

**Jeremiah 23: 25-40; “How God Uses His Word”, Sermon # 25 in the series –  
“Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God”,  
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2017,  
in the Morning Worship Service.**

The Lord our God takes very seriously the things which we preach and speak in His name. It is a very serious thing to deliver God’s word to people who are righteous and who know the Lord, and also to sinful people who we would hope would become righteous people by faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. To faithfully deliver God’s word over a period of time requires two things. It requires a call from God Himself, and it requires that the person preaching does not add to God’s word, or take away from it. He is willing to preach the whole counsel of God, and he actually goes about to do that. The prophets of Jeremiah’s day, with very few exceptions, violated both of these requirements. In verse 21 we find God’s complaint against them. I have not sent these prophets, and yet they ran. I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my counsel, and had caused my people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from their evil way.

But the prophets were speaking lies to the people and giving them false dreams and visions out of the deceit of their own hearts, it says in verse 26. And there was a great need to be able to discern the difference between true prophets and false prophets; between a true message from God and a false one. We have the same desperate need for this kind of discernment today as well. Without a true vision, or a word from God, people will perish in their sins. So this morning I would like to show you how God uses His word; to save men, and to turn them to righteousness; and to judge those people who will not repent. God uses His word in 3 ways which are given to us here in this passage. 1<sup>st</sup> – He uses His word as wheat to feed His people. 2<sup>nd</sup> – He uses His word as a fire to convict us and give us greater desires to be faithful to our God. And 3<sup>rd</sup> – He uses His word as a hammer to break people’s hard hearts.

**1<sup>st</sup> – God uses His word as wheat to feed His people.**

Wheat, if you do not know it, is the world’s most important grain crop. It is a grass type plant. It belongs to the group of grains called cereals. Other cereal grains are – rice, oats, corn, barley, and rye. There are 14 species of wheat and probably about 30,000 varieties of wheat grown in various parts of the world. The typical wheat plant has a stem with leaves and a head composed of clusters of kernels about 50 kernels to each plant. Each kernel is about 1/8<sup>th</sup> to 1/4 of an inch long, and composed of an outer husk which is a straw-like material called the chaff. Inside of the outer husk are several layers of what is called bran, which protect the inner kernel of the wheat – the endosperm. This kernel is the part which is ground to make bread, after the wheat is harvested. The wheat kernel is the valuable part of the plant. The chaff in the time of harvest would be separated from the wheat in the threshing process. The cut wheat would be piled on the threshing floor and men would take their winnowing forks and toss the wheat up in the air. The heavier kernels would fall to the floor and be gathered to make the bread and the chaff would be blown away because it was lighter.

Now, all of this pertains to the question of verse 28. “What is the chaff to the wheat?, says the Lord.” The word of God is the wheat. It is the valuable and precious grain which is made into bread for the souls of God’s people. The prophets of God take the bread of God’s word and deliver it to God’s people, and they are nourished and fed and strengthened by it, to do God’s will. The teaching of the false prophets is the chaff; the worthless part. However, the false prophets were calling their teaching, the wheat, even though it was chaff. They were passing it off as food for God’s people. But actually, their teaching was worthless, misleading, and poisonous for the people to take in to their hearts. It is sometimes said that you become what

you eat. This is also true in spiritual things. If you take in what is true and digest it you will be saved and become spiritually strong. If you take in what is false and digest it, you will not only not be saved, you will be spiritually poisoned and die eternally unless you can find the way to repent of it. So, this why in God's word, the Bible, God and His prophets speak about people as being wheat and chaff. They either have the kernel of the matter of divine truth planted in them, and they are growing up to eternal life, being most concerned about spiritual truths which will save them and make them strong by the grace of Christ; or they are chaff. If a person is chaff, he does not have the kernel of the matter in him. He may have the shell of a religious life, but he does not understand that he needs Christ's grace to become wheat; to be saved, and to turn away from sin, and lead a godly life.

