

"God's Word"

Jeremiah 36

Baxter Exum (#970)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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Introduction:

This morning we have come together to study the word of God! This morning, I would like for us to go back once again and consider a passage from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, and we will be looking together this morning at **Jeremiah 36**. If you are visiting with us this morning, you might want to know that the passage is found in our pew Bibles on page 1247. **»PPT»** I believe the painting on the wall this morning can be found in the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican in Rome.

You might remember that Jeremiah was called by God as a teenager, and he was called as a prophet to preach the word of God in some of the darkest times in the history of God's people. Over his lifetime, Jeremiah had the privilege of preaching during the reign of five kings, and by the end of his ministry, the Southern Kingdom of Israel had completely rejected God's message, and they were taken away as prisoners of war as the city of Jerusalem eventually fell to the Babylonian army in 586 BC. As a result of rejecting God, they would remain in captivity for a period of more than 70 years.

At the beginning, Jeremiah was calling the people to repent, but over time (as they refused to listen) Jeremiah's message turned into a warning, that their time was now up. We see such a warning in **Jeremiah 25:8-11**, ***"Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Because you have not obeyed My words, behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' declares the LORD, 'and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will utterly destroy them and make them a horror and a hissing, and an everlasting desolation. Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years.'***"

This particular prophecy brings us to our passage for this morning. The events recorded for us in **Jeremiah 36** take place in 604 BC—the fourth year of Jehoiakim, King of Judah. The timing is significant, because the previous summer the Babylonians had defeated the Egyptians in the battle of Carchemish. Up until this time, Jehoiakim had been trusting in Egypt for protection, he was basically a puppet

king, and now he is trusting in the protection of a world superpower that had just been defeated.

Now that Egypt had been conquered, therefore, the future of the Southern Kingdom of Israel was precarious, to say the least. The words of warning that Jeremiah had spoken earlier now appear to have at least a chance of coming true. The Northern Kingdom had already been taken into Assyrian captivity many years earlier (in 721 BC), but now the Southern Kingdom was heading down the exact same path. And yet in spite of the warnings, they were still worshiping gods of wood and stone, they were still sacrificing their children to the pagan gods. And so God was now getting even closer to bringing judgment on the Southern Kingdom. God was getting ready to unleash a world superpower on His own people, once again.

Even from a human viewpoint, if we look at a map we see the problem. Babylon is located to the northwest, Egypt is located to the southeast, Jerusalem is right there in the middle, and King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (having defeated the Egyptians up near the Euphrates River) now starts moving his armies down toward Egypt! By the time we get to **Jeremiah 36**, the armies of Babylon have made it all the way to the town of Ashkelon, only 35 miles from the city of Jerusalem. They are closing in—Egypt is on the run.

I do not know if we can imagine the seriousness of this situation. For just a minute, try to imagine with me that our nation has been invaded by a million-man enemy army. We have been completely overwhelmed, they came up through the Gulf of Mexico, the enemy soldiers have wiped out everything in the southern and central United States, and they are headed north. We find out that the entire enemy army has assembled down in Janesville. They have completely wiped out everything south of Janesville. And we find out they are headed for Lodi—that is their goal. But thankfully, we have a special agreement. Apparently, several years ago we swore allegiance to the village of Lodi, and in response, the Lodi Police Department has promised to offer us their protection. And so here we are in between a million man army and the city of Lodi, and we are the only thing standing in the way. Perhaps we can start to understand the seriousness of what is about to happen. King Jehoiakim is a dead man—he just does not know it yet!

And in response to the threat from the Babylonian armies, King Jehoiakim calls on the people to fast. He does not call for repentance, but he calls for an outward religious ritual—something that God had never even commanded! At this critical time, the prophet Jeremiah steps forward with a rather unwelcome message concerning the word of God.

I realize that this happened more than 2,600 years ago, and yet I would remind all of us of something that has already been said very well, **“If man has learned anything from history it is that he has learned nothing from history.”** This morning, therefore, I would like for us to consider a lesson from history concerning the word of God. I would like for us to take one section at a time and bring out a lesson about God’s word from each passage.

