

**Jeremiah 13: 1-1-23; “The Lord’s Picture Gallery”, Sermon # 13 in the series –
“Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God”,
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on November 17th, 2013,
in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

I do not know how many of you have been to the Chicago Art Museum, or if you have studied great works of art before, but looking at great works of art is something which communicates to the observer ideas, feelings, attitudes, and the values which make up our cultural heritage. To be ranked as great, “a work of art must have values which are broadly human, not limited to one time or place.” “It must deal with subjects of lasting, and not merely passing interest.” “The value of a work of art can be judged by its power to produce worthwhile experience in the observer.” What we have here in Jeremiah 13 is the Lord’s picture gallery. The Lord is using Jeremiah the prophet to portray the pictures of the sin and wickedness of the people of Judah and Jerusalem. What is being portrayed in these pictures are the values which are common to all mankind. They are not limited to the time and place of Jeremiah’s ministry. They have great relevance to this day, this place, to our church, and to our nation. In these pictures we will subjects of lasting interest and importance whether we will look carefully or casually. For they are pictures of our life in sin; our life of moving away from God, away from His Word, His promises and warnings, to live in the pride of our own understanding, to love and to serve other things than the true God.

But the glorious thing about gazing at these pictures is to understand that these pictures can be changed for us; they can be redone and made over into pictures of grace by the Master Artist, our Lord Jesus Christ. So as we go through the Lord’s picture gallery in this chapter, I want you to consider carefully with me, the 3 pictures in it which portray great darkness and great light. Each of these pictures is like a Rembrandt painting of old. It has a black backdrop, but its subject is full of light. When you look at these pictures from the standpoint of the people of Judah, whose lives were full of sin, all you can see is judgment. But if we look at them from a different angle, from the angle of Christ’s power and grace, we shall see how sinful people can change; how they can become portraits or pictures of grace. The 1st picture is that of the linen sash. (verses 1-11) The 2nd is that of the bottles filled with wine. (verses 12-19) And the 3rd is that of the Ethiopian and the leopard. (verses 20-23)

1st of all – Let’s look at the picture of the linen sash.

“Thus the Lord said to me: ‘Go and get yourself a linen sash, and put it around your waist, but do not put it in water.’ “So I got a sash according to the word of the Lord, and put it around my waist.” This word “sash” is the Hebrew word Ay-zore and it means a belt or a waistband. In the case of the high-priest’s clothing and dress it may take into consideration both the breeches that he wore as well as the sash or the belt around his waist. In this case, it was meant to be worn by Jeremiah to show forth the relationship between God and His people. It was a linen sash and linen was the material which made up the garments of the priests and especially the high-priest. Turn with me over to Exodus 28: 1-4. “Now take Aaron your brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister to Me as priest, Aaron and Aaron’s sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar.” “And you shall make holy garments for Aaron your brother, for glory and for beauty.” “So you shall speak to all who are gifted artisans, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron’s garments which they shall make: a breastplate, an ephod, a robe, a skillfully woven tunic, a turban, and a sash.” “So they shall make holy garments for Aaron you brother and his sons, that he may minister to Me as priest.” Now look over at verses 39-40. “You shall skillfully weave the tunic of fine linen thread, you shall make the turban of fine linen, and you shall make the sash of woven linen.”

“For Aaron’s sons you shall make tunics, and you shall make sashes for them.” “And you shall make hats for them, for glory and beauty.” Now all of these verses show us that the linen sash, or belt was commanded by God to be worn as one of the holy garments when ministering to the Lord. The garments were for beauty and for glory, and the sash tied it all together and all of the garments stood out. The men who would approach to minister to the Lord would be dressed in holy attire. The sash of our text would be one of the most obvious symbols of the special and intimate relationship which existed between God and His people.

