

Phillips Brooks, pastor of a church in Boston in the 1800s, is the author of the Christmas carol "O Little Town of Bethlehem." He was a very busy pastor, yet he always seemed relaxed and unburdened, willing to take time for anyone in need. Shortly before Brooks died, a young friend wrote to him and asked the secret of his strength and serenity. In a heartfelt response, Brooks credited his still-growing relationship with Christ.

He wrote, "The more I have thought it over, the more sure it has seemed to me that these last years have had a peace and fullness which there did not used to be. It is a deeper knowledge and truer love of Christ....I cannot tell you how personal this grows to me. He is here. He knows me and I know Him. It is the most real thing in the world. And every day makes it more real. And one wonders with delight what it will grow to as the years go on."

By God's grace, the true people of God will never become worthless silver.

1. Never scorn the Word of The LORD. (v.1-15)

In verse 1, God told His people to flee away from Jerusalem, which is surprising because Jerusalem was the place of safety. But Jeremiah brought a message from God that the capital was going to fall soon. "*Blow the trumpet... raise a signal...for disaster looms....and great destruction.*" All that was left for the people to do was to run from the city for safety. The people will be safer in the hilly area of Tekoa, 12 miles south of the city near the desert, than in the fortified main city. Why? Because the invasion of an enemy army is coming onto this city from the North.

Verse 2, God was the One doing the destroying. Verse 3, the Shepherds of the enemies were bringing their flocks all around readying for an attack on the city.

Usually, the armies of those days would attack in the morning, fight all day, and stop until the next morning. But here in verse 4, as the enemy is attacking, they begin at noon. Notice the quotation marks around verses 4 – 5. This is a statement of the enemy soldiers attacking the city, literally saying in verse 5 that they would "*...attack by night....*" Why? Because the pagan armies were disgusted with the wickedness of the city of Jerusalem, and such a vile place deserved a violation of the normal rules of war. God puts words to it in verse 6, "*...this is the city that must be punished; there is nothing but oppression within her.*"

What was so bad about the people of the city of Jerusalem? God explained in verse 7, as a well of water has to maintain a certain level of water to stay fresh, so the evil of the city was constantly maintained at a certain level and therefore stayed fresh and current. What sort of evil is constant? Verse 7 lists: violence and destruction. Where a community has constant violence and constant destruction, there is a further breakdown resulting in unremitting sickness and incessant wounds. The sort that need the healing of the Great Physician, but the evil is so prevalent that it brings into question the desire to heal. God desires to reconcile, but the ongoing situation of choosing evil makes it virtually impossible. What is God to do? We learn about God from the apostle Paul in the New Testament statement in 2 Timothy 2:13, that *“if we are faithless, “God remains faithful – for He cannot deny Himself.”* But what is a faithful God to do with this wicked city? A faithful God issues warnings. A faithful God has standards. A faithful God insist that the people change their behavior. But what if they won’t change? Verse 8, God gave the bottom line, *“Be warned, O Jerusalem, lest I turn from you in disgust, lest I make you a desolation, an uninhabited land.”*

In verse 9, the comprehensiveness of the ruin of the city is compared to picking grapes, and then looking for any hidden grapes on the vines. In verse 10, the difficulty that God had getting His message across, caused the statement about uncircumcised ears. No matter what admonitions God gave, all were in vain. What it all comes down to is their lack of ability to see that words from God are different that words from others. They take the holy and unique Word of the Lord, carried to them by the messenger Jeremiah, and the people scorn God’s Words. May we never get there! When we studied 1 Corinthians, we encountered this phenomena in the way that Paul describes the desperate spiritual condition in 1 Corinthians 2:14, *“The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.”* Thus the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah and the New Testament apostle Paul both provide the caution found in the first point of this sermon – that the true people of God will never reach the spiritual condition of scorning the Words of God, we will never ridicule that which is holy and precious to us – the Bible.

In verse 11, Jeremiah goes on to describe what it is like to be a preacher with a sermon from God to a callous people. Jeremiah was filled up with a good old fashioned “fire and brimstone” type of sermon about the wrath of God, and Jeremiah was tired of holding in the words. What did God advise for Jeremiah to do? Take that sermon inside of Jeremiah, the sermon about the wrath of God, and

“*pour it out...*” Give the sermon about the wrath of God to all people, for all had been corrupted. And all five stages of life are mentioned: the children in carefree play, the adolescents in their groups, the married adults, the more senior citizens, and even those well advanced in age, all people at all stages of life should equally pay attention and heed the message, indiscriminate of age. God’s message is for little children and God’s message is for the elderly dying.

