

Lesson 10 – Flight to Egypt

Jeremiah 42-45

There was a movie back in 1992 called, “A Few Good Men”. The story was about a young Marine who wasn’t keeping up with the rest of the unit during his basic training, and he wanted to quit. Hearing news of this, the base commander orders a “code red” which meant, in this case, two of the young Marine’s cohorts were to “discipline” him to get him back in line. The disciplining goes very wrong, and the young Marine dies. The two cohorts are brought up on charges, and they are court martialed.

The climactic scene in the courtroom is when the Defense Attorney played by Tom Cruise enters into an exchange with the Marine base commander played by Jack Nicholson. This is one of the better scenes in movie history, in my opinion. Tom Cruise’s character is trying to goad Jack Nicholson’s character in confessing that *he* ordered the “code red” in hopes such an admission would dismiss the claims against the two cohorts as they were just following orders.

Cruise’s character ups the tension when he demands answers from Nicholson’s character with some of the discrepancies in his story. Nicholson fires back, “You want answers?”. Cruise barks, “I want the truth!” Nicholson then utters this famous line – wait for it.... “You can’t handle the truth”!

You’re probably wondering why I’m starting off with this trip down memory lane at the movies. The statement Nicholson barks is actually very apropos for today’s lesson. It’s also one in which all we Christians need to ask ourselves about our real motivations in our relationships with God. Many of you have

heard me say this before “The truth does indeed hurt if you’re not living in the truth.”

There’s a key verse that we need to remember as we go through this lesson – it is actually from last week’s lesson. In chapter 41, we learn of Johanan an army officer, and he is leading the remnant from the land of Judah. Verse 17 tells us “And they departed and dwelt in the habitation of Chimham, which is near Bethlehem, as they went on their way to Egypt.” The reason this verse is so important is it tells us where Johanan’s and the rest of the peoples’ hearts already were as we lead into the initial exchange between them and Jeremiah in today’s lesson.

So the people ask Jeremiah in verse 2, *“Please hear our petition and pray to the LORD your God for this entire remnant. For as you now see, though we were once many, now only a few are left.* Notice the people don’t call the Lord their God – they refer to the Lord as Jeremiah’s God. Such is the attitude of those who are opposed to the Lord. Also, shouldn’t they have a hint of the ramifications of their rebellion based on what has happened already? “we once were many, now only a few are left.”

Their request of Jeremiah continues in verse 3, *“Pray that the LORD your God will tell us where we should go and what we should do.”* They claim they will obey whatever Jeremiah will tell them what the Lord says, but their hearts have already been revealed in Jeremiah 41:17 – they were already set on what they’re going to do – go to Egypt. Whether you are a believer or not, God will examine your heart to test whether or not a prayer or supplication is sincere – prayer is meant to get us in line with God’s will – not for God to get in line with ours. If our heart is already set on what we want to do, we shouldn’t bother praying – God knows our intentions.

Therefore, should God not bless our predetermined plan, whom do we have to blame? Ourselves.

Jeremiah's response to the people is worth commenting on, "*I have heard you,*" *replied Jeremiah the prophet. "I will certainly pray to the LORD your God as you have requested; I will tell you everything the LORD says and will keep nothing back from you."*"

Notice Jeremiah reminds them that he not only is praying to the Lord his God but also to the Lord their God. You see his heart for them – they may not recognize the Lord is their God, but Jeremiah does. He also promises to tell them the whole truth and nothing but the truth. That is what a witness is supposed to do under oath, that is what Jeremiah did, and it is what we are to do as witnesses of Jesus Christ.

What does that mean? We need to tell the whole story. The easy part of witnessing for Jesus is that He loves them, and He died on a cross for them. The hard part of the process of witnessing is telling people they're sinners and without repentance and faith in what Jesus did on the cross, they're sentencing themselves to hell. Just like the stories where we hear "they lived happily ever after", getting to that point involved going through some challenges and difficult times. When we get to the tough part of telling people of their sinful state, we can let them know that God already knew this and made a provision for them to be reconciled to Him through Jesus. There is a "Happily ever after" story to the Gospel, but we must tell the whole story as witnesses.