Verse 11 says, “For as the sash clings to the waist of a man so I have caused the whole house of Judah to cling to me,” says the Lord, “that they may become my people, for renown, for praise, and for glory; but they would not hear.” This Hebrew word “cling” is dawbag which means to adhere to, to be joined together, to pursue hard, to stick fast to. When God brings people into covenant relationship with Himself He binds them to Himself so that they are as near to Him as a sash is, upon a man’s waist. A real and true relationship between God and man is when God causes that believing person to cling to Him, to pursue hard after Him, to be brought near to Him; to stick to Him like glue. But sometimes what is to be the symbol of the reality of a person’s closeness to God becomes a symbol of their own pride; that which is the ornament of the close relationship becomes the substance. A person like this glories in that which God has called them to, in the relationship and privileges of nearness to Him. They declare that God is faithful, but then they assume that they can live following the dictates of their own heart. They are bound nominally to God (in name), but we are not united to Him spiritually. The sash, here in our text, indicated that God had called them to be His people. God’s intention for them would be that they would persevere in faith in God, in love to God, and hear and heed His Word. They would become His people for renown, for praise, and for glory. He would wear them as a sash. They would be a great and excellent people because they were given such great privileges of nearness.

But you and I need to understand this afternoon, that sometimes nearness is not enough. It was not enough under the Old Covenant. Many of these people were drawing near to God with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him. They had great pride in being the Lord’s sash, and yet they would not cultivate the relationship of nearness which leads to obedience. It was like they were taking this valuable and beautiful sash, this emblem of all the great privileges of their knowing God, and deliberately by their false worship and their immoralities, defiling it. Beloved brethren, we must never take for granted the privileges of having been brought near to God. We too are wearing a sash because we are kings and priests to our God. It is not enough to simply have the privilege of wearing the sash; of hearing God’s Word. We must learn to cultivate our relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and meditate upon the Word of God in order to do according to all that is written in it. It is not enough to say we are reformed, we must bring Christ’s life and His grace into every doctrine and every duty that we read of in His blessed word. Our orthodoxy is not meant to be a standard merely to judge the correctness of other people by, in relation to the Scriptures. Doctrinal truth is also that which should come to life in our thoughts and our life by the power of the Spirit of God, and therefore it should be meditated upon, each and every day. This is the greatest of privileges, when we are worn by the Lord and become a people of praise, renown, and glory.

Because this people refused to hear, the Lord said, “I will mar the pride of Jerusalem”. (verse 9) The very thing that this people refused to hear, the Lord would bring: “In this manner I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.” The very thing that they were proud of, the Lord would ruin and mar. They were proud of their temple, but it would be destroyed. They were proud of their worship service, but it was vain because they went after other gods. They were proud of everything that brought them wealth and pleasure, but it would all be ruined. They were proud of themselves, but God would take them captive and hide them

in a hole in the rock by the river Euphrates. They would be taken captive to Babylon. We must learn from this picture of the linen sash that whatever we are proud of, which is not to the glory of God, will be ruined and marred by God Himself. Whenever we think of ourselves as having it made spiritually because we have been shown grace, whenever we have been shown truth and we find ourselves resting satisfied with the mere knowledge of it, all the while still pursuing the world and fleshly desires, we are in great danger of self-deception. The only thing that will prevent this is a living, active faith in God and in His Christ; a faith that prays to God and asks Him to help us to take what we have been learning and live it out, in love to God and others. Concerning our Lord Jesus Christ it says of Him in Isaiah 11: 5 – “Righteousness shall be the belt (or the sash) of His loins, and faithfulness the sash of His waist.” This is what we should be proud of, as His people. This is a sash which God can wear; Jesus Christ is righteous and He rendered to God a perfect righteousness on our behalf. He was faithful to God His Father who appointed Him, it says in Hebrews 3: 1-6. He was and is a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God to make propitiation for the sins of the people. Jesus Christ brings us near to the Father, and keeps us by His powerful grace in right relationship with the Father by His being our Advocate. He was faithful over all His house, His Church, whose house we are, if we hold fast the confidence and hope we have in Him, firm to the end.

