

Jeremiah 46: 1-28; “A Look at Righteous Fear”, Sermon #53 in the series – “Heart Lessons Learned for a Prophet and the People of God”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on August 16th, 2020, in the Morning Worship Service.

We have come now to a series of prophecies made by Jeremiah concerning God’s judgments upon the nations surrounding Israel and Judah. The subject is judgments upon Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Syria (or Damascus), Kedar (Arabia), and Elam, a small country adjacent to Persia. In chapters 50 and 51, we find a lengthy judgment on Babylon. The Lord had used Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzar as His “Battle-ax”, as it says in chapter 51, verse 20, in order to break the nations in pieces. But then, afterwards He would judge Babylon, too, and repay her for all of her wickedness. As it says in verse 28, He was going to make a complete end of all the nations to which He had driven them. They had every reason to fear the judgment of God, but they did not. Those who were the faithful remnant of Israel in captivity, who are called here in this passage, God’s servants, in verse 27, are commanded not to fear, because the Lord would save them from afar and bring them back after the 70 years captivity was fulfilled.

What I want to do at this hour is to address the subject of human fear versus godly fear so that you will better understand what godly fear is, and whether you have it. Why do sinful and unrepentant people have every reason to fear, while God’s people are told not to fear? Well, we are going to see from these verses that it because sinful, unbelieving people and God’s Spirit-taught people look at fear differently. Because God’s people have have saving grace they are taught by the Spirit how to fear in a righteous way. There are 3 descriptions will show you if you have a fear of God which is righteous. 1st of all – God’s people acknowledge with righteous fear His right to avenge sin. 2nd – God’s people acknowledge with righteous fear His bringing conviction of sin. And 3rd – God’s people acknowledge with righteous fear that He can be just and loving at the same time. It is my prayer that each of us will see in this message, what we personally need, to grow in our understanding of God and His ways in our lives.

1st of all – God’s people acknowledge with godly fear, His right to avenge sin.

(verses 1-10)

I take this from verse 10 were it says – “For this is the day of the Lord God of Hosts – A day of vengeance, that He may avenge Himself on His adversaries.” I think that it will be good for all of us here to take notice of God’s principles of infallible justice. Each of us should take heed to the warning against thinking that we can ignore them. The Lord’s adversaries are those people and those nations who will not repent. They are determined to continue to worship false gods. They continue to live as though the true and living God did not exist and that He will not deal with them. You and I must tell people around us that our God is a jealous God. He is not just an awesome God who we should fear, but He is a jealous God who punishes sin. No man, no people, no nation, can ignore God, or make up their own religion, or live to themselves, without the Lord avenging Himself on them.

If you would be saved from your sins, you must come to acknowledge that God has every right to judge you for your sins; both in this life and in the next. The nation of Egypt had false gods and they lived in selfish extravagance. Egypt thought that she had a fine, strong army to defend herself with. But the Lord’s perfect sense of righteous justice demanded that this nation should be judged. And they would not be able to avoid His judgments. The sword would be satiated and made drunk with their blood, it says in verse 10. The Lord would have a sacrifice in the north country by the River Euphrates. The slaughter of men in battle is called a sacrifice because it makes some kind of satisfaction and atonement to God’s justice. So says the commentator William Lowth.

In verses 3-5 we find Pharaoh Necho drawing his troops up for battle, and yet the prophet in his vision saw them beaten. He saw their mighty men beaten down. They were speedily fleeing away. They didn't even look back. For fear was all around. It was on all of their faces. Why was this? Who created all of this fear among the mighty men of Egypt? It was Nebuchadnezzar, you say. Yes, he was God's instrument, but you must remember that it was God who was using this instrument! We very much need to understand in our day that God's justice will be satisfied in the final analysis. He will punish all sin. God is good, but His goodness is meant to lead us to repentance. God is patient, but He will not wait forever for men or nations to repent. He had a day of the Lord for nations in the past. There came a certain day when the unrepentant nations were judged for their sins and their kingdoms were cast down. But all of these judgments on nations in the past, they point to the great day of judgment which is coming, and so we must be ready for that day by repenting of all of our sins.