Verses 5 and 6 offer their response to Jeremiah's promise to tell everything the Lord says. They're, in effect, sentencing themselves to God's condemnation for the disobedience they already know in their hearts they're going to do. Can you see the grip the enemy has on them? They're so deceived – remember what was said in

chapter 17:9? “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”

Our hearts are deceitful, easily deceived, and beyond cure – on our own efforts. However, since with God all things are possible, God can cure and change our hearts. How does He do this? By revealing the truth of Who He is and His power to fully redeem you from the lies and deceit your heart has been subjected to.

So Jeremiah prays, and it takes how long for him to get an answer? 10 days. Anyone here ever put a time constraint on a prayer to God? ‘*God I need you to get back to me on this request – tick tock? Do you need a reminder of the predicament I'm in? Should I text you?*’ How hard is it to wait on the Lord? I don’t know about you, but I need a lot of work in this area. Peter said in the 8th verse of the third chapter of his second epistle “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day.”

God’s timing is rarely ours – we want answers – we want responses. But, as we were confronted in *A Few Good Men*, do we really want the truth? Can we handle the truth? Since God is good and, therefore, His intentions are good – and He knows all things and has an eternal perspective – He dictates the circumstances of our lives with a purposefulness based on His timing. My family and I went through a very difficult period for 5 years, and we spent the majority of our prayers during that time requesting immediate deliverance and healing. Being where we are now, there’s no way we would be where we are had the Lord complied with our timing – it was only in His timing that we are in the blessed place we are with Him today.

Jeremiah goes on to recite what the Lord has communicated to him and tells them if they obey his word, He will build them up – not tear them down; and plant them – not uproot them. He then goes on to offer this familiar promise in Scripture in verse 11 *Do not be afraid of the king of Babylon, whom you now fear. Do not be*

afraid of him, declares the LORD, for I am with you and will save you and deliver you from his hands.

The key phrases in this verse are “Do not be afraid”, and “I am with you” Jesus or an angel of the Lord used the phrase “Do not be afraid” 15 times in the Gospels. As for the people whom God said that He was with, it’s an impressive group. *Read the names and the verse references.*

Is there anyone in this room right now that is afraid of something – something going on in your life that is gripping you? Does anyone in this room need to hear God is with you right now? Just as He was with these people, so is He with each of you. Here’s the better news. For those of you whom have confessed Jesus as your Lord and Savior, not only is He with you, but also He is in you. 2 Corinthians 1:21-22 confirms this, “Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” Upon your receiving the gift of salvation, you were given the Holy Spirit. He is your “down payment” – the seal of the redemptive deal Jesus accomplished for you at the cross. You belong to Him, and to prove that, He now lives in you.

I may not understand your fear, but I do understand fear. I’m here to tell you God is with you, He’s in you, and He loves you more than you can imagine. I know this is hard to grasp when it feels like the walls are closing in, and you’re suffering. I promise you, though, when you take that leap of faith and begin to believe with all your heart the truth of God living in you, the fear will start to melt away, and you will obtain a peace that surpasses all understanding – despite your circumstances. Praise the Lord, right??!?!?

Verses 13-16 offer several “If....then....” statements. I’m going to several times during this message to ask you to consider God’s tone of voice when we read what

He is saying. In order to get a sense of God's tone of voice, we need to understand what God's true character is because it is our character that sets the stage for how we approach life and the tone to which we respond to things. Consider verses 11-12 shown on the screen and key words underlined which provide details of His character - and then think of His tone – He's not saying these “if...then” statements with any joy or condition to it. He gives us guidelines because He wants to protect us and care for us. However, because He is holy and just, He must respond to disobedience. He doesn't give Himself an option to respond to disobedience.

