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*Called to Speak for the Lord – the
Book of Jeremiah*

The Power of God's Word

September 13, 2020

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 1

Scripture Reading: 2 Kings 22

Like us, Jeremiah lived in a time of trouble on the world scene and within his own nation. Wickedness abounded in Judah, people there who claimed to be God's people lived evil lives in rank disobedience to the Lord. Judgment loomed and it was Jeremiah's divine commission to announce that judgment to his countrymen. As a result he was hated and persecuted, but nothing could stop God's Word from doing its work.

I wonder how many people here in our own community will soberly reflect on this past week's fires? I propose that almost none will consider:

- What one more day of that scorching east wind would have resulted in – and yet the Lord stopped it
- What hell must be like, and while we flee from a forest fire, how many will “flee from the wrath to come” as the Bible describes it?
- But in all these events, people in our day rarely even acknowledge God's hand in it. In fact they mock at the very idea that God had anything to do with it, let alone that He was in control of every single wisp of wind that directed the fires.

Listen then to Jeremiah's call from the Lord:

Jeremiah 1:1-12 ESV The words of Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, (2) to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. (3) It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of

Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

(4) Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, (5) “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (6) Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” (7) But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. (8) Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the LORD.” (9) Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. (10) See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” (11) And the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Jeremiah, what do you see?” And I said, “I see an almond branch.” (12) Then the LORD said to me, “You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it.”

The Days of Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah

What was the world scene in Jeremiah’s day? Let me read for you what R.K. Harrison writes on this (Introduction to the Old Testament, Eerdmans) –

The work of Jeremiah took place during one of the most critical eras in the history of the Hebrew people. The prophet was born about 640BC in Anathoth, a village some two miles NE of Jerusalem. Of priestly stock, his father was Hilkiah, who may have been a descendant of Abiathar [a wicked priest deposed by Solomon] and possibly the discoverer of the law scroll (1 Kings 22).

Little is known of the earlier years of the prophet, but he was most probably reared in the tradition of the Torah....He was also profoundly influenced by the utterances of the 8th century prophets [Isaiah, for example], and equally revolted by the pagan religious syncretisms prominent in the time of Manasseh.

His call came in 626 BC in the 13th year of the reign of Josiah...During the four decades in which Jeremiah prophesied,

momentous events took place in the ancient Near East, beginning the very year that the prophet received his call. The death of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal was a signal for Babylon to assert her independence under Nabopolassar (626-605BC), and this along with the resurgence of vitality in Egypt under Psammetichus (664-610BC), was to have an important bearing upon the course of life in the southern kingdom of Judah.

Remember that the northern kingdom of Israel had already been wiped out by Assyria in 722BC. But now, Babylon was becoming the world power and ultimately would be the nation used by the Lord to destroy Judah and carry off survivors such as Daniel and his friends into captivity.

Harrison continues:

During the period between the time of his call and the religious reformation of 621 BC [under the godly king Josiah], Jeremiah was primarily concerned with denouncing contemporary religious corruption and proclaiming imminent invasion from the north.

For example:

Jeremiah 1:13-14 ESV The word of the LORD came to me a second time, saying, “What do you see?” And I said, “I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north.” (14) Then the LORD said to me, “Out of the north disaster shall be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land.

In 621BC during the 18th year of his reign, Josiah initiated a systematic reformation of religion and morals in the southern kingdom (see 2 Kings 23:3ff). This was provoked by the discovery of a law-book during the course of renovations to the Temple fabric....it was not long afterwards that Jeremiah was commanded by God to proclaim the contents of this covenant in Jerusalem (Jer 11:1ff).

With the fall of Assyria [at the hands of Babylon and her allies], the Pharaoh Necho (610-594BC), asserted the military might of Egypt and marched into the Palestinian coastal plain. Josiah did not want Necho to assist Assyria, so he attempted to stop the Egyptians at Megiddo. Josiah was killed in this battle and his son Jehoiakim came to the throne. Necho then imposed heavy tribute on Judah (2 Kings 23:31ff).

During the reign of Jehoiakim (609-597BC) the fortunes of Jeremiah were at a low ebb. This situation was precipitated by the so-called “temple address” (Jer 7:1-8:12), delivered about 609 BC in which Jeremiah castigated the people of Judah for their superstitious trust in the Temple as a source of deliverance in time of crisis.

From the nature of his prophetic utterances, it is clear that Jeremiah perceived the dangers inherent in the position that Judah occupied in the contemporary international struggle for power. The Assyrian empire had disintegrated and its place in Mesopotamian affairs had been taken by a powerful Babylonian regime. Egypt had once more asserted its claim to a voice in the political doings of the Near East after more than a century of decline, and appeared certain to challenge Babylonian military might sooner or later.

If Judah was to become an ally of Egypt she would naturally suffer severe consequences if an Egyptian defeat took place, or if the Babylonians decided to invade southern Palestine and use it as a base for future operations against Egypt. Painfully aware of what the future held, Jeremiah foretold that

Judah would be engulfed by the might of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 25:9), and in consequence of this foresight he made dramatic, if unavailingly, attempts to influence the foreign policy of his country so that Judah might become a vassal of Babylon, and thus be spared the horrors and agonies of destruction (Jer 27:6ff).

