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Called to Speak for the Lord – the Book of Jeremiah

The Wickedness (and insanity) of
Willful Unbelief

June 20, 2021

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 37-39

Scripture Reading: Matthew 13:34-58

Follow along as I read chapters 37-39 of Jeremiah, which brings us to the final conquest and destruction of Jerusalem. And notice carefully all the statements which show us once again that *these so-called people of God knew full well that Jeremiah WAS a real prophet and that He spoke God's Word -*

Jer 37:1-21 Zedekiah the son of Josiah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah, reigned instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim. (2) **But neither he nor his servants nor the people of the land listened to the words of the**

LORD that he spoke through Jeremiah the prophet. (3) King Zedekiah sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the priest, the son of Maaseiah, to Jeremiah the prophet, saying, **“Please pray for us to the LORD our God.”**

(4) Now Jeremiah was still going in and out among the people, for he had not yet been put in prison. (5) The army of Pharaoh had come out of Egypt. And when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news about them, they withdrew from Jerusalem. (6) Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet: (7) **“Thus says the LORD, God of Israel: Thus shall you say to the king of Judah who sent you to me to inquire of me, ‘Behold, Pharaoh's army that came to help you is about to return to Egypt, to its own land. (8) And the Chaldeans shall come back and fight against this city. They shall capture it and burn it with fire.**

(9) Thus says the LORD, Do not deceive yourselves, saying, **“The Chaldeans will surely go away from**

us,” for they will not go away. (10) For even if you should defeat the whole army of Chaldeans who are fighting against you, and there remained of them only wounded men, every man in his tent, they would rise up and burn this city with fire.”

(11) Now when the Chaldean army had withdrawn from Jerusalem at the approach of Pharaoh's army, (12) Jeremiah set out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin to receive his portion there among the people. (13) When he was at the Benjamin Gate, a sentry there named Irijah the son of Shelemiah, son of Hananiah, seized Jeremiah the prophet, saying, “You are deserting to the Chaldeans.” (14) And Jeremiah said, “It is a lie; I am not deserting to the Chaldeans.” But Irijah would not listen to him, and seized Jeremiah and brought him to the officials.

(15) And the officials were enraged at Jeremiah, and they beat him and imprisoned him in the house of Jonathan the secretary, for it had been made a prison.

(16) When Jeremiah had come to the dungeon cells and remained there many days, (17) **King Zedekiah sent for**

him and received him. The king questioned him secretly in his house and said, “Is there any word from the LORD?”

Jeremiah said, “There is.” Then he said, “You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon.” (18) Jeremiah also said to King Zedekiah, “What wrong have I done to you or your servants or this people, that you have put me in prison? (19) **Where are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, ‘The king of Babylon will not come against you and against this land’?** (20) Now hear, please, O my lord the king: let my humble plea come before you and do not send me back to the house of Jonathan the secretary, lest I die there.” (21) So King Zedekiah gave orders, and they committed Jeremiah to the court of the guard. And a loaf of bread was given him daily from the bakers' street, until all the bread of the city was gone. So Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

Jer 38:1-28 Now Shephatiah the son of Mattan, Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchiah heard the words that Jeremiah was saying to all the people: (2) “Thus says the LORD: He who stays in this city shall die by the

sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live. He shall have his life as a prize of war, and live. (3) Thus says the LORD: This city shall surely be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon and be taken.”

(4) Then the officials said to the king, “Let this man be put to death, for he is weakening the hands of the soldiers who are left in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm.” (5) **King Zedekiah said, “Behold, he is in your hands, for the king can do nothing against you.”** (6) So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. And there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud.

