

What Will You Do In The End?

<i>Text</i>	Jeremiah 5:31
<i>Readings</i>	Revelation 6; Jeremiah 5
<i>Theme</i>	The Lord would bring judgement on Jerusalem for the sin of the prophets, priests and people.
<i>Purpose</i>	To warn us of the judgement of the Lord on us and our nation if we do not turn to him.

Congregation,

All of us have had times when we have been looking for someone. Maybe you were in a large gathering of people, like a fair or a conference or the A&P show. You went looking for one person and you couldn't find them. It is very difficult to find one person in a large crowd of people.

Now the Lord told Jeremiah to look for someone in the large crowds of Jerusalem; but it was going to be difficult to find this person. That instruction comes in verse 1: "Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem, look around and consider, search through her squares. See if you can find but one person who deals honestly and who seeks the truth, and I will forgive this city."

The Lord was looking for people of justice and faithfulness in the city of Jerusalem but he couldn't find them. He challenged the prophet to see if he could find anyone like this, and if so, he would forgive the city. If not, he would condemn it in judgement.

This reminds us of Psalm 14:2-3 – "The Lord looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned aside."

It also reminds us of the conversation Abraham had with the Lord about the destruction God planned to bring on the city of Sodom. Abraham was concerned about that because his nephew Lot lived there with his wife and children. He bargained with God asking him to spare the city if there were 50 righteous people in it. After further discussion he dared to take it down to ten – even then the Lord promised to spare the city.

In the case of Jerusalem the Lord was more generous – "If you can but find *one* person...I will forgive this city." The Lord did not mean this literally because there were a number of righteous people in the city – Jeremiah, his friend Baruch, King Josiah and others. But he put it like this to show the desperate state of Judah. Sin was widespread. Most had turned away from the Lord. The people worshipped idols and practiced the immorality that went with the pagan fertility religions. There was corruption and injustice.

This sin was universal through Judah – it touched every level and every class of society.

At first Jeremiah looked at *the common people* described in verses 3-4. The Lord had tried to bring them back to himself but they had hardened themselves in sin and refused to repent.

The prophet was prepared to make some allowances for them because perhaps they didn't know any better. They had not been taught the way of the Lord; what could you expect?

So he went to *the leaders* of the people, expecting more of them (verse 5). Surely they knew the way of the Lord and his requirements? But they too had rebelled against the Lord. They were like an ox used for ploughing that had broken off its yoke and refused to obey its master any more.

The rest of chapter 5 is a description of the sin of Judah and a warning of the judgement that would come. It ends with a graphic summary of this evil and the Lord's assessment of it:

An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy
falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; my people love to have it so, but
what will you do when the end comes?

1. First of all let's consider **the sin of the prophets**

The prophets of Judah were supposed to be God's spokesmen.

God used them to communicate his word to his people. They were his mouthpiece. They were to proclaim his truth and his law.

But an appalling change had taken place in Judah; instead of speaking truth, they spoke lies. Instead of speaking the word of the Lord, they spoke their own words. They spoke the exact opposite of what they were supposed to speak!

Jeremiah, a true prophet of God, had warned Judah that God would send a foreign nation to punish his people.

But the false prophets said the opposite; No, the Lord won't do anything! He is a God of love! And this is his city and his temple. No harm will come to us. We'll be all right. No need to be disturbed or anxious. Don't listen to that doomsayer Jeremiah. God will look after us. (verse 12)

But the Lord had something to say about these false prophets in chapter 6:14 -

They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,'
they say, when there is no peace.

They were like a doctor who fails to make an accurate diagnosis of the condition of a man who is seriously ill. He briefly examines the patient and tells him he is fine – it will pass, you will be okay, no need to worry, soon you'll be up and about again!

But that is no help to a person who is very sick and rapidly declining in health. A man in such a situation needs to hear the truth and needs a remedy, even if it is drastic.

These prophets were doing the same as this doctor – they were covering over the real problem and pretending all was well.

And the Lord condemned them for their lies and deceit and their loathsome conduct.

Compare this to **the church today**.

It is appalling that today too there are many pastors and theologians who are preaching their own ideas rather than the word of the Lord from the Bible.

Some have gone so far as to say they don't believe in the Bible. They don't believe it is the word of God and claim that it is the words of men – stories people wrote about the God and about Jesus. These are the false prophets of the church today.

Others have more confidence in the Bible but they don't present a clear message of the Lord from the Scriptures. Their sermons are full of their own ideas and thoughts and quotes of the ideas of other people. Their message is vague and indefinite, wishy-washy and unclear.

Yet what we need today is a clear, straight-forward, plain message from the Bible. The church and the nation need to hear the word of God – plain and simple.

2. This brings us to consider, secondly, the sin of the priests.

Their sin was closely connected with that of the prophets.

“The priests rule by their own authority.” The way this is written in the Hebrew Bible suggests that they worked hand in glove with the false prophets. The New English Bible translates this; “prophets prophesy lies and priests go hand in hand with them.” They were in this together – partners in crime.

The task of the priests was to administer the sacrificial system and to teach God's law.

The people were to come together in Jerusalem at the feasts and festivals and the priests were to read the law and explain it, as Ezra did in Jerusalem after the exile.

The problem was that the priests in Jeremiah's day did not know the law of God.