Jesus said, when He was in the wilderness and being tempted by the Devil, to command that the stones would become bread; He said – "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'" In other words, man does not live, either physically or spiritually on account of physical bread which he eats. Ultimately, he lives and stays in life because the Father upholds him in life by His very word, which appoints to all men the length of their life, the number of their days, and the strength that they shall have, at any given point in their life. And man only comes to have eternal life by believing in Jesus Christ in order to obtain it. God will eventually separate the wheat from the chaff on the final day of the world; the Day when Jesus returns, and raises all of the dead. That will be the day of judgment. It is our Lord Jesus Christ, in connection with the Father and the Spirit's working who will be the One who separates the wheat from the chaff. You remember what John the Baptist said in Matthew 3: 11 – "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry." "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." "He winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

God, through Jesus Christ, is the great winnowing, the great separator of men. He winnows (separates out in His most holy mind) the men who preach lies, from the men who preach the truth. He has made in His word the great distinctions between what is true and what is false, what is precious and what is vile, and what is good and what is evil. He knows what will feed His people, and what is worthless. We live in similar circumstances in our day, to what Jeremiah was experiencing in his day. There are many preachers and pastors in this land, and what are they preaching? Are they preaching chaff, or are they preaching wheat? If we listen carefully we can find as much chaff in our day as Jeremiah found in his day.

There is the chaff of preaching in such a way that it causes people to forget God's name. In verse 26b it says: "Indeed they are prophets of the deceit of their own heart, who try to make My people forget My name by their dreams which everyone tells his neighbor, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal." In our day these are people who preach a man-centered, man-pleasing gospel. "I have dreamed", I have dreamed", they say. And the things that they dream up, please themselves and others very well." They say that God has created us to feel good about ourselves. And life has been given to us to please ourselves. God wants us to have fun in worship, to always be happy in worship; let let's entertain ourselves and call it worship. And God's name is forgotten. Many Christians in our day think that life is to be lived for their own pleasure and it is to be lived entertaining themselves and getting others to join in.

But is this in line with the plain teaching of Christ, that if anyone wants to be His disciple that they must deny themselves and pick up their cross and follow Him? What about those things that He said that followed that statement? "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." How many Christians today are losing their old worldly life that they had before they were saved, in order to find a new

life, full of the excitement of devotion to Christ, and obedience to God's word? This is, by the way, the most exciting life of all.

Then there is the chaff of false doctrine. Many preachers this very day, in churches called "Christian" are propagating the false doctrine that God is not sovereign, that He is not omniscient, all seeing, or knowing; His foreknowledge and predestination are myths. His love is towards all men savingly; that they are not so totally depraved, sin has not so affected every area of their being, that people cannot choose God for themselves, apart from any particular and saving grace being applied to them. They preaching that we must choose God first, and that is how a person becomes a Christian. They accept Christ by their own free will without God every having to effectually call them or cause them to be born again before they can believe in Christ. This is surely getting the cart before the horse. Can a man who is dead in his trespasses and sins make himself alive? Can he cause himself to be born again by his own fallen mind and will? Anyone who will plainly read the word of God will see that without God acting first, these things cannot come about.

Then there is the chaff of a false gospel. Since God loves everyone, the false teacher says, He will never punish anyone for their sins. There is no thing as hell they say. Could God really punish any person everlastingly and never let them come back from it? What kind of a God, they say, would consign people who do not believe in Jesus to everlasting burnings?, they say. But let us pause a moment and consider; the Bible describes God as both loving and just. It is because He is just that He must punish all sin wherever He finds it. It is the antithesis of His holy being. It is the thing that He hates. He knows that one sin permitted to run its course destroys all the good that He means to bring. Therefore, since sin cannot co-exist with the holy God, neither can any sinner who holds on to their sin co-exist in the same holy place with God. Therefore, sin against God, unrepented of, and not atoned for by Jesus Christ, must be punished eternally, for the sinner has sinned against a holy God who is eternal. And this deserves an eternal punishment, especially when God has sent His Son that whosoever will believe in Him; in His finished work of righteousness and sufferings, can go free, and never come into condemnation ever again.

The true gospel is that Jesus died for sinners, and that all men by nature and practice are sinners. But the person believing in Jesus receives forgiveness from God and a righteousness infinitely better than their own. God uses His word as wheat, as spiritual bread, to give eternal life. Therefore, do not believe the chaff of a false gospel that God does not punish sin. He punished the Lord Jesus with a punishment equivalent to what you deserve if you went to hell. How could God exact this punishment from Jesus? He could do it, because He knew the infinite and eternal value of His Son's Person and His work would indeed satisfy His justice. What is the wheat to the chaff? In Christ's case, an infinite difference, because of His perfect righteousness and holiness. "I am the bread of life." "He who comes to me shall never hunger, and He who believes in Me shall never thirst." He means spiritually, when you believe in Him, you will never hunger for the chaff again. You will have found the bread of eternal life.