2ndly – Our 2nd Picture is that of the bottles filled with wine. (verses 12-19)

“Every bottle shall be filled with wine”, it says in verse 12. It is a picture of merry-making. That is what these people thought of, when they first heard the words from Jeremiah’s mouth. And since their pleasure was of utmost importance to them, they say: “Do we not certainly know that every bottle shall be filled with wine?” We take stock of these things, we inventory our pleasures to see if we have provided sufficiently for ourselves. We want our hearts to be glad even when you speak such awful words of judgment to us. We want to be happy, to be merry, to drink and disregard the fact that God is not pleased with us. But the Lord says to them, “Behold I will fill all the inhabitants of this land, even the kings who sit on David’s throne, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem – with drunkenness.” “And I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and sons together.” “I will not pity them or spare them.” We desperately need to see and to understand that our society, the country that we love, is in a similar condition today. When sin makes progress in an unbeliever’s heart, it will only lead them to seek more and more pleasure seeking. And that pleasure seeking will only lead to a greater lack of self-control; to more partying and excess, greater and greater lack of self-control, greater and greater disregard of one person for another until all of society lives for its games, its parties, and its drinks. It becomes an all-consuming insanity. So after exercising great patience, after giving many warnings and pleadings for repentance through His prophets, God will come swiftly and decisively to judgment in this life, in this society of Judah and Jerusalem. He will dash them one against another, all these party animals.

We should understand that people have not changed from that day to this, and God has not changed from that day to this. Wine is still a mocker, and strong drink is still a brawler and he who is intoxicated by it is still not wise today. What is the answer to this overwhelming flood of wickedness which has overtaken our society and threatens all that God desires to see from His people? The answer is still the same as it has always been. When we have Christ and the wisdom of His word working in our heart, we will pursue spiritual and heavenly things. And, we will still be faithful in earthly things. But they will not be our major pursuit. If we are truly wise, we will not allow worldly and sinful pleasures to take the place of our devotion to God. If you will drink deeply of Christ and spiritual things you will come to thirst for nothing else. Ephesians 5: 17-21 says, “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody

in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God.”

3rd – The 3rd and final picture in the Lord’s gallery in this chapter is that of the Ethiopian and the Leopard.

Our first two pictures are pictures of the pride. The pride of the sash is related to unimproved religious privileges, and the 2nd is the pride of worldly pleasures apart from developing a relationship with God and Christ. But This 3rd picture is of the impossibility of changing what we are by nature as sinners, apart from grace. These people with all their religious privileges and with all their pride of life, had grown accustomed to doing evil. For them to change and to become those who did good was as likely as a black man from Ethiopia changing his skin color. It would be like a leopard changing its spots. Sin had become inveterate in these people. It was firmly established in them by long persistence. It was a deep-seated, deep-rooted habit. To do good was impossible. Today, from this text, I want to show you that sin is so exceedingly sinful that God has stated that it must be punished. Verse 22 says – “What will you say when He punishes you? But you say, “I cannot change”. “I have these habits.” “My heart is dark, and it is so deceitful.” But let me ask you – Do you want to change? If you lack the power to change, Christ does not. If you will look to Him in faith, He will give you the power to change, and break all your sinful habits. He has been faithful unto death for sinners. He is the sash that His Father can wear. He will save you, He will deliver you. He will change your dark heart and take your spots of sin away. He will give you a holy hatred of sin, and holy love of Himself.

On the other hand – Are you here this afternoon thinking, “I am not so bad really?” “Why all this fuss about sin?” “Can’t we talk about something that will make me forget such things?” “I love life’s pleasures; away with God’s words. Well, this word is for you. Hear and give ear; do not be proud, for the Lord has spoken to you from Word. Give glory to Him, confess you need of Christ to save you from yourself and save you from your sins. Will you still refuse to be made clean; to break with your sins? Then my soul will weep in secret for your pride. Please turn to Jesus before it is too late; before He causes darkness, before your feet stumble on the dark mountains of life. And while you look for light He turn it into the shadow of death, and makes it dense darkness. Realize that mercy is offered to you now; mercy that will give you the power to have a life which will be pleasing to God. And when you experience grace by believing in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you will say, “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me; bless His holy name.” “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits: “Who forgives all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with lovingkindness and compassion, who satisfies your mouth with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s. Truly this is the way to live your life and face head-on that eternity that is coming. Let it be so in your case.