

FACING THE IRE OF GOD

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Scripture: Jeremiah 7-8

Often when we talk about God, we think about all His wonderful attributes. We love talking about His love and how much He loves us. And we love talking about His compassion that He brings in the relationship that we have. We love to talk about His faithfulness and how He continues to sustain us. We love talking about the way in which He gives to us, how generous He is. These are all facets of who He is.

But tucked away in the Scriptures every now and then, is a reminder too, that God is a just God, that there are some lines that He will not cross or allow us to cross, and that there are some bars that He will not lower.

You remember the one who came to Jesus and asked: What must I do? And Jesus told him, "Sell all you have, give to the poor, and then come follow me." And he was a rich man and couldn't do that. and it says that it was a sad moment because Jesus loved him. And yet, Jesus let him go. Jesus didn't call him back and try to bargain with him: Okay, don't give everything. Give me 10%, or 20% or 30. No! He let him go. There are some things that a holy God will not compromise on.

And I was led to this passage in Jeremiah 7 and 8 Jeremiah 7:16. Let us read this verse as a preamble for us, as an introduction to what we'd like to be thinking about today.

Pray no more. As for you, do not pray for these people, do not lift up, cry or pray for them, and do not intercede with me, for I do not hear you. Strange words coming from God!

This is a word to Jeremiah, the prophet at that time in Judah, telling him to stop praying, stop begging for these people. Stop crying for these people. Jeremiah, as you know, was called the weeping prophet because he wept before the people. He wept before God asking for God's mercy, calling the children of Judah to repentance. For forty long years he did that. and now, as we read in this 7th chapter, God is saying: "Stop. Stop your praying. Stop your begging. Stop your crying. For I will not listen." Most of the time, our problem is that we pray too little. We're not that much of prayers. And yet, here we come to a place where God is telling somebody who was praying so earnestly, to stop.

Why was God saying that? The answer to that is actually in the text. "Because judgment was unavoidable." Judgment was already in place. Judgment had already been initiated. There was no room now for repentance. It was over. That window had closed. God had already opened the windows on judgment for the children of Judah. Israel, as you know, had already been taken into captivity, and God's judgment had already started. At least two of the deportations to Babylon had already happened. God had decided that this was how the children of Israel were going to pay for all that they had done.

And so He tells Jeremiah: Stop praying, Jeremiah. It's like praying for a sick person, and that person is no more. God has taken that person home and He says: Stop praying. You don't need to pray any longer. That prayer is ineffective as of now. Three times, in fact, in the book of Jeremiah, God says to Jeremiah: Stop! Here in 7:16, and then once again in 11:14 and then 14:11-12. God says: Jeremiah, Stop praying.

When you stop and think about it, that a terrible place to be, if the Lord God Almighty is saying; Stop praying for you. The finality of something like that is so chilling, is so scary, in fact. And it's a stark reminder that when we refuse to listen to God, then there's no other recourse but to face the anger of God.

Which again begs the question: What made God so angry that He was led to this kind of a place to allow judgment to come upon them, and to stop Jeremiah from praying?
vv. 23-31 among others scattered through this whole book are just indictments that God has given. But let's focus on these –

23 But what I told them was: "Obey me, and I will be your God and you shall be my people; only do as I say, and all shall be well!" 24 But they wouldn't listen; they kept on doing whatever they wanted to, following their own stubborn, evil thoughts. They went backward instead of forward. 25 Ever since the day your fathers left Egypt until now, I have kept on sending them my prophets, day after day. 26 But they wouldn't listen to them or even try to hear. They are hard and stubborn and rebellious—worse even than their fathers were. 27 Tell them everything that I will do to them, but don't expect them to listen. Cry out your warnings, but don't expect them to respond. 28 Say to them: "This is the nation that refuses to obey the Lord its God and refuses to be taught. She continues to live a lie. 29 O Jerusalem, shave your head in shame and weep alone upon the mountains; for the Lord has rejected and forsaken this people of his wrath." 30 For the people of Judah have sinned before my very eyes, says the Lord. They have set up their idols right in my own Temple, polluting it. 31 They have built the altar called Topheth in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, and there they burn to death their little sons and daughters as sacrifices to their gods—a deed so horrible I've never even thought of it, let alone commanded it to be done."

What a list of indictments. Take them one by one.