**This leads us on to our 2<sup>nd</sup> way that God uses His word; He uses His word as a fire to convict us and give us greater desires to be faithful to our God.**

Verse 29 – "Is not My word like a fire?" says the Lord." Now, we have looked at this idea before in our study of Jeremiah. In chapter 20, verse 8 Jeremiah said – "For when I spoke, I cried out; I shouted, 'Violence and plunder!' "Because the word of the Lord was made to me a reproach and a derision daily." "Then I said, 'I will not make mention of Him, nor speak anymore in His name.'" "But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones; I was weary of holding it back, and I could not." This was the experience of the strength of God's Spirit working His word into Jeremiah's heart, reviving Him in the work of the ministry when he wanted to quit because people were mocking him and making fun of him as he preached to

them. But the Holy Spirit's spiritual fire came to his heart, and he knew that he could continue. He knew that He had to continue. He knew that he would continue to preach. And the Holy Spirit attended His ministry of the preaching of the word, so that it was with power. It was with power to bring conviction and the confounding of his adversaries, and it was the power of God to save those who heeded his words, trusted in God's mercy, and repented of their sins.

Let me tell you what it is like for a preacher in these days, when there are no longer revelatory gifts of prophecy. For every man that God will raise up to be a faithful preacher, indeed for every Christian when they receive Christ, they are baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire. They should, at times, experience the reality of a great and burning desire to read God's word, and in the case of one called to the ministry, a great and burning desire to preach God's word to others. They will at certain critical times, experience this experience of fire, of burning, spiritually speaking, because God is faithful to Himself, and He cannot deny Himself, You may remember that John the Baptist was described by the Lord Jesus as a "burning and a shining light". He caused even self-righteous and sinful men to feel the heat of God's word. This heart sensation of conviction of sin and God's authority being conveyed in the word, gripped his hearer's hearts. Even though some did not repent, a great many of his listeners did. Multitudes were coming to hear John and to be baptized with the baptism of repentance. And all of this came about because of the powerful working of the Holy Spirit in relation to the word of God being preached.

God the Spirit can, most certainly and definitely, according to the will of the Father, light an on-going fire in the believer's heart, as the word comes to their heart with power according to His sovereign will. The two on the road to Emmaus, in Luke 24, when they were walking back home a couple of days after Christ's crucifixion, talking over all the things which had happened, they had this glorious experience happen to them. As they were conversing and reasoning together, Jesus Himself drew near to them, and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him at that moment. The Lord asked them – "What kind of conversation is this that you are having with one another as you walk and are sad?" They explain to him that Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and the people, was delivered up by the chief priests and the rulers of Israel to be condemned to death, and He was crucified. But they were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. And besides that, it was the 3<sup>rd</sup> day since those things happened, and certain women of their company who arrived at His tomb early, said that they had seen a vision of angels who said that He was alive. Some of the disciples had gone to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but Him they did not see.

Then Jesus said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that that the prophets have spoken!" "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to have entered into His glory?" "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." Now, you can see, that this was God using His word. The Father appointed this meeting, and the Son, although concealed in His identity at that point, was opening up the Scriptures to these men who were sad, when they should have been expectant. Is this not the way that we ourselves are, sometimes as Christians? Sad, downcast, discouraged, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken? Well, they drew near the village where they were going, and the Lord Jesus indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, it says, saying: "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And so He went with them to the house. And, it says: "It came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them." And their eyes were opened and they knew Him, and He vanished from their sight." And they said to one another, "Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?"

This is what I wanted to show you. This is how God uses His word as a fire, in lives of all of His disciples. It is He who caused Jeremiah's heart to burn and helped him on to fulfill his ministry in the face of tremendous opposition. It is Christ who will cause our hearts to burn within us, as the Scriptures are opened for us, if we will only believe. If we do not remember to believe in Christ's resurrection at our lowest points in our experience, how then will we be able to do anything to the glory of God in living our Christian lives unto God, day by day? *E.H. Divall has a poem entitled – "A Believer's Rest" – "He is not far away: Why do we sometimes seem to be alone, and miss the hands outstretched to meet our own?" "He is the same today, as when of old He dwelt in human form with His disciples – When He knew the needs of all His fellow-men, and all their sorrows felt." "Only our faith is dim, so that our eyes are holden, and we go all day, and until dusk, before we know that we have walked with Him."*

