

THE SERMON NOTEBOOK

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Jeremiah's America - # 12

SUBJECT: THE WORD OF GOD

TITLE: TELL THEM I SAID SO

TEXT: JEREMIAH 2:1-4

INTRODUCTION. When I was in seminary, we learned that Dr. R. G. Lee was going to be preaching at Mid-City Baptist Church in New Orleans, so Becky and I drove over for a service. I had heard Dr. Lee many times, and for a long time I heard him every Sunday on TV. As we sat down in the auditorium I looked up above the choir and read the words from the banner, "God Said it, I believe it, and that settles it."

There is no doubt that the pastor and church sought to show their deep love for, and trust in the Word of God. This sign, however, disturbed me and as I reflected on it later I realized what the problem was. When God says it, it is settled! Period. When God speaks eternal truth is expressed. The only question is, am I going to get in on what He is up to!

I subscribed to a very narrow view of the Word of God. Now, before you condemn me for being too narrow, let me assure you that one of my majors was in a social science. I understand a lot more than you may believe about examining all sides, considering all factors, and listening to the opinions of others. Having said that, let me tell you again just how narrow I am. I believe the Bible is the divinely inspired, infallible, inerrant Word of God, the perfect word of the perfect God. I found myself saying the very same words as I was leading a conference in a very liberal church a few years ago. I realized there were those there who would not agree with me. In fact, the pastor came for the introduction each session and left! Rather than trying to soften what I had said, I added, "If God could not produce a perfect Book why call Him God? And if He could have done it, and wouldn't do it, what kind of God is He?"

Right now, I am waiting for a stronger word than inerrant and when it comes along I feel sure I will embrace it. After all, I anticipate an interesting move among some people at some point in the near future. When some pastors, for example, find that their position is not popular more and more are going to be using the word inerrant. In fact, it is already happening. In one day I had two pastors to tell me they believe the Bible in inerrant, they just don't want anyone to force them to say so. I have been trying to recall the last time I have seen a pastor backed up against the wall and forced to say that God's word is inerrant! Jesus certainly didn't hesitate to use the Scripture in a manner I interpret to mean that He believed it was absolutely authoritative, perfect, and reliable in all things. He charged that the leading religious leaders of the day die err because they did not know the Scripture.

This message is a part of a series that I put under the umbrella term, JEREMIAH'S AMERICA. There is much in the ancient Book of Jeremiah that mirrors modern day America. There is one significant difference, and that is that America is sinning against a much greater light. We have the complete Word of God. The Messiah has come. He suffered and bled and died for our sins. He arose from the dead and ascended to the Father. He sent the Holy Spirit to guide us in the study and application of the Holy Scripture.

When we read Jeremiah, we may be totally amazed at the ignorance of those rebellious people. How could that have been so foolish. They never seemed to learn, did they? After all, they had the prophet Jeremiah! He came out and told them exactly what God wanted them to know. How could they not listen to what God was saying through Jeremiah? It is far easier to condemn those ancient Israelites than it is to face the sin of America today when they scoff at the Word of God, go to court to have it removed from public places, and deleted from our history books. Let me stress again that we are more guilty than they because America is sinning against a far greater light.

I. JEREMIAH DELIVERED THE WORD OF GOD TO JUDAH.

1) There is the word of invitation and commission, 1:7-10.

Then the Lord said to me: Do not say: I am only a youth, for **you will go to everyone I send you to and speak whatever I tell you**. Do not be afraid of anyone, for I will be with you to deliver you. This is the Lord's declaration. Then the Lord reached out His hand, touched my mouth, and told me: Look, **I have filled your mouth with My words**. See, today I have set you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and demolish, to build and plant" (Jer 1:7-10, HCSB).

Now, is there anyone who can read this passage and doubt that God took very seriously His word for His people? Is there any way you can justify anyone who persecuted Jeremiah and refused to hear God's message? Is there any doubt that the message Jeremiah delivered was the from God? Perhaps no other person has ever been called to commit his life more fully to delivering the "Thus saith the Word of the Lord" than the weeping prophet. He was even told never to take a wife, never to have a family. God was sparing him the pain and grief of seeing his own family go through the coming judgment.

