

Jeremiah 15: 1-20; “To Show Mercy or Judgment?”, Sermon # 15 in the series –
“Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God”,
Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on March 23rd, 2014,
In the Afternoon Worship Service.

The reason that you and I are here this afternoon worshipping God is because we have found favor in His sight through Jesus Christ our Lord. And the reason that we needed to find favor with God is because God has determined to execute His righteous judgment against all people and all nations who will not repent and believe the gospel. He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world. When a person repents and believes in Jesus Christ, they become a worshipper of God because God has shown them mercy. And so the true believer should study to know the mind of the Lord as it is revealed in the Scriptures. They should study and listen and want to learn, and to do, what is pleasing to the Lord. If they do this, they will come to rightly understand that God's righteous judgments begin in this life and they proceed into the next, for all people. God certainly brings judgments against the wicked; beginning in this life, although sometimes we as Christians don't understand why the wicked prosper. And God certainly judges His people, although it is in an entirely different fashion from the wicked. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. There is no wrath upon the believer, but rather a loving discipline of interaction concerning our obedience and our witness for Him.

Sometimes in this life it is hard for the believer to know whether the Lord is favorable towards them or not because of the trying circumstances which they find themselves in. It may be the result of the sinfulness of the society in which they live. They think that all will be swept away in earthly judgments, even themselves. It may be because as they look at their own heart they see so much remaining corruption, and so much unbelief, that they think, “Surely, God cannot be pleased with me.” And so they are not sure how long God's patience will last; how far will God's grace go? They want to be assured of God's favor. They do not want to be deceived at this point. My purpose here this afternoon is to reveal the Lord's mind in judgment; to apply it as the text does, on the level of the nations, in reference to Judah. But I want, as well, to apply it to us as individuals here today. When the Lord proceeds in judgment, there are certain weighty considerations in His holy mind. These considerations determine whether He will show mercy or execute judgment. There are 4 weighty considerations which I will draw from this text.

1st of all – The faithfulness or unfaithfulness of appointed leaders. (Verses 1-9)

“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Even if Moses and Samuel stood before Me, My mind would not be favorable toward this people.’ “Cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth.” The implication of this verse is that the faithfulness and integrity of Moses and Samuel, had, in that day, an influence with God to stay His hand of judgment. Let's look at some of the verses relative to this. Exodus 32, verses 6-13. “Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” “And the LORD said to Moses, “Go, get down!” “For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.” “They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them.” “They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!’” “And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people!” “Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.” “Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: “LORD, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand?” “Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, ‘He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?’” “Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people.” “Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of

heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.” “So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.” Here in these verses we find Moses reasoning with the Lord, in his intercession to Him. He is saying: Is this destruction of your people really to Your honor? This is your people. Other nations will misconstrue your character as vacillating and cruel. They will think that you have brought them out of Egypt only to harm them, and destroy them.

Look with me now, over at Numbers 14: 11-19. “Then the LORD said to Moses: ‘How long will these people reject Me?’ “And how long will they not believe Me, with all the signs which I have performed among them?” “I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they.” “And Moses said to the LORD: ‘Then the Egyptians will hear it, for by Your might You brought these people up from among them, and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land.’ “They have heard that You, LORD, are among these people; that You, LORD, are seen face to face and Your cloud stands above them, and You go before them in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night.” “Now if You kill these people as one man, then the nations which have heard of Your fame will speak, saying, ‘Because the LORD was not able to bring this people to the land which He swore to give them, therefore He killed them in the wilderness.’ “And now, I pray, let the power of my Lord be great, just as You have spoken, saying, ‘The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.’ “Pardon the iniquity of this people, I pray, according to the greatness of Your mercy, just as You have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.” Here we see Moses use other arguments. He tells the Lord that the Egyptians and other will think you were not able to bring them out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. He pleads, “Let your power be greater yet.” “You are patient, merciful, and forgiving.” And so we see here, that the Lord was favorable to the people for Moses’ sake.

