

Jeremiah 8:4-9:26 “Know the LORD”
Use Psalm 47 as call to worship

April 26, 2015

We’ve reached the point in Jeremiah where if I preach verse-by-verse,
it will start getting very repetitive!
So my plan is move more quickly – and focus on the big themes.
If we pass over something this chapter, that’s okay –
it will come back again later!

Chapters 7-10 are organized around the theme of the temple.
We heard Jeremiah’s temple sermon last week.
God had called Jeremiah to preach this message in the temple –
but as Jeremiah 26 tells us, the sermon was cut off in the middle
when the prophets and priests objected to it.
Chapter 7 is written in prose – and looks a lot like a sermon.
Chapters 8-10 are written largely in poetry –
which appear to be Jeremiah’s reflections on chapter 7,
along with his reflections on Jerusalem’s rejection of the sermon.

Once again, we are working through two chiasms.
The first one, in 8:4-9:6, explains the problem as a problem of *knowledge*.
They do not know my rules (8:7) – but more importantly,
they do not know *me* (9:3).
Indeed they *refuse* to know me (9:6)

The second chiasm, in 9:7-26, focuses on the result of Israel’s rebellion
and the coming judgment.
It is tied to the first chiasm by its famous concluding reflection:
“Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom,
let not the mighty man boast in his might,
let not the rich man boast in his riches,
but let him who boasts boast in this,
that he understands and knows me,
that I am the LORD
who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.
For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.” (9:24)

I’ve put the chiasms in the bulletin, so that you can see how the passage fits together,
but I’m going to simplify the *sermon* outline
to help you see the *point* that Jeremiah is making.

- 1. Judah’s Problem: They Do Not Know Me (8:4-9:6)**
 - a. My People Do Not Know the Rules of the LORD (8:4-7)**
 - b. They Have Dealt Falsely and Rejected the Word of the LORD (8:8-10)**
 - c. They Have Healed the Wound of the Daughter of My People Lightly (8:10-12)**
 - d. An Empty Harvest (8:13)**
 - e. Why? Because We Have Sinned (8:14-15)**

- f. **The Army of Terror Comes and Devours the Land (16-17)**
- e'. **If the LORD Is King, Why Have They Provoked Me? (8:18-19)**
- d'. **The Harvest Is Over, and We Are Not Saved (8:20)**
- c'. **My Heart Is Wounded for the Wound of the Daughter of My People (8:21-9:1)**
- b'. **Falsehood Has Grown Strong in the Land (9:2-3)**
- a'. **They Refuse to Know Me, Declares the LORD (9:4-6)**

2. Judah's Future: The Death of a Nation (9:7-26)

- a. **I Will Punish Jerusalem (9:7-11)**
 - b. **Who is the Wise Man? (9:12-14)**
 - c. **I Will Feed Them Bitter Food and Scatter Them among the Nations (9:15-16)**
 - d. **Call for the Mourning Women to Come and Wail (9:17-19)**
 - d'. **Teach Your Daughters a Lament (9:20-21)**
 - c'. **The Dead Bodies of Men Shall Fall Like Dung upon the Open Field (9:22)**
 - b'. **Let Not the Wise Man Boast in His Wisdom – but that He Knows Me (9:23-24)**
- a'. **The Days Are Coming When I Will Punish the Uncircumcised – in Heart (9:25-26)**

If you look at the two outlines in the bulletin,
you can see the difference between ancient Hebrew rhetoric and modern English rhetoric.

Ancient Hebrews expected to hear a sermon
move from its beginning to its middle – and then back again.

It is such a common phenomenon in ancient Hebrew texts
that it may well have been almost unconscious.

Modern Americans expect a three-point sermon
where any sub-points closely relate to the main point.

I think it's often useful for us to hear the chiasmic structure of OT texts –
but when covering a larger chunk of material,
it may be better to summarize what Jeremiah is saying
in a more “American” structure:

So let's look at these three things:

- 1) What does lack of knowledge look like?
- 2) How should we respond to this lack of knowledge?
- And 3) what will God do about this lack of knowledge?

1. What Does Lack of Knowledge Look Like? (8:4-17)

Last week, we saw that Israel was trusting deceptive words,
and so therefore, truth had perished.

You can see the same themes at work in chapters 8-9.