Those who refused to obey God's message through Jeremiah were going to pay a serious price for their rebellion. Those in America today who refuse to read and apply the Word of God are going to face the God of the Word in judgment. This is serious! You had better take it seriously - He does!

2) There is the interrogatory word, 1:11-14.

"Then the word of the Lord came to me, asking, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" I replied, "I see a branch of an almond tree." The Lord said to me, 'You have seen

correctly, for I watch over My word to accomplish it.’ Again the word of the Lord came to me inquiring, ‘What do you see?’ And I replied, ‘I see a boiling pot, its mouth tilted from the north to the south.’

God gave Jeremiah two visions and after each He asked what he asked, “What do you see, Jeremiah?” Jeremiah responded and then the Lord told him the significance of what he had seen:

“Then the Lord said to me, ‘Disaster will be poured out from the north on all who live in the land. Indeed, I am about to summon all the clans and kingdoms of the north.’ This is the Lord’s declaration. They will come, and each king will set up his throne at the entrance to Jerusalem’s gates. They will attack all her surrounding walls and all the other cities of Judah” (1:14-16).

The Lord continued to speak:

“I will pronounce My judgments against them for all the evil they did when they abandoned Me to burn incense to other gods and to worship the works of their own hands. “Now, get ready. Stand up and tell them everything that I command you. Do not be intimidated by them or I will cause you to cower before them. Today, I am the One who has made you a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests, and the population. They will fight against you but never prevail over you, since I am with you to rescue you.” This is the Lord’s declaration” (Jer 1:16-19, HCSB).

Did you note the first person pronouns in these verses? I am, I will, I am, I am. If you do not hear the authority of the God - Creator, Sustainer, Redeemer, and Judge - in these words, how can you say you fear God. How can you say you honor His name? How can you claim to know Him? The people of Jeremiah’s day were without excuse when they refused to obey the word of the Lord, but we are much more guilty if we disobey Him today, for we are sinning against a greater light. They heard the word delivered orally. We have the written Word of the living God! It has stood the test of time and the attacks of Satan for centuries and it has never been refuted or silenced.

Yet, arrogant lawyers, self-serving politicians, egotistical news people, and vile entertainers mock the Word of God - and America still watches them, listens to them, reads them. They attack God and we honor them for it! The ACLU attacks the Ten Commandments to the cheers of the networks and church members all over America hang onto every word - and believe them. The prince of this world is smiling at the ignorance, and iniquity of the church in America today!

3) There is the imperative word, 2:1-4.

“The word of the Lord came to me: ‘Go and announce directly to Jerusalem that this is what the Lord says: I remember the loyalty of your youth, your love as a bride— how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown. Israel was holy

to the Lord, the firstfruits of His harvest. All who ate of it found themselves guilty; disaster came on them .’ **This is the Lord’s declaration.**

“**Hear the word of the Lord**, house of Jacob and all families of the house of Israel. **Here is what the Lord says:** What fault did your fathers find in Me that they went so far from Me, followed worthless idols, and became worthless themselves?” (Jer 2:1-5, HCSB).

Did you note the times the Lord stress that this is His word?

The word of the Lord came to me;
this is what the Lord says;
This is the Lord’s declaration;
Hear the word of the Lord;
Here is what the Lord says...

I am convinced that God does not repeat Himself for no reason. When we read the same things five times in a few verses I think we need to reflect on it. It seems like I remember some parent demanding of a child, “Don’t make me repeat myself.” Don’t ask me where I heard that, because I really never wanted to force my father to repeat himself. How could these dumb, simple-minded, fools have refused to hear God’s message? America is even more guilty for we are sinning against both the message of Jeremiah and the prophets, we are refusing to listen the New Testament and the Holy Spirit.

4) There is the word of indictment, 3:6-13.

“In the days of King Josiah **the Lord asked me, ‘Have you seen what unfaithful Israel has done?** She has ascended every high hill and gone under every green tree to prostitute herself there. I thought: After she has done all these things, she will return to Me. **But she didn’t return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it.** I observed that it was because unfaithful Israel had committed adultery that **I had sent her away** and had given her a certificate of divorce. Nevertheless, **her treacherous sister Judah was not afraid** but also went and prostituted herself. Indifferent to her prostitution, she defiled the land and committed adultery with stone and tree. Yet in spite of all this, her treacherous sister Judah didn’t return to Me with all her heart—only in pretense.’ This is the Lord’s declaration” (3:6-10).