I. One of the first lessons we learn comes from verses 1-10, as we find that GOD'S AUTHORITATIVE AND POWERFUL WORD HAS BEEN MADE AVAILABLE. »PPT»

If you will, please look with me at the first ten verses of **Jeremiah 36**—the message from God as the Babylonian armies close in on Jerusalem—**Jeremiah 36:1-10**...

¹ In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, ² "Take a scroll and write on it all the words which I have spoken to you concerning Israel and concerning Judah, and concerning all the nations, from the day I first spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day. ³ "Perhaps the house of Judah will hear all the calamity which I plan to bring on them, in order that every man will turn from his evil way; then I will forgive their iniquity and their sin." ⁴ Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD which He had spoken to him. ⁵ Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, "I am restricted; I cannot go into the house of the LORD. ⁶ "So you go and read from the scroll which you have written at my dictation the words of the LORD to the people in the LORD'S house on a fast day. And also you shall read them to all the people of Judah who come from their cities. ⁷ "Perhaps their supplication will come before the LORD, and everyone will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and the wrath that the LORD has pronounced against this people." ⁸ Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading from the book the words of the LORD in the LORD'S house. ⁹ Now in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, all the people in Jerusalem and all the people who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem proclaimed a fast before the LORD. ¹⁰ Then Baruch read from the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the LORD in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court, at the entry of the New Gate of the LORD'S house, to all the people.

All of us will probably agree that there is tremendous power in the written word. Even in secular life, we know that some things hold more weight simply because they have been written down: a law, a will, a love letter. We recognize the value of having something in writing. And here we find that the word of God has been written down.

In **verses 1-2**, God tells Jeremiah to take a scroll and to write down a very specific inspired message. Certainly we think about **2 Peter 1:19-21**, ***"So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture***

is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."
 Jeremiah was not making things up, but the message came from God!

What I find especially interesting here is that God's powerful word stayed true (it stayed inspired) even though it went from God, to Jeremiah, to Baruch, to the people of Judah, into the king's hand, and ultimately into our own hands sitting here this morning. God's word has authority, and even if it changes form from spoken word to written word and back again, God's authoritative word never changes!

I appreciate what we find at the beginning of **verse 3**, ***"Perhaps the house of Judah will hear...."*** The written word of God was authoritative, and because it was written, the listeners had the blessing of being able to read it. And even if this generation refused to listen, the word had been written down—it could be passed along to the next generation. As those little children grew up in Babylonian captivity, perhaps they would listen to the words of Jeremiah, perhaps they would understand why God let such a terrible thing happen, perhaps they would someday return to the Lord...and they did!

Many years later, the next generation had a change of heart, and they slowly made their way back to Jerusalem (we read about this in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah). God's authoritative word was still available. The written word of God was an act of mercy. The written word of God was an act of love. The written word of God continues to be an act of mercy and love. The word of God was written down for our benefit. As Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 10:11**, ***"Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."*** The word of God was written down for our benefit. First of all, then, we learn that God's authoritative and powerful word has been made available.

II. There is a second lesson we can learn from Jeremiah 36, and that is, GOD'S WORD HAS THE POWER TO CHANGE PEOPLE'S HEARTS. »PPT»

If you will, please look with me at what happens next. Jeremiah has apparently been banned from the temple, and so Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch, reads the word of God to the king's officials (he gives them a little preview), and this is what happens. Let's look at **verses 11-19**...