After all, chapters 8-10 function as “commentary” on Jeremiah's temple sermon.

If you trust in deceptive words, then truth will perish.

And if truth perishes, then you will have lost the knowledge of God.

a. They Twist/Reject the Word of the LORD to Pursue Unjust Gain (8:4-10)

⁴ *“You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD:*

When men fall, do they not rise again?

If one turns away, does he not return?

⁵ *Why then has this people turned away
in perpetual backsliding?*

*They hold fast to deceit;
they refuse to return.*

Jeremiah plays on the word “to turn” or “return” in verses 4-6.

Israel has turned away in “perpetual turning” –

they are always turning away – never turning back!

⁶ *I have paid attention and listened,
but they have not spoken rightly;*

no man relents of his evil,

saying, ‘What have I done?’

Everyone turns to his own course,

like a horse plunging headlong into battle.

⁷ *Even the stork in the heavens*

knows her times,

and the turtledove, swallow, and crane^[a]

keep the time of their coming,

but my people know not

the rules^[b] of the LORD.

Birds keep the time of their coming.

Every year you see the birds return.

The geese flying overhead – the cardinals brightening up a late winter’s day
with the hope of spring.

The birds know when to return.

But my people do not know the rules of the LORD.

One of God’s rules is that if you have sinned

you should repent and return to the LORD.

But my people think that all they have to do is bring a sacrifice!

Remember the “deceptive words” that they trust?

“the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord” –
they think that if they sin, all they need to do is bring a sacrifice.

Think about that:

If all you do is “pray a prayer” and say “please forgive me,”

but you do not *turn* to the Lord,

then you are doing precisely what Israel did.

My people do not know the rules of the LORD.

God identifies this as a lack of *knowledge*.

And notice in verses 8-9 *why* God calls it a lack of knowledge:

⁸ “*How can you say, ‘We are wise,
and the law of the LORD is with us’?
But behold, the lying pen of the scribes
has made it into a lie.*”

Jeremiah is claiming that the scribes are perverting the scriptures.

The language that Jeremiah uses *may* suggest that the scribes
have been intentionally distorting the text of the Law!

Think of the power of the scribes:

they are copying the text of the Law.

If they don’t like what the Law says,

then they could simply change it to suit their fancy!

It’s possible that Jeremiah is accusing the scribes of *changing the scriptures*.

At the very least, Jeremiah is accusing them of *twisting* its meaning.

The reason why Jerusalem has a knowledge problem

is because the scribes – the teachers – are twisting and corrupting the scriptures.

We see this today in the growing number of churches that have twisted the scriptures
to permit same sex marriage.

But we need to face up to the fact that the *first step* toward that
was when we removed ‘sex and babies’ from the marriage service.

Most weddings today – and for the last fifty years –

focus on how marriage is about companionship and commitment.

But companionship and commitment can exist in many relationships.

What is unique to *marriage* is sex and babies.

The sexual act was designed by God for procreation.

Sure, it is enjoyable as well –

but the *purpose* of the sexual act is to produce babies –

in the same way that eating is to provide nourishment.

It is a good thing to *enjoy* a good meal.

We ought to feast – as well as fast.

But we ought to enjoy God’s good gifts in the *way* that he intended them.

The “wise” in our day have rejected the word of the LORD.

And so what Jeremiah said to Jerusalem should be said to us as well:

⁹ *The wise men shall be put to shame;
they shall be dismayed and taken;
behold, they have rejected the word of the LORD,
so what wisdom is in them?*

If you are willing to twist and corrupt the word of the LORD,
then you have no wisdom.

Verse 10 helps us understand at least *why* they are twisting the word of God.
God says that he will give their wives and fields to others – *because*:

¹⁰ *Therefore I will give their wives to others
and their fields to conquerors,
because from the least to the greatest
everyone is greedy for unjust gain;
from prophet to priest,
everyone deals falsely.*

Why do teachers twist the word of the LORD?

Jeremiah says that the reason why the prophets and priests turned away from the LORD
is that they are greedy – they long for “unjust gain” –
they are selfish and use other people to get ahead in life.

I want you to think about this.

Because Jeremiah does not say that they *realize* that they are greedy.
The prophets and priests might very well think that they are being faithful!

