

**Jeremiah 26: 1-24; “Jumping Off the Fence”, Sermon # 28 in the series – “Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2017, in the Morning Worship Service.**

In the last sermon that I preached to you, from chapter 25 of Jeremiah, I attempted to show you that there is a progression in the Lord’s execution of justice and judgment in this life. He rises up early to show us our sins; He notes the passing of time. He mixes the cup of His righteous wrath and anger against the sins of men and nations, and unless they repent, they will be forced to drink it.” His judgments begin in this life and they will culminate in eternal punishment where He will roar against unrepentant sinners forever. I set forth to also the great truth of God’s mercy in the gospel; how gracious and loving our God was in the giving of His Son, who rose up early every morning to listen as a disciple, who even drank the cup of God’s wrath to the dregs, and who overcame sin and death as the Lion of Judah.

In our passage this morning we find another progression. It is the progression of the Lord’s Word among men and nations. There is a progress, in every generation, which the Lord’s word makes. And His striving with all men through His word, preached by His prophets in the Old Testament times, and by His preachers in New Testament times, will force each and every one of us to jump down off the fence we are sitting on, and the side which we will land on, will determine our eternal destiny. In the Christian’s case, the way that the Lord will lead them, and how much progress they make in obedience will show forth how much progress they are making in becoming holy, even as He is holy. So, in this hour, I want to make 3 observations on how the Lord’s word makes progress among men, so that we might better see whether we are comprehending just how important it is to heed the message of obedience to His preached word. There is, in these verses, a perhaps, a perplexity, and a proposition in relation to Jeremiah’s preaching which we need to take notice of, so that we will understand what God is doing in the preaching of the word here today, and every Sunday.

**The 1<sup>st</sup> Observation – There a “perhaps” in regard to the outcome of the preaching of the Lord’s word.** (verses 1-7)

In verse 2 it says – “Thus says the Lord: ‘Stand in the court of the Lord’s house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the Lord’s house, all the words that I command you to speak to them.’ “Do not diminish a word.” “Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that I may relent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings.” John Gill says concerning the setting of this chapter – “The prophecy of this chapter, and the facts and events connected with it, were (took place) before the prophecy of the preceding chapter, though they are here related; that being in the fourth year, this in the beginning of Jehoiakim’s reign. Josiah was lately dead; Jehoahaz his son reigned but three months, and then was deposed by Pharaohnecho king of Egypt; and this Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah, who before was called Eliakim, was set on the throne.”

I want you to see that there is a “perhaps” here in verse 3 which is spoken by the Lord to Jeremiah his prophet. Oh-lah’ee Hebrew – If so be (KJV) “Perhaps they will listen”, when you go up to the Lord’s house and speak to all the cities of Judah, which have come up to worship. Jeremiah was to speak to them all the words that God commanded them, and he was not to diminish a word. He was not to lessen the effect that the words would have; he was not to soften his expressions, or tone down the language to suit his hearers. He was to deliver God’s word in the strongest and plainest manner that he could. He would use these words and these means in his preaching, because perhaps, everyone would listen. And perhaps, they would turn from their evil way, so that God would then relent concerning the calamity which He had purposed to bring upon them for the evil of their doings. This kind of language, when being used by God does require

explanation. We know from many other places in the Bible that there are no “perhaps” with God. There are many with us, but there are none with Him. His using the word “perhaps” here is meant to cause us to understand something about how the great God communicates with people who need to understand His will and His ways.

God communicates with people by means of His preached and declared word. And He communicates with them as responsible free moral agents; people who are responsible to act upon what they have heard preached to them. They are to listen and to consider and then heed all the truths and exhortations which have been delivered to them, by receiving His word and repenting of whatever sins they are guilty of. God is expecting that they will then turn to Him, believing that they can then learn the new and better way of righteousness, by continuing to receive His word. It is important for us all to realize that our God is a God who is unchangeable in His being. He does not repent or relent in relation to His purposes or plans. He knows the end from the beginning. He is great enough in His wisdom and understanding to know whether any of these people that Jeremiah was preaching to, were going to listen and walk in His law, His truth which was being set before them. But our God is a God who works according to His own purposes and plans, in accordance with the real responses of men. And so He speaks to them in these anthropopathic, these terms which men can understand. He says that if they will listen He may relent concerning the calamity. He may change His mind, and not bring it if the guilty sinners would repent.