Egypt in Scripture is symbolic of the secular world, so the intent of going to Egypt is a symbol of denying God and disobedience. Disobedience is sin, and the wages of sin is death. Beginning with Adam and Eve and their sin, sin has caused separation from God and death (they were covered in skins by the Lord – something had to die to provide the skin). God has been faithful from the beginning warning us of the consequences of sin. The good news is His faithfulness didn't stop with the warning of the consequences but it continued with the mechanism for us to be forgiven of our sin once and for all – by the blood of His Son.

Up until verse 19, God is warning people if they go to Egypt, they will perish and suffer His wrath. Here, the LORD steps up from a warning to a command, “Do not go to Egypt”. Again – think of the tone – is He saying this out of anger or out of a loving parent telling a child not to do something because the parent knows the child is going to get hurt if he chooses to do what he is told not to do.

Notice God calls them out for their false promise of obedience to His instructions. God is not mocked and isn't fooled when we're not sincere. We need to be careful what consequences we will agree to should we not be sincere in our approaches and promised obedience to God. He will call us on it.

What's the people's response to Jeremiah's message? He is lying. Have you ever been warned by God or someone you believe is speaking for God and then, because you didn't like the message, decided the message must be a lie or not from God? Again, we learned earlier that the people had already decided they were going to go to Egypt, so Jeremiah's message to tell them to stay put was not what they wanted to hear.

To be fair, they've seen a lot of disaster come upon their people because of the Babylonians, so the thought of staying put to potentially be the final course of destruction, I can see the difficulty of hearing a message to not run.

How does this apply to us today? 'Lord, I'm in a marriage that is going nowhere – he treats me terribly, and there is no love.' Or 'I can't stay in this job one more day – the owner is a tyrant and manages with no godliness whatsoever.' Yet, someone you trust or you hear from God through Scripture or prayer tells you to hang in there. That's really hard to agree to, isn't it?

We need to remember God allows people and circumstances into our lives that cause us pain to accomplish a good purpose. Remember, ALL, (including the good AND the bad) things are working together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose. Remember what Joseph said to his brothers in the book of Genesis? What they meant for evil, God meant it for good.

I'm not telling you that you should blindly remain in a painful situation – please always seek the Lord and maybe even a trusted Godly friend for counsel. However, don't bother doing this if you have already made your mind up your getting out. You're wasting your time and God's time if you're not sincerely seeking God's guidance.

The people then claim Jeremiah is being influenced by Baruch. Baruch was the scribe to Jeremiah who wrote the scroll that Jehoahkim burned. He was just God's

messenger, but He is grouped in as Jeremiah's co-conspirator against the disobedient people. When we publically align ourselves with the teachings and warnings of God, we will be linked and persecuted. Remember what Jesus said in John 15:20a: Remember what I told you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.

In verses 4-6 we read of Johanan and the other army officers disobeying the Lord's instructions and lead the people off to Egypt and bringing others in tow including Jeremiah and Baruch. Those who choose to take on a position of leadership, the level of accountability for their actions become much more intense. Think of what Harry Truman must have went through when he gave the go ahead to release atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. His decision alone cost the lives of approximately 220,000 people – less than 4 months after taking office.

The concept of accountability in leadership is true in all aspects of life, but it is especially true in the spiritual realm. Carol, all the other lecturers and myself take our teaching very seriously because the Bible is very clear about our accountability to you. James 3:1 says, Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. When I hear of pastors or men and women in positions of spiritual leadership not providing the full counsel of God or distorting the truth of God's Word, I am grieved for the people who are listening to them, but I am terrified of how God is going to deal with the leaders when they breathe their last breath for not presenting the full counsel of God. Paul said that he was blameless before God because He told them everything. May all men in the church leadership be able to say the same.