Here in the United States of American, it does not matter of how strong we are, God can still make us fear if He purposes to do so. Listen to Proverbs 21, verse 30 – “There is no wisdom or understanding or counsel against the Lord.” “The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance is from the Lord.” A righteous person knows this, and that is why they do not fear the strength of nations who worship false gods or false philosophies of life and human government. They know, as it says in Ecclesiastes 9: 11 – “The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill.” Rather, the Christian loves the Lord, they love His word, and they fear His judgments. In Psalm 119, verses 119 and 120 it says – “You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross; therefore I love your testimonies.” “My flesh trembles for fear of You, and I am afraid of Your judgments.” A Christian is afraid with a righteous fear because they are acknowledging God's right to punish sin wherever He finds it. It is an awful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, but the righteous acknowledges God's right to judge all men.

2nd – God's people acknowledge with thankfulness His bringing conviction of sin.

Verses 11 and 12 – Go up to Gilead and take balm, O virgin the daughter of Egypt; in vain you will use many medicines; you shall not be cured.” “The nations have heard of your shame, and your cry has filled the land; for the mighty man has stumbled against the mighty; they both have fallen together.” So, you see here that when sinful, unbelieving people are convicted of sin, they look at fear differently from God's people. People who will not acknowledge God sinfully seek many medicines for their cure from their own sinful problems, but they never find it until they find Christ. There is probably no greater question that you can pose to yourself than this – What can I do to get rid of my guilt and shame? You fear that you shall not find a cure, spiritually speaking. You should understand that there are many medicines which are tried by sinners which will never cure them. And the reason for this is because your sins are actual wounds to your own soul which need to be treated.

Many people, when they see how deep these wounds are, they despair of ever finding a cure. In the case of Egypt, God says that there would be no cure for them. In the case of you who sit before me today, there is great hope for you if you will believe in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if you try to assuage your guilt with medicines of your own devising, or medicines which cover up the symptoms of sin, and make you feel that it will be alright to continue on in your sin, then you are in the worst possible danger. You see, you may not know this, but sin is something which wants to steal your very life away. For instance, the medicine of morality, the medicine of trying to be good in order to please God, it will never cure you. You may try ever so much to keep God's Law and to be a good person, and yet if you make a thorough examination of your heart you will see gashing wounds and the disease of sin in the motions of your heart.

Although outwardly you may appear to be righteous to people around you, yet inwardly you have problems with envy and bitterness and resentment. You struggle with unloving thoughts.

And you become angry and defensive when others try to speak to you about a problem you may have in your life. No outward compliance with God's law will take away these wounds. No amount of good behavior before other people around you will heal the disease of sin. Keeping God's law outwardly is no sign of true conversion necessarily. You may keep God's commandments outwardly and yet your heart is meditating sin. It is no sign of true obedience if you are still practicing sin in your heart. It is saving grace alone that will heal your sin-sick soul, and its wounds. False or watered-down man-centered doctrines you may think will be a balm to ease the pain of sin, for a time. But they will not bring the cure for sin. It is only when you come to believe that Christ alone can save you, and you apply to Him for grace, that the miracle of the New Birth is wrought in the heart, and the seed of righteousness is planted there.

The efficacy of Christ's blood and His righteousness then cleanses from all sin. Christ's righteous life and His sacrificial death are all the balm that you will need. His life and death and the benefits of these, when they are effectually applied by the power of the Holy Spirit, the sinner comes to find a New and Living way to God. They learn by His grace to love Him, to honor Him, and to serve Him in newness of life. They will never perish because their life and their salvation rests upon Christ's perfect faithfulness to God's holy law. They will never perish because He died in their place at the cross, and God cannot punish twice. If you are trusting in Christ and repenting of your sins, you cannot be damned and sent to hell, for God has no wrath toward you any longer; you have found the cure.

Do not think that the power of positive thinking will ever bring any person to heaven, for this is to ignore the extent of your problem. You may positively think that you are a pretty good person, doing pretty well in righteousness, but remember God demands perfection. And can you give it to Him of your own free will? No, before you are converted to Christ, your free-will is a slave to sin. How can you know that you have really given Christ your all when there are many things in your heart, both before and after you come to Christ which are deceitful motions of your heart. You really want to hold on to your worldliness, your pride, your sensuality, your sense of superiority before you come to Christ.