Each of us should understand that God is great enough to do this; to speak to us on our level, and in accordance with our understanding, so that we really will see what our responsibility is. And if a person, or a nation does not take heed to their responsibility, and really do what He is asking for, then He really will bring His judgments. And if a person or a nation really does take heed to their duty to receive the word, and repent, then God really will show mercy. It is true that God always knows the outcome beforehand, and really has ordained all of these things according to the counsel of His own will, but in the process of interaction between Himself and sinners, He is not like a puppet master pulling the strings, as though a person does not really have a choice laid before Him to really do what He is asked to do. On the contrary, God is so very great, that He encompasses the whole process from beginning to end; ruling, judging, and deciding what He will do at every point in the process of interaction in the very real way of proposing and stating what it is that He is asking, for and what He intends to do if the hearer of the word complies with His word, or whether they will disobey. The person who hears the message is free to do what he is inclined to do in relation to it. God is not forcing him either to receive it or to reject it. Man is free to choose, but God is perfectly sovereign over man in judgment and in mercy.

God always has a preceptive will in which He commands faith in His promises and obedience to His precepts, and He also always has a secret decretive will which is not openly declared to all men, but which is revealed over time in the outworking of His decrees in His holy judgments and actions in relation to the thousands of situations which He brings men and nations into, as the righteous Judge that He is. Our God reigns over all these things, and nothing escapes His notice, or is out of His ability to act in relation to any person. He has His times and places where He will have His truth preached, and He is looking, during those times, at each person’s response of obedience or disobedience, whether you are an unbeliever or a believer. He has many things to teach you; many things to show you, about the meaning of your life, and what He expects of you. He is patient and kind, but He will not ultimately take “no” for an answer from you. You must jump down off of the fence and choose whether you will listen and heed the message of the word of God, or not. If you do not, He notices this, and you will be storing up wrath for yourself, if you do not repent and believe in Jesus. And on the other hand, if you do listen and heed, He will teach you, the sinner, His good way when you incline your ear to hear Him and to do what He commands.

We see here that He tells Jeremiah to go and stand in the court of the Lord’s house and speak to all the cities of Judah; the people who come to worship in the Lord’s house. This was the largest

court of the temple where the people came up, three times a year, to worship. It was the place where in better days the worshipper said, as in Psalm 122, as he was ascending to Jerusalem – “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’” Here in this time of Jeremiah’s ministry, He tells Jeremiah – Perhaps, if they are spoken to at this time, and in this the most important place, they will listen and return and repent of their sins. He knows that there are certain times and certain places where we might consider more carefully His word, and perhaps act upon it. He knows that this is a good thing, for us to be confronted with our sins in the house of God, the place of His solemn presence, and to have His word come to us with power so that we do not remain unbelievers, and as Christians that we are not hypocrites.

Hypocrites only want to come to worship the Lord in a beautiful earthly setting and have a wonderful time humanly speaking. They do not want to really want to deal with God over the issues of their heart and their life. Their ultimate concern is not whether they will obey God’s word or not. They believe that religion ought to be a purely positive thing. They may say that they are Christians, but they want to ignore the thing that is so glaringly wrong with them in the Lord’s eyes – their sins, which He knows must be dealt with if they are to be true worshippers. God wants your heart dear believer, and if you truly know Him, He will work through the preaching of the word to get it. Do you want to be a true worshiper? Then you must deal with all of your sins in the sight of the holy God. God would have you to worship Him in the beauty of holiness. Listen to Psalm 96, verses 4-9 – “For the Lord is great and greatly to be praised; He is to be feared above all gods.” “For all the gods of the peoples are idols.” “But the Lord made the heavens.” “Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and beauty are in His sanctuary.” “Give to the Lord, O families of the people, give to the Lord glory and strength.” “Give to the Lord the glory due His name; bring an offering and come into His courts.” “Oh, worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!” “Tremble before Him, all the earth.”

The reason that we ought to tremble before Him is that when we perceive His majesty and his glory and the great value of knowing Him and walking with Him in truth, and then we go about to live foolish and sensual and covetous lives; wanting every earthly blessing, but not wanting even to begin to understand anything of what it means to serve God with all of our heart, then He knows that we have deceived ourselves. In some very important ways we may be living a lie. We may love the world much more than we do, Him. This is the reason why God commands Jeremiah not to diminish a word of all the words He gave him to give to all the people. Do not take away from the content of the message Jeremiah. Do not take away the cutting force of it, or the convicting aspects of the word; and do not take away the apprehension of mercy either, for those who do hear and heed. For perhaps everyone will listen, and turn from their evil way.

God uses means to accomplish His ends. And His means are the preaching of the word, and His striving with sinners and saints by the working of His Spirit. He really does strive, even with those who He knows are dead in their trespasses and sins. He really is able to give saving grace to such; to make them alive, and to grant to them faith and repentance, but these acts of His are not something that we can perceive or know the depths of the working of them in any person’s life; not even in our own. The evidence of God’s saving mercy being shown, will be found in the sinner freely being made willing to come to Christ; to come to respond in faith and repentance to the gospel preached. Let us who preach and share the gospel realize just how great God is in the process of interaction with every person. And let us believe that even the worst of sinners can be saved, and that they may respond, even when we do not see any indication of it when we share the truth of the gospel with them. There is a perhaps from our perspective in terms of God’s great working.