If you are in a position of leadership, please cling to the Lord to make sure you have His heart and His wisdom to lead in a manner that is pleasing to Him – but not necessarily pleasing the people. I know some of the things I say up here you

may not like or agree with, but I can assure you they are the truth according to God's Word as I understand it. I encourage you to ask questions - I'm happy to have a discussion with you any time.

In verses 7-13 of chapter 43, the people are now entering Egypt. The Lord instructs Jeremiah to take some large stones with him and bury them in clay in the brick pavement at the entrance to Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes. This would be a symbol of what is going to happen to them as they will be overtaken by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian forces in judgment for their denying God's instructions.

So because of their disobedience and going to Egypt, they are now bringing judgment on Egypt. We need to remember that when we deliberately disobey God and choose to sin, not only are we going to suffer, but those who had nothing to do with our sin but had the misfortune of being close to us, they end up paying a price for our sin. When I look back on the bigger sins in my life, the pain of what happened to me was nowhere near as devastating to me as was the pain that happened to those closest to me – to those I love. There's a ripple effect to sin, and we need to remember that when we're tempted.

In the first 3 verses of chapter 44, we hear God giving the people a history lesson on what happened to Jerusalem and the all the towns in Judah because of their idolatry – they were all in ruins. Want to know where God is most sensitive in how we live? What's #1 and #2 on God's Top Ten? #1 - You shall have no other Gods before me. #2 - "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of *anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; ⁵ you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Idolatry is a BIG deal to God. If our attention and worship is not on Him, it's on someone or something else. Let's think again about His tone. Is it 'don't do this or don't do that' out of anger – like pointing a finger at someone. Or is it from a loving parent to a child saying 'listen to me because you're my child, and I care more for you than anyone else. What I'm telling to you to do or not to do is solely based on my love for you and desire to protect you from the consequences of doing what you're thinking of doing.'

Do you hear the difference? One tone is from a position of judgment – the other is from a position of love and concern. Although there will be judgment for disobedience, judgment is not God's preference – but it is His duty to deliver judgment as it is a demonstration of proof that He is holy and just.

In verse 4 we read of a word that we don't hear from God very often – the word "hate". Out of our desire to please God, seems we should be sensitive to those things He clearly states He hates. In Proverbs 6:16-19 we learn of 7 things that God hates:

1. A proud look
2. A lying tongue
3. Hands that shed innocent blood
4. A heart that devises wicked plans
5. Feet that are swift in running to evil
6. A false witness who speaks lies
7. One who sows discord among the brethren

It would appear that the people were guilty of the first two commandments as well as #4 on the list of things He hates. Idolatry is something all of us need to ask God to reveal to us if we are at all guilty and then repent and ask for forgiveness immediately. If you do this, your relationship with God will immediately improve.

Verses 7-8 show God asking why they are doing these things that are provoking Him and forcing Him to judge them. Do you hear God's heart in these questions?

This is the voice of a loving parent asking his wayward child, ‘Why are you doing this – you’re setting yourselves up for disaster.’

But the hearts of the leaders of the people and the people were set – they were going to do what they wanted to do – regardless of Jeremiah’s warnings. We need to be careful when we close our minds off to things that God may be trying to convict us. There is a point where God will honor our choice, and then we have no one to blame but ourselves when the eventual judgment comes.

Verses 17-18 are important verses. We will certainly do everything we said we would: We will burn incense to the Queen of Heaven and will pour out drink offerings to her just as we and our ancestors, our kings and our officials did in the towns of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem. At that time we had plenty of food and were well off and suffered no harm. But ever since we stopped burning incense to the Queen of Heaven and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have had nothing and have been perishing by sword and famine.”

Now we get to the source of what is motivating their disobedience. It was their flesh – living in their sin they had plenty of food; they were well off; they suffered no harm. When they chose to stop their sinning, they were subjected to pain and suffering.

