

196--Jeremiah: A Righteous Prophet in a Wicked Culture

Jeremiah 2:30-31, *“In vain I have chastened your children; they received no correction. Your sword has devoured your prophets like a destroying lion. O generation, see the word of the Lord!”*

Introduction: Have you ever caught yourself saying,

- “Sometimes, I feel like I’m the only righteous person in the world.”
- Or “This world is just so wicked, where are all the good people these days?”
- Or, “I am not sure it does any good to teach or preach anymore because nobody listens.”

If so, you may be able to learn from Jeremiah. God gives this young prophet a great mission to go speak to a wicked society (1:5-10). His reaction seems to be similar to ours.

Jeremiah began his work as a prophet near the end of Josiah’s reign as king (Jer. 1:2). The nation of Israel was so bad Josiah...

- Found the Book of the Covenant by accident (2 Kings 22:8).
- Had to purge the temple of its pagan influences and idolatrous relics (2 Kings 23:4).
- Fired the idolatrous priests and had them executed (2 Kings 23:5).
- Had to defile the high places, altars and tombs to keep worshippers away from them (2 Kings 23:6-16).

After Josiah’s noble efforts the nation of Israel did not improve. The next king, Jehoiakim, *“did evil in the sight of the Lord...”* (2 Kings 23:37). Zedekiah soon followed him, but we read in 2 Kings 24:19, *“He also did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that Jehoiakim had done.”* Because of their disobedience, the Lord allowed Judah to be sold into captivity. It is in the years just prior to their captivity, that Jeremiah is to warn and prophesy of their doom.

Notice some key points in his message.

I. Jeremiah Sought to Instill A Sense of Shame

A. In Jeremiah 6:13, God is upset at how saturated His people have become in sin.

1. *“...from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely.”*

2. Even worse is that they have no sense of guilt or shame (6:15)--*“Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time I punish them, they shall be cast down,” says the Lord.*”

B. We live in a world that is often unashamed to do wrong and desensitized to sin.

1. Too often, we are not sorry for our sin but sorry we got caught in our sin!
2. True godly sorrow is ashamed of the act of sin and the proof is in the repentance.

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3. 2 Corinthians 7:9-11 says, *“Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.”*

II. Jeremiah Wanted People to Backtrack

A. Jeremiah says in 6:16, *“Thus says the Lord: ‘Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.’”*

1. Judah was trying to get more “progressive” and further from God.

2. Yet, Jeremiah was teaching them to backtrack because it is possible to progress too far.

B. Later, in 31:21 he says, *“Set up signposts, make landmarks; set your heart toward the highway, the way in which you went. Turn back, O virgin of Israel, turn back to these your cities.”*

C. Modern churches today often pride themselves on being “progressive.”

1. Yet, if progress means leaving the “doctrine of Christ” behind we have gone too far.

2. 2 John 9 says, *“Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.”*

3. If you’ve gone beyond the boundaries of God’s Word, God wants you to find out where you got lost along the way and go back to the “old paths” and stop wandering!

III. He Taught People to Look to God for Answers

A. Too often, we try to answer all of life’s problems with our own, limited wisdom, and gut instincts and opinions.

B. Yet, Jeremiah taught, *“O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps”* (10:23).

C. The answer is not self-derived, but of divine origin. *“O Lord, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing”* (10:24).

D. People have opinions on all sorts of subjects...

1. Yet, if these opinions are out of line with God’s revelation they are useless!

2. As Romans 12:16 says, *“Do not be wise in your own opinion.”*

3. Colossians 3:2 says, *“Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”*

IV. Jeremiah Warned of False Religion

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A. Many people today say, “well, we are just all taking different paths to heaven.”

B. Jeremiah plainly mocks that idea saying, “*Because My people have forgotten Me, they have burned incense to worthless idols. And they have caused themselves to stumble in their ways, from the ancient paths, to walk in pathways and not on a highway...*” (18:15).

1. God’s way is the only way...why would we choose another way besides the one He has prepared?

2. Creating your own path to God when one already exists is filled with problems.

C. Jesus once warned, “*Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven*” (Matthew 7:21).

V. Jeremiah Taught the True Glory

A. Jeremiah’s job involved much negative preaching--“*See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out and to pull down, to destroy and to throw down, to build and to plant*” (1:10).

B. Yet, his tearing down was followed by building--“*Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight.*’ says the Lord” (9:23-24).

C. This message still applies to the world today.

1. The world is filled with braggarts who talk of their education and intelligence.

2. The world is often too impressed by strength and athletic ability.

3. The world views true success as measured by riches, houses, possessions.

D. Yet, Jeremiah taught the thing that pleases God most is an obedient knowledge of the Lord (see Hebrews 11:6).

Conclusion: The message of Jeremiah may be 3,000 years old but it is still relevant today. Righteous Christians living in a wicked world still need to preach...

- The shame of sin.
- The need to backtrack and find the true path to Jesus.
- The insufficiency of the human mind to answer divine questions.
- The danger of false religion.
- The true glory of living to glorify God, not ourselves.

Do not wait until you are sold into the slavery of sin, as Israel did, to try and make correction! God was giving Israel a second chance through Jeremiah. Today, God works through preaching to bring you to repentance before sin hardens your heart.