The military situation came to a head in 605 BC when Necho marched to the Euphrates, and Nabopolassar sent his son, Nebuchadnezzar II with an army to fight against him. A decisive battle took place at Carchemish, in which the Egyptians were routed and the balance of power in the Near East fell firmly into Babylonian hands. Since all routes to the Egyptian border were now under Babylonian control, it was merely a question of time before the victory at Carchemish was implemented by a further advance against Egypt. *It was this consideration that prompted Jeremiah to urge submission to Babylonian suzerainty, and when Ashkelon fell to Nebuchadnezzar in 604BC, the situation became more acute than ever.*

King Jehoiakim had little time either for the prophet or his message (Jer 26:20ff) for the king’s religious inclinations

were idolatrous, and this combined with his selfishness and personal vanity contributed to the misfortunes of the southern kingdom. Jehoiakim was essentially a political opportunist, as his vacillating policies with regard to Egypt and Babylon clearly indicate. Having been a Babylonian tributary for some 3 years, Jehoiakim rebelled in a desperate bid for independence, despite the warnings of Jeremiah (Jer 22:18) as to the outcome of such a policy. Babylonian retribution occurred with the invasion of Judah by Chaldean forces in 597BC and the initial attack upon Jerusalem. Jehoiakim died just prior to the capture of the city...and was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin, who capitulated to the Babylonians and was taken captive to Babylon along with other exiles. After the attack, Nebuchadnezzar established Zedekiah as a puppet ruler in Judah.

And, you see, this is the point that Daniel fits in:

Daniel 1:1-6 ESV In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. (2) And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the vessels

of the house of God. And he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and placed the vessels in the treasury of his god. (3) Then the king commanded Ashpenaz, his chief eunuch, to bring some of the people of Israel, both of the royal family and of the nobility, (4) youths without blemish, of good appearance and skillful in all wisdom, endowed with knowledge, understanding learning, and competent to stand in the king's palace, and to teach them the literature and language of the Chaldeans. (5) The king assigned them a daily portion of the food that the king ate, and of the wine that he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king. (6) Among these were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah of the tribe of Judah.

Harrison continues-

When Zedekiah ultimately decided to rely upon Egyptian support and revolted against Babylon, the Chaldean armies again swept down upon southern Palestine in 587BC. Jeremiah advised Zedekiah to surrender, as he had urged him previously. Zedekiah

refused and threw Jeremiah into prison. The doom of Judah was sealed and in 587BC the second captivity took place during which the Temple was pillaged and the land of Juda was ravaged. Nebuchadnezzar treated Jeremiah with great deference and remained in Judah until rebels forced him to go with them to Egypt, where he spent his last days.

So there you have a brief summary of the political scene during Jeremiah's ministry, and the various intrigues and conspiracies that ended in the destruction of Judah.

Harrison's description is very helpful – these facts must be understood if we are going to really understand the Word of the Lord to Jeremiah recorded for us in this book. However, I would criticize Harrison at this point – he should have emphasized more strongly that Jeremiah was speaking the Word of the Lord. Let me give you an example:

For Jeremiah the sole remedy for the sin of the nation lay in sincere repentance and following a life of obedience to the divine will (Jer 9:23f). He viewed sin as a perversion of the Hebrew spiritual genius....The consequence of sin was judgment, and the longer the prophet

lived the more certain he became that such an eventuality would overtake the nation in the end.

Harrison consistently does this. While it is true that God's prophets were not mere robots repeating words – they each had their own personalities and the words they spoke were indeed the words they spoke – what Harrison's language fails to emphasize is what this book emphasizes:

Jeremiah 1:9-14 ESV Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. **And the LORD said to me, “Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.** (10) See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.” (11) **And the word of the LORD came to me,** saying, “Jeremiah, what do you see?” And I said, “I see an almond branch.” (12) **Then the LORD said to me,** “You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it.” (13) **The word of the LORD came to me** a second time, saying, “What do you see?” And I said, “I see a boiling pot, facing away from the north.” (14) **Then the LORD said to me,** “Out of the north disaster shall

be let loose upon all the inhabitants of the land.

This is crucial for us to see, yet so many like Harrison fail to emphasize it. These words are not Jeremiah's opinions. The rising and falling of the nations he speaks of are not merely his own report and political opinions. No. They are the movements, the rising and falling of kings and nations as decreed and directed by the Hand of the Lord. Jeremiah *spoke the words which the Lord spoke to him!* That is the tenor of the book of Jeremiah. You cannot read it and miss this.

Jeremiah then is a book about the powerful Word of God which He speaks and performs. The words that Jeremiah speaks are words the Lord put in his mouth and which, as a result, have power over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overflow, to build and to plant. God not only speaks, but He watches over His Word in power to perform it. And so the book opens:

Jeremiah 1:1-3 ESV **The words of Jeremiah**, the son of Hilkiah, one of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, (2) **to whom the**

word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. (3) **It came also** in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

So this book is the words of Jeremiah, and yet these are words given to him – “to whom the word of the Lord came.” This is the consistent teaching the Lord gives us about His Word – and thus about our Bibles:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, (17) that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:20-21 ESV knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. (21) For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Ezekiel 1:1-3 ESV In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. (2) On the fifth day of the month (it was the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin), (3) the word of the LORD came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the Chebar canal, and the hand of the LORD was upon him there.

from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have purposed, and I will do it.

And this is why it is divinely *powerful*

Hebrews 4:12 ESV For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Isaiah 46:9-11 ESV remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, (10) declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,' (11) calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my counsel