

The Eternal Word Of God

Jeremiah 36:1-32

Hebrews 11:1 states, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” This morning I am preaching in a basically empty auditorium to an audience I cannot see, in the hope that somebody is listening. This is a faith venture.

Last Sunday Pastor Ken spoke about the good news of the New Covenant – recorded in Jeremiah 31. This covenant was about 600 years into Jeremiah’s future, and therefore faith was required by Jeremiah to believe that God would keep the great promises contained in this New Covenant. The first promise God made to New Covenant believers is that He would write His Law on our hearts, which brings peace and order into a place that was once dark and self-serving. By the way, genuine Old Covenant believers also had God’s Law written on their hearts, but at that time it was called being circumcised of heart. Secondly, God promised that New Covenant believers will enjoy right standing and intimacy with Him. Again, Old Covenant believers also enjoyed intimacy with God. We are specifically told that Moses, Job and Abraham did as well as many others. Thirdly, and this promise is unique to the New Covenant, instead of a remnant of faithful believers, which characterized Old Covenant Israel, God’s New Covenant people will all be genuine believers. In other words, if you are a genuine follower of Christ, then you are in the New Covenant. If you are not a genuine follower of Christ, then you are not in the New Covenant. The problem with Old Covenant Israel is that while all

male Jews were circumcised in the flesh, most were not were circumcised of heart. Lastly, in the New Covenant God promises eternal forgiveness of sin. How many of you think the New Covenant is good news?

Sadly, Jeremiah also had the God-given task to speak about dreadful judgments that would soon come upon Old Covenant Judah. God's motivation for giving these stern warnings was so the people of Judah might repent of their sins and be spared from ruin. Let's begin by reading verses 1-3,

“In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD [four years earlier, in 605 B.C. – the Babylonian army, led by King Nebuchadnezzar, won a decisive battle against Egypt, and then shortly afterward defeated Judah. Jehoiakim was made king by Nebuchadnezzar and was forced to pay tribute to him. Judah was humbled by God, but much greater judgment would come, if Judah did not repent of her idolatrous ways. And so God tells Jeremiah]:² ‘Take a scroll and write on it all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and Judah and all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah until today [this scroll was probably a summary of the judgments Jeremiah had foretold over a period of twenty years].³ It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the disaster that I intend to do to them, so that every one may turn from his evil way, and that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.’”

Jeremiah's scroll would contain good news and bad news. The bad news was that God's judgment upon Judah was about to become much worse. The good news is that the people of Judah still had time to repent and be saved. And friends, the gospel of Christ, which is good news, also contains bad news. The bad news is that all have sinned and fallen short of doing what God says is right. Upon the heels of that bad news is that the

wages of sin is separation from God. Because we are all by nature sinners, we all experience spiritual separation from God. If our separation from God is not corrected, then at the time of physical death, unrepentant people will begin to experience the agony of complete separation from God.

No one living on earth knows what complete separation from God is like – because of common grace. What is that? In **Matthew 5:45**, Jesus explains, “For he [God] makes his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” Everyone experiences these blessings. However, at the time of an unbeliever’s death, common grace ends and complete separation from God begins. If people choose to live their lives apart from God now, then at death, God grants them their wish forever. I hope everyone listening to these words has come into peace and fellowship with God through repentance and faith in Christ. Let’s continue reading verses 4-8,

“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 that he had spoken to him [it would seem that Jeremiah could speak well, but not write well. Baruch could write well. That made them a great team].⁵ And Jeremiah ordered Baruch, saying, ‘I am banned from going to the house of the LORD [probably because King Jehoiakim did not want to hear what God had to say through Jeremiah. It is a sad state of affairs when a true prophet of God was banned from the house of God, and false prophets were welcomed. But those were the times in which Jeremiah lived. Instead of speaking life-giving words of truth, the false prophets spoke lies, which Jeremiah referred to as poisoned water – Jeremiah 8:14; 9:15. The people who believed those lies, saw no need to repent and therefore remained on the path of death. Sadly, there is a lot of poisoned water being spewed out today by our media, our politicians, our academia and in our pulpits. Truth may be hard to hear, but truth is also what can make people

free, which is why verse 6 goes on to say], ⁶ so you are to go, and on a day of fasting in the hearing of all the people in the LORD's house you shall read the words of the LORD from the scroll that you have written at my dictation. You shall read them also in the hearing of all the men of Judah who come out of their cities. ⁷ It may be that their plea for mercy will come before the LORD, and that every one will turn from his evil way, for **great is the anger and wrath** that the LORD has pronounced against this people.' ⁸ And Baruch the son of Neriah did all that Jeremiah the prophet ordered him about reading from the scroll the words of the LORD in the LORD's house."

