

Come Back to Me

March 17, 2019

Our Savior's Way
Worshiping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Kumfer

Last week Pastor Mann spoke about temptation and how God provides a way for us to stand up under temptation and provides a way out. Let me tell you about a time that this happened in the Bible to God's people.

Jeremiah was a prophet chosen from among God's people. He would travel the countryside and deliver messages from God to the cities of Judah and people of Israel. And one day, God tells Jeremiah that he has a new message for him to deliver. This message is a very important one. God tells Jeremiah that He must speak against all the cities of Judah and the people who come to worship. In so doing, God has one hope for the people who hear his message that they would listen and turn away from their evil ways. If they do, then God can relent of the disaster that He will enact on account of their evil deeds.

Can you imagine what Jeremiah is thinking? He has an important message, one of condemnation but also of hope. Of course, this is all contingent on one thing that the people listen to him. If we trace the history back and consider the likelihood of people listening to God's prophets there isn't a great track record. In the gospel of Luke, Jesus says, "***O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills its prophets and stones those who are sent to it!***" But here is Jeremiah, the prophet, coming to speak a word from God against the people of Jerusalem and all of Judah.

If I were Jeremiah I would be scared to death. He knows what God has said and it's a terrible punishment because of the evil deeds the

people have done. But the whole purpose of this message is to help these people turn back. Even though it rarely ever works that way for those in Jeremiah's time or for us.

Now, if you were listening to Jeremiah, what would you think? Would you be angry at him because he was condemning your actions and telling you to stop it? Would you brush him off as a crazy fanatic who has taken things too far? Would you confront him and tell him to stop it because he's making people upset or uncomfortable? I think that wherever we fall in that spectrum one thing would be true for us. We wouldn't listen.

An article from Psychology today said, "research using reactance theory (the theory of how we react) informs us that whenever someone tells us what to do and how to do it, we respond with defensive defiance because we want to maximize our personal freedom and decision making." Even with the span of thousands of years between us and the people of Jeremiah's time, we are so similar. In this narrative, God is speaking through Jeremiah to His people in the hopes of getting through to them. The same work that He continues to this day.

Listening is a challenging thing for us. I love the irony of doing a sermon connected to listening and knowing the statistics and then thinking about how many people are actually listening to what I'm saying. But I hope you all are because God has an important message for us. And that message is repent, turn from your evil ways and come back to Him.

I know that there are all kinds of responses going on inside your head. Most of those responses are coming because in saying that, I am challenging your sense of freedom and decision making. More and more in our culture, we are told that there is no truth and there is no one right way to do things. Everyone gets to think for themselves, do what they want, and it will be fine. But that's a lie. God says something different.

In His words through Jeremiah God is saying, "***Stop it. Turn away from the evil you are doing and come back to me.***" He's calling His people home and hoping that they will hear the message. It's that

same message he was giving to Jonah to bring to the Ninevites. **“Stop it. Come back!”**

Our response is often the same as the people of Jerusalem. We respond in anger. “What do you know? Why shouldn’t I be able to do what I want? I’m a big boy I can make my own decisions! You don’t know any better than I do.” It seems like any time someone says anything contrary to the way people want to live they are condemned. It happened to Jeremiah. It happens to us.

After Jeremiah delivered his message to the cities of Judah the people gathered together and condemned him to death. They were ready to kill him because he told them to stop doing evil. Seems ridiculous right? But it’s still happening today. God is telling us the same thing. **“Repent. Stop it! Come back to me.”** And our response is the same. We turn away. We don’t want to follow God’s commands because they limit us.

Following God would make us stand out and look different. It would make other people feel uncomfortable. It makes us feel uncomfortable. It makes us angry. Because we feel like God’s commands are too restrictive. They don’t let us be who we are. They change who we are on the inside. But that’s the point.

On the inside, everyone is sinful and corrupt. Whether big or small it doesn’t matter because all sin is the same. Let me say that again, all sin is the same. It is abhorrent to God. God can’t stand to have sin in his presence. Not just because He hates it but because of who He is. God is holy and without blemish. Therefore no sin can be in His presence because that sin would corrupt His holiness.

That’s why Satan was trying so hard to tempt Jesus into sin. Because if he had succeeded, if Jesus had listened to him, there would be absolutely no hope for us. But he didn’t succeed. Jesus resisted temptation. He didn’t listen to what Satan, the god of this world was saying. He listened to the messages from God. Messages found in the words of scripture. And it’s true that those messages can be corrupted just like Satan was doing to tempt Jesus. But when we take the whole of scripture, and read it and know it, that’s where the truth is found.

The truth is that God is good and gracious. He loves us more than anything or anyone else. He made us special. Just like our kids are learning in chapel this past week. God made us and He loves us. He loves us enough to tell us when the things we're doing aren't right.

You want to know what sin is. Read God's word. It's right there. God tells us what sin is and condemns it. He calls us to turn away from it. To live a new life apart from it. And it's an impossible task for us.

BUT...and this is a big but. God knows how hard it is. He knows how weak we are on our own. He knows that we desire sinful things. But He has made us new in Jesus Christ. The reading from the Gospel of Luke says that Jesus desires to, "***gather your children as a hen gathers her brood under her wings...***" Christ desires to protect and lead us. He teaches us so that we will know the way we should go. So that we will have a way to stand up under the temptations we face. The only way we miss out on that is if we refuse to listen.

When we do listen but still fall, He is there to catch us. His desire for us is to be perfect as He is perfect but when we can't Jesus was perfect for us. He welcomes us to turn back to Him and be forgiven. That's what we celebrate when we commune together every week. We repent and return to Him for forgiveness. Through that forgiveness, we are made clean. We are given a fresh start. For sure we'll need more fresh starts but our God is patient and kind, loving His people.

So when we hear the message from God in whichever way He chooses to deliver it to us, let us be like the people of Judah when they recognized God was speaking to them through Jeremiah, they relented and repented. They turned away from their murderous ways and asked for forgiveness. And what's best about it is that they received it. Because God loves us and offers forgiveness to us through Christ who died and rose for us. Amen.