Look also with me, over to 1st Samuel 12: 13-15 and 20-25. “Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen and whom you have desired.” “And take note, the LORD has set a king over you.” “If you fear the LORD and serve Him and obey His voice, and do not rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then both you and the king who reigns over you will continue following the LORD your God.” “However, if you do not obey the voice of the LORD, but rebel against the commandment of the LORD, then the hand of the LORD will be against you, as it was against your fathers.” “Now therefore, stand and see this great thing which the LORD will do before your eyes: Is today not the wheat harvest?” “I will call to the LORD, and He will send thunder and rain, that you may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which you have done in the sight of the LORD, in asking a king for yourselves.” “So Samuel called to the LORD, and the LORD sent thunder and rain that day; and all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.” “And all the people said to Samuel, ‘Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins the evil of asking a king for ourselves.’ “Then Samuel said to the people, “Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart.” “And do not turn aside; for then you would go after empty things which cannot profit or deliver, for they are nothing.” “For the LORD will not forsake His people, for His great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people.” “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way.” “Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.” “But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.”

You can see here that these men, who I have just read to you about, were great intercessors with God; and because of their integrity and their faithfulness they prevailed with God to prevent the destruction of His ancient people. How important it is for leaders in Church and State to be intercessors. But now we see that not even the intercession of men, on the level of these godly men, will avail to turn away the wrath of God in acts of judgment. It was because of the unfaithfulness of another leader, Manasseh, that these things were taking place. We have an account of him over in 2nd

Kings 21 and 2nd Chronicles 33. I will not take the time to turn you over there, but in both accounts we have his sins listed. He did evil in the sight of the Lord according to the abominations of the nations whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel. He rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down, he raised up altars to the Baals, he made wooden images, and worshipped all the host of heaven. He caused his sons to pass through the fire, he practiced soothsaying, used witchcraft and sorcery, consulted mediums and spiritists. He not only committed personal sins like these, but he did something far worse. It says that he seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations God destroyed before them in the land. Amazingly, after all this – the Lord saved him! He repented of all of his sinful deeds. But even this great and gracious act of sovereign grace and mercy was not enough to change the Lord’s mind about His judging Judah and Jerusalem. Even the great reforms and the personal piety of Josiah were not enough to change the Lord’s mind. It says that there was no king before him or like him; who turned to the Lord with all of his heart and soul and might, nor after him did any arise like him. The next verse says: “Nevertheless, the Lord did not turn from the fierceness of His great wrath which was aroused against Judah because of all the provocations of Manasseh with which he provoked the Lord.” The Lord not only keeps track of all of the sins, or good things done by appointed leaders; He comes to the place where some leaders sins are so provoking that He cannot possibly hold back His fierce wrath. He becomes weary of relenting. It is like a man who is converted to Christ in prison after he has committed a murder. Justice demands still that he pay for the crime, even though he is forgiven of all of his sins if he asks God to do so. But sin has consequences that sometimes goes on and on. We must realize that our responsibility before our children, to be faithful, will have lasting effects just as our unfaithfulness will have lasting consequences of earthly judgments, and will affect our reward in the next life, even though we are still saved, it will be through fire.

There is a 2nd weighty consideration in the Lord’s mind which determines His showing mercy or executing judgment, and that is the prayers of His suffering people. (verses 1-15)

Jeremiah in verse 10 has come to the place where he feels sorry that he was ever born. It is indeed a difficult thing for him to have to contend with sinful men over their sins. They treat him as one who was lending money at interest. They cursed him for his speaking the word of the lord to them. He appears to be complaining to his mother in verse 10, but the Lord is the only one who is listening. Our complaints are directed to God even though we may address someone else, such as our mother. God considers our complaints a weighty thing. The Lord answers Jeremiah that it would surely be well for him and the remnant of those who would hear and heed His word. He would, in the midst of judgment remember mercy. He would cause the enemy to intercede with them. When a man’s ways please the Lord, he makes even his enemies to be at peace with him. Even when he found himself in affliction and adversity, even when taken away into captivity, even when God’s anger was kindled toward everyone around him, yet God would watch over Jeremiah. The Lord does consider our fears. Jeremiah is still very concerned that persecutors would prevail over him, in verse 15. He prays that the Lord would exercise his enduring patience with him. Do you pray as a believer for the Lord to be patient with you? You should. I think that we would be quite amazed to see, just how patient our Lord really is with us. The Apostle Paul, in 1st Timothy 1: 16 says, “For this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first, Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering (all patience) as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.” This is what our great God does in love to all who will believe in Jesus Christ – He shows all longsuffering. As believers, we have much to learn and much to repent of, and much to do, in obedience to Him. And He will patiently teach us, because Christ has died for this. Jeremiah also asks that the Lord would remember that he has suffered for His name’s sake. It was because His real intent had been to be a faithful spokesman. It was for this reason that he suffered rebuke and experienced great loneliness. He had been mocked, and spoken against. His heart and mind were wounded and in pain. It was something which seemed incurable; something that even God Himself who was the fountain of Living Waters might even seem to become, as an