I hope none of you think that God no longer judges wickedness because we are living in the New Covenant Age of grace. I have heard that myth many times. Friends God has always been loving, gracious and holy. That is who He is. His love motivates Him to be merciful and patient with our sins, but His holiness demands that He punish ongoing, unrepentant sin. The two most referred to Psalms in the New Testament are Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. Both of these Psalms speak about conditions upon the earth during this New Covenant Age, which Christ ushered in through His death, resurrection and ascension to the right hand of the Father. If you look at these Psalms, you will notice that both of them speak forcefully about continuing judgments upon the wicked during this New Covenant Age. The ultimate Day of Judgment will occur when Christ bodily returns to the earth in order to raise the dead and finalize eternal destinies. Everyone who has ever lived, will at that time stand before God. Only the righteousness of Christ, imputed to our accounts, grants us eternal life with God.

Let me clarify something. People who lived before Christ came to

earth, who repented of their sins and put their trust in God's temporary provisions for their sins [sacrificial lambs], their faith in God's temporary provisions was reckoned by God as faith in Christ. This is one of the reasons why John the Baptist referred to the Lord Jesus as – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The next verses we read, take place about a year after verse 1. Let's continue reading at verse 9,

“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 [some commentators believe the purpose of this fast was **not** so people could repent of their sins, but to encourage national pride, because Jehoiakim decided to stop paying tribute to Nebuchadnezzar – which was a truly bad idea].¹⁰ Then [at the time of this fast], in the hearing of all the people, Baruch read the words of Jeremiah from the scroll, in the house of the LORD, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the secretary, which was in the upper court, at the entry of the New Gate of the LORD's house.¹¹ When Micaiah the son of Gemariah, son of Shaphan, heard all the words of the LORD from the scroll,¹² he went down to the king's house, into the secretary's chamber, and all the officials were sitting there: Elishama the secretary, Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, Elnathan the son of Achbor, Gemariah the son of Shaphan, Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the officials [In pronouncing all these names, I feel like I have earned my paycheck for the month. I hope we all understand that these details and host of names indicate that this is not a made up story. These were all real people who served under King Jehoiakim].¹³ And Micaiah told them all the words that he had heard, when Baruch read the scroll in the hearing of the people.¹⁴ Then all the officials sent Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, son of Shelemiah, son of Cushi, to say to Baruch, ‘Take in your hand the scroll that you read in the hearing of the people, and come.’ So Baruch the son of Neriah took the scroll in his hand and came to them.¹⁵ And they said to him, ‘Sit down and read it.’ So Baruch read it to them.¹⁶ When

they heard all the words, they turned one to another in fear. And they said to Baruch, ‘We must report all these words to the king.’¹⁷ Then they asked Baruch, ‘Tell us, please, how did you write all these words? Was it at his [Jeremiah’s] dictation?’¹⁸ Baruch answered them, ‘He dictated all these words to me, while I wrote them with ink on the scroll’ [the reason Baruch was told to read the scroll is because Jeremiah was banned from the temple].¹⁹ Then the officials said to Baruch, ‘Go and hide, you and Jeremiah, and let no one know where you are’” [they knew Jehoiakim would try to kill them even though they spoke the truth of God’s Word].

Friends, my hope for God’s blessings upon the earth, is not all wrapped up in civil leaders. But I will say this, God-fearing civil leaders can do a great deal of good, and civil leaders who do not fear God, can do a great deal of harm. Josiah was a God-fearing king, and he did much good for Judah. In contrast, Josiah’s son Jehoiakim was a lousy king, who did tremendous harm to Judah. Christians should pray and vote for God-fearing civil leaders. And if we do not care if our civil leaders fear God or not, then God will give us the kind of civil leaders we deserve. Jehoiakim perfectly reflected the values of the people of Judah, which was bad for everyone. Let’s continue reading at verse 20,

²⁰ So they went into the court to the king, having put the scroll in the chamber of Elishama the secretary, and they reported all the words to the king.²¹ Then the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll, and he took it from the chamber of Elishama the secretary. And Jehudi read it to the king and all the officials who stood beside the king.²² It was the ninth month [corresponding to our December], and the king was sitting in the winter house, and there was a fire burning in the fire pot before him.²³ As Jehudi read three or four columns, the king would cut them off with a knife and throw them into the fire in the fire pot, until the entire scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the fire pot.²⁴ Yet neither the king nor any of his servants who heard all these words was afraid, nor did they tear their

garments [in repentance].²⁵ Even when Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah urged the king not to burn the scroll, he would not listen to them.²⁶ And the king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son and Seraiah the son of Azriel and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel to seize Baruch the secretary and Jeremiah the prophet, but the LORD hid them.”

Judah was about to be horribly judged, but God was making provisions for the safety of those who feared Him. God has always done this. In the judgment of the flood, God made provisions for Noah and his family.

When God judged Sodom, He made provisions for Lot and his family.

