

Tonight the Great Lakes Presbytery is installing Blair Smith as the third minister of the Word at Michiana Covenant.

And tonight we are hearing from the prophet Jeremiah part of what the ministry of the Word is supposed to do.

In 2 Timothy 4:1-2, Paul says to Timothy:

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

In other words, Paul tells Timothy:

Judgment Day is coming – so preach the Word.

Jeremiah focuses on the *word* more than any other prophet:

Jeremiah says “thus says the LORD” 155 times – which is more than the rest of the OT combined! (Shead, 45)

And he uses the phrase “declares the LORD” 167 times – which also is more than the rest of the OT combined! (Shead, 46)

That’s 322 references to “the word of the LORD” in 52 chapters.

And that’s not including phrases like “the word of the LORD came to me” – or “as the LORD commanded me.”

Jeremiah relentlessly reminds us that he is *not* saying hard things because he feels like it.

He is saying hard things because the LORD insists upon it!

The LORD has spoken.

The God who created all things has declared it.

That’s why I decided to stick with our Jeremiah series for the installation sermon.

We need to remember that the *word of the LORD* may not be comfortable for either the preacher or the hearers!

At the heart of all sin and rebellion is the refusal to accept *God* as God – a refusal to *hear* his Word and do it.

And so we start with a somewhat bizarre example:

The word “loincloth” is used eight times in these eleven verses.

Curiously, there are also eight uses of the various ways of talking about the word of the LORD:

“Thus says the LORD to me” (v1)

“according to the word of the LORD” (v2)

“And the word of the LORD came to me a second time” (v3)

“as the LORD commanded me” (v5)  
“And after many days the LORD said to me” (v6)  
“that I commanded you” (v6)  
“Then the word of the LORD came to me” (v8)  
“declares the LORD” (v11)

### **1. The Good-for-Nothing Loincloth: Or, What Is the Chief End of Man? (v1-11)**

*Thus says the LORD to me, “Go and buy a linen loincloth and put it around your waist, and do not dip it in water.”<sup>2</sup> So I bought a loincloth according to the word of the LORD, and put it around my waist.*

While some have suggested that the linen loincloth would resemble priestly garments, the word for linen is *not* the normal word used with priestly garments. Nonetheless, the linen loincloth would contrast with the rougher cloth that Jeremiah wore.

And so...

*<sup>3</sup> And the word of the LORD came to me a second time, <sup>4</sup> “Take the loincloth that you have bought, which is around your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates and hide it there in a cleft of the rock.” <sup>5</sup> So I went and hid it by the Euphrates, as the LORD commanded me. <sup>6</sup> And after many days the LORD said to me, “Arise, go to the Euphrates, and take from there the loincloth that I commanded you to hide there.” <sup>7</sup> Then I went to the Euphrates, and dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it. And behold, the loincloth was spoiled; it was good for nothing.*

If “Euphrates” means the river in Mesopotamia, then this would be a journey of several weeks or months. But there is a place about three miles from Anathoth called “Parah” that in Hebrew is spelled almost exactly like “Euphrates.”

I suspect that the confusion is intentional.

After all, Jeremiah 13 will be the first time that Jeremiah explicitly uses the word “exile” since chapter 1.

And Judah will be sent into exile *to the Euphrates*.

I suspect that God chose Parah precisely because it sounds like “Euphrates.”

Going to Parah becomes a symbolic act of going to Babylon.

Of course, it’s also possible that God really did send Jeremiah to the Euphrates *twice* – with only a few days in between the two *really long* journeys!

But so far, all we have is a really weird, confusing symbolic action.

Like the parables of Jesus, the symbolic actions of Jeremiah are designed to communicate – but only to those who have insight –

who understand the deeper meaning of the picture.

Indeed, Jeremiah's symbolic actions *are* parables.

And their deeper meaning can only be understood *by the word of the LORD*.

The explanation of the parable is found in verses 8-11:

<sup>8</sup> *Then the word of the LORD came to me:* <sup>9</sup> *“Thus says the LORD: Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. <sup>10</sup> This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own heart and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them, shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing. <sup>11</sup> For as the loincloth clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me, declares the LORD, that they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory, but they would not listen.*

Think about what this loincloth tells us!