unreliable stream and as waters that fail to him. Have you ever felt this way, this kind of pain that seems to overwhelm your mind and heart? This is something that sometimes happens when we take our stand for truth and others reject us. But to our God, it becomes a weighty consideration to show mercy. Verse 11 – “The Lord said: ‘Surely it will be well with your remnant.’”

3rd – The next weighty consideration in the Lord’s mind as to whether He will execute judgment or show mercy, is found in verse 16 –

“Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart; for I am called by Your name, O Lord God of hosts.” In God’s mind this is perhaps the most weighty consideration. “He has magnified His Word above all His Name.” (Psalm 138, verse 2) What God looks upon with favor is when a nation or a people, or an individual discovers the tremendous value of His Word, and then they really read it, and do it. God is reminded by Jeremiah that he found His words, he ate His words, and that these words became the joy and rejoicing of his heart. We must ask ourselves this all important question – Have I found the words of God and have I eaten them, and have they become the joy and rejoicing of my heart? We must not only find them, but we must eat them. That is, we must not only regularly feed upon God’s Word, but also we need to be able to see it as that which gives, nourishes, and strengthens the life of our soul. We are to understand that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds from God’s mouth. The words of the Bible, God honors as bread to feed His people; every morning to be collected as manna. Oftentimes we must learn to eat the bitter things as well as the sweet. We must be willing to eat what the Lord sets before us. I’ve sometimes heard Christians say that they are not being fed when they attend a certain church. And indeed it is a great evil when Christ’s sheep are led into pastures of men’s opinions, and their words. Let the Word of God sound forth from this pulpit and every pulpit of Christ’s churches. It is the secret and real life of every ministry.

But when we feed on the words of God we will find it not only strengthening, we will find it to become to us the joy and rejoicing of our hearts. The words of God become the joy of our hearts as we ponder them, meditate upon them, feed upon them; as we come to understand where true spiritual joy exists. It resides in the heart satisfied by the true joy of being in fellowship with God Himself; with the Father, and the Son. God Himself becomes precious, Christ’s life and the fullness of His grace are there in our heart and mind, so that we more and more realize that we are doing all things for Him and through Him. We more and more realize what He has done, is doing, and will do, in supplying all of our needs according to His riches. This comes to us as we meditate upon the Scripture truth, day by day. “O send out Your light and Your truth, and let them lead me, let them bring me to your holy hill of Zion, and to your tabernacle.” “Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy.” (Psalm 43: 3 and 4) We are desirous to partake of the milk, the meat, and the honey of God’s words that our hearts might rejoice in God Himself. God will mediate all these blessings through Christ by His Spirit as we read and hear His word preached.

The last weighty consideration in the Lord’s mind as to whether He will show mercy or execute judgment is whether we separate between the precious and the vile. (verse 19)

“If you return, then I will bring you back; you shall stand before Me; if you take out the precious from the vile, you shall be as My mouth.” “Let them return to you, but you must not return to them.” God would have a pure people, a pure worship, and pure doctrine. God has brought us into covenantal relationship with Himself in Christ. The leaders in Christ’s Church must learn to separate the precious from the vile in terms of sound doctrine and obedience to His Word being the standard which we hold up, and which we hold to. The work of a pastor is to do this very thing. And if you will pray for the leaders of this church, God will bless us. We will stand for truth and the preciousness of Christ’s grace. We will, by Christ’s help not go backward into compromise with the world and its philosophies, but we will go on to see the Lord do great things for us. Christ is the Savior of sinners. God’s mind will be favorable to us when we trust in Him. He will patiently hear our prayers and change us so that each one of us will be able to separate the precious from the vile, and we will call it the joy and rejoicing of our hearts.