

Sermon for November 10, 2013 – Final Judgment

Jeremiah 26:1-6 (NKJV)

Theme: **Listen to the LORD.**

- 1) *He wants us to repent*
- 2) *He wants us to trust in His mercy*

In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the LORD, saying, ² "Thus says the LORD: `Stand in the court of the LORD'S house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD'S house, all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word. ³ `Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that I may relent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings.' ⁴ "And you shall say to them, `Thus says the LORD: "If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, ⁵ "to heed the words of My servants the prophets whom I sent to you, both rising up early and sending them (but you have not heeded), ⁶ "then I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.'"

The Jews in Jeremiah's day were proud of their heritage. Their forefathers built their nation on the LORD's promises – trusting in Him to protect them through thick and thin. The LORD delivered them with a mighty hand. He gave them his Holy Word. He promised to be their God, and that they would be His people as long as they faithfully kept His Word.

But the golden age of trusting the LORD was long gone. To be sure, the Jews still considered themselves to be "God's people." The problem was that they weren't. Long ago they had stopped studying God's Word. They excused all sorts of sinful behavior and beliefs. Worst of all, they ignored God's prophets who called them to repent. Relying on their heritage, they thought they were safe. And so God threatened them with disaster to show them they had indeed fallen from grace. He commissioned Jeremiah to deliver this message when a new king began to reign.

Brothers and sisters in Christ. We have a rich and wonderful heritage in God's Word. Many of us are life-long members of Immanuel whose grandparents and great-grandparents helped found this congregation. For this we ought to thank God.

But let us also learn from Judah's example not to depend on our heritage to save us. It is so easy to become complacent – to think we don't need to study or strive for the truth because we already have it. To this, the LORD says: *let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.* (1Co 10:12 NKJV) Let us all "take heed" of the message God gave Jeremiah and learn to: **Listen to the LORD.** 1) *He wants us to repent.* 2) *He wants us to trust in His mercy*

Part One: *He wants us to repent.*

Our sermon text begins: *In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the LORD, saying, ² "Thus says the LORD: `Stand in the court of the LORD'S house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD'S house, all the words that I command you to speak to them. Do not diminish a word.*

Note that God commanded Jeremiah to preach in the court of the temple. But why? Weren't those who came to the temple already believers?

The answer is no. Even though the people coming to the temple seemed religious - fulfilling the outward requirements of God's law - the LORD knew that their hearts were far from Him. They pretended to listen, but their listening involved picking and choosing what they wanted to hear and believe. They treated God's word like a buffet, only eating what they wanted and leaving the rest. But the LORD wanted them to listen to ALL of his Word. He didn't want a single word diminished – that is, considered unimportant.

I want to pause here for a moment. We all have a desire in us to pick and choose what we want to believe from the Bible and leave the rest. We may not like what the Bible says about the roles of men and women, so we are tempted to simply ignore it. Sex outside of marriage is so common today, we might choose to ignore what the Bible says about that too. We are tempted to use emotional arguments to trump God's teaching on fellowship. The list can go on, but I think you get the point – we are not immune to the temptation to view God's Word as a Smorgasbord. May God keep us from doing so!

The LORD continues: *Perhaps everyone will listen and turn from his evil way, that I may relent concerning the calamity which I purpose to bring on them because of the evil of their doings.'*

If the Jews would repent like the people of Nineveh did at Jonah's preaching, then the LORD would do for them what He did for Nineveh: He would relent of his anger and spare Judah from disaster. This was God's whole intent: that the people repent and return to him in faith.

"And you shall say to them, `Thus says the LORD: "If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, ⁵ "to heed the words of My servants the prophets whom I sent to you, both rising up early and sending them (but you have not heeded), ⁶ "then I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth."

Time and time again the LORD warned the Jews about their unfaithfulness and idolatry. He sent prophet after prophet to his people, but they did not listen. The Jews called the prophets fanatics and wanted nothing to do with them. "We are God's people," they said to themselves, "We have the temple and we perform the sacrifices and worship God requires. We are good, God-pleasing people. How dare the prophets judge us!"

