

What the Lord Requires (Jeremiah 22, 23)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (6/14/2020)

Introduction

1. God is sovereign in all things.

The great principle established in the text is that God does not react to circumstances; he directs them to His own glorious ends. In this process He uses even evil to bring judgment unto righteousness.

2. Because God is sovereign in all things, the circumstances of Jeremiah's persecution were fully controlled by the hand of Him whose name is *Yahweh Tsidqenu*—"the Lord is our righteousness" (Jer. 23:6).

- a. Jeremiah delivered the prediction of imminent judgment at the Potsherd Gate. Because of the prediction of judgment, Pashhur, a chief priest, beat and imprisoned him. Why? Jeremiah's message contradicted that of the professional prophets. Pashhur's purpose was to silence him. The attempt did not work, for on release the next day, Jeremiah doubled down on the message of judgment, singling out Pashhur for severe condemnation.

- b. Jeremiah did not cave to political pressure because he was a true Prophet, and the Word of God was in him by the Spirit of God. The Word overruled his own human weakness, being in him a burning fire and compelling him to preach the truth.

- c. The primary purpose of a prophet is to be the Lord's spokesman. He is a prophet only when he proclaims the Word of the Lord, not his own opinion.

A true Prophet cannot and will not resign under pressure because his courage, Spirit-enabled, overrides his natural proclivities. This truth is in evidence as the broken prophet railed against the hard providence of his circumstances, even cursing the day of his birth (Jer. 20:10–18).

I. Hard Providence

1. The text before us was Jeremiah's message to the sons of Josiah.

- a. Judah's last kings were Jehoahaz (Shallum), Son of Josiah (3 mos.); Jehoiakim (Eliakim), Son of Josiah (11 years); Jehoiachin (Coniah), Son of Jehoiakim (3 mos.); and Zedekiah (Mattaniah), Son of Josiah (11 years).

- b. When Zedekiah began to rule, the Chaldean army approached Jerusalem. The king called the prophets to ascertain Yahweh's Word concerning the matter. The prophets, being a professional class, denied the danger confronting the nation in order to please the king. By contrast, Jeremiah announced that Babylon would be victorious over Judah. Although the fall of the city was 7 years away, its fate was sealed. The only alternative was death or captivity. Yahweh's sovereign will was certain.

- c. The Lord's ultimate goal in the process of judgment is stated in the 5th verse of Chapter 23.

2. Did this certainty of judgment preclude any hope of repentance and restoration? The Lord confirmed the responsibility of the kings of Judah, her priests, and her prophets in Chapter 22:1–5).

II. Ultimate Failure

1. They did not listen to these words nor obey them (Jer. 22:21).

Observe that listening is with the intent to obey. This is what Jesus meant when He speaks of having “ears to hear” (Matt. 11:15; Luke 6:49; John 8:43, 45)

The deeper work of the listening ear is to *know* the Lord (Jer. 9:23, 24).

2. Their deaf ears to the Word of God was the cause of their rejection and judgment (Jer. 22:8).

III. Destructive Leaders

1. Disastrous shepherds (civil leaders, Jer. 23:1, 2)

David wrote of the ideal shepherd in the 23rd Psalm. All the kings of Israel were to model their care of the people of God after the Lord’s great example. Sadly, many rulers become power hungry and oppress the people (Matt. 23:4).

- a. Self-interest was the foundation of their governance (Jer. 22:13–15).
- b. They failed to follow the godly example of Josiah (Jer. 22:15–17).
- c. Their failure resulted in the neglect of the people’s welfare (Jer. 23:2; Micah 6:8).
- d. The Lord did not fix the problem with Judah’s shepherds but revealed their motives, condemned their errors, and removed them from the throne. In their place the Lord announced His method of shepherding (governance) under David’s greater Son, the Branch—Jesus Christ (Jer. 23:2–6).

2. Lying prophets (spiritual leaders, Jer. 23:11, 12)

In the economy of God, the prophets superseded the king. God called them to be, in effect, spiritual watchdogs of the kingdom.

- a. Their betrayal of the holy office

The tragedy of Jeremiah’s day was that the prophets were more inclined to appease the king and comfort the people with false messages than preaching the hard truth and enduring the pushback of the sinful reaction to the truth (Jer. 23:22).

- b. Their personal defilement (Jer. 23:13–15)

- c. Their rejection by God (Jer. 23:16, 17)

God’s Word to His Church

“O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the Lord!” (Jer. 22:29)

The hour of success and prosperity is the time when we are least likely to hear to the Word of God. The pride of national greatness that attributes power to self, boasting of strength of character and determination to persevere in the conflict to win the day in self confidence is sin.

The sovereign Lord’s plan in the midst of the chaos of Josiah’s sons was to bring out of it a glorious kingdom ruled by David’s greater Son, Jesus Christ. Success in establishing this great prospect required ending the horrible reign of these wicked kings. The end came with harsh consequences as Babylon crushed the nation of Judah. The resulting carnage and destruction cause us to shudder in horror. Yet, the tendency is to forget the more deadly reign of terror that gripped the land for the years preceding the fall of Jerusalem.

The mess we are witnessing in our land with Covid-19 and the protests and riots destroying our country is being directed by God’s sovereign hand “to lead lines of order” out of a culture that has long abandoned God. Fear not. Trust “*Yahweh Tsidqenu*” (23:6).