Verse 12, compares this to ancient warfare. If a city resisted being overtaken, then the ancient armies would unleash a new type of warfare, which was to destroy it all, without respect to the Geneva convention, without respect to the property, the age, or the gender of the inhabitants. Basically, God is saying that holy warfare was being called for, but instead of God’s people conducting holy warfare, it was the enemies conducting holy warfare AGAINST God’s people as the recipients! God’s people would be deprived of the material possessions that they cherished, their property will be transferred violently to new owners, and the old relationships of life will be changed when the city of Jerusalem collapses. This is the price to be paid for trusting in wealth instead of trusting in the living God. The wages of sin have become death. The people have no hope and they are without God in the world.

In verse 13, the extremes of the society are mentioned in order to include all those between the least and the greatest. Everyone deals falsely. Everyone is greedy. Yes, the prophets, too. Yes the priests, too. The religious leaders had become as corrupt as the general populace. The way of life was fraud and deception. This is the exact opposite of what the people were supposed to sing while traveling up to Jerusalem to worship, words contained in the Songs of Ascents, such as Psalm 132:9, a prayer in which they sing for the Lord to be present in worship, and to God to “*Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness, and let your saints shout for joy.*” So if the religious leaders were righteous, they would be mourning for the dire spiritual condition of the people. Consider the words of God to the clergy in Joel 2:17, “*between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep, and say, ‘Spare Your people, O LORD...’*” And what might be the answer? Joel 2:20, God said, “*I will remove the northerner far from you...*” God would call off the dogs! God would stop the attack!

Verse 14, what was the condition of the pastors in the days of Jeremiah? Spiritual quackery. The pastors said to the people that all is well. God wants you to be happy. So be happy! Don’t worry, be happy is not the gospel. They say God wants you to pursue your every whim and wish. They say *Peace, peace* is the

message of God, when the truth about the relationship of God to the people, is that *there is no peace*. The people have spiritual terminal disease, and false pastors say that spiritually, they just need a band-aid.

Verse 15 shows that the people were so far gone, that they would commit atrocities and abominations, and not even be ashamed at all. They no longer had the ability to blush. They were marked as the recipients of God's coming wrath, rather than those who will be rescued.

2. Develop a taste for God's good old paths. (v.16-26)

The people have been urged to follow the ancient paths of God. Verse 16 the LORD Himself urges the people to walk in the good way. Why? Because they will find what can only be found with the LORD – *rest for your souls*. That is what Jesus said in Matthew 11:29, *Come to Me, ... and you will find rest for your souls*. Persons bound up in paganism are filled with a deep and unshakeable sorrow. They don't have rest like Christians have.

Sounds like a good deal. Will they take it? No. End of verse 16, "We will not." We will not walk as Christ says for us to walk. We will not call homosexuality an abomination, and teach our families to avoid it. We will not insist on chaste and pure habits across our city and culture. We will not change our ways of greed and lust and power and rebellion. We prefer the pleasures of sin for a season. Due warnings have been given. God will only allow it to continue so long. We repeat verse 1, when the trumpet sounds, flee for safety. But despite all the warnings, and the wearying of Jeremiah the faithful weeping prophet, and the pleadings of the LORD God Himself, the people refuse to flee the wrath to come, the people refuse to walk in the good way of the LORD God. Notice it is not the people of the world, but the people of Jerusalem, who are being refusing to walk with God. It is not the people of the world, but the people of the church who are refusing to walk in the way of the Lord God. God is addressing Himself to Zion.

God is not done pleading. Verse 17, God sent watchmen to say, "*Pay attention to the sound of the trumpet!*" but the people said, "*We will not pay attention.*"

What will be God's response to such blatant disregard of God's Word, God warnings? We get the answer straight from God, who is speaks in verses 18-19, "*Therefore, hear, O nations, and know, O congregation, what will happen to them. Hear, O earth; behold, I am bringing disaster upon this people...because they have not paid attention to My words, and as for My law, they have rejected it.*"

God's chosen people will be humiliated, and the gentile nations will see it.

In verses 20-21, God changes tactics. Instead of appealing to past experiences anymore, now God shows that ritual performances of church that are fancy and expensive are not impressing God, when they won't adopt the proper moral attitude. Frankincense? Sweet cane? Burnt offerings? Sacrifices? God will allow people to perish, in order to cause them to stumble, and perhaps turn back to God. Losses of fathers and sons, and losses of neighbors and friends are coming next. God will touch the lives of loved ones, much like God famously did for Job.

When they suffer, they will say that God is cruel and unkind, but they are mistaken. Gravely mistaken. God has been asking the people to turn to Him, and the people refused. The cruelty that is coming was of their own making.

The invaders from the north are still coming in verse 22. In verse 23, the invading army is cruel, and they "have no mercy." They are fearful, sounding like the roaring sea, as they arrive on horses against God's daughter of Zion, God's precious capital city.