1. Disobedience to God's Word.

There's a very cryptic line right there. It says: They are worse even than their fathers were.

I want to put that in a little bit of context as we look at their fathers, their grandparents and the heritage that they had. Let's go back about 200 odd years to the prophet Elijah. Elijah was prophesying around 870 BC (Jeremiah is around 640 BC). This is what God said.

Elijah recounts it in 1 Kings 16:30-34

"30 Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him." Ahab, the son of Omri, did more evil than everybody who had come before. And God is telling Jeremiah that these people have done worse than them.

31 And as though it had been a trivial thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. 32 So he erected an altar for Baal at the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. 33 Ahab also made the Asherah (which was a pole that stood to the goddess of fertility from the Canaanite people). So Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him. Then if you want to see the absolute depravity to which the people had sunk in the time of Ahab. 34 In his days Hiel the Bethelite rebuilt Jericho; he laid its foundations with the loss of Abiram his firstborn, and set up its gates with the loss of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the Lord, which He spoke by Joshua the son of Nun."

They rebuilt the walls that God had brought down. And the reason that this is so important is that if you go back and look at Joshua 6:20 – After the walls of Jericho had fallen down and they saw the

wonder and the awesome power of God that He brought down the walls without them having to do anything except walk around it, Joshua then said this to the people.

Joshua 6:26 Then Joshua made them take an oath at that time, saying, "Cursed before the Lord is the man who rises up and builds this city Jericho; with the loss of his firstborn he will lay its foundation, and with the loss of his youngest son he will set up its gates."

And that is exactly what Hiel did at the time of Ahab, completely disobedient to what God had said. Even the loss of his firstborn didn't deter him from doing something that was forbidden by God; he was willing to even give up his second son, his youngest son. God is saying to Jeremiah that these people have done even more than that kind of depravity and sin and disobedience,

2. They wouldn't listen to God.

They followed their own stubborn, evil thoughts, yet they did not incline their ear but walked by their own advice and in the stubbornness of their evil hearts. And they went backward and not forward.

Somewhere along the line, as we listened to this passage of scripture, as it happened to me, I kind of left the children of Israel and began to allow God to deal with me. On the one hand, we're seeing how straight God can be about some of the things that He will not compromise on, that He takes things very seriously. And halfway through, even as I was preparing, I realized that we cannot just look at the children of Israel and say, "This is what they did!" We have to look at it for ourselves as well and ask the question: Does it relate? Can I see anything that is going on here in my life that would incur this kind of a response from God, that He stops listening? I want to invite you to allow that attitude to settle. I truly believe that these passages of scripture in the Bible are meant for us to see if there needs to be a realignment. See if there needs to be something that we need to do to have fellowship with God once again.

He says, "They wouldn't listen because they were stubborn and just consumed with their own evil thoughts and followed their own advice. And instead of moving forward, they went backward. That phrase is so powerful! When you think about the life that we are supposed to live as His disciples, that we walk in holiness, we walk in fellowship with the Living God, can we say that we are moving forward, moving into His presence every day, every moment, that we are pressing into Him? Or do we look at our lives and say: MY goodness! I'm way back there. I used to have a good relationship with Him but now I don't. I'm not moving forward anymore.

And then God says they wouldn't listen or even hear. He says, "Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt, until this day, I have sent you all my servants, the prophets, sending them daily again and again. yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck." They wouldn't listen.

Beloved, we have the prophets contained in the Word of God today. And the question for us is: Do we pay attention to the Word of God? Do we know the Word of God? Are we spending time in it? Do we know the things that God doesn't like? Or do we do like the children of Judah did? They did not listen to the prophets. They were hard, stubborn and rebellious.

Wonder what it is that makes us hard and calloused? When you see yourself, is there some kind of hardness that has come because of something that you are holding on to? Something you know that shouldn't be there and stubbornly saying, "Lord, this I will not give up." It could be anything. But you would know because God will deal with you every day about that. What is it that God is saying to you? "That particular thing is not from Me. It's something that you shouldn't have. Allow Me to soften that part of you, to give you back gentleness in that area."

Rebellion in the Bible is equivalent to the sin of divination. That's what the Bible tells us. And God detests divination.

Proverbs 29:1 *"He who is often reproved, yet stiffens his neck will suddenly be broken beyond healing."*

How careful we need to be about those things that we hold dearly to, that really are not godly things or even things that are not from God or not what God wants.

