

4:5-6:30: Sin & Judgment I/II

Introduction:

Well, friends. We do have a little less time than usual, so this message is a little shorter than usual, too.

We're back in this long section of 4:5 through the end of Chapter 6, and while we talked about just one verse last week, and we explored the ways that single verse can challenge us, today we'll talk about the broad narrative movement of this passage. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Picking Up: 6:10-11

We saw last week as Jeremiah railed against God as a liar, and broke in grief over how God hadn't met his expectations. He was angry and shocked that Judah was going to receive the same consequences for their betrayal of God that Israel had received, shocked that God was allowing Assyria to threaten His people, and Jerusalem, too.

Today's passage starts as Jeremiah talks to himself. But talking isn't really the right word. He's shouting in grief, just like he has been. Here's what he says:

***To whom can I speak and give warning?
Who will listen to me?
Their ears are closed
so they cannot hear.
The word of the Lord is offensive to them;
they find no pleasure in it
But I am full of the wrath of the Lord,
and I cannot hold it in.***

Jeremiah is “full of the wrath of the Lord.” First, and importantly: When we hear “wrath” we think of anger. We can’t help it. Biblically, it seems like wrath is not God’s rage, so much as God allowing people to have what they really want, even when what they want bring negative consequences. Wrath is not anger and a spanking; wrath is allowing people to have at it. We can see this in Romans, but see it here, too: Jeremiah is full of this message he’s supposed to give, must give--cannot hold in--that the consequences of all their betrayal and rejection of God are coming on Judah.

But for multiple reasons Jeremiah feels like this thing he must do is just pointless to do. Have we felt that way? He gives multiple reasons for it that overlap like a spirographed Venn diagram: No one will listen to him. No one wants to listen to him. No one can even

get out of their own prejudices to hear him.

And God, in response to this urge to speak that Jeremiah can't hold back tells him where to send it, where to send all these words that Jeremiah doesn't want to speak because he knows it's pointless:

Where to Speak: 6:12-21

***12 "Pour it out on the children in the street
and on the young men gathered together;
both husband and wife will be caught in it,
and the old, those weighed down with years.***

***13 "From the least to the greatest,
all are greedy for gain;
prophets and priests alike,
all practice deceit.***

***14 They dress the wound of my people
as though it were not serious.***

***'Peace, peace,' they say,
when there is no peace.***

***15 Are they ashamed of their detestable
conduct?***

***No, they have no shame at all;
they do not even know how to blush.
So they will fall among the fallen;***

***they will be brought down when I punish them,”
says the Lord.***

Ugh, right? This is how terrible Judah has become. And God keeps going. He talks about Judah’s resistance (and Jesus will echo this, too), about the failures of Judah’s leadership, about how little God cares that Judah uses the fanciest materials in their meaningless worship services. And because of all this, death is coming.

16 This is what the Lord says:

***“Stand at the crossroads and look;
ask for the ancient paths,
ask where the good way is, and walk in it,
and you will find rest for your souls.***

But you said, ‘We will not walk in it.’

***17 I appointed watchmen over you and said,
‘Listen to the sound of the trumpet!’***

But you said, ‘We will not listen.’

***18 Therefore hear, you nations;
you who are witnesses,***

observe what will happen to them.

19 Hear, you earth:

***I am bringing disaster on this people,
the fruit of their schemes,
because they have not listened to my words
and have rejected my law.***

***20 What do I care about incense from Sheba
or sweet calamus from a distant land?
Your burnt offerings are not acceptable;
your sacrifices do not please me.”***

21 Therefore this is what the Lord says:

***“I will put obstacles before this people.
Parents and children alike will stumble over
them;
neighbors and friends will perish.”***

And, look. This sounds terrible, right? But these chapters of Jeremiah, they just build and build and build on this idea that Jeremiah's people, Judah, they don't care at all anymore about what God wants, don't care anymore about betraying their marriage commitments to God, their covenant promises...even though to reject these promises rejects God's special protection for them. Feel the movement of these passages.

Back in 4:22:

Uncaring: 4:22

***“My people are fools;
they do not know me.
They are senseless children;
they have no understanding.
They are skilled in doing evil;
they know not how to do good.”***

Then at 5:1, God invites Jeremiah to find ANYONE with any character at all and He'll save Judah from itself.

Uncaring: 5:1-2:

***“Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem,
look around and consider,
search through her squares.
If you can find but one person
who deals honestly and seeks the truth,
I will forgive this city.
2 Although they say, ‘As surely as the Lord
lives,’
still they are swearing falsely.”***

Jeremiah tries, but he can't. At 5:4 we read, with a

little prejudice tossed in,

Uncaring: 5:4-5:

***I thought, "These are only the poor;
they are foolish,
for they do not know the way of the Lord,
the requirements of their God.
5 So I will go to the leaders
and speak to them;
surely they know the way of the Lord,
the requirements of their God."
But with one accord they too had broken off the
yoke
and torn off the bonds.***

In 5:30 We learn a little bit about what those who are supposed to speak to God are actually doing, and how those who are supposed to learn from them are responding:

Uncaring: 5:30-31:

***"A horrible and shocking thing
has happened in the land:
31 The prophets prophesy lies,***

***the priests rule by their own authority,
and my people love it this way.***

But what will you do in the end?