This is a classic spiritual warfare scenario – we’re cruising along in our sin and things are going pretty well. Who are we serving when we’re in sin? Satan. He’ll leave us alone and let us slowly self-destruct. However, when we choose to follow Jesus, we immediately become an enemy of Satan, and he’s no longer going to leave us alone – he’s going to harass us. He can never take us from Jesus’ grip, but he can make our lives miserable. He’ll seek to remind us of “the good old days” and put doubt in our minds of God’s character to provide and protect in a manner that we’re used to or the way we believe we “deserved to be treated”.

We need to remember Satan can't do anything unless God allows it, so why does God allow Satan to harass us even after we've received the gift of Jesus? It's a matter of letting us know where we are in our trust and faith in the LORD's true character. Do we really believe His grace is sufficient for us? Do we really believe He is going to provide for us or protect us?

It comes down to whether or not we're going to base our faith on the spiritual promises from God or the fleshly temptations of the world, which is currently run by Satan. The people here have made their choice – they have been deceived by their flesh and have chosen to deny God. It's so sad. Here's the thing – no one is more grieved by this than God.

So the people have made their choice, and in verse 26, God makes an interesting statement. But hear the word of the LORD, all you Jews living in Egypt: 'I swear by my great name,' says the LORD, 'that no one from Judah living anywhere in Egypt will ever again invoke my name or swear, "As surely as the Sovereign LORD lives."

Why would God include this statement? He knows where their hearts are, and they are not with Him. Therefore, to swear in His name would be, in effect, using the Lord's name in vain. That's #3 on God's top ten of His commandments.

Verse 27 of chapter 44 offers a word that should be troubling – and maybe contradictory to an earlier verse in the book of Jeremiah "For I am watching over them for harm, not for good; the Jews in Egypt will perish by sword and famine until they are all destroyed."

How does this verse compare to 29:11: For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." What's the difference? One group is living in disobedience and one is in obedience. Which viewpoint of God's do you prefer?

Summary

Once again, we hear in today's lesson of an obstinate and defiant people – lulled to sleep in their sin because of the comforts of the flesh. Someone comes along and tells them to wake up to the truth that there is a price to pay for their disobedience, and unless they repent and obey the word of the Lord, disaster is going to come.

Does any of this sound familiar in today's times? All this coming judgment should indeed lead us to examine our hearts, but the truth of the matter is – just as it was back in Jeremiah's days – our hearts are going to lie to us. Our hearts are going to choose what is easy – what is comfortable. Thank God Jesus didn't choose that path when He went to the cross. That is why we need to ask God to examine our hearts – He will tell us the truth because He cannot lie.

When you choose to believe in Jesus and all He did at Calvary, you are no longer under the judgment of God. Jesus willingly allowed Himself to be nailed to a cross, so He could take the judgment for my sin and your sin. When He said it was finished on the cross, there was nothing more for us to do to be forgiven and be declared not guilty of God's judgment.

I am speaking of eternal judgment. Sin is sin, and continuing in it will produce a fleshly judgment. Even though we are living in the grace of God, it doesn't mean we should be getting in the face of God with our bad behavior. God is merciful, but there are consequences to sin. He will respond to our sin, but His response is purposeful – not punitive. He is our heavenly Father, and we are His children. No one knows more about the cost of sin than God – just look at the cross. He doesn't want me to sin, and He doesn't want you to sin because He knows the pain it is going to cause us. He dictates the consequences of our sin in a manner to discipline us with a desire that we will no longer sin. God is so good.

I'll end this lecture with a couple of invitations. First, I invite each of you to take some time out, mediate, and reflect on the *truth* that you are *free* from God's judgment once and for all if you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior. There is nothing more for you to do – just believe.

I also invite you to give *God* permission to examine your hearts and minds to reveal any sin or any lies you may be holding onto. Just as Jack Nicholson said, *you* may not be able to handle the truth of what is revealed, but *God* certainly *can* handle the truth. More importantly, what He'll do with what He finds will bring you a healing, freedom, peace, and joy that will change your lives – if you ask Him with all sincerity. He's ready. Are we? Let's pray.