Romans 2:5 says *"But because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed."* God's anger is being incurred. And then God says, *"They refuse to obey and they refuse to be taught."*

One of the things I shared with our new members recently is what we look for in leaders in the church. We look at all the things that Titus and Timothy talk about in terms of elders, and those are the criteria we use. But we also have three other things which we call the FAT principle. It stands for Faithfulness, Availability, and Teachability. And all three of them are necessary. You can't be faithful and available if you're not teachable. It doesn't work. You can't be teachable and available if you're not faithful. It doesn't work. We have to be children, constantly learning. We cannot come to a point in our lives where we say, "I know the Bible. I'm done. There's nothing more to learn." God continues to reveal His mind and His heart for us through His Word.

3. Truth has perished.

There's no more truth. it's dead. It's gone. Which means that all the people are living in a lie. Truth has perished and has been cut off from their mouth. How important is truth? Jesus said: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. God is truth. that is why in Romans 1 – His anger is against the suppression of truth. In v. 18-19 it says: *"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them."* Jesus said: I have come to testify to the truth. Truth was on trial even at that time, and continues to be even as it was in the days of Jeremiah.

So, as we look at all of these indictments, we need to be very careful, that while we enjoy all the wonderful benevolent things of God's character that He brings and we enjoy, we must also recognize that there are some things that He will not compromise on.

Why had judgment come upon the children?

Why was it too late for Jeremiah to pray, that God told him to stop. The answer is found in Jeremiah 8:4-7

⁴ *"You shall say to them, 'Thus says the LORD,
"Do men fall and not get up again?*

Does one turn away and not repent?

⁵ *"Why then has this people, Jerusalem,*

Turned away in continual apostasy?

They hold fast to deceit,

They refuse to return.

⁶ *"I have listened and heard,*

They have spoken what is not right;

No man repented of his wickedness,

Saying, 'What have I done?'

*Everyone turned to his course,
Like a horse charging into the battle.
7 "Even the stork in the sky
Knows her seasons;
And the turtledove and the swift and the thrush
Observe the time of their migration;
But My people do not know
The judgment of the LORD.*

Why was God angry? Because there was no repentance from the people. They were in continual apostasy. What is apostasy? It is knowing God, but refusing to acknowledge Him, follow Him, or doing what He wanted them to do. The key word, actually, there is continual apostasy. It's this continual thing that gets us into trouble. Watch out for those things in our lives that are always ongoing.

The writer of Hebrews also says: Things that are not just one off, but things that continue on. The sin that we do day in and day out, that's the one you need to be careful about, because that has become brazen sin that is beyond asking for repentance from God. Continual apostasy, deceitful, not spoken the truth, doing their own thing, unaware that one day they're going to be judged by God.

For them the window had closed. And I know for us, as we are here, we have breath, we are living. And we live in this dispensation of grace where God's favor rests upon us. He invites us to ask for His forgiveness and cleansing. But beloved, there's a window there as well. I tell you this: there is nothing more stark than the reality of standing in a cemetery amidst the hundreds of graves and realize that the time for each one of them under that stone is over. The window had closed.

And none of us has a guarantee on our next breath. And if our next breath doesn't happen, that's the window that closes. Seek ye the Lord while He may be found. While you can, that's the time to seek Him. And once it's too late, He cannot be found. There is no way to ask for repentance after we have died. No way! It's gone.

The only time and place for us to look at all of these things – disobedience, apostasy, not reading the Word – all of these things that God had such an issue with the children of Judah. The only way is to ask for His forgiveness, to repent and seek His cleansing. If we confess our sins, He is faithful. He is a just God. He'll forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So let's leave the children of Judah. Let us take all those indictments and let if fall on us and see if any of them stick. The ones that stick don't have any business being a part of our lives, for those are points of anger from God. Those are things that He cannot stand. He is a holy God and His anger falls on those areas. See ye the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake their ways.

This is the time that we have, while we have breath. Let's just spend a few moments of quiet. Would you allow the Holy Spirit, give permission to the Holy Spirit to speak to you/me and point out if there's anything in our hearts, in our lives that don't line up with the holy will of God for us. Then seek His forgiveness, repent of it, invite His cleansing while we have time.

Amen.