“**The Lord announced to me, “*Unfaithful Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah.*** Go, proclaim these words to the north, and say: Return, unfaithful Israel. This is the Lord’s declaration. I will not look on you with anger, for I am unfailing in My love. This is the Lord’s declaration. I will not be angry forever. Only acknowledge your guilt—you have rebelled against the Lord your God. You have scattered your favors to strangers under every green tree and have not

obeyed My voice. This is the Lord's declaration" (Jer 3:11-13).

Is there any wonder Jeremiah is called the weeping prophet? Amos and Hosea had warned Israel the northern kingdom, the ten tribes, that they must repent, or God would destroy them. She refused to repent and God destroyed the nation. Isaiah and Micah were sent by God to warn Judah that if they did not repent they would face God in judgment. They would not be destroyed by Assyria, they would go into captivity in Babylon. Now Jeremiah has been sent to try to get the people to repent. They knew everything that had happened to their kinsmen, but they refused to repent. God said, "Unfaithful Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah." Is America any less guilty than Judah. We have the lesson of Israel and Judah! Are you weeping for America?

5) There is the irrefutable and authoritative word, 11:1-5.

"This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: 'Listen to the words of this covenant, and tell them to the men of Judah and the residents of Jerusalem. *You must tell them: This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says:* Let a curse be on the man who does not obey the words of this covenant, which I commanded your ancestors when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the iron furnace. I declared: **'Obey Me, and do everything that I command you, and you will be My people, and I will be your God,' in order to establish the oath I swore to your ancestors, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as it is today."**

"I answered, "Amen, Lord."

The Word of God was clear. They knew their history. They knew God's protection, and they knew God's provisions. They still would not listen to His word, nor obey it. Once again, America is sinning against a greater light. On March 18, 2005 a judge in Florida, in defiance of the Governor Jeb Bush, President George W. Bush, the congress of the United States, and the pleas of the family of Terri Shiarvo, ordered the feeding tubes pulled. The husband could have simply divorced her and let her family care for her. They begged him to simply let they care for her. He wanted her dead. Not other answer would serve his purpose. He wanted her dead! His lawyer called the congress of the United States a bunch of thugs and compared them to the old Soviet Politburo. And the liberal media cheered.

Let me stress that a Florida congressman, who is a medical doctor, had talked with Terri's neurosurgeon and he has told the congressman that Terri is not in a vegetative state. The family says she was responding to therapy until her husband got his hands on the medical settlement and then began demanding that they pull the feeding tube. He was living in an adulterous relationship with another woman with whom he has two children. Why could he - and why could that judge - not have simply permit the family to take over her care and let her live?

There is an unholy, murderous alliance in America today, and that is the alliance between a runaway leftist judiciary, left wing politicians, and certain medical personnel who will commit murder for a

buck - and fight for the right to do it. This murderous alliance has claimed the lives of almost 45 million unborn babies since Roe v. Wade, and now they have turned their attention to people like Terri Shrarvo and countless others, especially the elderly. Have they ever heard of the sanctity of life? They do not read the Word of God, they do not know it, and they do not want it.

6) There is the judicial word, 14:10-15.

“This is what the Lord says concerning these people: Truly they love to wander; they never rest their feet. So the Lord does not accept them. Now He will remember their guilt and punish their sins” (14:10).

Now, the Lord turns His attention to the false prophets who were telling the people what they wanted to hear. He prefaces that by telling Jeremiah not to pray for the people: “Then the Lord said to me, “Do not pray for the well-being of these people” (14:11). That is shocking enough, but there is more:

“If they fast, I will not hear their cry of despair. If they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. Rather, I will finish them off by sword, famine, and plague” (14:12).

Their worship was so polluted that God refused their offerings and sacrifices. Don’t you ever think that because you offer up a prayer, sing a song, or give your tithes and offerings that God is obligated to receive them. Jeremiah responds:

“And I replied, ‘Oh no, Lord God! The prophets are telling them, ‘You won’t see sword or suffer famine. I will certainly give you true peace in this place.’ But the Lord said to me, ‘**These prophets are prophesying a lie in My name. I *did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them.*** They are prophesying to you a false vision, worthless divination, the deceit of their own minds” (14:13-14).