“I made the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah cling to me” –  
God's purpose in calling Israel and Judah was so that he might wear them.

God's people – the church – is a garment to adorn God.

“That they might be for me a people, a name, a praise, and a glory...”  
Israel was called to be God's people – so that *God* might look good!

The Shorter Catechism captures this in its opening answer:

“Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

Adam had sinned – and so God had banished mankind from the Garden.  
But the Exodus was designed as the “new creation” of the people of God.  
God called Israel to succeed where Adam had failed.  
God brought Israel into the Promised Land – a ‘new Eden’ as it were.

The only other place that uses the language of “a name, a praise, and a glory”  
is Deuteronomy 26:18-19 –

“And the LORD has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession,  
as he has promised you,  
and that you are to keep all his commandments,  
and that he will set you in praise and in fame [or name] and in honor [or glory]  
high above all nations that he has made,  
and that you shall be a people holy to the LORD your God,  
as he promised.”

In Deuteronomy 26, the focus is on how God will do this for Israel –  
so that God would make for Israel a name, a praise, and a glory.

In Jeremiah 13, we see that the opposite is also true:

when Israel obeys and follows the LORD,  
then Israel is “a people, a name, a praise, and a glory” *for God*.

But pay attention to what God is saying!  
What was the purpose of the loincloth?  
To “cling to the waist of a man.”  
What was the purpose of Israel?  
To “cling to me, declares the LORD.”

God wanted a people who would be near to him –  
a people who would cling to him –  
(and yes, this is the same word used in Genesis 2:24 –  
when a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife!).

Jeremiah is tying together Deuteronomy language with Genesis language –  
showing that Jerusalem was supposed to be the new Eve.

But after all these years, Israel is like a spoiled loincloth.  
It’s disgusting.  
It’s filthy.

Who would want to wear this?

“They would not listen.”  
“This evil people, who refuse to hear my words, who stubbornly follow their own heart  
and have gone after other gods to serve them and worship them,  
shall be like this loincloth, which is good for nothing.”

Israel has turned out to be just like Adam –  
Jerusalem is just like Eve.

Humanity is filthy, disgusting, and spoiled.  
Even God’s chosen people, Israel, are good for nothing.

Who would want to wear such a filthy, disgusting garment?

All Jeremiah tells us is that the loincloth was good for nothing.  
He doesn’t tell us what he did with it!  
What would you do with a filthy, disgusting loincloth?

We’re not talking about an old garment that needs patching.  
We’re not talking about a worn out shirt that you can “repurpose” for something else.  
We’re talking about a moldy tattered loincloth.

It’s good for *nothing*.

The whole house of Israel – and the whole house of Judah –  
are good for *nothing*.

And what is it that God condemns?  
“The pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.”  
In precisely the place where you think most highly of yourself,  
God says that you are good for nothing!

And yet the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!  
Indeed, the Word became flesh *as a Jew*.

Jeremiah doesn't tell us the good news yet –  
but in Jeremiah 33, the prophet will return to this triad of “name, praise, and glory”  
as he speaks of the restoration of Jerusalem,  
“I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me,  
and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me.  
And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise, and a glory  
before all the nations of the earth.” (33:8-9)

## **2. Smashing Drunk: The Messianic Drinking of the Cup of God's Wrath (v12-14)**

<sup>12</sup> “*You shall speak to them this word: ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, “Every jar shall be filled with wine.”’ And they will say to you, ‘Do we not indeed know that every jar will be filled with wine?’*”

Wine was considered a blessing –  
so when Jeremiah says, “Every jar shall be filled with wine,”  
the initial response will be positive!

Jesus, after all, will fill six stone jars with the best wine for a wedding at Cana.  
Every jar will be filled with wine!