(7) When Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern—the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate— (8) Ebed-melech went from the king's house and said to the king, (9) “My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they did

to Jeremiah the prophet by casting him into the cistern, and he will die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city.” (10) Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, “Take thirty men with you from here, and lift **Jeremiah the prophet** out of the cistern before he dies.” (11) So Ebed-melech took the men with him and went to the house of the king, to a wardrobe in the storehouse, and took from there old rags and worn-out clothes, which he let down to Jeremiah in the cistern by ropes. (12) Then Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, “Put the rags and clothes between your armpits and the ropes.” Jeremiah did so. (13) Then they drew Jeremiah up with ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

(14) **King Zedekiah sent for Jeremiah the prophet and received him at the third entrance of the temple of the LORD. The king said to Jeremiah, “I will ask you a question; hide nothing from me.”** (15) Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “If I tell you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you counsel, you will not listen to me.” (16) Then King Zedekiah swore secretly to Jeremiah,

“As the LORD lives, who made our souls, I will not put you to death or deliver you into the hand of these men who seek your life.”

(17) Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, “Thus says the LORD, the God of hosts, the God of Israel: If you will surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then your life shall be spared, and this city shall not be burned with fire, and you and your house shall live.

(18) But if you do not surrender to the officials of the king of Babylon, then this city shall be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and you shall not escape from their hand.”

(19) **King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “I am afraid of the Judeans who have deserted to the Chaldeans, lest I be handed over to them and they deal cruelly with me.”** (20) Jeremiah said, “You shall not be given to them. Obey now the voice of the LORD in what I say to you, and it shall be well with you, and your life shall be spared. (21) But if you refuse to surrender, this is the vision which the LORD has shown to me: (22) Behold, all the women left in the house of the king of Judah were being led out to the officials of the king of Babylon and were saying, “Your

trusted friends have deceived you and prevailed against you; now that your feet are sunk in the mud, they turn away from you.’ (23) All your wives and your sons shall be led out to the Chaldeans, and you yourself shall not escape from their hand, but shall be seized by the king of Babylon, and this city shall be burned with fire.”

(24) **Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “Let no one know of these words, and you shall not die.** (25) If the officials hear that I have spoken with you and come to you and say to you, ‘Tell us what you said to the king and what the king said to you; hide nothing from us and we will not put you to death,’ (26) then you shall say to them, ‘I made a humble plea to the king that he would not send me back to the house of Jonathan to die there.’” (27) Then all the officials came to Jeremiah and asked him, and he answered them as the king had instructed him. So they stopped speaking with him, for the conversation had not been overheard. (28) And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was taken.

Jer 39:1-18 In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of

Babylon and all his army came against Jerusalem and besieged it. (2) In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, on the ninth day of the month, a breach was made in the city. (3) Then all the officials of the king of Babylon came and sat in the middle gate: Nergal-sar-ezer of Samgar, Nebu-sar-sekim the Rab-saris, Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, with all the rest of the officers of the king of Babylon.

(4) When Zedekiah king of Judah and all the soldiers saw them, they fled, going out of the city at night by way of the king's garden through the gate between the two walls; and they went toward the Arabah. (5) But the army of the Chaldeans pursued them and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho. And when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, at Riblah, in the land of Hamath; and he passed sentence on him. (6) The king of Babylon slaughtered the sons of Zedekiah at Riblah before his eyes, and the king of Babylon slaughtered all the nobles of Judah. (7) He put out the eyes of Zedekiah and bound him in chains to take him to Babylon. (8) The Chaldeans burned the king's house and the house of the people, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. (9) Then

Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, carried into exile to Babylon the rest of the people who were left in the city, those who had deserted to him, and the people who remained.

(10) Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, left in the land of Judah some of the poor people who owned nothing, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time. (11) **Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon gave command concerning Jeremiah through Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, saying,** (12) **“Take him, look after him well, and do him no harm, but deal with him as he tells you.”**

(13) So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, Nebushazban the Rab-saris, Nergal-sar-ezer the Rab-mag, and all the chief officers of the king of Babylon (14) sent and took Jeremiah from the court of the guard. They entrusted him to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, that he should take him home. So he lived among the people.

(15) The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah while he was shut up in the court of the guard: (16) **“Go, and say to Ebed-melech the Ethiopian,** ‘Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will fulfill my words against this city for harm and not for

good, and they shall be accomplished before you on that day. (17) But I will deliver you on that day, declares the LORD, and you shall not be given into the hand of the men of whom you are afraid. (18) For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword, but you shall have your life as a prize of war, **because you have put your trust in me, declares the LORD.**”

I want us to consider several vital applications from this account in God’s Word.