**Now for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Observation – Here in this situation, we find perplexity in minds of the hearers of the word of God.**

Verse 8 – “Now it happened, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak to all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people seized him, saying, “You will surely die!” “Why have you prophesied in the name of the Lord, saying, “This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant?” “And all the people were gathered against Jeremiah in the house of the Lord.” “When the princes of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king’s house to the house of the Lord and sat down in the entry of the New Gate of the Lord’s house. “And the priests and the prophets spoke to the princes and all the people, saying, “This man deserves to die!” “For he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears.”

Now, you can see here, that when these religious but unsaved priests and prophets heard Jeremiah’s sermon, they immediately and vehemently opposed him. And they and all the people, it says, seized him and said, “You shall surely die!” This is the reaction of the self-justifying heart. You may want to think that things are perfectly alright with you when they are not. When these people heard this sermon which threatened and warned them of God’s judgment, they began to warn and threatens harm to the preacher of the word. In your case you may not threaten harm to the preacher, but you may be grumbling and complaining of the preacher and his message in your heart. The preacher has been faithful to speak of the most important things that you should do. But your sinful nature never likes to contemplate the idea that God is displeased with you, or that He is angry over your sins, or that He will bring judgment against you. And so, not being able to prove the preacher wrong in the things that he is asserting that God will do, being unable to lash out at God, they you will find some way to speak against God’s messenger.

These people said that Jeremiah ought to die because he spoke against the city. He is unpatriotic, he is negative, he is full of judgment against us, they say about him. They remind me of the many false Christians in our own day whose favorite verse is, “Do not judge”, as though it is wrong to point out what sin is, and that the soul that sins will die, unless that person repents. They do not want you to judge them in the sense that you are pointing out sin to them where they are sinning, where they are dishonoring God; as though that is wrong, and that you do not have the Biblical right to judge them by speaking up and telling them the truth. If this is true then no sins can be pointed out to them, they think, as long as they use this verse in a false way – Do not judge me; I have the Biblical right to continue on in my blindness, my unbelief, and my sinfulness.

You and I who would be faithful to preach and share the word of God must remember that telling people around us what is sinful and what is righteous will enable them to see their own guilty condition before God, even if they do not like it. They may not like us for telling them the truth, but in giving them this good information about sin and righteousness, what it is, we may just lead them to the place where they will see their need of Christ. If we do not tell them, how will they know? The preaching of the law does not save anyone, but it is essential to any person’s knowing why they must believe in Jesus Christ to be saved. The preaching of the law is essential in order to set forth God’s righteousness and His righteous expectation that they must repent, or they will perish. Further, we must share with them if they think they are Christians, that they must pursue peace with all men, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. We must look carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God. (Hebrews 12: 14 and 15)

When Jeremiah calmly reiterated to them that it was the Lord who had sent him to prophesy against the house and the city and when he dispassionately pleaded with them that his sermon be taken seriously, then the princes and all the people did change their minds, and they said to the priests and the prophets, “This man does not deserve to die.” “For he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God.” This was what changed their minds; the fact that Jeremiah had spoken to them in the name of the Lord. And what did he preach to them at that point? He not only told them that God had sent him to prophesy to them in His name, but that they ought to amend their ways and their doings, and obey the voice of the Lord their God, and then God would relent

concerning the doom that He has pronounced against them. And, you know what? Some of them did listen, and they did repent.

Yes, it is true that there was perplexity in the minds of the people. Should they listen to Jeremiah or kill him? Their real question was – What shall I do with the word of the Lord? Shall I let it reside within my mind and heart, so that it speaks to me, or shall I put it to death? For what you do with the prophet, the one who preaches to you, you will do with the word of the Lord. If you find this kind of perplexity in your mind and heart; going back and forth as to whether you ought to take the Lord's word to heart, or whether you ought to put it to death as you hear it preached, consider: You should understand that there is battle going on for your soul if you have not yet believed the gospel. And if you are a Christian there is a battle going on between the flesh and the Spirit as to whether you will receive the word of God to do it, or whether you will find some way to compromise your obedience to it, through your rationalizing it away. Either way, you must come to obedience to the word of God if you would be saved and sanctified. You cannot sit on the fence.