¹¹ Now when Micaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, had heard all the words of the LORD from the book, ¹² he went down to the king's house, into the scribe's chamber. And behold, all the officials were sitting there—Elishama the scribe, and Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, and Elnathan the son of Achbor, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the other officials. ¹³ Micaiah declared to them all the words that he had heard when Baruch read from the book to the people. ¹⁴ Then all the officials sent Jehudi the son of

Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cush, to Baruch, saying, "Take in your hand the scroll from which you have read to the people and come." So Baruch the son of Neriah took the scroll in his hand and went to them. ¹⁵ They said to him, "Sit down, please, and read it to us." So Baruch read it to them. ¹⁶ When they had heard all the words, they turned in fear one to another and said to Baruch, "We will surely report all these words to the king." ¹⁷ And they asked Baruch, saying, "Tell us, please, how did you write all these words? Was it at his dictation?" ¹⁸ Then Baruch said to them, "He dictated all these words to me, and I wrote them with ink on the book." ¹⁹ Then the officials said to Baruch, "Go, hide yourself, you and Jeremiah, and do not let anyone know where you are."

For just a moment, I would like for us to consider how the word of God affected the hearts of the religious leaders that are pictured here in this little section. The first one to be mentioned is a man by the name of Micaiah. Micaiah immediately takes the scroll and shows it to others. He takes it from the temple to the king's house. We might say today that he takes it to the White House. And so he shares the word of God with others. In **verse 11**, Micaiah is identified as the grandson of Shaphan. We might say to ourselves, "Well, who really cares who his grandpa was?" Well, if we look into it a little bit, we find that Shaphan was the scribe (many years earlier) who had brought a long-lost copy of the word of God to King Josiah. You might remember that the scroll was discovered as they were cleaning out the temple, and Shaphan was the one who brought that scroll to King Josiah. Shaphan read it to the king, and King Josiah tore his garments in sorrow and instituted a series of amazing reforms. King Josiah, by the way, was the father of King Jehoiakim. And so it appears that respecting God's word is a quality that runs in the family—from Shaphan to his grandson, Micaiah.

The result of Micaiah sharing God's word with the religious leaders is found starting in **verse 16**, as the religious leaders look around at each other in horror. They hear the word of God, and they are terrified. They, ***"...turned in fear to one another."*** They are touched by the message from God. We need to ask ourselves: When we hear a message from God today, do we also react with fear and respect? When God says, ***"He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned"*** (**Mark 16:16**), do we respond by shrugging it off, or do we respond by doing something about it? When we hear the Lord say, ***"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves"*** (**Matthew 7:15**), do we tell ourselves that this can never happen today, or do we take it seriously—do we react with fear, as we should?

The religious leaders, therefore, reacted with fear, and in the next few verses, they go on to ask some very good questions. They validate that this is, in fact, a message from the Lord—that it is not just the rantings of a fellow scribe, and so they are moved to consider the evidence. They want to be sure before they even consider sharing it with the king. And by the time we get to **verse 19**, we find that the

officials are moved to start making plans for the safety of Jeremiah and Baruch. They know that the king will not be happy, and so they tell Jeremiah and Baruch to go hide. As I see it, the officials are supportive of the message. They know there will be trouble, and so they make sure that Jeremiah and Baruch are safe. As one commentary pointed out, these men, "...became protectors of the subversive voice."

It is amazing to consider that these leaders, so high in the administration of King Jehoiakim, are still able to be touched by the word of God, and yet we know that, **"...the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart"** (**Hebrews 4:12**).

III. As we look back at Jeremiah 36, we notice something else about God's word, and that is, THE WORD OF GOD IS ABLE TO MAKE SOME PEOPLE VERY, VERY ANGRY. »PPT»

If you will, please look with me at what happens next, in **verses 20-26—Jeremiah 36:20-26**...

²⁰ ***So they went to the king in the court, but they had deposited the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and they reported all the words to the king. ²¹ Then the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and he took it out of the chamber of Elishama the scribe. And Jehudi read it to the king as well as to all the officials who stood beside the king. ²² Now the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month, with a fire burning in the brazier before him. ²³ When Jehudi had read three or four columns, the king cut it with a scribe's knife and threw it into the fire that was in the brazier, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier. ²⁴ Yet the king and all his servants who heard all these words were not afraid, nor did they rend their garments. ²⁵ Even though Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah pleaded with the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them. ²⁶ And the king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son, Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel to seize Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet, but the LORD hid them.***

It is so sad to see someone corrupted by power even to the extent that they would have the audacity to burn the word of God! That kind of arrogance can make some people think that they are above God's law, that they are not accountable to it, that God does not really mean anything to them.

