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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
November 10, 2013
25th Sunday after Pentecost
Last Judgment Sunday

Scripture Lessons: 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10; Luke 19:11-27
Hymns: 279; 608; 605; 32:1,4 (798:1,2,4)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Jeremiah 26:1-6

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.’”” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God!

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, who will come again in glory to Judge the living and the dead, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: Judgment

There is judgment and **then** there is **judgment!** The Prophet Jeremiah was a prophet to the people of Judah. He worked in the days of some very wicked kings, the last four kings who ruled over Judah before they were taken into captivity. This judgment was more than just a 70 year period in which the people of Judah lived in a foreign land. It was a severe judgment from God. This judgment was the horrific conquest of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar. It included the slaughter of many of the people of Israel, and the starvation of many thousands more while Jerusalem was besieged. Only a small remnant survived the terrors of Nebuchadnezzar, and even those suffered greatly at his cruel hands.

This was a great and terrible judgment from God against all those refused to repent of their sins of idolatry and other great sins. Jeremiah was sent by God along with a number of other prophets, to warn of the judgment to come. These prophets were sent with a message from to try to save people from suffering the consequences of their sin.

There is judgment and then there is judgment! God still warns of judgment to come upon all those who do not repent, but as horrible as the judgment was that befell Judah, the eternal judgment, the final judgment holds far greater terrors for all who fall victim to it.

As we near the end of the Church year we consider the end of this world, we consider the coming judgment that shall be brought upon this world and all who are in it. The message of Jeremiah still fits for us today, for the Lord who desires all men to be saved sends forth His messengers with --

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THEME: God's Urgent Warning of Coming Judgment.

As we look more closely at the words the Lord gave to Jeremiah let us consider --

I. The Intended Audience for this Call to Repentance.

Jeremiah 26:1-2 “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.’”

The Lord sent Jeremiah to the temple courts, where people were coming to worship the Lord. The Lord sent Jeremiah to declare an urgent call to repentance to people who appeared to already be repentant, at least outwardly. They were coming to the temple in Jerusalem bringing their sacrifices, and observing the ceremonies and feast, and singing the psalms and hearing the words as the priest declared the Word of the Lord. Why should the Lord send Jeremiah to the temple? Why would the Lord choose these people as the select audience for this message?

The answer is twofold. First the Lord tells us plainly that the people were coming to the temple from all the cities and towns of the kingdom of Judah. By declaring the Lord’s message to this assembly the message would be heard by people from all over the country. The message would go back to all these different towns and cities. The news of what happened in the temple courts as the people assembled for worship would be heard by virtually all the people! The vast majority of the population of the kingdom would receive word of this urgent call to repentance. They would hear the warning of the judgment that was about to befall the land.

The second point is that these were the people that needed to hear the message. Yes, without doubt there were some among the crowds that gathered at the temple for worship that day who were sincere and devout in their worship of the Lord. However, the people of Judah had also been practicing idolatry at their altars on the high hills and in the groves where they had erected their idols with their altars, all the while thinking that as long they continued to observe the feasts and sacrifices of the Lord, and keep the Sabbath, the Lord shouldn't have a problem with it. They were just trying to cover all the spiritual bases. They thought that maybe these other gods were also legitimate powers that should also be appeased. In fact they would finally move a number of the altars and idols right into the temple courts, where they would also worship the sun, and the moon, and all the heavenly host right along with the Lord! The Lord saw their idolatry as spiritual adultery.

This was very much the audience that needed to hear this call to repentance that the Lord was proclaiming through Jeremiah. They needed to know and understand that their spiritual trysts with the false gods of the nations surrounding them would be their doom! It was time to repent. It was time to see their sin and wickedness for what it was, the evil that would bring them to destruction!

What does this mean for us? We live in very different times. We are not about to face Nebuchadnezzar and his armies. We are not going to fall victim to the forces of destruction that leveled Jerusalem and brought death upon so many of its people. **The Lord still calls for repentance. The Lord warns us yet today of coming judgment.** Indeed, it won't be Nebuchadnezzar this time. It will be someone far more powerful with much greater armies at His disposal. It will be the Lord Jesus Christ coming with flames of fire, and all the holy angels with Him! The judgment He brings to the earth will be just. The destruction that He brings will be complete. This isn't the time to postpone repentance. This is the day of

salvation. This is our time of grace. Once the Lord appears it will be too late.