But through it all, the Jews lost sight of the fact that they were first and foremost sinful and in need of salvation. They lost sight of the fact that the LORD is a jealous God, who will not share his glory with another god – be that god an actual idol or ourselves and our selfish pursuits.

The warning God gave the Jews in Jeremiah's time, he also wanted written for us to hear. It is so easy to come to church, go through the outward motions of worship and not actually **listen** to God - to merely rely on our membership at Immanuel or our heritage as Lutherans to save us. We easily fall into the trap of worshipping two gods: the LORD on Sunday mornings and material things the rest of the week. Yes, we all need to take God's warning to heart. Who of us is without sin? Who of us does not have a selfish heart? We need to repent of our lust for leisure that tries to keep us from worship. We need to repent of our trust in money rather than in God, which prevents us from making bold acts of faith and contributing generously to the work of the LORD through his Church. We need to repent for our indifference to the Word and for our refusing to even consider coming to a Bible class or reading the Bible or a devotional book at home.

And if we don't repent? the LORD says: ⁶ *"then I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth."* Before the temple was built in Jerusalem, God appointed Shiloh to be the place of His presence – the place where He was to be worshipped. But the people of Shiloh's time took the LORD for granted. They didn't listen to His repeated calls to repent, so the LORD removed himself from that place and allowed that city to be utterly destroyed. The same thing eventually happened to Jerusalem.

And what about us? Jesus promised that: *where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.* (Mat 18:20 NKJV) Jesus is here, right now, calling us to repent and trust in him alone for the forgiveness of sin. He is here – ready to share his awesome love and protection with us. But if we ever think we don't need to hear or meditate on His wonderful Word, if we don't heed his call to repent and return to him, then he just may remove his presence from us like He removed it from both Shiloh and Jerusalem.

“LORD, forgive us for the times we have put our trust in money or our heritage rather than you. Forgive us for not listening to you as we ought: with great joy, eager to learn more about you from your Word. Forgive our sins. Create a new heart in us and restore unto us the joy of your salvation.”

Part Two: He wants us to trust His mercy

Brothers and sisters in Christ, if we truly mean what we just prayed than know this: we are forgiven in Christ.

King David once wrote: *The LORD is merciful and gracious, Slow to anger, and abounding in mercy.* ⁹ *He will not always strive with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever.* ¹⁰ *He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities.* ¹¹ *For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him;* ¹² *As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us.* ¹³ *As a father pities his children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him.* (Psa 103:8-13 NKJV)

The LORD truly desires our eternal salvation. How much? So much that He sent His one and only Son to die for our sins. He doesn't want us lost. He takes no pleasure in the death and damnation of the wicked. And this is the reason He is constantly calling us to repent of our sin and turn to Him for forgiveness.

Last week we celebrated the Reformation. October 31 was the day Martin Luther posted the 95 theses on the Castle Church door in Wittenberg. Do you know what the very 1st thesis said? This: *When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” [Matt. 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance.*

The word repent means “to turn”. The life of a Christian is one of constantly turning – away from sin and death and to salvation and life. Repentance is not just something we do once before we become Christian, and then we are good. It is something we are constantly doing. Why? Because of our sinful nature that keeps tempting us away from Christ. This is why we need to be in God's Word, studying His Law so we recognize our helplessness – that we need Jesus every moment of our lives. And after we recognize this need for forgiveness, the LORD wants us to trust His mercy. Jesus has paid for our sins in full – how wonderful is this news! He has reconciled us with God. He has chosen us as His own dearly loved children so that we can serve him in everlasting, righteousness, innocence and blessedness now and for all eternity. As we cling to Christ through faith in His Word, we don't have to be afraid of any disaster. We don't have to be afraid of the soon approaching day of judgment! And why not? Because the LORD remains with us and will deliver us from this evil world to be with him forever in heaven.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ – don't treat God's Word with contempt. **Listen to the LORD.** 1) *He wants us to repent.* 2) *He wants us to trust in His mercy.* Amen.