How many false teachers *know* that they are false teachers?
Most false teachers *think* that they are faithful.

But notice the second thing that identifies a lack of knowledge:

b. They Say “Peace, Peace” When There Is No Peace (8:11-17)

¹¹ *They have healed the wound of my people lightly,
saying, ‘Peace, peace,’
when there is no peace.*

They tell people that God is at peace with them –
when, in fact, God is at war with them!

Since my first example went after one danger,

let me turn to a different danger for my second example:

I have seen conservative Presbyterian churches say “Peace, peace”
to men who abuse their wives.

I even saw a biblical counselor urge a woman to take her husband back
after he had multiple affairs.

Why do they do this?

“They have healed the wound of my people lightly.”

They have fallen into the trap of thinking that because grace is a free gift,
therefore all you have to *do* is *say* that you are sorry!

If the abuser – if the cheater – “says” that he (or she) is sorry,
then *you* are now obligated to take him back, right?

“Peace, peace” – when there is no peace.

“My people do not *know* the rules of the LORD.”

God does not say “peace” to those who just *mouth* their repentance.

Indeed, verse 12 identifies the second part of their lack of knowledge:

“they did not know how to blush.”

They were so hardened in their sin that they were not at all ashamed.
They didn’t even think that they were doing anything wrong.

¹² *Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?*

No, they were not at all ashamed;

they did not know how to blush.

Therefore they shall fall among the fallen;

when I punish them, they shall be overthrown,

says the LORD.

¹³ *When I would gather them, declares the LORD,*

there are no grapes on the vine,

nor figs on the fig tree;

even the leaves are withered,

and what I gave them has passed away from them.”^[c]

In verses 14-15 we hear the response of Jerusalem:

¹⁴ *Why do we sit still?*

Gather together; let us go into the fortified cities

and perish there,

for the LORD our God has doomed us to perish

and has given us poisoned water to drink,

because we have sinned against the LORD.

¹⁵ *We looked for peace, but no good came;*

for a time of healing, but behold, terror.

Let that sink in.

“the LORD our God has doomed us to perish and has given us poisoned water to drink,
because we have sinned against the LORD.”

Judgment Day has come:

¹⁶ “*The snorting of their horses is heard from Dan;
at the sound of the neighing of their stallions
the whole land quakes.*

*They come and devour the land and all that fills it,
the city and those who dwell in it.*

¹⁷ *For behold, I am sending among you serpents,
adders that cannot be charmed,
and they shall bite you,”
declares the LORD.*

My people do not know the rules of the LORD –
and the result of their lack of knowledge is judgment and destruction.

So the basic foundational point in Jeremiah 8-9 is the great and grievous danger
of a lack of knowledge of what God requires.

This is why *teaching* is one of the two basic methods of making disciples.

Jesus says that his ministers are to make disciples in two ways:

baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

We need a thorough knowledge of the scriptures.

We need to know the whole counsel of God.

Christopher Wright says it well when he says that

“One of the most disfiguring features of the world church is the widespread ignorance
of the basic demands of discipleship,
of obeying the requirements of the Lord Jesus Christ himself.

And when those who have been evangelized but not disciplined
are then exploited by unaccountable leaders

who care more for their own status and wealth
than for the teaching and example of Christ,

then the church itself becomes a scandal, a denial of the gospel.” (123)

So how should we respond to this lack of knowledge?

Listen to what the LORD says!

2. How Should We Respond to This Lack of Knowledge? (8:18-9:6)

In 8:18-9:6 there are two responses –

we should mourn (8:18-9:1)

and we should beware their treachery (9:2-6).

But who is speaking here?

The first person voice sounds (at times) like Jeremiah.

And at other times it is definitely Yahweh.

The blending of their voices is *essential* to Jeremiah’s point.

God mourns over Jerusalem – and so therefore we should too!

a. We Should Mourn (8:18-9:1)

¹⁸ *My joy is gone; grief is upon me;^[d]
my heart is sick within me.*

¹⁹ *Behold, the cry of the daughter of my people
from the length and breadth of the land:*

*“Is the LORD not in Zion?
Is her King not in her?”*

*“Why have they provoked me to anger with their carved images
and with their foreign idols?”*

²⁰ *“The harvest is past, the summer is ended,
and we are not saved.”*

²¹ *For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded;
I mourn, and dismay has taken hold on me.*

I want you to see that this is the *first* response of the prophet (and of the LORD).

