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Called to Speak for the Lord – the Book of Jeremiah

The Promised Remnant

April 11, 2021

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 24

Scripture Reading: Ezra 9

Mat 13:24-50 He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, (25) but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. (26) So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also.

(27) And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ (28) He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go

and gather them?’ (29) But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. (30) Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’”

(31) He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. (32) It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

(33) He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

(34) All these things Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed, he said nothing to them without a parable. (35) This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet: “I will open my mouth in

parables; I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.”

(36) Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” (37) He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. (38) The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, (39) and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. (40) Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. (41) The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, (42) and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (43) Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

(44) “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. (45) “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in

search of fine pearls, (46) who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

(47) “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. (48) When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. (49) So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous (50) and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

If you study the history of the visible Christian church in this present world, you will see these parables of Jesus being played out. Christ’s kingdom in this present age is corrupted by evil fish. The net is cast. The gospel is preached, and something like that catch of fish is the result. Evil mixed with the genuine.

Or in terms of good seed being sown – the gospel preached – and the true sons of the kingdom grow – but so do the sons of the evil one who are the result of bad seed – of a false gospel – being sown. The two, right now in the present state of Christ’s kingdom in this world,

are mixed. We are to do all that we can to put the sons of the evil one out from among us as we see them evidence themselves. But we can only do this imperfectly – so deceptive is the enemy that his children can appear as sons of righteousness (2 Cor 11). It will only be at the end of this age, when Christ comes again, that His church will be purified of all counterfeits and evil.

Good and Bad Figs

In our text this morning here in Jeremiah 24, we see this very mixture. The Lord gave Jeremiah a vision of two baskets of figs as a picture of it. Listen:

Jer 24:1-10 After Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken into exile from Jerusalem Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, together with the officials of Judah, the craftsmen, and the metal workers, and had brought them to Babylon, the LORD showed me this vision:

behold, two baskets of figs placed before the temple of the LORD. (2) One basket had very good figs, like first-ripe figs, but the other basket had very bad figs, so bad that they could not be eaten.

(3) And the LORD said to me, “What do you see, Jeremiah?” I said, “Figs, the good figs very good, and the bad figs very bad, so bad that they cannot be eaten.”

(4) Then the word of the LORD came to me: (5) “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so I will regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I have sent away from this place to the land of the Chaldeans. (6) **I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up. (7) I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.**

(8) “But thus says the LORD: Like the bad figs that are so bad they cannot be eaten, so will I treat Zedekiah the king of Judah, his officials, the remnant of Jerusalem who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt. (9) I will make them a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth, to be a reproach, a byword, a taunt, and a curse in all the places where I shall drive them. (10) And I will send sword, famine, and pestilence upon them, until they shall

be utterly destroyed from the land that I gave to them and their fathers.”

Now, the captivity in Babylon lasted 70 years. At the end of that time, God effected the return of some 50,000 exiles to Judah. This return is recorded primarily in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. But as you read those two books, and in particular the last two chapters of Ezra (9-10), you cannot help but notice a discrepancy. Listen to Jer 24:6-7 again where we have the Lord’s promise concerning the “good figs,”-

Jer 24:6-7 I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up. (7) **I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD,** and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

We do see in Ezra 9-10 an account of real repentance. The people, who had preceded Ezra in returning to Judah, had intermarried with pagan people there and had done so long enough before that they had children by the time Ezra arrived. This of course was

that same old, same old pattern of wickedness Israel had been cast out of the Land for – disobedience to the Law, intermingling with the wicked, and then adopting their false gods and evil practices. This quickly then after their return, these exiles are headed right down that same old path!

Ezr 9:1-3 After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, “The people of Israel and the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. (2) For they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost.” (3) As soon as I heard this, I tore my garment and my cloak and pulled hair from my head and beard and sat appalled.

And though under Nehemiah there were great times of obedience to the Lord, the people still would wander and

sin and both Nehemiah and Ezra would have to drive them back to obedience:

Neh 13:23-29 In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. (24) And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people.

(25) And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. (26) Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin.

(27) Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?” (28) And one of the sons of Jehoiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was the son-in-law of Sanballat the Horonite. Therefore I chased him from me. (29) Remember them, O my

God, because they have desecrated the priesthood and the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites.

Now, think carefully about this in relation to that promise in Jer 24:6-7 –

Jer 24:6-7 I will set my eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up, and not tear them down; I will plant them, and not pluck them up. (7) **I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be my people and I will be their God**, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

Is this what happened under Ezra and Nehemiah? Well, in part perhaps. The repentance shown by the majority of the people was virtually unheard of in times before the captivity and yet...does this event fully match God’s promise here in verse 7? I think not.

This language that Jeremiah uses here in verse 7 is *new covenant language*. He will speak this way later and more fully –

Jer 31:31-34 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the

house of Israel and the house of Judah, (32) not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. (33) For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: **I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (34) And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,** declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

See it? The “good figs” promise is seen in part in those days of the return to the Land, but Ezra and Nehemiah both had to keep on the people – *know the Lord, obey the Lord, know the Lord...* And ultimately, what happened? By the time the Lord Jesus came into this world, the Jews were corrupt. The Pharisees, the scribes, the Sadducees. False tradition. A corrupted temple. A people who were, well, *rotten figs fit for destruction*. The old, old pattern of God

giving His Law and of Israel rejecting it, and Him, was alive and well.

What does this mean for us?

First of all, we can know with certainty that anyone who claims to know the Lord, who claims to be born again, and yet who has to be pushed and shoved into obedience to Him, *is not a Christian*.

Many pastors and church members have this Old Testament notion of the New Testament body of Christ. They think that Christians are people like Old Covenant Israel who can be expected to “naturally” wander off into sin and who have to be driven back into the path. Pastors preach sermons to either:

1. Drive the people to “know the Lord” and obey Him, regarding Christians as people who are constantly desirous of doing evil so they have to be tightly controlled, or –
2. Make excuses for unconverted people, telling and assuring them that they are Christians, but that “we are all sinners” so we must not expect too much of one another.

But in Christ, things have radically changed! The New Covenant in Christ *truly effects a heart change. In Him we are new creations whose nature is now such that we love the Lord, love His Word, and now primarily we just need to be reminded of who we are in Christ!* Therefore, live as you now are!

You aren't bad figs anymore!

Second, the New Covenant promises and effects *full and complete redemption from all evil. From the curse, from death, from sin, from fallen flesh.* The creation itself will be restored. We will be raised incorruptible never to experience any sin or any effect of sin ever again. We will not return to the Land and then have the same experience the people had under Ezra and Nehemiah. We won't turn right around and start in on that old pattern of sin and judgment again.

Third, God's people right now in this church age are a remnant. They always have been and so it is today. Notice carefully that in this vision of the good figs and bad figs, **ALL the figs are people who claimed to be God's people. ALL the fish in the net claim to be in God's Kingdom. ALL the**

weeds among the wheat claim to be wheat! But it is only the remnant, preserved and created by the Lord, that truly belong to Him.

Here is wisdom that the Lord has given us right here in His Word. Let him who has ears to hear, hear.