But wine can be either a blessing or a curse:

<sup>13</sup> *Then you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the LORD: Behold, I will fill with drunkenness all the inhabitants of this land: the kings who sit on David's throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. <sup>14</sup> And I will dash them one against another, fathers and sons together, declares the LORD.*

Prophets, priests, and kings – and all the people.  
Every jar shall be filled with wine –  
and then smashed together!

And God speaks frankly about what is coming:

*I will not pity or spare or have compassion, that I should not destroy them.’”*

Usually, when God sends a prophet,  
the people are being given a chance to repent.

Now, God says that there is no way to avoid this coming destruction.

Why does God do this?

Why does God bring judgment – dashing fathers and sons against one another?  
Smashing his own people?

Jesus will show us why.

Because Jesus will take this cup himself.

If there is no way to escape the coming judgment,  
then what is Jeremiah's purpose?

The answer is found in verses 15-17.

Judgment is coming.

You cannot escape.

So how shall the faithful remnant respond to the wrath of God:

### **3. Be Not Proud: The Prophet's Secret Weeping (v15-17)**

<sup>15</sup> *Hear and give ear; be not proud,  
for the LORD has spoken.*

<sup>16</sup> *Give glory to the LORD your God  
before he brings darkness,  
before your feet stumble  
on the twilight mountains,  
and while you look for light  
he turns it into gloom  
and makes it deep darkness.*

Judgment is coming.

You cannot escape.

All you can do is “give glory to the LORD your God before he brings darkness.”

“Give glory to the LORD” is what Joshua told Achan to do in Joshua 7:19-20,  
after Achan had been found guilty of taking the devoted things.

You are about to die –  
so give glory to the LORD!

Again, think of our Lord Jesus!

Think of how Jesus says this in John 12:28,

“Father, glorify your name.”

Then a voice came from heaven:

“I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.”

How does God glorify his name?

Jesus goes on to say,

“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.” (v32-33)

The glory of God is revealed in the cross of Jesus.

We will be singing Psalm 23 – “yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death” –  
the valley of deep darkness.

That valley of deep darkness is the valley through which Jesus walked.

There was no way for Jesus to escape that judgment.

Jesus had to recapitulate the history of Israel –

Israel was called to succeed where Adam had failed.

But Israel had failed – just like Adam.

And so now Jesus must pass through all the phases of the life of the people of God.

Including – and especially – the wrath and curse of God in the exile.

But in Jeremiah’s day,

the people of God failed the test.

They did not give glory to God in the face of exile.

Instead, as Jeremiah says in verse 17:

*<sup>17</sup> But if you will not listen,  
my soul will weep in secret for your pride;  
my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears,  
because the LORD's flock has been taken captive.*

Why in secret?

Because the LORD has forbidden Jeremiah to pray for his people.

God has said, “I will not listen” –

and so Jeremiah must weep bitterly in secret for their pride –

for their arrogance –

because the LORD’s flock has been taken captive.

It may be a ruined loincloth.

But Jeremiah remembers what Judah was supposed to be!

And so finally, for the first time since the introduction in chapter 1,  
Jeremiah uses the word “exile.”

#### **4. Okay, Fine, I’ll Say It! Exile Is Coming (v18-19)**

*<sup>18</sup> Say to the king and the queen mother:*

*“Take a lowly seat,*

*for your beautiful crown*

*has come down from your head.”*

*<sup>19</sup> The cities of the Negeb are shut up,*

*with none to open them;*

*all Judah is taken into exile,*

*wholly taken into exile.*

Jeremiah hasn't used the word "exile" since 1:3.  
Now he uses it twice in order to highlight it.

Pride goes before a fall.  
Do not think more highly of yourself than you ought.  
Those who exalt themselves will be humbled.  
Those who humble themselves will be exalted.

If you will not give glory to the LORD –  
if you insist on being proud and arrogant –  
if you will not listen to the voice of the LORD, and repent!  
then you will lose all that you love.

Hebrews 10:28-29 will give us similar warnings:  
"Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses  
dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.  
How much worse punishment, do you think,  
will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God,  
and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified,  
and has outraged the Spirit of grace?"

Deuteronomy had said that if Israel refused to hear and obey the Law of Moses,  
then God would bring judgment and destruction.