When we see the suffering of those who have turned away from Christ,
our first response ought to be that our *heart* is wounded.

The priests and prophets have “healed the wound of my people lightly.”
Therefore, the heart of God is wounded.

God does not delight in the outpouring of his wrath –
and neither should we.

God’s wrath and anger is his *alien* work – his strange and terrible work.

The people cry out: “Is the LORD not in Zion?”

They have believed the false peace proclaimed by the prophets.

And the LORD responds by weeping over “the daughter of my people” –
just as David had wept over “Absalom, my son.”

²² *Is there no balm in Gilead?*

Is there no physician there?

*Why then has the health of the daughter of my people
not been restored?*

⁹ ^[e] *Oh that my head were waters,*

and my eyes a fountain of tears,

that I might weep day and night

for the slain of the daughter of my people!

We must affirm the wrath of God against sin.

But we must also affirm the sorrow of God – the weeping of God – over judgment.

As we saw earlier in the series,

Jeremiah shows us the *passion* of the *impassable* God.

When we say that God is “impassable”
what we mean is that God has no *passions* –
in the sense that God never “reacts.”

We cannot force God’s emotions.

It would be better to say that we see God’s *affections* in Jeremiah.

Anger, jealousy, grief, sorrow, love, –
all these are clearly seen in God.

Indeed, as Wright says,

“We must not think...that if God is grieved by our sin
he cannot also be angry about it or punish us for it.

On the contrary, the very nature of the relationship is such
that terrible anger and desperate grief

are both simultaneously appropriate reactions,
as those who have experienced or witnessed a marriage breakdown
will immediately agree.” (128)

And that’s why the warning against treachery follows hard upon the heels of God’s grief:

b. We Should Beware Their Treachery (9:2-6)

² [f] *Oh that I had in the desert
a travelers' lodging place,
that I might leave my people
and go away from them!*

*For they are all adulterers,
a company of treacherous men.*

³ *They bend their tongue like a bow;
falsehood and not truth has grown strong^[g] in the land;
for they proceed from evil to evil,
and they do not know me, declares the LORD.*

“They do not know me.”

Falsehood has grown strong – precisely where *truth* ought to have reigned.
They have become a “company of treacherous men.”

Now that’s a dangerous place!

⁴ *Let everyone beware of his neighbor,
and put no trust in any brother,
for every brother is a deceiver,
and every neighbor goes about as a slanderer.*

⁵ *Everyone deceives his neighbor,
and no one speaks the truth;
they have taught their tongue to speak lies;
they weary themselves committing iniquity.*

⁶ *Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit,
they refuse to know me, declares the LORD.*

Notice that verse 6 ups the ante:

It's not just that they do not know me.
"They refuse to know me."

We've been talking a lot about evangelism recently.

When people prefer lies and deceit, there is not much that you can do!
All you can do is proclaim the good news of Jesus –
and walk humbly before them.

Oh, and there is one more thing you can do:

Weep.

After all, that is what God will do!

3. What Will God Do About This Lack of Knowledge? (9:7-26)

a. God Will Lament as He Destroys Them (9:7-11)

⁷ *Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts:*

*"Behold, I will refine them and test them,
for what else can I do, because of my people?"*

⁸ *Their tongue is a deadly arrow;*

*it speaks deceitfully;
with his mouth each speaks peace to his neighbor,
but in his heart he plans an ambush for him.*

⁹ *Shall I not punish them for these things? declares the LORD,
and shall I not avenge myself
on a nation such as this?*

God will punish them.

God will avenge himself on them.

But even as he brings judgment upon them:

¹⁰ *"I will take up weeping and wailing for the mountains,
and a lamentation for the pastures of the wilderness,
because they are laid waste so that no one passes through,
and the lowing of cattle is not heard;
both the birds of the air and the beasts
have fled and are gone.*

¹¹ *I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins,
a lair of jackals,
and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation,
without inhabitant."*

Notice that in verses 10-11 the “I” that takes up weeping and wailing is the same “I” that will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins.