1. The willful, knowing, hatred of God’s Word and the wicked attempts to destroy it – no sacrifice left for willful sin
2. Our names are recorded by the Lord, whether for good or for evil
3. God’s preservation of His remnant, the suffering of His remnant
4. Conformity to this world will end in eternal destruction for worldlings.
5. The insanity of refusing to get the Pearl of Great Price

Willful, Knowing Hatred of God’s Word

We see in this account, and we have seen it repeatedly already in the book of Jeremiah, *that Zedekiah and the people of Judah KNEW that Jeremiah was a prophet of God and that his Words were indeed the Lord’s Word.*

The king and others even sought out Jeremiah and asked him “what does the Lord say?” Often they did this in secret for fear that word would get out about them listening to Jeremiah.

But they knew. Yet they would not repent. They would not obey. Even when their world was crumbling around them, they would not turn from their evil and ask the Lord for mercy.

I have a note on my desk that reads like this:

“If a person has been actively and knowingly hiding their sin, all the while insisting that they are a child of God, then when the light begins to shine on them and expose them for what they really are, *and they still refuse to confess their sin and repent of it, there no longer remains a sacrifice for them.*”

Consider it here:

Heb 10:26-27 For if we go on sinning

deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, (27) but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

Deliberate. Having received the knowledge of the truth. And yet goes on sinning. There no longer remains a sacrifice for sins.

The common claim that “it is never too late to repent” is at best a half-truth and therefore a lie. It was too late for Zedekiah and the wicked in his nation who had been warned and warned and warned, who knew Jeremiah spoke for the Lord, and yet who refused to obey. It was too late.

You see warnings of this point of no return sinning in other places in the Old Testament:

Num 15:28-31 And the priest shall make atonement before the LORD for the person who makes a mistake, when he sins unintentionally, to make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven. (29) You shall have one law for him who does anything unintentionally, for him who is native

among the people of Israel and for the stranger who sojourns among them. (30) But the person who does anything with a high hand, whether he is native or a sojourner, reviles the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from among his people. (31) **Because he has despised the word of the LORD** and has broken his commandment, that person shall be utterly cut off; his iniquity shall be on him.”

Many people are confused by this because we all know that when we sin we are doing so willfully – sometimes ignorantly, but generally we know what we are doing, and that it is sin. But what Scriptures like this are talking about is sin such as we see here in Zedekiah and others. *Knowing, willful disobedience of God’s Word. Despising the Word of the Lord. Trying to negate and destroy God’s Word.* There is atonement in Christ for unintentional sin. For sin that we repent of, in which we acknowledge the truth of God’s Word and our disobedience of it. But for this business of “sin with a high hand,” Christ’s sacrifice is not available to them. They are reprobate.

See it again:

Heb 6:4-6 For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, (5) and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, (6) and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

So let me ask you – are there people around us today who evidence this sin? Yes. Where are most of them to be found? *In local churches, pretending to be Christians.* They hate and persecute God's true people and they do all they can to silence the proclamation of God's Word.

The Recording of Our Names

You also notice in these chapters of Jeremiah that numbers of people are specifically *named*. The guard who arrested Jeremiah falsely and brought him to be beaten. The people to persecuted and imprisoned Jeremiah. *And then you have Ebed-melech, that Ethiopian who came to Jeremiah's defense and saved his life.* Names, you

see. Works, whether good or bad. Recorded in the Lord's books.

Php 4:3 Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Rev 20:12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done.

The Lord sees. The Lord knows. The Lord remembers.

God's preservation of His remnant & the Suffering of His Remnant

In our study of this book of Jeremiah, we have seen God's prophet preaching and preaching and preaching to the people of Judah. And virtually the universal response has been that they rejected God's Word, refused to repent, and instead embraced the false prophets among them.

NOTE: In regard to the false prophets, did you notice what Jeremiah said to King Zedekiah?

(19) Where are your prophets who prophesied to you, saying, ‘The king of Babylon will not come against you and against this land’?