But although its power is broken over you when you come to Christ, you still do not really understand how much of it is still there. And it will take Christ's grace and Spirit working in your heart to deal with the sins of your heart in such a way as they are subdued. Don't fool yourself. Your salvation and your progress in holiness do not rest upon your free will or your own determination to do what is right. Yes you must have that, but you must more importantly do and keep God's commandments by His power and from the right motives, and this is something that you will learn all the rest of your days after you come to Christ.

You say, well I go to church regularly, and give of my money to the church. I try to think good thoughts, I try to believe in the inherent goodness of every person; that God will not punish any pretty good person. My friend, if you think that righteousness is simply attending church, of being a member of a church, of partaking of the ordinances and sacraments, and that this is going to heal you of your sins, you may very easily deceive yourself. You cannot be saved simply trying to be a faithful church-goer. It is a good thing to go to good Bible-believing church, but even that will not be enough to save you. Salvation is not to be obtained through the works of the law, and certainly it will not be attained by having good intentions. You say, I will reform my life. I will turn over a new leaf. I will stop all of my drinking and my smoking, I will covenant not to look at a woman to lust for her in heart. I will stop being angry at my wife.

But you see, you could repent of all of these sins, and even in a measure reform your own life, and unless you have Christ, you still would not be saved. Some people hope to be saved by going to a sacramental church, and they think that they know Christ. They think that they have found salvation by the form of godliness, but they do deny its power. They believe that they are saved by going to the Mass, or saying the Rosary, or praying to Mary, or to the saints, or even to

the dead. They think that they are storing up merit and favor with the Almighty by doing such things. But, it will be a bitter pill at the last for them when they are turned away at the very gates of heaven, for there is no cure for sin in these things.

And so you think to yourself, well surely I do not think that I can find a cure for sin in that way. But I do think that it is a good thing to pursue being happy in this life. God wants me to be happy, and so perhaps as I pursue the good things that He gives of this life, that it will turn my thoughts to also think about the things of eternal life. Don't count on it my friend. There are many people out there who think that they are going to heaven, without having any real devotion to God, either in private worship or public worship. How often do you worship God through prayer and the devotional reading of the Bible. Is this not the regular fare of the true Christian? But ask yourself whether you really do this; whether you really love doing this more than pursuing all the entertainments of the world. If you live like that, by filling your mind with worldly entertainments, you will always be drawn to have more of them than you will of God Himself. If this is the case with you, then you may find that listening to good Biblical preaching will not really have any deep effect upon you.

How can you really make any real progress in holiness and righteousness, and real Biblical obedience, if you are bored by hearing the word? Some listeners want the preacher to impress them and to entertain them, but that is not his job. His job is to declare to you the word of the Lord with all that the passion of his heart and might can put forth. Your job is to receive that word by partaking of the truth of the doctrines preached and the applications of the truth which are given to you. If you do that you will find that you will be blessed and helped by the word in many ways. For instance think of how you think of conviction of sin. Is conviction of sin a good thing? Well it is a good thing if it leads you to Christ.

Think with me of the work of the Holy Spirit in convicting a sinner of his sin. In John chapter 16, verses 9-11, Jesus says to his disciples – “But now I go away to Him who sent Me, and none of you asks Me, ‘Where are You going?’” “But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart.” “Nevertheless I tell you the truth.” “It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you.” “And when He has come, He will convict the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they do not believe in Me; of righteousness, because I go to My Father and you see Me no more; of judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”

Have you ever thought about these blessed words? It was to the advantage of the disciples that Jesus would go away. If He didn't, their great spiritual Helper would not come to them. Now, they already had the Holy Spirit's working in terms of their own salvation. But they needed a Helper to help them in their preaching and in their ministry of the word to people around them. Conviction of sin is very much needed in the hearts of sinners who are having the word preached to them, because they do not by nature believe in Christ. A preacher preaches the gospel, and he preaches the word, and yet they will not come unless the Spirit comes and convict the sinner of his sins. What the Spirit does, when He effectually convicts the sinner of his sins, is to create a spirit of bondage in them leading to fear. The sinner really comes to see and to feel that they are guilty before God.

