

Second Sunday of End Time – Last Judgment – November 10, 2019

Jeremiah 26:1-6

1 Early in the reign of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, this word came from the LORD: 2 “This is what the LORD says: Stand in the courtyard of the LORD’s house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word. 3 Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done. 4 Say to them, ‘This is what the LORD says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, 5 and if you do not listen to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened), 6 then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth.’ ”

There are monasteries over in Greece that were built up high on cliffs for protection from invading enemies. Centuries ago the only access was a ride in a swaying basket, pulled up by monks with a single rope. The story is told of a visitor who was traveling up in the basket and midway up got nervous because he noticed that the rope holding the basket was old and frayed. Hoping to relieve his fear he asked the monk riding with him, “How often do they change the rope?” The monk replied, “Whenever it breaks!” That answer did nothing to make the visitor feel very safe about traveling up in that swaying basket. Safety and protection is something that everyone is searching for in their lives. Depending on where we are at and what we are doing, there are certainly times when we feel safer than others. But no matter what safety and protection someone can find in their life, ultimately it will end, whether at their death or when Jesus returns on the Last Day. As we focus today on the Last Judgment that will come at the end of this world and look at these words of Jeremiah, we will see how we can be perfectly safe when that Judgment finally comes.

Our text today takes us back to the final years of the kingdom of Judah, just before 600 BC. Over a century had passed since the northern kingdom of Israel had been destroyed and taken away into exile. Jeremiah was one of the last prophets that God would send to his people and his ministry would stretch over a period of forty years. His task was to preach a message of repentance to a people that had largely rejected God. He had some help along the way. His ministry began under King Josiah, the last faithful king of Judah. Josiah came to the throne at the age of eight and over the years worked to restore the temple and remove idol worship from the land. But one king could not change the hearts of all his subjects and so Jeremiah’s task of preaching repentance would continue.

Chapter 26 takes place roughly half way through Jeremiah’s ministry, “early in the reign of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah” (v. 1) Jehoiakim did not follow in his father’s footsteps and instead “did evil in the eyes of the Lord his God” (2 Chr 36:5), which likely included a return to worshipping the idol and gods of the nations around them. Jeremiah was given specific instructions on what to do in verse 2: “This is what the LORD says: Stand in the courtyard of the LORD’s house and speak to all the people of the towns of Judah who come to worship in the house of the LORD. Tell them everything I command you; do not omit a word.” Jeremiah was to go to the temple and share God’s message, not leaving out anything that the people might not want to hear. Verses 4-6: “Say to them, ‘This is what the LORD says: If you do not listen to me and follow my law, which I have set before you, and if you do not listen to the words of my

servants the prophets, whom I have sent to you again and again (though you have not listened), then I will make this house like Shiloh and this city an object of cursing among all the nations of the earth.” If the people continued on their path, there would be no safety in their future. If they continued to not listen to God, he would have the nation destroyed. He would make the temple and Jerusalem like Shiloh. Shiloh was the first place of worship that Joshua set up when the twelve tribes first entered Canaan. The tabernacle had been set up there and it would be the central place of worship down to the time of Samuel. But due to the people’s rejection of God at that time, it was destroyed and would never hold any significance for God’s people again. The same would happen to Jerusalem and the temple if they continued on their path. They would become an object of cursing among all the nations. What kind of nation would be defeated and destroyed by its own God? This was the fate that was awaiting them.

Even though they were heading down this path, the Lord still offered them hope of safety. Verse 3, “Perhaps they will listen and each will turn from his evil way. Then I will relent and not bring on them the disaster I was planning because of the evil they have done.” The Lord was willing to forgive their sins and stop the coming destruction. It didn’t have to come to this. But sadly Jeremiah’s preaching would fall on deaf ears. Jehoiakim would soon rebel against King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians would take away the first wave of exiles, which probably included men like the prophets Daniel and Ezekiel. Things would spiral down from there so that within twenty years, Jerusalem and the temple would be destroyed. All safety for God’s people would be lost.

As terrible as this would be for the kingdom of Judah, this destruction pales in comparison to what is coming on the Last Day. Instead of a temple and a city and a nation being destroyed, it will be the entire world and everything in it. Instead of sending a people off into exile, the punishment on that day will be banishment to the fiery dungeons of hell, separated from God for all eternity. This is what all people in this world, past, present and future will be facing. So how can we guarantee our safety on that day? Because if we look at ourselves, Jeremiah’s words still apply—we have not always listened to the Lord or followed his laws or listened to his prophets. We too should be destroyed along with everyone and everything else in this world because of the corruption of our sin.

So how do we find safety on that day? We do not look to ourselves, we look to the Lord. In his mercy, he has forgiven our sins. He has relented and will not bring on us the disaster we deserve for the evil we have done. All of this is possible because of the Lord’s plan of salvation. Yes, his Old Testament people would go into exile at the time of Jeremiah, but he would bring back a remnant. This would happen so that his plans would be in place to send a Savior, a Messiah, down through the line of Abraham and David. Jesus would pay for our sins and take on our punishment so that we can safely stand at the Last Judgment not as guilty, but as innocent. We will have nothing to fear on that day because of everything that Jesus has done for us.

While we wait for the Last Judgment, it is good to keep in mind that the Last Judgment is coming. It is easy to forget what is still coming as we live our daily lives in this world. Jesus has not come for nearly 2,000 years, he may not come for another thousand. Or he could come tonight. We live with this in mind so that we are ready whenever he returns. We continue to listen to the Lord and follow his laws and turn from our evil ways, or we risk not being ready and losing out on the safety that Jesus has won for us.

While we wait for the Last Judgment, we also keep in mind those around us. We know we’re safe, but not everyone has that same confidence. Jesus has not yet returned because there are still more souls to be added to his kingdom. Everyone in this world carries around the guilt

and burden of their sin and a fear of what happens next, whether they're willing to admit it to themselves or not. And we have the solution to their suffering. Our first approach is not to tell someone, "Hey, did you know that you're going to hell?" That may be needed at times for those who are stubbornly refusing to repent. Instead we can approach them from the standpoint of safety. Everyone wants to feel safe and we can let them know about their eternal safety and how that can bring peace of mind to their lives right now. Like Jeremiah we will not always find success in our preaching. But we will continue to share the good news about Jesus so that the Holy Spirit can work in people's hearts and help them to find true peace and safety in their lives.

From a human perspective, the ministry of Jeremiah would seem like a failure. Forty years of preaching the same message that in the end was rejected. He had to witness Jerusalem and the temple being destroyed. He would be kidnapped down to Egypt, where he possibly had to finish his life. And while he didn't see much success, he was still a faithful prophet of the Lord, telling them everything he was commanded, not omitting a word. In the end he had that same hope of safety. He wrote in the book of Lamentations: "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. . . .it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD" (3:22,26). Even when his world was falling apart, he could wait quietly for the safety of his eternal life in heaven. We have that same hope. When it comes to the Last Judgment, we know we will be perfectly safe, not because of ourselves, but because of the Lord's great love and compassion. May we continue to hold onto this hope every day and share it with those around us. Amen.