And when God judged Judah in the days of Jeremiah, He made provisions for all who feared Him. God speaks of this in Jeremiah 24:1-10,

“ . . . the LORD showed me two baskets of figs placed in front of the temple of the LORD.² One basket had very good figs . . . the other basket had very poor figs, so bad they could not be eaten.³ Then the LORD asked me, ‘What do you see, Jeremiah?’ ‘Figs,’ I answered. ‘The good ones are very good, but the poor ones are so rotten they cannot be eaten.’⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to me . . .⁵ ‘Like these good figs, I regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I sent away from this place to the land of the Babylonians [people like Daniel and his three friends]⁶ My eyes will watch over them for their good . . .⁷ They will be my people, and I will be their God . . .⁸ But like the poor figs, which are so rotten they cannot be eaten . . . so will I deal with Zedekiah [the evil king who followed Jehoiakim], his officials and the survivors from Jerusalem . . .⁹ I will make them abhorrent and an offense to all the kingdoms of the earth . . .¹⁰ I will send the sword, famine and plague against them until they are destroyed from the land I gave to them and their fathers.”

Friends, it is God’s blessings upon the righteous and His judgments upon the wicked that make me optimistic about the good things Christ will accomplish through His Church during this New Covenant Age. But let’s go back to God’s plans for Jehoiakim and the other bad figs of Judah,

beginning at verse 27,

²⁷ Now after the king had burned the scroll with the words that Baruch wrote at Jeremiah's dictation, the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah:
²⁸ 'Take another scroll and write on it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has 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 in it that the king of Babylon will certainly come and destroy this land, and will cut off from it man and beast?" ³⁰ Therefore thus says the LORD concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: 'He shall have none to sit on the throne of David [Jehoiakim's son set on the throne only three months before he was removed and taken to Babylon. The next king, Zedekiah was Jehoiakim's brother. Concerning Jehoiakim God says], and his dead body shall be cast out to the heat by day and the frost by night. ³¹ And I will punish him and his offspring and his servants for their iniquity. I will bring upon them and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem and upon the people of Judah all the disaster that I have pronounced against them, but they would not hear.'
³² Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote on it at the dictation of Jeremiah all the words of the scroll that Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire. And many similar words were added to them."

I love what **Isaiah 55:10-11**, has to say about the overcoming, unstoppable power of God's Word,

"As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it."

And what is God's plan for the nations during this New Covenant Age? We don't have to guess. Two prophets, who were contemporaries of Jeremiah, were given visions of what will happen now that Christ has ascended to His throne of power, at the Father's right hand. Listen first to

Daniel 7:13-14,

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man [that was Christ’s favorite title for Himself] coming with the clouds of heaven [where was he coming to?] He approached the Ancient of Days [God the Father] and was led into his presence [notice what is conferred upon the Lord Jesus at the time of His ascension].¹⁴ He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him [Daniel uses the past tense to show prophetic certainty]. His dominion [supreme authority] is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed” [in contrast the other kingdoms mentioned in the book of Daniel, which rose to power – but were then destroyed].

Ezekiel also lived at the time of Jeremiah and Daniel and received a vision from God of a new temple, much greater than the temple destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. – and the temple destroyed by the Romans in A.D. 70. I believe Ezekiel’s vision of a new temple, is a picture of Christ’s Church, which is God’s temple upon the earth during this New Covenant Age. Ezekiel 47:1-9, speaks about what this temple will accomplish during this New Covenant Age,

“The man [an angel] brought me [Ezekiel] back to the entrance of the temple [a new and glorious temple], and I saw water coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east [I believe this water represents the gospel empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is the same water Jesus offered the woman at the well in John 4] . . .³ As the man went eastward with a measuring line in his hand, he measured off a thousand cubits and then led me through water that was ankle-deep [the New Covenant Temple of God – was birthed at Jerusalem and the water of the gospel immediately began to flow out of it, but the stream was shallow because initially there were not many Christians who could carry the water of life to others].⁴ He measured off another thousand cubits and led me through water that was knee-deep [over this next period of time, more

people became Christians and more of the water of life could be carried to others]. He measured off another thousand and led me through water that was up to the waist.⁵ He measured off another thousand, but now it was a river that I could not cross, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in – a river that no one could cross [there are presently over 2 million people a month, entering into eternal life through repentance and faith in Christ. Friends, there are more people than ever carrying the water of life to others] . . .⁸ He said to me, ‘This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Sea [referring to the Dead Sea, which in this vision is a picture of lost, spiritually dead mankind. But look what happens when this water enters into the Dead Sea] . . .⁹ When it empties into the Sea, the water there becomes fresh . . . so where the river flows everything will live.’”

Our Lord Jesus echoed this same teaching in Matthew 13, when He said His kingdom is like a mustard seed, in that it starts small but grows mightily. Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel had every reason to be gloomy, pessimistic people because of the time in which they lived. But none of them were pessimistic – because they all believed God was on His throne and the glorious New Covenant was coming. Listen to Peter’s testimony about this truth in **Acts 3:22-25**

“For Moses said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people [referring Christ]; you must listen to everything he tells you . . .²⁴ Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on [which includes Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel], as many as have spoken, have foretold these days [the days of the New Covenant, in which the great promises of the Old Covenant Age will be fulfilled].²⁵ And you [those of us living in the New Covenant Age] are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, ‘Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.’”

I believe Christians have a Biblical foundation for being optimistic – even when we find ourselves in the midst of a pandemic. Let’s pray.