“Therefore, **this is what the Lord says** concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name, though I did not send them, and who say: There will never be sword or famine in this land: **By sword and famine these prophets will meet their end.** The people they are prophesying to will be thrown into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword. There will be no one to bury them—they, their wives, their sons, and their daughters. I will pour out their own evil on them” (Jer 14:15-16).

God will judge all those who preach a lie in His name, and all those who are deceived by them will face God in judgment. When the ACLU went on their evil campaign against Chief Justice Roy Moore of Alabama because of a passive display of the Ten Commandment in the court building, how many so-called “reverends” were there out there celebrating with them? The Reverend Barry Lynn thought it was horrible to see the Ten Commandments displayed in a public building. After all, an atheist might pass by them and they might make him feel bad!

When the Supreme Court took prayer out of the public school classroom, my systematic theology professor applauded the decision. He thought it was great. Can you believe that? How may modern day prophets have openly and publically campaigned against prayer and the Word of God, while professing in the strongest terms their faith in God? How many of them have ranted and raved against those who believe that the Bible is inerrant, and then make statements like, "I would sign my name to every page of the Bible"

7) There is the inerrant word, 26:1.

"At the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came from the Lord: 'This is what the Lord says: Stand in the courtyard of the Lord's temple and speak all the words I have commanded you to speak to all Judah's cities that are coming to worship there. Do not hold back a word. Perhaps they will listen and return—each from his evil way of life—so that I might relent concerning the disaster that I plan to do to them because of the evil of their deeds. You are to say to them: This is what the Lord says: If you do not listen to Me by living according to My law that I set before you and by listening to the words of My servants the prophets I have been sending you time and time again, though you did not listen, I will make this temple like Shiloh. I will make this city an object of cursing for all the nations of the earth' (Jer 26:1-6).

Time will not permit us to pursue this, but let me assure you that history bears out the fact that God did exactly what He said He would do. The Word of God is holy, perfect, inerrant. Whatever He has announced, He has done, whatever He has promised He has fulfilled. Brother, if we preach the Word, we had better preach it with a conviction that it is the Word of God, the truth without any mixture of error, the perfect Word of the perfect God. If I err, it is going to be on the side of inerrancy of the Word of God. I had rather go to heaven and have the Lord tell me I took His Word too seriously than for Him to tell me I did not take it seriously enough.

II. WE CONDEMN OURSELVES WHEN WE CONDEMN ANCIENT JUDAH.

1) America Is Even More Guilty Than Jeremiah's Judah.

If you somehow feel that those ancient Israelites were blind, foolish, backward, or that their hearts were hardened against God, do you not condemn America when we are guilty of many of the same sins? In Romans 2:1, Paul wrote, "Therefore, anyone of you who judges is without excuse. For when you judge another, you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, do the same things."

There is one major difference today. There are millions of Christians in America - and sadly, millions more who profess faith in God who never darken the door of any church - unless it is for a funeral or wedding. God's Word is available to almost anyone in America, even in prison. If we do not read it and apply it in our daily life, we are even more guilty than those Israelites.

2) We are sinning against a greater light.

That Light is the One Who declared Himself to be the Light of the World. We also have the New Testament and the presence of the divine Author, the Holy Spirit, to illumine our hearts that we might understand it and apply it. Listen to the claims of the Scripture itself:

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

“First of all, you should know this: no prophecy of Scripture comes from one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, moved by the Holy Spirit, men spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20-21)

“So My word that comes from My mouth will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish what I please, and will prosper in what I send it to do” (Isaiah 55:11).

3) Many of us have been engaged in the Battle for the Bible for many years.

A half century ago, Francis Shaeffer declared that the next great battlefield in Christianity would be the Scripture. Shaeffer had been fighting the battle for the Bible for years before many pastors knew there was a battle going on, or approaching. He had seen what liberalism had done to another denomination and did not want to see others go through that kind of battle.