Is your heart good ground for the word of God? In the preaching of the word, seed is sown on your heart. In Luke 8: 11 Jesus explains this truth. He says this: "The seed is the word of God." "Those by the wayside are the ones who hear; then the devil comes and takes away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved." "But the ones on the rock are those who when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away." "Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity." "But the ones that fell on the good ground are those who having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep it and bear fruit with patience." Dear ones, is the word falling on good ground in your heart here this morning?

How do I know?, you ask. Well, Jesus goes on to explain that, right after these verses in Luke 8 on the parable of the soils. He says – "No one, when he has lit a lamp covers it with a vessel or puts it under a bed, but sets it on a lampstand that those who enter may see the light." "For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light." "Therefore take heed how you hear." "For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him." Let us see here that lighting the lamp is your making a profession of faith in Christ. You don't cover that profession with a vessel or put it under the bed, but you set it on a lampstand. Setting it on the lampstand is the picture of your bringing your testimony to church and setting it on the back table, but it is your good confession of Christ which makes up that testimony; what He has done for you, not what you have done to supposedly change yourself or your own mind so that you could find the truth of the reality of what is the spiritually right thing to do.

You know that you have been given spiritual light by Christ and you want those who enter, those who know Christ, and those who you want to see come to Christ, to see that same light of truth that you have been given, and therefore, you will take heed to how you will listen to the word of God preached. If you really have been given light and a true understanding of the Bible through that light, you will be given more. If the light, the understanding that you have, is purely selfish; what understanding can I have, and still live for the world, or for my sinful pleasures, then even what you seem to have learned and understood, shall in time be taken from you, and you will prove yourself not to have been a Christian at all. Sometimes a person will falsely think that their relationships with relatives is more important than really persevering in going to church and hearing the word of God in order to do it. Right after Jesus spoke these words in Luke 8 that I just read to you, about "taking care how you hear", it says this: "Then His mother and brothers came to Him and could not approach Him because of the crowd, and it was told Him by some, who said, 'Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see You.'" "But He answered and said to them, 'My mother and brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.'" Let there be

no perplexity about these things. Receiving the word of God to do it is the most important thing. Some of these people who listened to Jeremiah did receive it, and they did repent, and others did not, and they sealed their own doom. The truth of the goodness of your heart will become apparent, if you will hear the word of God to do it, and to keep it.

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> Observation that I will make to you from this text is this: There is a this proposition to learn in regard to the preaching of the word of God.**

Will you live by faith in Christ, or will you live in fear? Certain of the elders of the land rose up and spoke to all the assembly, it says in verse 17. They said – “Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and spoke to all the people of Judah, saying: ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts: ‘Zion shall be plowed like field, Jerusalem shall become heaps of ruins, and the mountain of the temple like the bare hills of the forest.’” And further they said – “Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah ever put him to death?” “Did he not fear the Lord and seek the Lord’s favor?” “And the Lord relented concerning the doom which He had pronounced against them.” “But we are doing great evil against ourselves.” Listen to me now – If you have never yet come to Christ, will you not take King Hezekiah for your example of what to do when you are convicted of sin by the preaching? Hezekiah did not extinguish the burning fire of the conviction of sin with unbelief and suppressing or ignoring what was preached. Instead it says that he feared the Lord. He chose to have regard for the word of God, to act according to what God was expecting of him. He believed that God would save him, and defend he and the people. Let us choose to place ourselves and all of our concerns in His holy and wise hands.

For those of you who are believers and you are trying to be faithful in the sharing of God’s word with others, consider this: The elders of the city spoke to the people of another prophet named Urijah who had prophesied against the city and against the land. He used words just like those which Jeremiah used in speaking to them. When Jehoiakim and all the mighty men and the princes heard his word, the king sought to put him to death; and he being afraid, he fled to Egypt. But Jehoiakim sent men to Egypt and they brought him back and the king had him killed with the sword and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people. This was the history that the elders related. And then this chapter ends with this statement in verse 24 – “Nevertheless the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, so that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death.”

In other words, the prophet Urijah who lived in fear after he had faithfully preached the word, fled, and he was forced to come back, and he was put to death, while Jeremiah who said in verse 14 – “As for me, here I am, in your hand; do with me as seems good and proper to you, but know that you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves, on this city, and on its inhabitants, he lived, and was not delivered up to be killed; God had appointed a man who would protect him. The principle which each of us should live by, in relation to the preaching and sharing of the word of God, is faith in God; faith that He will do what is right, and what is best for us in every situation of danger. The question is – Will we choose to live by faith or by fear when that difficult situation comes to us? Faith will say – Should a man like me flee?, as Nehemiah said when he was threatened and lied about. Should I flee and try save my own life? I will not. Let us determine to live by faith in the Son of God. “He who seeks to save His life shall lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s shall preserve it.”