Where were they now that the Babylonian army surrounded the city? Crickets. Not to be found anywhere. *Their word had been proven false, and yet the people of Judah still rejected Jeremiah.*

Jeremiah suffered greatly. He nearly died in that pit had it not been for the Lord rescuing him through Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian. Listen carefully now –

Every real Christian is going to suffer for Christ. Suffer with Christ.

Php 3:10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,

We share in the sufferings of Christ and become like Him. Not in the sense that our sufferings are redemptive as His

were on the cross, but we are joined to Him and in this world we are hated and therefore we suffer. This is how Christ reveals Himself to us more and more. If you want to know Christ better, then pay the price required – suffer with Him by standing with Him and refusing to conform to this world. By following Him anywhere He leads. Let me ask each of us – what price are we balking at paying? Where are we hesitating?

The most Christlike people I know are those who have suffered for following Him.

Listen to this quote I came across last week in G.K. Beale’s commentary on Revelation. He acknowledges David Wells also for this. He said,

“John’s readers live in a worldly culture which makes sin seem normal and righteousness appear strange. In particular, John writes because he perceives there is a real danger that the churches will conform to what are considered ‘normal’ values of the world system rather than to God’s transcendent truth....Believers are faced with the choice of lining their lives and conduct up with one perspective or another – the heavenly or the world – and their eternal destiny

depends on that choice.” [Revelation: A Shorter Commentary, G.K. Beale, 2015]

Did you see it in Hezekiah?

(19) King Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “I am afraid of the Judeans who have deserted to the Chaldeans, lest I be handed over to them and they deal cruelly with me.”

And again-

Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, “Let no one know of these words, and you shall not die. (25) If the officials hear that I have spoken with you and come to you and say to you, ‘Tell us what you said to the king and what the king said to you

The fear of man. Zedekiah KNEW Jeremiah spoke God’s truth, but he would not obey. Zedekiah chose the world and as a result judgment came upon him and he is in hell right now.

So the Lord would put the question to us- *Are you choosing the world and its values, or Christ? Are you choosing what the world calls normal, or are you ready to be called AB-normal and*

persecuted and mocked for it? Because if you are choosing the world – you can sit in a pew every Sunday, you can be baptized, you can tell yourself you are on your way to heaven, but if you have not been born again, you are lying to yourself. If you are popular with the world, yet presume you are popular with God, you are lying to yourself. If you have never known suffering for Christ, yet you fancy that you are making huge sacrifices for Him by your various religious doings, then you are lying to yourself.

Let me tell you – I will soon begin my 29th year here in this ministry and numbers of you have been here all of that time and others most of that time. And I can confidently tell you that this town, this county, the churches in it in particular, are infested with a plague of counterfeit Christianity and counterfeit Christians. And my greatest fear is that ANY of you here will come before Christ on that Day when He comes to judge us all, and you will be no more than a “Tillamook” Christian. *Depart from Me, I never knew you.* Those will be the words.

Are you *normal*? Or are you a fool for Christ in this world’s eyes? Have you ever suffered for Christ? Has following

Christ ever cost you anything? These are the questions which our souls depend upon.

God has His remnant – always. Jeremiah, Ebed-Melech, Daniel and his friends and a few others there in Judah. He always has His remnant and preserves them, but their number is often very small. It is always very small in comparison to what claims to be His church.

The insanity of refusing to get the Pearl of Great Price

Finally, consider this. Zedekiah and his countrymen ALL had repeated offerings of blessing from God if they would repent and obey Him. Jeremiah was by no means the only prophet God sent to them. The Lord's patience with them was amazing. And they KNEW Jeremiah spoke for the Lord. Here they had the blessings of the covenant put right in front of them...but they would not.

Mat 13:44-46 “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.

Salvation in Christ is a treasure. It is a pearl. Both without price. Price-less. Infinite in value. Eternal treasure. But people like Zedekiah and like the mass of people around us today, reject it for trinkets. It is insane.

But those Christ is calling to Himself, see Him for what He is:

Col 2:3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

So in joy they set out to give up all they have in order to get Him. No one has to prod them. The see Christ, they MUST have His salvation, and no price is too high to pay.

It turns out, in the end, Christ is free – we just have to receive Him by faith and be born again.