And then we go into Jeremiah 6, and God declares how Assyria is on their way, and Jeremiah bemoans, at 6:10, how pointless his job is because no one cares what he has to say. We just looked at all this.

And what we realize when we walk through 4, 5, 6...is that Jeremiah isn't exaggerating. No one cares about anything Jeremiah has to say. What it means to be God's People has zero influence, zero felt-relevance, in the lives of Judah, now. All the stuff is there--A temple, priests, prophets, ceremonies, holy days--but it has become totally and completely disconnected from both God and any of the virtues that God's People are supposed to have.

Our context is very different from Jeremiah's. We don't live in a society where God is meant to be our society's center--you know, its touchstone, its source of wisdom, character, purpose, every neighbor gathered in worship and a shared sense of identity in God. The Church and our Society do not overlap. They never will.

We could use this passage as a launching-off point to rage against the Church if we wanted to, but not against the rest of our Society. We could bemoan how many people in the Church--but not our people, of course--ignore what it means to follow Christ, and how everyone pays Jesus lip-service, and basically throw all Christians who aren't us under the bus. It's not useful. But it's an easy way to take the lesson of this passage and run with it.

There's better ways, though.

First, Hope:

First, I think that today's passage gives me hope. Because from either the standpoint of our society or the Church, we're not without it. You can go and find one person in the Church who cares what God thinks. You can. And you can go and find a person in society who "deals honestly and seeks the truth." Jeremiah's case was hopeless, our situations--whatever it is we're feeling or dealing with, and we could each bring our small list to the table, and they'd probably have remarkable overlap--our situations are not hopeless. The Church is not useless and uncaring of God; our society is not without honesty and neighborly concern.

We have it better than we often feel we do, and to forget that is to abandon our need to live faithfully, hopefully, and lovingly.

Second, Responsiveness:

And alongside this is how deeply responsive God is in Jeremiah, here. God doesn't want what every single other person wants. God doesn't want wrath to come; God wants mercy to come. God sends Jeremiah to find a single person of character; the fact that Jeremiah can't is beside the point I'm making now, which is simply this: God wants to be merciful, wants to save Judah, wants to redeem everyone for the sake of one. When Abraham pleaded for Sodom and Gomorrah, he talked God down to saving everyone--even though they were incredibly evil and heartless--for the sake of ten. Ten couldn't be found. Judah is worse than they ever were, because one can't be found now. But God wants to save everyone for the sake of one.

And, look: this takes us to Christ, and it ought to.

Taken To Christ:

When Jesus was crucified, like, right after it had happened, he gasped out in prayer, "Father, forgive them because they don't know what they're doing."

Not long after he shouts “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” And without getting too trinitarian, and lingering on what it means for God to forsake Himself, let’s just notice that in that tiny bit of time Jesus was both stars of today’s passage: Jeremiah, in disbelief that God could abandon Israel, and God, desperate to show mercy to those who didn’t really care at all about mercy--or honesty or justice or kindness. We’re the ones who, this side of the resurrection, live to, as Paul puts it, “persuade others” of what God wants of them. Paul continues in 2 Corinthians 5, saying “What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience....For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. 15 And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”

God would have saved everyone in Judah for the sake of one honest person; God’s been out to save everyone in the world for the sake of Christ. When we take communion like we did today, we’re reminded that we are a community of hope who lives for the sake of the one honest person God found when Jesus was born. We’re challenged to keep hoping, because

there are those who deal honestly and seek truth--both in the Church, but even outside it. And we ourselves may be able to partner with God in the redemption of the world but letting those outside it learn of the truth we've experienced: That Jesus loves us, was miraculously born, lived an exemplary life, died and sent us the Spirit to do the same, and will return--will return to deal honestly with us, seeking the truth of who we are in him, and how faithfully we've lived up to that identity.

Our Context & Jeremiah's:

Thank God that our context is not Jeremiah's. We are not alone in our longing to be in relationship with God, living among people who want nothing to do with anything virtuous at all. We are not called to speak to those who will never, ever hear us. We're beset by many problems, but not alone in them. Instead, we are the ones who, for the sake of one, have been caught up together in redemption and power and love. In a society which can feel incredibly painful and hopeless sometimes, we need to remember that we live with enormous hope, can be heard by others, and are not alone as we speak.

For the sake of one, God has saved all, so that those

who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. Until Jesus returns, let's live for him who died, and do it hopefully, together, knowing that things are not as bad as they feel, and speaking knowing we can be heard.

Going Deeper: Jeremiah 4:5-6:10:

Take the time to slowly read Jeremiah 4:5 through the end of chapter 6! (Yep...it's a lot. You can do it!)

- What broad themes do you see in this passage?
 - What is the narrative “flow” of the passage?
 - What are some things that deeply stuck out to you? What made you notice these things? What could be their relevance for your life of faith?
- How does Jeremiah's relationship to his society parallel yours? What are key differences? Why does knowing this matter when we try to apply Scripture?
- Do you relate to Jeremiah here? To God? In what ways?
- What is God's posture toward His People in today's passage?
- In what ways can you connect this passage--it's themes, characters, or key moments--to your or our church's walk with Christ?