In fact, it had even been lost for a while until it was found in the time of Josiah. Hilkiah, the High Priest, had been cleaning up in the temple and had found a scroll which turned out to be the Book of the Law! (2 Kings 22:8). This is what had inspired the reforms of Josiah.

But even though this law had been found, the priests still ignored it. They weren't interested in knowing what God commanded. They didn't teach or rule by the authority of God or by the authority of his law, but they ruled by their own authority.

They did what was right in their own eyes. They made up their own laws and rules.

We are in a very **similar situation today**.

The law of God is ignored in some churches.

Some who claim to be Christians don't live by God's commands. They do what they want to do; they make their own decisions about what is right and wrong.

Then there are those in the church who reinterpret the laws of God and relegate them to the past, like God's commands against homosexuality. That was an old law for those times, they say, but we know better than that!

The law of God is also ignored in society today. Those in government rule by their own authority. They make up their own laws. They decide what is right and wrong and they do this without any reference to the Bible.

We have seen many examples of this in New Zealand in recent times with legislation that has given legal recognition to homosexuality, to prostitution, and to civil unions between same sex couples. All of these are examples of leaders who rule by their own authority without any regard for the commands of God in the Bible.

What was shocking in Judah was that the people "love it this way"!

3. So, in the third place, we consider **the sin of the people**

The people of Judah loved it this way because they were free to do their own thing. They could keep on sinning and no one would tell them off. So they carried on with their idolatry and immorality and adultery.

The rich and wealthy indulged themselves without a thought for the poor or needy.

They did not plead the case of the fatherless nor did they defend the rights of the poor (verse 28).

The prophets and the priests allowed them to continue on in like this and even encouraged it. They left the people free to choose their own path and they did not make them feel guilty. They did not give them any qualms of conscience.

So the people carried on. They delighted in their sin. They enjoyed this situation. They liked to hear easy and soothing words, not like that wet blanket Jeremiah! What a pessimist he was! They did not want to hear the truth about their situation; rather, they loved it the way it was and they didn't want anyone to rock their boat, or disturb their comfort, or challenge them about their sin or their lifestyle.

It is the same today. Most thoughtful people know there is something drastically wrong with our society, but very few want to hear a biblical diagnosis of this situation, especially if it deals with their own sin and guilt before a holy God.

No, they love it just the way it is. Their situation is not perfect but they don't want Christians telling them what to do and they certainly don't want God telling them how to rule their lives or pointing out their sin.

It's been said that a country gets the government it deserves and that may well be the case in our situation, especially in a democracy where we vote in the government we want – a Big Brother who will look after all our needs.

“...and my people love it this way”!

4. But the prophet Jeremiah raised the prospect of **the judgement**

“But what will you do in the end?”

This is not going to go on forever, he warned. God is not mocked. A judgement is coming.

There had already been some warning of what was to come. God had struck his people already (verse 3) but they felt no pain – they had ignored him. He had with-held the autumn and spring rains as a sign of his displeasure, but there was no response. They didn't say; “Let us fear the Lord our God.”

In the same way God warns us of the judgement that is going to come. He does that in natural disasters, like a massive tsunami, or an earthquake, or a flood. Not that those who die in these are better or worse than us, but all of these are warnings that we too will perish unless we repent (Luke 13:1-5).

The judgement against Judah had to come because their sin was an offence against the holiness and majesty of God. The Lord had no option. Judgement was necessary. After recalling all their sin the Lord asked; “Should I not punish them for this? Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this?” (verse 29)

It is the same today. God cannot let all this go unpunished. As in the days before the flood God says; “My Spirit will not contend with man forever.” (Gen 6:3). People cannot turn away from a holy God and disregard him and expect to carry on as usual. God is not “an old man rocking in a chair, blind and hard of hearing.” (Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, p. 48). No, he is a God of justice who is all powerful and almighty and he will judge the sin of this world and of our lives.

In his classic story “Pilgrim’s Progress”, John Bunyan named the town in which Christian lived “The City of Destruction”. That is a fitting name for all our cities and towns unless there is a genuine repentance from sin and turning to God.

For Judah that judgement was going to come through **a foreign nation**. At the beginning of Jeremiah’s ministry it was not clear which nation that would be. Egypt, Assyria and Babylon were the three main world powers. As time went on the prophet warned that God would use Babylon as an instrument of his judgement.

For us, in this New Testament age, the judgement will come **at the return of the Lord Jesus**. He will come as the judge of all. He will be assisted by his angels. They will gather all the people who have lived in all the nations through all of history. Every person will have to stand before the judgement throne of God. No one will escape. Every evil doer will be punished.

The prophet Zephaniah pictured the Lord searching Jerusalem with lamps to punish those who are complacent and think, “the Lord will do nothing” (Zephaniah 1:12).

Jeremiah was told to search for one righteous man. Zephaniah pictured the Lord searching for every evildoer to bring them to judgement.

In the days of Jeremiah the Lord showed some mercy and the people of Judah were not completely destroyed (verses 10 & 18).

In the final judgement the Lord will also show mercy to all who have believed in the Lord Jesus and followed him and put his words into practice in their lives.

In his vision of the end in the book of Revelation John saw kings and princes, slave and freeman hiding in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. “They called to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’” (Revelation 6:15-17).

That echoes the question of Jeremiah;

“But what will you do in the end?”

The Word of God addresses that question to you as well;

What will *you* do when Jesus returns?

Where will you turn?

Will you be safe?

Will you be able to stand secure through faith in the Lord Jesus?

Amen.