So conviction of sin is good because it shows us where we have gone astray, where we have dishonored God, and where we have broken His holy law. The sinner, when they experience a spirit of bondage due to their sins, cannot go back to living their life in sin as they have all along. And yet they cannot go forward to truly find salvation in Christ without the Spirit's help; opening their eyes to understand, opening their hearts to believe, and to respond to, the things which are spoken to them. Once the Spirit does this, then they see Christ's finished work of perfect righteousness will avail for them. They can receive it by faith. They conceive of the idea that they can become a new creature in Christ; that they can find a New Heart and a New Life, of

righteousness, peace, and joy, in the Holy Spirit. They know that through Christ, they no longer have to be a slave to Satan, or be held captive in his kingdom of darkness any more. By faith in Christ, the chains fall off and the heart is set free. The sinner has now become one of Christ's saints, and he finds he wants to walk on the path of righteousness. He glories in the light shining on his path.

In terms of knowing that you have salvation, this balm which will save you, you need to understand what it cost Christ to purchase this grace for you. It took His going to the cross and suffering there. It took His taking your place in judgment there, so that God's righteous wrath would be turned away from you. God avenges Himself on Christ instead of you. It is by His wounds that you are healed. Wounded for your transgressions, bruised for your iniquities; chastised so that you could find peace with God, and the power to begin to live a righteous life. But once you come to Christ, this spirit of bondage leading to fear is taken completely away. Listen to Romans chapter 8, verses 14-16 – "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'" "The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

Ah, dear Christian, you needed that conviction of your sins by the Spirit, or you would never have come to Christ. But once you did come to Christ, you found the Spirit bearing witness with your spirit that you were a child of God. That is one of the lines of true assurance. You find that you can now pray to God, and you know that God will hear you as a loving heavenly Father, for Christ's sake. You know this experientially. All of your sins have been forgiven you and you have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit Himself to teach you and lead you in living your Christian life. You are an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ. All of the blessings of salvation which He died to purchase are yours and will become yours over time. Would you have full assurance then? Then realize that all of your salvation rests upon what He did for you. But realize also that that Christ would have you work for Him, labor for Him, do all of your good works for other people, for Him. He would have you to show forth your love for Him, by going about to keep His commandments and learning to please Him, day by day.

3rd – God's people acknowledge with righteous fear that He can be just and loving at the same time.

Verses 27 – "But do not fear, O My servant Jacob, and do not be dismayed, O Israel!" "For behold, I will save you from afar, and your offspring from the land of their captivity; Jacob shall return, have rest, and be at ease; no one shall make him afraid." "Do not fear, O Jacob My servant," says the Lord, for I am with you; for I will make a complete end of all the nations to which I have driven you, but I will not make a complete end of you." "I will rightly correct you, for I will not leave you wholly unpunished." The punishment God is talking about here is loving correction. He will bring us through calamities in order to do us good, and that we might glorify Him by learning how to react rightly to all that comes to us. We have seen that sin is that which brings us into bondage and the captivity of being in the Devil's kingdom. We have seen that Jesus Christ, by His precious blood has brought us near to God, has taken away our reproach and sins, so that no one need make us afraid if we are experiencing His grace at work in our soul.

There will be times in the Christian life when we may still be afraid; afraid of men, afraid of nations, afraid of God's judgments coming upon our nation, and upon the whole earth. But at such times, let us remember what the apostle John tells us in 1st John 4: 17-19. "Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world." "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment." (or punishment) "But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." "We love Him because He first loved us." These, my brethren, are very important principles for us to

remember. Our boldness in the day of judgment is that we have come to know the love of Jesus Christ. His perfect love was to lay down His life for us. Our love for God is perfected in Him. His love, of course, is perfect as He is perfect, and perfectly loved God with all of His heart, and His neighbor as Himself. But His love is being perfected in us, according to our faith in Him, and that faith learned to work by means of love. As Christ was in this world, so also are we.

This means that there will be some suffering that will come to us because we are being made like Him. We are being conformed to His blessed image. In the world, we will have tribulation. We will know men's wrath and hatred against us because by nature, they do not want Christ to rule over them. But perfect love, the love of Christ controlling us, we will cast out the fear of men. We will fear God more, for we will know that after they kill our body they cannot do anything more to us. Our soul is safe, and we are being made perfect in love in suffering or dying in His cause. Let us remember the words of Psalm 56: 3 – "Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You." "In God (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear." "What can flesh do to me?" And verse 13 – "For You have delivered my soul from death." "Have You not kept my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"