The makeup of Jeremiah's audience is significant for us also. It is too easy for people who go to church to point their fingers at others as being the ones who need to repent. It is too easy for Christians to go to church and let the message go in one ear and out the other. There are too many churches who have taken virtually the same position about the gods of this world as the people of Judah that Jeremiah originally addressed. They equivocate, "Who's to say other gods aren't as real as the God we worship? Who's to say that there aren't different ways to eternal life alongside of believing in Jesus? Who's to say that people with alternate lifestyles aren't in God's favor? Who's to say what is sinful for other people when it is simply a part of their private lives and the function of their own bodies?"

Who's to say? The Lord Himself will have His say! The Lord has already told us what is sin, and He has told us that sin brings death and damnation. The Lord has had His say, and He has declared that **judgment is impending**. There is an **urgency** connected to this message. Just as there was the urgency of impending judgment in Jeremiah's day, so that urgency is with us today, for we do not know the day or the hour when the Lord Jesus shall return. We do not know when, but we do know His --

II. Message – Listen Up: Your Eternal Life Is at Stake!

Jeremiah 26:4-6 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 Lord doesn't mince words here with Judah. If the people would not turn away for their sin and idolatry **bad** things were going to happen. The land would be destroyed. Things would be as bleak as they had become in Shiloh, which once had been a thriving place when the tabernacle of the Lord was located there, before the temple was built, but it was nothing in Jeremiah's day. It could just as well have been a ghost town. So there is an **urgent** call here. The Lord had sent messengers before, **early on**, and a good number of them, more than whose names appear as titles for books of the Bible. The people just didn't listen! Even when there were good kings over the land who tried to bring reform, most of the people maintained their evil ways. The voice of Jeremiah was the **final call**. If they still refused to listen and heed the Lord's call for repentance such judgment would befall them that the name of Jerusalem would be used as a reference to being cursed.

God's grace is found within that message. You may say what? Where? God's grace **is** found within that message in that He sent the message at all! He wasn't sending the prophets of doom to rub it in, because the Lord found some pleasure in the judgment that was to befall Judah. Not at all! It was the Lord's hope that they would hear, and turn away from their sin. He told Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 26:2-3 ““Speak ... 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.””

He didn't want to bring calamity upon the land and destroy all of Judah. He didn't want to bring death and condemnation. **He wanted them to live!** It is even as the Lord declared through Ezekiel, a contemporary of Jeremiah, who had been taken captive to Babylon.

Ezekiel 33:11 ‘As I live,’ says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?’

The Lord was offering them life through repentance and faith. They needed to turn away from their sin. They needed to trust the Lord for forgiveness and life and salvation. That was all He wanted for them. That was the message that He had delivered to them with the earlier prophets. Repent! Turn away from sin and find forgiveness in the mercies of our God! The Lord declared this saving truth clearly, pleading through Isaiah:

Isaiah 1: 16-18 “Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, 17 Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow. 18 “Come now, and let us reason together,” Says the Lord, “Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.”

Again, all this remains true for us today. The Lord still calls urgently for repentance. **“The Lord ... is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance”** (2 Peter 3:9). Yes, the only reason that the Judgment has not come already is because the Lord still doesn’t have any pleasure in the death of the wicked. He wants **all** people **everywhere** to see their sin, and turn away from it, and not get caught up in the judgment to come. He doesn’t want to send anybody to eternal perdition. He doesn’t desire any to suffer the eternal fires of hell! But if they persist in sin and unbelief, rejecting the sacrifice Christ made for them then God will have no choice. Tragically many, many, far too many shall hear the words, **“Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels”** (Matthew 25:41).

But that is not the Lord's desire for you, or your family, or even your worst enemy, for we were all by nature God's enemies, but He still desires our salvation for –

1 Timothy 2:3-6 “God our Savior ... desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”

Yes, He not only desired our salvation, but He provided that salvation by sending His Son to ransom us from sin and death. Jesus paid the price of our salvation, and then ascended on high where he intercedes for us before the throne of God. It is because Jesus pleads for us according to the mercies of His grace and according to the merits of His sacrifice that we are not condemned.

Hear **God's Urgent Warning of Coming Judgment!** Take it to heart. Realize the danger of your sin, and repent! Turn away from every evil way, and turn to Jesus! Cling to the merits of His cross, and know the grace that saves, yes, even a wretch like me!

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.