We will despair. And we will lose hope.

Things are not as they seem. God is acting. He sees. He knows. We need to continually pray that He will enable us to have eyes to see as he does, and to give Him glory for all that He is and does.