

BaptistWay: No stopping God's message

March 17, 2014

- *The BaptistWay lesson for March 30 focuses on Jeremiah 36.*

Jeremiah 36 chronicles a pivotal time in the prophet's ministry. He is commanded to summarize in writing all the prophecies God has leveled against his people. Ultimately, the scroll was to be presented to young Jehoiakim, who took the reins of leadership during a particularly difficult time. God hoped this might lead to repentance among the people (v. 3).

God always holds out hope, even in the most hopeless of situations. When tempted to give up, cease caring or become cynical because the lack of goodness we see, remember God never has given up on us.

The scroll

We're not sure what God commanded Jeremiah to write on this scroll, because we do not know how much of the book of Jeremiah was written at this time. Some have suggested the first six chapters; others have posited chapters 1-20. Whatever the case, we know the scroll was long, which is likely why Baruch's help was enlisted. Resistance had built up to God's word, as evidenced by the fact Jeremiah was not allowed to enter the Temple (v. 5). The authorities did not want him "raining on their parade."

The truth is hard to digest sometimes. As a new Christian, I often found it difficult to listen to foreign missionaries. Their hardships and the urgency expressed in their desire to take part in the Great Commission often left me feeling like I did not measure up and my concerns were unimportant. Until I connected the urgency of missions with the rest of what the Bible said about individual callings, spiritual gifts and the work of the Holy Spirit, I

could not appreciate the truth these missionaries presented and respond appropriately.

In Jeremiah 36, God tries to connect the current wicked state of his people with all they have forgotten about him and his desire for them in hope they, too, will respond appropriately.

The reading

Reading the scroll was quite an event. Everyone stopped their normal activities, and a fast was proclaimed (v. 9) as Baruch read it from high above the gate of the Temple for all to hear (v. 10). It did not take long for word about this to travel to the secretary's room, where all the temple officials sat (vv. 11-13). Their lack of concern for spiritual things is evident in the fact they did not attend. After reading the scroll a second time, Baruch is asked a telling question: "Did Jeremiah dictate it" (v. 17)?

Of course, they knew the answer. No matter how far from God's will we fall, there always is a part of us that knows the truth. How we respond is up to us.

The response

The officials understood this message was important and attempted to respond with a measure of faith (vv. 20-21). In hope he, too, would be convicted, they had the scroll brought to King Jehoiakim, who also was notably absent when the scroll was read initially. Wanting nothing to do with its message, he threw it into the flames after only three or four columns of it were read (v. 23).

The result

Not even the king could hide from God's truth. Immediately after his dismissal, Jeremiah again is commanded to write another scroll with the

same words as the previous one and an additional message of unavoidable, imminent destruction (vv. 28-31). This would go down in history as the event that caused the Babylonian exile. While there is some truth to this, we cannot forget that this event was a long time in the making.

Jeremiah was told at the beginning this would happen. How do we make sense of the fact God continues to hold out hope for his people to repent? Why does God say in verse 7, “Perhaps they will bring their petition before the Lord and will each turn from their wicked ways” when he knows they will not?

It’s difficult to understand all God had in mind through the prophecies. For some strange reason, God holds out hope for us, even though he knows the conditions of our hearts. If this is the way God, whose knowledge is infinite, chooses to relate to his creation, what should our response be?

Does it make a difference?

One of the blessings and curses of being a preacher is you get to share the word of God weekly. It is tempting to wonder if it makes any difference in the lives of some you come to know. After seeing the same people struggle to stay awake week after week, as well as repeated moral failures and emotional immaturity in the lives of those who are supposed to be church leaders, it’s tempting to wonder if God’s word makes a difference. Jeremiah was convinced it did—even if he could not see or understand how.

How is God leading you to share his word with others? Whatever the manner, know it does make a difference.