*A man named G.H. Morrison says this: "Christ does not startle us with unexpected novelties; He touches with glory what is quite familiar. It is the familiar experiences that He explains. It is the familiar cravings that He satisfies. It is the familiar thoughts which have filled the mind since childhood that He expands into undreamed-of fulness. We have known what sin was since we were at school. Christ meets us and talks about our sin—and we learn that sin is more exceedingly sinful than we had ever thought in our most reproachful moments; we learn, too, that He died that we might be forgiven, and that there is pardon for our worst sins, this very hour. We have known what pain was and we have known what death was, and we have known that there was a heaven and a God; but when Christ meets us as we travel by the way and talks to us of these familiar things, there is such promise and light and love about them all that everything becomes new."*

My brethren, this is God's using His word as a fire. Will you not remember that this can be your experience when Christ in His word draws near. Not simply conviction of sin, and realizing that you have fallen short of His glory in so many ways, but His drawing near to stir up and the renew feelings and thoughts of love for Him in relation to all that He has done for you. I do not believe that we have ever sung hymn # 261 in our Trinity Hymnal before, but let me read to you the words of it, for they are appropriate here. "Christ in His Word draws near; hush, moaning voice of fear, He bids thee cease; with songs sincere and sweet let us arise, and meet Him who comes forth to greet our souls with peace." "Rising above thy care, meet him as in the air, O weary heart; put on joy's sacred dress; lo, as He comes to bless, quite from thy weariness, set free thou art." "For works of love and praise, He brings thee summer days, warm days and bright; winter is past and gone, now He salvation's Sun, shineth on every one with mercy's light." "From the bright sky above, clad in His robes of love, 'Tis he, our Lord!" "Do, earth itself grows clear, as His light draweth near: O let us hush and hear His holy Word." (End of quote)

I pray that here today, no one will refuse the fire of God's word to their soul. For the word of God itself tells us that we are not to quench the Holy Spirit. If you draw near to God, He will draw near to You." The way that He often draws near to you is in the preaching of the Scriptures. And sometimes we feel the warmth of conviction of sin, don't we? What should we do about it? James goes on to say in chapter 4, verse 8 – "Cleanse your hands, you sinner; and purify your hearts, you double-minded." Lament and mourn and weep!" "Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom." "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up." If Jesus is coming to your heart this morning in the preaching of His word, will you not receive Him to purify your heart and mind and conscience? Will you respond rightly in faith when He heats up the furnace of your life, when He comes to address the sinful motions of your heart, so that by His Spirit they will be purged away? Will you so receive His word that the dross and scum and filth of sin will come to the surface and be skimmed off? It will be an act of worship offered in righteousness if you will receive Him when He comes to you

in this way. But you say – My heart is like the lower millstone; my heart is so hard, it is like a rock.

**Then, let me describe for you, 3<sup>rd</sup> and finally, how God uses His word as a hammer to break people's hard hearts.**

“Is not God’s word like a fire? says the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?” Let’s say that the way you view your heart presently, or the heart of someone you dearly love, is like that we find in Job 41: 24. Their heart is as hard as a stone, even as hard as the lower millstone. You must remember that the Lord has the power through the use of His word to break the stoutest, most resistant heart. He knows how to break the pride of your power without destroying your life, and create faith in you. He has this power whether you believe it, or not. In God’s law in Leviticus 26: 18 it says: “And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.” “I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze.” “And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.” In Job 34: 24 it says that, “He breaks in pieces mighty men without inquiry, and sets others in their place.”

But He also knows how to break your old hard stony heart in pieces and give you a new heart. Listen to Ezekiel 11: 19 and 20. “Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God.” Now, let us see that these things can and do happen when the word of God is preached. God may come in the preaching of the word and break your heart, but He only does this in order that He might take away the stony heart and give you a heart of flesh. This is what He must do if ever you are to come to know Him and walk in obedience to Him. He may shatter your dreams, and burn up your dross, and blow away the chaff of false doctrines and selfish living, and man-centered worship, but a new heart will bring the better and the lasting things. God will use His word, and by the power of the resurrected Christ, He will accomplish all these good things, in accordance with His eternal purposes. May He give each of us grace to submit to His will; that we believe in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and that we would come to love His work in us, as the One who feeds us with the finest of wheat, the One who purifies us with refining fire, the One who causes us to burn in love and devotion to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us; the One who breaks and shatters our stony heart only to give us a new one.

How does this come about? It comes about when you see your helplessness and inability to change your own sinful heart, and you acknowledge this to God. Listen to Leviticus 26, concerning the conversion of the Jews, and event yet to take place in the history of the church. Verse 40 – “But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, and that I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt – then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember...” Verse 45 – “But for their sake I will remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God.”