As God will say to Ezekiel,

“I take no delight in the death of the wicked” (18:23)

And even so, God speaks to us and calls us to lament – even as he destroys them:

b. God Will Call Us to Lament as He Destroys Them (9:12-22)

¹² *Who is the man so wise that he can understand this? To whom has the mouth of the LORD spoken, that he may declare it? Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness, so that no one passes through?* ¹³ *And the LORD says: “Because they have forsaken my law that I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice or walked in accord with it, ¹⁴ but have stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals, as their fathers taught them.*

¹⁵ *Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I will feed this people with bitter food, and give them poisonous water to drink. ¹⁶ I will scatter them among the nations whom neither they nor their fathers have known, and I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them.”*

Verses 12-16 provide a very standard summary of God’s covenant lawsuit:

Because they have forsaken my law –
because they have not obeyed me –
because they have stubbornly followed their own hearts –
and because they have gone after the Baals –
therefore I will bring judgment upon this rebellious nation.

And so just as the women were called to celebrate the triumph of the LORD at the Red Sea –
so now the LORD calls the “mourning women” to come and raise a wailing over us.

¹⁷ *Thus says the LORD of hosts:
“Consider, and call for the mourning women to come;
send for the skillful women to come;*

¹⁸ *let them make haste and raise a wailing over us,
that our eyes may run down with tears
and our eyelids flow with water.*

¹⁹ *For a sound of wailing is heard from Zion:
‘How we are ruined!
We are utterly shamed,
because we have left the land,
because they have cast down our dwellings.’”*

When the men are done fighting – and dying –
then the women are left to wail and mourn.

It is a scene repeated over and over throughout human history.

²⁰ *Hear, O women, the word of the LORD,
and let your ear receive the word of his mouth;
teach to your daughters a lament,
and each to her neighbor a dirge.*

²¹ *For death has come up into our windows;
it has entered our palaces,
cutting off the children from the streets
and the young men from the squares.*

²² *Speak: "Thus declares the LORD,
'The dead bodies of men shall fall
like dung upon the open field,
like sheaves after the reaper,
and none shall gather them.'*"

Jesus will follow up this theme when he said on his way to the cross:

"Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

²⁹ For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us,' and to the hills, 'Cover us.' ³¹ For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" (Luke 23:28-31)

The language of dead bodies spread like "dung on the surface of the ground" reminds us of the end of the temple sermon (8:2), signalling the end of this particular commentary on the temple sermon.

There remains but one final note that Jeremiah wants us to hear – so that we might know how to avoid this fate:

c. God Calls Us to Know Him (9:23-26)

²³ *Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."*

There is a lot of so-called "knowledge" out there.

We live in the information age – where all of human knowledge lies within your grasp.

Don't boast about that.

Do not boast in your strength –

before long, you will be weak and helpless in the face of death!

Do not boast in your riches –

before long, you will depart this world with nothing of all that you stored up for yourself!

There is only one thing worth boasting of:

“that he understands and knows *me*.”

Knowing God is the one thing worth boasting about.

And notice the particular boast:

“that I am the LORD

who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.”

Those three words:

“steadfast love, justice, and righteousness” –

God practices righteousness – he orders his world wisely and well.

God practices justice – he decides each case aright.

God practices steadfast love (*hesed*) – he is kind and merciful
in his faithfulness to his covenant.

By this point you may be wondering:

“Is God really kind and merciful?

I can see how he is just in punishing sin – but is he really kind?”

Verses 25-26 begin to answer that question – in an odd sort of way!

²⁵ “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will punish all those who are circumcised merely in the flesh— ²⁶ Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert who cut the corners of their hair, for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart.”

Here, Jeremiah begins to grasp – in a very preliminary way –
the future of the gospel –

“to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

God had singled out Israel to be his own people –

“Israel is my son, my firstborn” –

but now the firstborn son of God has failed (just like the rest of humanity).

Jeremiah now speaks of the coming judgment on all mankind –

all the uncircumcised nations –

including Israel, because Israel is uncircumcised in heart.

And while the *good news* is not yet stated – it is implied:

if God is going to bring judgment on all nations,

then we may have hope that God will make things right for all nations!

And that’s what he has done in Jesus.

This is why Jesus said (as we saw this morning)

“No one knows the Son except the Father,

and no one knows the Father except the Son

and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him” (Matt 11:27)

In the revelation of the Son of God, we now *know* God.