

A Ruined Sash (Jeremiah 13:1–11)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (3/22/2013)

Introduction

1. Israel's covenant Lord pronounced judgment on the covenant-breaking people of Israel. The first pronouncements were made to Hezekiah by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 39:5–7).
2. By the time of Jeremiah, the captivity was certain and imminent (Jeremiah 20:4, 5).
3. The general assumption is that God warned Israel in order to coax and prod her to change her mind and repent of her stubborn rebellion. Scripture, however, argues that no sinner can be coaxed to repentance without divine enablement: "*Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil*" (Jeremiah 13:23). Repentance is not feeling sorry for sin; it is being convicted by the Spirit of specific sin, honestly confessing the sin, and reforming one's life to turn from and abhor that sin.
 - a. It is true that the call to repentance presumes responsibility to do so: "*Return, O faithless children, declares the LORD; for I am your master*" (Jeremiah 3:14; Isaiah 55:7).
 - b. Promises are also made to those who do repent: "*Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness*" (Isaiah 1:27).
 - c. Israel saw no repentance, not because of any failure of the Lord's ability to persuade the people but owing to their own obstinance: "*They have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to repent*" (Jeremiah 5:3). That God may choose not to enable repentance in a sinner does not mean that the sinner is excused from the command to do so. It rests with the sinner to obey God.

The theme of this message is repentance and how God enables it.

I. A Lesson

1. A symbol to illustrate Judah's spoiled relationship to Yahweh
 - a. A strange action and a ruined belt

The Lord had Jeremiah buy a linen belt (*loincloth* in most translations) to secure his robes (an emblem of pride) and to wear in public. He was not to wash it. After a while, the Lord asked him to take it to the Euphrates, actually a place called *Parath* not far from Anathoth (Joshua 18:23) and hide it there. The word can also be translated *Euphrates*; thus, the reference also points to the river on the border of the Mesopotamian kingdoms, Assyria and Babylon—no doubt, a deliberate play on words.

After an unspecified time, Jeremiah returned to the hiding place to retrieve the sash, only to find it ruined. This ruined belt served as an object lesson for Yahweh to justify His judgment on Israel's stubborn refusal to repent.

- b. The strange command interpreted

Another interesting play on the words is found in verse 9: "*Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.*" *Parath* means *humiliation of strength*. This pride led to the stubbornness of those who followed their own sinful hearts (v. 10). The Lord intended to humiliate, shame, and destroy the pride of these wicked people.

2. A parable of mistaken confidence (vv. 12–14)

- a. Another play on words: “*You shall speak to them this word: ‘Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Every jar shall be filled with wine’*” (v. 12).

The Hebrew word *nebel, jar* has the same consonants (n-b-l) as the word *fool, nabal* (Hebrew writing has no vowels). A proverb common among the people was, “Every fool will be filled with wine.”

- b. Here the Lord repeats His intention to bring judgment on Jerusalem because the people placed their prideful confidence in themselves—their own wisdom and not the Lord.

When the people argued that no one really knew whether all the jars would be filled with wine, the prophet informed them that indeed, all the *fools* (the king, the priests, the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem) would be filled with wine and self-destruct under their own folly, and the Lord would have no compassion on them (vv. 13, 14).

II. The Interpretation

1. The problem of self (v. 10)

- a. Israel created her own calamities and then expected the Lord to bail her out. However, she stubbornly refused to heed God’s clear instructions, thus becoming worthless to God.
- b. Yahweh’s intention for His people (v. 11)

Israel was to be to the Lord “*a people, a name, a praise, and a glory*”: however, they would not listen (v. 11). The purpose of *listening* is to be instructed in the ways of Yahweh, putting His Word into effective practical use in one’s life. Because they would not listen and act in accordance to the purpose of God, they were good for nothing—useless to Yahweh’s design for them to be *a people, a name, a praise, and a glory*.

- c. The duty of all creatures is to reflect the One whose image they bear. This duty is to worship and honor the Lord alone, make Him preeminent in all aspects of life (hallow His name), and give Him glory in all things.

2. Defiling the pompous pride

- a. The waistcloth reflected the wealth and status of the wearer; so the ruined sash illustrated how the sin of self (iniquity) defaced God’s image in His people.

The image of God is defaced when the image bearer focuses only on self. Sadly, Israel pridefully chose to exalt their own supposed goodness. God hates pride and will destroy it. “*The LORD of hosts has purposed it, to defile the pompous pride of all glory, to dishonor all the honored of the earth*” (Isaiah 23:9; Proverbs 8:14; 15:25; James 4:6, 7). The ruined sash illustrates that defilement.

- b. *Iniquity* is self taking glory that belongs to God only by making itself preeminent. Iniquity is stubbornly following one’s own heart. Shun and flee any advice that suggests you should follow your heart. Iniquity arises from *pride*—self’s relentless self-exaltation—which forces one to live apart from God (Psalm 10:3, 4). The statement, “*There is no God,*” can be taken, not as a declaration of atheism, but rather as a pronouncement of *independence* from God.
- c. Iniquity also encourages *hypocrisy*. Blind to their disobedience, Israel hypocritically asked, “*Why have these things come upon me?*” (v. 22). She knew why. Sinful souls are often self-

deceived. Pride prevents them from seeing the truth of their true status before God. Only the Spirit of God can break through the self-deception and bring the soul to face God's truth about themselves.

III. A Message

1. Repentance requires full and honest confession to God (vv. 15, 16).

Our tendency is to self-protect. We are ashamed of our sin and don't want others to think poorly of us. The truth is just the opposite. Yes, we may experience shame when our sin is exposed in repentance but not the awful condition of being shamed when the deed is exposed in divine judgment (v. 22). The momentary shame experienced in honest, humble, and broken confession will give way to greater joy when God cleanses and restores the heart to holiness through forgiveness.

2. True repentance requires us to die to self and give glory to God.

The phrase, "*give glory to God*" (v. 16), is a call to repentance. It is to come clean with God in the way Joshua instructed Achan—to confess his sin in taking forbidden spoil from Jericho (Joshua 7:19).

When one understands how his prideful self-serving iniquity has dimmed the glory of God in life and testimony, he will grieve with godly sorrow that leads to repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10, 11).

3. True repentance is a gift of God, as verse 23 reveals.

God must make the change, or there will be no change. And there will be no change where there is no true repentance (Acts 5:31).

Paul rebuked the church in Corinth for its toleration of awful sin. The guilty person was protected by a false notion of love, putting not only the erring member in jeopardy but the church as well. The church was to magnify Christ, not obscure Him through prideful tolerance of what He hated. The church was to promote selfless holiness by celebrating the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth (1 Corinthians 5:8). The preservation of the church's false love in ignoring the sin cost them the power of Christ and the spiritual dynamic that would have been evident in their obedience (v. 4). It also harmed the sinning brother in preventing deliverance in the day of the Lord (v. 5).

Paul's concern for the church was relieved when the church acted in obedient faith and disciplined the brother. The man also repented. Church discipline is not punishment or judgment; it is discipline (being treated as sons; Hebrews 12:7) that should result in "*the peaceful fruit of righteousness.*" Now the church family needed to reaffirm their love for the repenter and restore him to fellowship (2 Corinthians 2:5–13; 2 Timothy 2:24–26).

Oh, that God may grant His prideful, self-absorbed and erring people repentance to the acknowledging of the truth in order that we may see a reviving in this desperate time.