In verse 24, the report of the devastation will be painful to hear. We can all imagine a fully-equipped soldier unequally matched against a defenseless woman, demoralized by the shock of the fall of her city. In the preaching of Jesus, He repeated a phrase common then, "Flee to the mountains!" In verse 25, there is nowhere to run, not to the countryside, not the open road, not the mountains. Instead, there is "*Terror is on every side.*" We will hear Jeremiah keep on saying this phrase, later in this book.

What does God say now? God says Mourn! Verse 26, "*O daughter of My people, put on sackcloth, and roll in ashes...make mourning...[make a] most bitter lamentation...*"

This brings us to our third point, from the final verses of chapter 6.

3. Receive God's refining. (v.27-30)

Remember Jeremiah's assignment from God in chapter 5, to find one good person? Now here at the end of chapter 6, Jeremiah is still searching. Now we have the language of the search that is borrowed from the process of that precious metal that we call silver.

God says to Jeremiah in verse 27, "*I have made you a tester of metals among my people, that you may know and test their ways.*"

Being God's people they are silver, precious and valuable, right? But the people have impurities. So the question is – what is the purity level of the silver?

Compare the people to silver, and let's test them - how bad is the quality of their silver?

Verse 28, God lists the impurities of the silver people. "all stubbornly rebellious, going about with slanders." These are like the silver has been mixed with bronze and iron. The silver has been corrupted, showing that the people have been corrupted.

What can be done for silver that has been corrupted? You can heat it up with a device that blows very hot air from a blast furnace. That device is called a bellows. We will have to heat it up very hot, to try to burn off the irregularities. Let's give a try, what do you say? Verse 29, "*The bellows blow fiercely; the lead is consumed by the fire; in vain the refining goes on, for the wicked are not removed.*"

We have a situation. We have precious silver, mixed with other base metals, and we cannot separate the silver from the bronze and iron. We have God's people, mixed with sins and idolatries, and we cannot separated the inhabitants of Zion from the wickedness. The people of God's city remain stubbornly rebellious and openly wicked.

What do we do now? When we cannot separate evil behavior from church members, what do we do?

The question is what does God do next? What would a holy God do?

Verse 30, "*Rejected silver they are called, for the LORD has rejected them.*"

Conclusion:

1. Be warned through the Word of God, never scorn it. This chapter is a solemn warning for everyone who stands at a fork in the road and wonders which road to choose. The only safe thing to do is walk in the way of Christ. Consider the people of ancient Jerusalem as a warning to us. Even after they passed through the crucible of divine testing and felt the heat of divine judgment in the prophetic message, the people proved to be nothing but dross, the slag of metallic waste. The people were not precious silver with some impurities, but rather they were base metal from which nothing of worth could be extracted. Be warned.

2. Develop a taste for God's good old paths. Just as Jeremiah pointed people to the ancient path, Jesus came and pointed to Himself and said, 'I AM the Way.' Jesus is the path, the ancient path. No one comes to God the Father, except through Jesus. Trust in Jesus, who has saved you by His grace. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear. Do not harden your heart. Christ came to take our impurities upon Himself, and receive the full judgment of God that we deserve. Acts 4:11, "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected...has become the cornerstone." Christ

died to purify us of all of our sins. In Matthew 27:46, Christ cried out to God the Father, “Why have you forsaken Me?” The reason that God the Father had forsaken His Only Begotten Son, who was pure silver, was to fulfill the covenant to us and to pour out His righteous wrath on our sins, and so that our impurities would be cleared away. Christ was rejected by God the Father, in order that we will never be rejected. 1 Peter 2:6, quoting from Isaiah 28, says “*For it stands in Scripture: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*” Christ rose again, and ascended to Heaven and was exalted at the right hand of God the Father. From there, Christ will come a second time and take us, His people to Himself. By God’s grace, the true people of God will never become worthless silver.

3. Receive God’s refining. Participate with God in purifying yourself. In James 4:8, we are admonished to “...*Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.*” Too many Christians assume that they can have Christ and also have the world at the same time. They want to go the direction of the ancient path and at the same time go the direction of the modern superhighway. They want to mix the bronze of the devil and the iron of the world with the pure silver of Christ. Too many Christians want to mix a little greed and immorality in with their faith. Too many Christians want to combined a little pride and gluttony in with their hope. Too many Christians think that they can get away with idleness and worry, along with their love. God’s people are supposed to be righteous, like pure silver. Purify yourself! How? Come to God confessing your sins. The apostle John explains this to us in 1 John 1:5-9, “*This is the message we have heard from [Christ] and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with Him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*”