Did you notice how much of the message he listened to before he started burning it? Three or four columns! And again, what a contrast! In **verse 25**, we find that Gemariah was present. Again, Gemariah was the son of the scribe who had

presented the word of God to King Josiah many years earlier. And what a difference! Josiah reacts with great sadness and tears his clothing, but Josiah's son, King Jehoiakim, reacts by cutting and burning the word of God.

In **verse 26**, we find that the king sends some people to go find Baruch and Jeremiah. Several chapters earlier, the king had done this to a prophet by the name of Uriah. The story is found in **Jeremiah 26:20-23**...

²⁰ Indeed, there was also a man who prophesied in the name of the LORD, Uriah the son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim; and he prophesied against this city and against this land words similar to all those of Jeremiah. ²¹ When King Jehoiakim and all his mighty men and all the officials heard his words, then the king sought to put him to death; but Uriah heard it, and he was afraid and fled and went to Egypt. ²² Then King Jehoiakim sent men to Egypt: Elnathan the son of Achbor and certain men with him went into Egypt. ²³ And they brought Uriah from Egypt and led him to King Jehoiakim, who slew him with a sword and cast his dead body into the burial place of the common people.

How sad it is when people react in anger to the word of God! Let us not follow the example of King Jehoiakim! But instead, let us take the word of God to heart.

IV. Before we close, I would like for us to notice one final lesson, and that is, THE WORD OF GOD CANNOT BE DESTROYED. »PPT»

As we close, let us consider what happens next, in **verses 27-32—Jeremiah 36:27-32**...

²⁷ Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah after the king had burned the scroll and the words which Baruch had written at the dictation of Jeremiah, saying, ²⁸ "Take again another scroll and write on it all the former words that were on the first scroll which Jehoiakim the king of Judah burned. ²⁹ "And concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah you shall say, 'Thus says the LORD, "You have burned this scroll, saying, 'Why have you written on it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and will make man and beast to cease from it?' " ³⁰ 'Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah, "He shall have no one to sit on the throne of David, and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat of the day and the frost of the night. ³¹ "I will also punish him and his descendants and his servants for their iniquity, and I will bring on them and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and the men of Judah all the calamity that I have declared to them—but they did not listen."'" ³² Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the son of Neriah, the scribe, and he wrote on it at the dictation of

Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and many similar words were added to them.

How foolish it was for Jehoiakim to think that he could destroy the word of God! He actually thought that he could cut it up and burn it in the fireplace, but the truth is, there are not enough knives or fireplaces in the world to destroy the word of God! But instead, something else happened. In the genealogy of Jesus Christ in **Matthew 1**, we would expect to find the name of Jehoiakim right between Josiah (his father) and Jeconiah (his son), but the name is missing! It is almost as if God is saying, **"You think you can destroy me? Ha! Watch this!"** And so his name has been removed from the genealogy! It's almost as if God took a scribe's-knife to it and threw it in the fireplace—the name is missing!

Not only that, but consider what happened in the passage we just read. The scroll is destroyed, and God simply tells Jeremiah not only to write it again, but did you notice what happened in the very last verse (in **verse 32**)? The Bible says, **"...and many similar words were added to them."** And so not only did Jehoiakim not destroy God's word, but he made it longer! He made it stronger!

We learn from this that destroying the message itself (or even destroying the messenger) does nothing to make the truth go away. The truth is still there! The Babylonian armies were still only 35 miles away! And here we are today—on the other side of the world, 2,600 years later, and we are still reading the words of Jeremiah!

Conclusion & Invitation:

This morning, we have studied the word of God, and our conclusion is that we must believe it and obey it with all our heart. The Bible teaches that we must turn away from sin and be immersed in water. This is our response to the death of Jesus on the cross. If you have any questions, we would love to study with you, but if you are ready to obey the good news right now, you can let us know as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: church@fourlakescoc.org