Little do most pastors know the debt they owe my close friend and brother, Dr. Gene Jeffries for helping to expose liberalism in a major seminary. Two other students helped to expose the liberalism of Dr. Ralph Elliot, who would go on to write a commentary of the Book of Genesis, which revealed his liberalism and his attitude toward the Word of God. I might add that, as I recall, Dr. Jeffries was the only one who would sign his name to the letter exposing the professor’s liberalism. Gene has been preaching and teaching the Word of God for many years. He was in full-time evangelism for a number of years and he had an international radio program for several more years. Dr. Jeffries, founder and president of Cambridge Graduate School, has written the curriculum for three graduate schools. He has worked tirelessly as pastor, evangelist, writer, and educator for our Lord.

The reason I mention Gene Jeffries is that we have talked about various issues, doctrines, and theological principles for a number of years. The thing I appreciate so much about Gene is that he never lets popular fads, cultural agendas, the power of the press, or the popularity of the latest best selling author to distract him from the Word of God. You want to deal with an issue, get ready to go to the Word of God.

Gene and I had discussed a number of movements, old-line denominational positions, modern writers from Henry Blackaby to Rick Warren, and the latest novel program someone introduces to the church. Retired General Dutch Shoffner met with my sons and me at the Cracker Barrel in West Monroe several months ago. Dutch had a copy of an amazing copy of the Four Gospels - in Old Russian. Dutch told me that a Ph.D in Russian history was with him when he acquired this indescribable book. You open the pages and see where someone, who was probably reading it in a hiding place, had dripped candle wax all over the pages. The owner had love the Word of God and spent countless hours reading it. Oil from his hand had stained the margin at the bottom of pages. His life may well have been at risk because he owned this Scripture.

Dutch wanted information about his Bible and I sent digital photos of various pages, including the title page, to Gene. He told me he was sending the pictures to a Jewish Christian in the Ukraine who is working on his Ph.D. with Cambridge Graduate School. We are still looking for answers. Dr. Jeffries has expressed to me his conviction that many Christian schools today are spending more time teaching programs, principles, and methods than the Word of God. There is nothing wrong with teaching principles and methods, where the problem come is when we let them have precedence over the Word of God.

Now, here is where the rubber hits the road. The Word of God has had to take a back seat to religion, philosophy, psychology, and a host of programs in America. You doubt that? Let me tell you about the soloist who, with her husband, visited in our home a number of years ago. This was a brilliant, well informed lady who had not only sung professionally, she often sang in various churches. After about an hour she surprised me when she suddenly said, "I cannot tell you how refreshing it is to find a pastor who will talk with you about the Word of God." I was so surprised that I have no idea how I responded.

America followed the news when the Episcopalian Church elected an openly homosexual priest as a bishop. In an interview on Hannity and Colmes, Sean Hannity asked two priests about their action. They were very quick with their answers - they had been first in opening the door to women in the ministry; they would be seen as taking the lead in this. Hannity asked, "But what about the Bible?" One priest snapped back arrogantly, "The Bible is not our authority!"

CONCLUSION. We have the Word of God, in many translations today, including the Holman Christian Standard Bible, a word for word translation that is very readable. We have all sorts of helps to enable us to understand the Scripture and apply it in daily life. We have the Holy Spirit to help us to understand it and to apply it. If we reject the Word of God we are more guilty than those people of Jeremiah's day.

Now, do you remember that Old Russian Bible? I have held it in my hands, I have turned the pages. I have seen the candle wax on page after page. I have seen the pencil marks, and the little strips of paper the owner used for Bible marks. I have seen the severely stained lower outside corners. I am convinced that this man, or woman, may well have been reading this Scripture at the risk of his/her life. He was willing to risk his life because of his faith in the Word of God.

I want to ask you if you have that kind of love for the Word of God. You may have many copies of the Bible at home. You may have various translations. You may have all sorts of Bible tools to help you with Bible study. What I want to ask you now is how seriously do you take it? How much do you love it? Would you risk your life to read it? Would you risk your life to apply it?

If you do not study God's Word and apply it in your life, you are guilty of a serious sin against the Lord. If you are willing to commit yourself to the study of His Word, our Lord will bless you beyond measure. If you will study the Word of God you will learn how lost people are saved, and how saved people should live. It is so simple young children can grasp the meaning. The Bible simply says, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." If you know Him as Savior, have you crowned Him as Lord over your life? Will you let me pray with you about it right now?