Even so, if you reject Jesus and his sacrifice,  
then there is no other sacrifice that can cover sin!  
All that is left is judgment and death.

And God says that all of this has happened because of your sin.

This is the final point in Jeremiah 13.  
Judgment has come upon you because of your sin!

It would be wrong to see every bad thing as a judgment for your personal sin.  
Jesus rebukes those who think that the blind man was born blind  
either for his own or for his parent's sin.  
So we should not view every bad thing simply as a judgment for our sin.

But there is a shift in pronoun in verses 20-27 –  
whereas the "you" in verses 18-19 was masculine plural (the king and the queen mother)–  
now in verses 20-27, the "you" is feminine singular (Jerusalem).

### **5. Your Sin Has Brought This Upon You (v20-27)**

<sup>20</sup> *"Lift up your eyes and see  
those who come from the north.  
Where is the flock that was given you,*



*your beautiful flock?*  
<sup>21</sup> *What will you say when they set as head over you  
those whom you yourself have taught to be friends to you?  
Will not pangs take hold of you  
like those of a woman in labor?*  
<sup>22</sup> *And if you say in your heart,  
'Why have these things come upon me?'  
it is for the greatness of your iniquity  
that your skirts are lifted up  
and you suffer violence.*

Our passage began with a cloth around Jeremiah's waist.  
Now it ends with the skirts of Jerusalem being lifted up.

The imagery moves quickly – and fearfully!  
The pain of childbirth in verse 21.  
And then rape in verse 22.

Throughout all of human history,  
the horrors of war have included death, rape, and plunder.  
It is entirely right to say “war is hell.”

And that is why God says that Jerusalem has brought this *hell* upon herself:  
<sup>23</sup> *Can the Ethiopian change his skin  
or the leopard his spots?  
Then also you can do good  
who are accustomed to do evil.*

Here is Jerusalem's problem:  
she cannot change!  
Here is *our* problem:  
we cannot change!  
Left to ourselves, we will *never* change!

And so God says to his helpless people:

<sup>24</sup> *I will scatter you<sup>[a]</sup> like chaff  
driven by the wind from the desert.*  
<sup>25</sup> *This is your lot,  
the portion I have measured out to you, declares the LORD,  
because you have forgotten me  
and trusted in lies.*  
<sup>26</sup> *I myself will lift up your skirts over your face,  
and your shame will be seen.*  
<sup>27</sup> *I have seen your abominations,  
your adulteries and neighings, your lewd whorings,*

*on the hills in the field.*  
*Woe to you, O Jerusalem!*  
*How long will it be before you are made clean?"*

Notice that in the final “woe” in verse 27,  
God reveals the solution:  
“How long will it be before you are made clean?”

We started with a filthy loincloth.  
Now, the LORD asks, “How long will it be before you are made clean?”  
Jerusalem is a filthy garment.

Zion has failed.  
The Church has fallen into idolatry – and adultery.  
This is the problem with the earthly Jerusalem.

She keeps failing!  
If you put your hope in the earthly Jerusalem, you will be disappointed.  
We’ve seen in recent weeks that the church is our *mother* –  
and that is an important doctrine!  
But Paul reminds us in Galatians 4 that the earthly Jerusalem is Hagar –  
she is in bondage with her children.  
But the heavenly Jerusalem is free – and *she is our mother!*

In the book of Revelation, we see a similar contrast between a filthy, whoring city –  
Babylon the Great –  
who falls under the judgment of God.

But in Revelation 19:6-8, we hear something new as well!  
“Hallelujah!  
For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.  
Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,  
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,  
and his Bride has made herself ready;  
it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure –  
(for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints).”

Finally, we see a beautiful, glorious city!  
The Heavenly Zion – our Mother!  
And finally, the filthy loincloth of Jeremiah 13 is replaced with the *fine linen* –  
of the righteous deeds of the saints!  
Jesus has died to cover *all your sins* with his precious blood.  
God no longer sees your sins.  
He sees Jesus and *his righteousness* in your justification.  
And he sees only the good works that he has wrought in your sanctification.